

**JONATHAN  
EDWARDS**

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**PASTORAL  
SERMONS**



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# Pastoral Sermons

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## **A WARNING TO PROFESSORS:**

OR, THE

GREAT GUILT OF THOSE WHO ATTEND ON THE ORDINANCES  
OF DIVINE WORSHIP, AND YET ALLOW THEMSELVES IN ANY  
KNOWN WICKEDNESS

That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire to devour them. Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, to, thus have they done in the midst of mine house.\* EZEK. 23:37, 38, 39

## INTRODUCTION

SAMARIA and Jerusalem, or Israel and Judah, are here represented by two women, Aholah and Aholibah; and their idolatry and treachery towards their covenant God is represented by the adultery of these women. They forsook God, who was their husband, and the guide of their youth, and prostituted themselves to others. The baseness of Aholah and Aholibah towards God, their husband, is here pointed out by two things, viz. adultery and blood-shed: They have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands.

1. They committed adultery with other lovers, viz. with their idols: With their idols hare they committed adultery.

2. They not only committed adultery, but they took their children that they bore to God, and killed them for their lovers. Their hearts were quite alienated from God, their husband, and they were so bewitched with lust after those other lovers, that they took their own children, whom they had by their husband, and put them to cruel deaths, to make a feast with them for their lovers; as it is said in ver. 37. "And have also caused my sons whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire to devour them."

But here is a twofold wickedness of those actions of theirs held forth to us in the words. (1.) The wickedness of them considered in themselves; for who can express the horrid baseness of this their treatment of God, their husband? (2.) An additional wickedness, resulting from the joining of these actions with sacred things. Beside the monstrous wickedness of these actions in themselves considered, there was this which exceedingly increased the guilt, that on the same day they came into God's sanctuary, or that they lived in such wickedness at the same time that they came and attended the holy ordinances of God's house, pretending to worship and adore him, whom they all the while treated in such a horrid manner; and so herein defiled and profaned holy things; as in ver. 38, and 39. "Moreover, this have they done unto me; they have defiled my

sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary, to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house."

DOCTRINE.—When they that attend ordinances of divine worship allow themselves in known wickedness, they are guilty of dreadfully profaning and polluting those ordinances.

By a divine ordinance, when the expression is used in its greatest latitude, is meant any thing of divine institution or appointment. Thus we call marriage a divine ordinance, because it was appointed by God. So civil government is called an ordinance of God: Rom. 13:1, 2. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."

But the word is more commonly used only for an instituted or appointed way or mean of worship. So the sacraments are ordinances; so public prayer, singing of praise, the preaching of the word, and the hearing of the word preached, are divine ordinances. The setting apart of certain officers in the church, the appointed way of discipline, public confession of scandals, admonition, and excommunication, are ordinances. These are called the ordinances of God's house, or of public worship; and these are intended in the doctrine: it is the profanation of these ordinances that is spoken of in the text: "They came into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo! thus have they done in the midst of mine house," saith God. This doctrine seems to contain two propositions.

## **SECT. I**

The ordinances of God are holy

DIVINE ordinances are holy in the following respects:

1. They are conversant wholly and immediately about God, and things divine. When we are in the attendance on the ordinances of divine worship, we are in the special presence of God. When persons come and attend on the ordinances of God, they are said to come before God, and to come into his presence: Jer. 7:10. "Come and stand before me, in this house which is called by my name." Psal. 100:2. "Come into his presence with singing."

In divine ordinances, persons have immediate intercourse with God, either in applying to him, as in prayer and singing praises, or in receiving from him, waiting solemnly and immediately on him for spiritual good, as in hearing the word; or in both applying to God and receiving from him, as in the sacraments. They were appointed on purpose that in them men might converse and hold communion with God. We are poor, ignorant, blind worms of the dust; and God did not see it meet that our way of intercourse with God should be left to ourselves; but God hath given us his ordinances, as ways and means of conversing with him.

In these ordinances, holy and divine things are exhibited and represented. In the preaching of the word, holy doctrines and the divine will are exhibited; in the sacraments, Christ Jesus and his benefits are represented; in prayer and praise, and in the attendance on the word and sacraments, are represented our faith, love, and obedience.

2. The end of God's ordinances is holy. The immediate end is to glorify God. They are instituted to direct us in the holy exercises of faith and love, divine fear and reverence, submission, thankfulness, holy joy and sorrow, holy desires, resolutions, and hopes. True worship consists in these holy and spiritual exercises; and as these divine ordinances are the ordinances of worship, they are to help us, and to direct us in such a worship as this.

3. They have the sanction of divine authority. They are not only conversant about a divine and holy object, and designed to direct and

help us in divine and holy exercises, but they have a divine and holy author. The infinitely great and holy God hath appointed them, the eternal Three in One. Each person in the Trinity hath been concerned in their institution. God the Father hath appointed them, and that by his own Son. They are of Christ's own appointment; and he appointed, as he had received of the Father: John 12:49. "I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak." And the Father and Son more fully revealed and ratified them by the Spirit; and they are committed to writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

They are holy, in that God hath hallowed them, or consecrated them. They are conversant about holy things; and God ordained them, that in them we might be conversant about holy things. They are for a holy use; and it is God who, by his own immediate authority, ordained them for that holy use; which renders them much more sacred than otherwise they would have been.

4. They are attended in the name of God. Thus we are commanded to do all that we do, in word or deed, in the name of Christ, Col. 3:17. which is to be understood especially of our attendance on ordinances. Ordinances are administered in the name of God. When the word is preached by authorized ministers, they speak in God's name, as Christ's ambassadors, as co-workers together with Christ: 2 Cor. 5:20. "Now we are ambassadors for Christ;" chap. 6:1. "We are workers together with, him." When a true minister preaches, he speaks as the oracles of God, 1 Pet. 4:11. and he is to be heard as one representing Christ.

So in administering the sacraments, the minister represents the person of Christ; he baptizes in his name, and in the Lord's supper stands in his stead. In administering church-censures, he still acts, as the apostle expresses it, in the person of Christ, 2 Cor. 2:10. On the other hand, the congregation, in their addresses to God in ordinances, as prayer and praise, act in the name of Christ, the



Mediator, as having him to represent them, and as coming to God by him.

## **SECT. II**

God's ordinances are dreadfully profaned by those who attend on them, and yet allow themselves in ways of wickedness

PERSONS who come to the house of God, into the holy presence of God, attending the duties and ordinances of his public worship, pretending with others, according to divine institution, to call on the name of God, to praise him, to hear his word, and commemorate Christ's death, and who yet, at the same time, are wittingly and allowedly going on in wicked courses, or in any practice contrary to the plain rules of the word of God, therein greatly profane the holy worship of God, defile the temple of God and those sacred ordinances on which they attend. The truth of this proposition appears by the following considerations.

1. By attending ordinances, and yet living in allowed wickedness, they show great irreverence and contempt of those holy ordinances. When persons who have been committing known wickedness, and yet live in it, and have no other design than to go on still in the same, when they come from their wickedness, as it were the same day, as it is expressed in the text, and attend the sacred solemn worship and ordinances of God, and then go from the house of God directly to the like allowed wickedness—they hereby express a most irreverent spirit with respect to holy things, and in a horrid manner cast contempt upon God's sacred institutions, and on those holy things which we are concerned with in them.

They show that they have no reverence of that God who hath hallowed these ordinances. They show a contempt of that divine authority which instituted them. They show a horribly irreverent spirit towards that God into whose presence they come, and with whom they immediately have to do in ordinances, and in whose

name these ordinances are performed and attended. They show a contempt of that adoration of God, of that faith and love, and that humiliation, submission, and praise, which ordinances were instituted to express. What an irreverent spirit doth it show, that they are so careless after what manner they come before God! that they take no care to cleanse and purify themselves, in order that they may be fit to come before God! yea, that they take no care to avoid making themselves more and more unclean and filthy!

They have been taught many a time, that God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity, and how exceedingly he is offended with sin; yet they care not how unclean and abominable they come into his presence. It shows horrid irreverence and contempt, that they are so bold, that they are not afraid to come into the presence of God in such a manner; and that they will presume to go out of the presence of God, and from an attendance upon holy things, again to their sinful practices. If they had any reverence of God and holy things, an approach into his presence, and an attendance on those holy things, would leave that awe upon their minds, that they would not dare to go immediately from them to their ways of known wickedness.

It would show a great irreverence in any person towards a king, if he should not care how he came into his presence, and if he should come in a sordid habit, and in a very indecent manner. How much more horrid irreverence doth it show, for persons willingly and allowedly to defile themselves with that filth which God infinitely hates, and so frequently to come into the presence of God!

2. By making a show of respect to God in ordinances, and then acting the contrary in their lives, they do but mock God. In attending ordinances, they make a show of respect to God. By joining in prayer, in public adorations, confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, they make a show of high thoughts of God, and of humbling themselves before him; of sorrow for their sins, of thankfulness for mercies, and of a desire of grace and assistance to obey and serve God. By

attending upon the hearing of the word, they make a show of a teachable spirit, and of a readiness to practise according to the instructions given. By attending on the sacraments, they make a show of faith in Christ, of choosing him for their portion, and spiritually feeding upon him.

But by their actions they all the while declare the contrary. They declare, that they have no high esteem of God, but that they despise him in their hearts. They declare, that they are so far from repenting of, that they intend to continue in, their sins. They declare, that they have no desire of that grace and assistance to live in a holy manner for which they prayed, and that they had rather live wickedly: this is what they choose, and for the present are resolved upon. They declare by their actions, that there is no truth in what they pretend in hearing the word preached, that they had a desire to know what the will of God is, that they might be directed in their duty; for they declare by their actions, that they desire not to do the will of God, and that they do not intend any such thing: but intend, on the contrary, to disobey him; and that they prefer their carnal interests before his authority and glory.

They declare by their actions, that there is no truth in what they pretend in their attendance on the sacraments, that they desire to be fed with spiritual nourishment, and to be conformed and assimilated to Christ, and to have communion with him. They show by their practices, that they have no regard to Christ; and that they had rather have their lusts gratified, than to be fed with his spiritual food: they show, that they desire not any assimilation to Christ, but to be different from him, and of an opposite character to him: they show, that instead of desiring communion with Christ, they are his resolved and allowed enemies, wilfully acting the part of enemies to Christ, dishonouring him, and promoting the interest of Satan against him.

Now, what can this be else but mockery, to make a show of great respect, reverence, love, and obedience, and at the same time wilfully to declare the reverse in actions. If a rebel or traitor should send

addresses to his king, making a show of great loyalty and fidelity, and should all the while openly, and in the king's sight, carry on designs of dethroning him, how could his addresses be considered as any other than mockery? If a man should bow and kneel before his superior, and use many respectful terms to him, but at the same time should strike him, or spit in his face, would his bowing and his respectful terms be looked upon in any light than as done in mockery? When the Jews kneeled before Christ, and said, Hail, King of the Jews, but at the same time spit in his face, and smote him upon the head with a reed; could their kneeling and salutations be considered as any other than mockery?

Men who attend ordinances, and yet willingly live in wicked practices, treat Christ in the same manner that these Jews did. They come to public worship, and pretend to pray to him, to sing his praises, to sit and hear his word; they come to the sacrament, pretending to commemorate his death. Thus they kneel before him, and say, Hail, King of the Jews; yet at the same time they live in ways of wickedness, which they know Christ hath forbidden, of which he hath declared the greatest hatred, and which are exceedingly to his dishonour. Thus they buffet him, and spit in his face. They do as Judas did, who came to Christ saying, Hail, Master, and kissed him, at the same time betraying him into the hands of those who sought his life.

How can it be interpreted in any other light, when men come to public worship, and attend ordinances, and yet will be drunkards and profane swearers, will live in lasciviousness, injustice, or some other known wickedness? If a man should pray to God to keep him from drunkenness, and at the same time should put the bottle to his own mouth, and drink himself drunk; the absurdity and horrid wickedness of his conduct would be manifest to every man. But the very same thing, though not so visible to us, is done by those who make profession of great respect to God, and pray God from time to time to keep them from sin; yet at the same time have no design to forsake their known sins, but intend the contrary.

God sees men's designs and resolutions more plainly than we can see their outward actions; therefore for a man to pray to God to be kept from sin, and at the same time to intend to sin, is mockery as visible to God as if he prayed to be kept from some particular sin, which he was at the same time willingly and allowedly committing.

These persons are guilty of a horrid profanation of God's ordinances; for they make them occasions of a greater affront to God, the occasions of showing their impudence and presumption; for he who lives in wilful wickedness, and doth not enjoy the ordinances of God, is not guilty of so great presumption, as he who attends these ordinances, and yet allows himself in wickedness. This latter acts as though he came into the presence of God on purpose to affront him. He comes from time to time to hear the will of God, and all the while designs disobedience, and goes away and acts directly contrary to it.

A servant would affront his master by wilfully disobeying his commands in any wise. But he would affront him much more, if he should on every occasion come to him to inquire his will, as though he were ready to do whatever his master would have him do, and then should immediately go away and do the contrary.

3. They put the ordinances of God to a profane use. The ordinances of God are holy, as they are set apart of God to a holy use and purpose. They are the worship of God, instituted for the ends of giving honour and glory to him, and to be means of grace and spiritual good to us. But those persons who attend these ordinances, and yet live in allowed wickedness, aim at neither of these ends: they, in their attendance on ordinances, neither aim to give honour to God, or to express any love, or esteem, or thankfulness; nor do they sincerely seek the good of their own souls. It is not truly the aim of any such persons to obtain grace, or to be made holy; their actions plainly show that this is not their desire; they choose to be wicked, and intend it.

It is not therefore to these purposes that they improve the holy ordinances of God; but they put them to another and profane use. They attend ordinances to avoid that discredit which a voluntarily and habitual absence from them would cause among those with whom they live, to avoid the punishment of human laws, or for their worldly advantage; to make up for other wickedness, or for some other carnal purposes. Thus they profane the ordinances of God, by perverting them to profane purposes.

4. When persons thus treat God's holy ordinances, it tends to beget contempt of them in others. When others see sacred things commonly used so irreverently, and attended with such carelessness and contempt, and treated without any sacred regard; when they see persons are bold with them, treat them without any solemnity of spirit; when they see them thus commonly profaned, it tends to diminish their sense of their sacredness, and to make them seem no very awful things. In short, it tends to imbolden them to do the like.

The holy vessels and utensils of the temple and tabernacle were never to be put to a common use, nor to be handled without the greatest care and reverence: for if it had been commonly otherwise, the reverence of them could not have been maintained; they would have seemed no more sacred than any thing else. So it is in the ordinances of christian worship.

### **SECT. III**

A call to self-examination

LET this doctrine put all upon examining themselves, whether they do not allow themselves in known wickedness. You are such as do enjoy the ordinances of divine worship. You come into the holy presence of God, attending on those ordinances, which God, by sacred authority, hath hallowed and set apart, that in them we might have immediate intercourse with himself; that we might worship and

adore him, and express to him a humble, holy, supreme respect; and that in them we might receive immediate communications from him.

Here you come and speak to God, pretending to express your sense how glorious he is, and how worthy that you should fear and love him, humble yourselves before him, devote yourselves to him, obey him, and have a greater respect to his commands and to his honour, than to any temporal interest, ease, or pleasure of your own. Here you pretend before God, that you are sensible how unworthily you have done by sins committed in times past, and that you have a great desire not to do the like in time to come. You pretend to confess your sins, and to humble yourselves for them. Here you pray that God would give you his Spirit to assist you against sin, to keep you from the commission of it, enable you to overcome temptations, and help you to walk holily in all your conversation, as though you really had a great desire to avoid such sins as you have been guilty of in time past. And the like pretences you have made in your attendance upon the other ordinances, as in hearing the word, in singing praise, &c.

But consider whether you do not horribly defile and profane the public prayers and other ordinances. Notwithstanding all your pretences, and what you seem to hold forth by your attendance on them, do you not all the while live in known wickedness against God? For all your pretences of respect to God, of humiliation for sin, and desires to avoid it, have you not come directly from the allowed practice of known sin to God's ordinances, and did not at all repent of what you had done, nor at all sorry for it at the very time when you stood before God, making these pretences; and even had no design of reformation, but intended to return to the same practice again after your departure from the presence of God?—I say, Hath not this, on many occasions, been your manner of coming and attending on the ordinances of divine worship? Not only so, but is it not still your manner, your common way of attending upon these ordinances, even to this very day? Do you not lie to God with your tongues, when you pretend, that he is a great God, and that you are poor, guilty, unworthy creatures, deserving his wrath by the sins of which you

have been guilty? and when you pretend, that you earnestly desire he would keep you from the like for time to come? Are you not guilty of horrid mockery of God in it, when at the same time you design no such thing, but the contrary?

Do you not even the same day that you come into God's house, and to his ordinances, allow yourselves in known sins? Do you not with consent and approbation think of the sinful practices, in which you allow yourselves, and in which you have been exercising yourselves in the week past? Do you not the very day in which you attend ordinances, allowedly please and gratify a wicked imagination? And are you not then perpetrating wickedness in your thoughts, and contriving the further fulfilment of your wickedness? Yea, are you not guilty of these things sometimes even in the very time of your attendance on ordinances, when you are in the immediate presence of God? and while others have immediate intercourse with God, and you likewise pretend to the same? Do you not, even in these circumstances, allow yourselves in wicked thoughts and imaginations, voluntarily wallowing in known wickedness?

Are not some of you guilty of allowedly breaking God's holy sabbath, in maintaining no government of your thoughts, thinking indifferently about any thing that comes next to mind; and not only thinking, but talking too about common, worldly affairs? And sometimes talking in such a manner, as is not suitable even on other days; talking profanely, or in an unclean manner, sporting and diverting yourselves in such conversation on God's holy day? Yea, it is well if some have not been thus guilty in the very time of attendance on the ordinances of worship.

Examine yourselves, how it hath been with you. You all attend many of the ordinances of divine worship. You come to the house of God, attend public prayers, singing, and preaching of the word; and many of you come to the Lord's supper, that holy ordinance, instituted for the special commemoration of the greatest and most wonderful of all divine acts towards mankind; for the special and visible



representation of the most glorious and wonderful things of our religion; for the most solemn profession and renewal of your engagement to God; and for special communion with Jesus Christ. Let such examine themselves whether they do not allow themselves in known sin, to the horrid profanation and pollution of this most sacred ordinance.

Examine and see whether you do not allow yourselves in some way of dealing with your fellow-men, which you have sufficient light to know to be evil; or whether you do not allow yourselves in a known evil behaviour towards some person or persons of the families to which you respectively belong, as towards your husbands, your wives, your children, or servants; or your neighbours, in your spirit and behaviour towards them, or in your talk of them.

Examine whether you do not some way willingly indulge an unclean appetite, in less or grosser acts of uncleanness, or in your discourse, or in your imagination. Or do you not give way to a lust after strong drink, or indulge yourselves in some vicious excess in gratifying some sensual appetite in meat or drink, or otherwise? Are you not willingly guilty of vanity, and extravagance in your conversation?

Do you not, for all your attendance on ordinances, continue in the allowed neglect of your precious souls, neglecting secret prayer or some known duty of private religion? Or do you not allow yourselves in sabbath-breaking?—In all these ways are the ordinances of God's sacred worship polluted and profaned.

Men are apt to act very treacherously and perversely in the matter of self-examination. When they are put upon examining themselves, they very often decline it, and will not enter into any serious examination of themselves at all. They hear uses of examination insisted on, but put them off to others, and never seriously apply them to themselves.—And if they do examine themselves, when they are put upon it, they are exceedingly partial to themselves; they spare themselves; they do not search, and look, and pass a judgment

according to truth; but so as unreasonably to favour and justify themselves—If they can be brought to examine themselves at all, whether they do not allow themselves in known wickedness, although they attend on divine ordinances, they will not do it impartially. Their endeavour will not be indeed to know the truth of their case, and to give a true answer to their consciences; but to blind themselves, to persuade and flatter themselves that they do not allow themselves in known sin, whether it be true or not. There are two things especially wherein persons often act very perversely and falsely in this matter.

1. Persons very often deal very perversely in pretending, that the sins in which they live are not known sins. Nothing is more common surely, than for persons to flatter themselves with this concerning the wickedness in which they live. Let that wickedness be almost what it may, they will plead to their consciences, and endeavour to still them, that there is no evil in it, or that they do not know that there is any evil in it. Men's own consciences can best tell how they are wont to do in this matter.—There is hardly any kind of wickedness that men commit, but they will plead thus in excuse for it. They will plead thus about their cheating and injustice, about their hatred of their neighbours, about their evil speaking, about their revengeful spirit, about their excessive drinking, about their lying, their neglect of secret prayer, their lasciviousness, their unclean dalliances; yea, they will plead excuses for very gross acts of uncleanness, as fornication, adultery, and what not. They have their vain excuses and carnal reasonings in favour of all their evil actions. They will say, What harm, what evil is there in such and such an action? And if there be a plain rule against it, yet they will plead that their circumstances are peculiar, and that they are excepted from the general rule; that their temptation is so great, that they are excusable; or some thing will they find to plead.

If it be some thing upon which their lusts are much set, and about which they feel remorse of conscience, they will never leave studying and contriving with all the art and subtlety of which they are

masters, till they shall have found out some reason, some excuse, with which they shall be able in some measure to quiet their consciences. And whether after all they shall have made it out to blind conscience or not, yet they will plead that their argument is good, and it is no sin; or if it be a sin, it is only a sin of ignorance.—So men will plead for the wickedness which they do in the dark. So without doubt some very gross sinners plead to their consciences; as would appear, if we could but look into their hearts; when indeed the strongest argument they have, that in such a thing there is no evil, is the strongest lust they have to it, the inordinate desire they have to commit it.

It was the saying of one, *Licetis perimus omnes*; that is, We all perish by lawful things; which is as much as to say, men commonly live wickedly and go to hell, in those ways which they flatter themselves to be lawful. Or at least they flatter themselves, that they are sins of ignorance; they do not know them to be unlawful.—Thus, I make no doubt some will be apt to do, in applying to themselves this use of examination, if they can be persuaded to apply it to themselves at all. Whether these things be true of you, let your own consciences speak, you that neglect secret prayer; you that live in secret, unclean, lascivious actions; you that indulge an inordinate appetite for strong drink; you that defraud or oppress others; you that indulge a spirit of revenge and hatred towards your neighbour.—Here I desire you to consider two or three things.

(1.) Not all sins, which one knows not with a certain knowledge to be sinful, are justly called sins of ignorance. Men often will excuse themselves for venturing upon a sinful action or practice, with this, that they know not that it is sinful; which is at most true no otherwise, than as they do not know it to be sinful with a certain knowledge, or with the evidence of absolute demonstration; although at the same time it is a sin against their light, and against great light. They have been so taught, that they have had light enough to make them sensible that it is displeasing to God, and not warranted or allowed by him. And they do in their consciences think it to be sinful;

they are secretly convinced of it, however they may pretend the contrary, and labour to deceive themselves, and to persuade themselves that they do not think there is any evil in it.

Those sins which are contrary to sufficient information and instruction, and contrary to the real dictates of their own consciences, or to the judgment of their own minds; whether there be certain or demonstrative knowledge or no; these are what I would be understood to mean, when I speak of known sins. Such light as this, whether there be absolutely certain knowledge or no, is sufficient to render the action utterly inexcusable, and to render it, when allowed, a horrible profanation and pollution of the holy ordinances of God.

(2.) It is in vain for persons to pretend that those are sins of ignorance, which they have often and clearly heard testified against from the word of God. It will be found to be so at last; it will be found to be a vain thing for persons who have lived under the light of the gospel, and where all manner of iniquity is testified against, if they live in immoral and vicious practices, to pretend that they are sins of ignorance; unless the case be very peculiar and extraordinary.

(3.) It is in vain for you to pretend that those are sins of ignorance, of which you would not dare to proceed in the practice, if you knew that your soul was to be required of you this night. Persons do many things, for which they plead, and pretend they think there is no evil in them, who yet would as soon eat fire, as do the same, if they knew that they were to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ within four and twenty hours. This shows that persons do but prevaricate, when they pretend that their sins are sins of ignorance.

2. Another way wherein men deal falsely and perversely in this matter, is, in pretending that they do not allow themselves in those sins which they practise. They either pretend that they know them not to be sins, or if they cannot but own that, then they will say, they do not allow themselves in them; and so they hope God is not very much provoked by them. They pretend this, though they make a

trade of them. They go on repeating one act after another, without ever seriously repenting of past, or resolving against future acts. But take heed that you do not deceive yourselves in this matter; for such pretences, however they do something towards stilling your consciences now, will do nothing when you come to stand before your righteous and holy Judge.

#### **SECT. IV**

Address to such as attend ordinances, and yet allow themselves in known sin

CONSIDER how holy and sacred the ordinances of God are; what mockery you are guilty of in making such a show, and such pretences in attending ordinances, and yet voluntarily acting the reverse of what you pretend. Consider that there is no sort of sinners with whom God is so provoked, and who stand so guilty before him, as the profaners of his ordinances. The fire of God's wrath is kindled by none so much as by the polluters of holy things. They are represented as those who are especially guilty before God, in the third commandment: "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Why is this annexed to this command, rather than to any other of the ten, but because the breach of it especially renders a man guilty in the sight of God?

The taking of God's name in vain includes the profanation and pollution of ordinances and holy things. They do in a very dreadful manner take God's name in vain, who attend on his ordinances, and yet live in known sin; for, as we have shown, they manifest the greatest irreverence for him, and contempt of divine things. They manifest a contempt of his authority, a contempt of the business and design of his ordinances, and a most careless and irreverent spirit in things wherein they have immediate converse with God. Ordinances, as we have shown, are attended in the name of God; and therefore, by such an attendance on them, the name of God is greatly profaned. You that attend ordinances in such a manner, take the name of God

so much in vain, that you use it only in mockery, and so as to expose it to contempt. Such a way of attending ordinances is a trampling of all that is sacred under foot.

We have in Scripture scarce any such awful instances of the immediate and miraculous vengeance of God, as on the profaners of holy things. How did God consume Nadab and Abihu, for offering strange fire before him! How did he break forth upon Uzza, for handling the ark with too much irreverence! 2 Sam. 6:6, 7. And how did he break forth on the children of Israel at Bethshemesh, for profaning the ark! "He smote of the people fifty thousand threescore and ten men," as in 1 Sam. 6:19.

And God hath threatened in the New Testament, that if any man "defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy," 1 Cor. 3:17. There is an emphasis in the expression. God will destroy all sinners, let it be what sin it will which they commit, and in which they continue; and yet it is said, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy," as if it had been said, there is something peculiar in the case, and God is especially provoked to destroy such, and consume them in the fire of his wrath; and he will indeed destroy them with a destruction especially dreadful.

So God hath declared, Gal. 6:7. "That he will not be mocked;" i.e. if any presume to mock him, they will find him, by experience, to be no contemptible being. God will vindicate his holy majesty from the contempt of those who dare to mock him, and he will do it effectually: they shall fully find how dreadful a being he is, whose name they have daringly profaned and polluted. Defilers and profaners of ordinances, by known and allowed wickedness, provoke God more than the heathen, who have no ordinances. Thus the wickedness of Judah and Jerusalem is said to be far worse than that of Sodom, though the inhabitants of Sodom were, as we have reason to think, some of the worst of the heathens. See Ezek. 16:46, 47, &c. The sin of Sodom is here spoken of as a light thing in comparison with the sins of Judah. And what should be the reason, but that

Judah enjoyed holy things which they profaned and polluted, which Sodom had no opportunity to do? for it is not to be supposed, that Judah otherwise arrived to the same pass that Sodom had.

Consider therefore, ye who allow yourselves in known wickedness, and live in it, who yet come to the house of God, and to his ordinances from time to time, without any serious design of forsaking your sins, but, on the contrary, with an intention of continuing in them, and who frequently go from the house of God to your wicked practices; consider how guilty you have made yourselves in the sight of God, and how dreadfully God is provoked by you. It is a wonder of God's patience, that he doth not break forth upon you, and strike you dead in a moment; for you profane holy things in a more dreadful manner than Uzza did, when yet God struck him dead for his error. And whereas he was struck dead for only one offence; you are guilty of the same sin from week to week, and from day to day.

It is a wonder that God suffers you to live upon earth, that he hath not, with a thunderbolt of his wrath, struck you down to the bottomless pit long ago. You that are allowedly and voluntarily living in sin, who have gone on hitherto in sin, are still going on, and do not design any other than to go on yet; it is a wonder that the Almighty's thunder lies still, and suffers you to sit in his house, or to live upon earth. It is a wonder that the earth will bear you, and that hell doth not swallow you up. It is a wonder that fire doth not come down from heaven, or come up from hell, and devour you; that hell-flames do not enlarge themselves to reach you, and that the bottomless pit hath not swallowed you up.

However, that you are as yet borne with, is no argument that your damnation slumbers. The anger of God is not like the passions of men, that it should be in haste. There is a day of vengeance and recompence appointed for the vessels of wrath; and when the day shall have come, and the iniquity shall be full, none shall deliver out

of God's hand. Then will he recompense, even recompense into your bosoms.

## **The Pure in Heart Blessed**

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. MATTHEW 5:8

GOD formerly delivered his law from mount Sinai, by an audible voice, with the sound of a trumpet, with the appearance of devouring fire, with thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes. But the principal discoveries of God's word and will to mankind were reserved to be given by Jesus Christ, his own Son, and the Redeemer of men, who is the light of the world.

In this sermon of Christ, of which the text is a part, we hear him delivering the mind of God also from a mountain. Here is God speaking, as well as from mount Sinai, and as immediately, but after a very different manner. There God spake by a preternatural formation of sounds in the air; here he becomes incarnate, takes on him our nature, and speaks, and converses with us, not in a preternatural, awful, and terrible manner, but familiarly as one of us. His face was beheld freely by all that were about him; his voice was human, without those terrors which made the children of Israel desire that God might speak to them immediately no more; and the revelation which he makes of God's word is more clear and perfect, and fuller of the discoveries of spiritual duties, of the spiritual nature of the command of God, of our spiritual and true happiness, and of mercy and grace to mankind. John 1:17. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."



This discourse of Christ on the mount seems principally levelled against the false notions, and carnal prejudices, that were at that day embraced by the nation of the Jews; and those benedictions, which we have in the beginning of his sermon, were sayings that were mere paradoxes to them, wholly contrary to the notions which they had received. That he, who was poor in spirit, was blessed, was a doctrine contrary to the received opinion of the world, and especially of that nation, who were exceedingly ambitious of the praise of men, and highly conceited of their own righteousness. And that he was a blessed and happy man, who mourned for sin, and lived mortified to the pleasures and vanities of the world, was contrary to their notions, who placed their highest happiness in worldly and carnal things. So also that they who were meek were blessed, was another doctrine very contrary to their notions, who were a very haughty, proud nation, and very revengeful, and maintained the lawfulness of private revenge, as may be seen in the 38th verse. Equally strange to them was the declaration that they who hungered and thirsted after righteousness were happy; for they placed their happiness, not in possessing a high degree of righteousness, but in having a great share of worldly good. They were wont to labour for the meat that perisheth, they had no notion of any such thing as spiritual riches, or of happiness in satisfying a spiritual appetite. The Jews were dreadfully in the dark at that day about spiritual things. The happiness which they expected by the Messiah was a temporal and carnal, and not a spiritual, happiness. Christ also tells them that they were blessed who were merciful, and who were peace-makers; which was also a doctrine that the Jews especially stood in need of at that day, for they were generally of a cruel, unmerciful, persecuting spirit.

The truth which Christ teaches them in the text, that they were blessed who were pure in heart, was a thing wholly beyond their conceptions. The Jews at this time placed almost the whole of religion in external things, in a conformity to the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses. They laid great stress on tithing mint, and anise, and cumin, and on their traditions, as in washing hands before meat and the like; but they neglected the weightier

matters of the law, and especially such as respected holiness of heart. They took much more care to have clean hands, and a clean outside, than a clean heart, as Christ tells them, Matt. 23:25, 27. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within ye are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."

We may observe concerning the words of the text,

1. That Christ pronounces the pure in heart, blessed. Christ here accommodates his instructions to the human nature. He knew that all mankind were in the pursuit of happiness, he has directed them in the true way to it, and he tells them what they must become in order to be blessed and happy.

2. He gives the reason why such are blessed, or wherein the blessedness of such consists; that they shall see God. It is probable the Jews supposed that it was a great privilege to see God, from those passages in the law, where there is an account of Moses's earnestly desiring to see God's glory; and from the account that is given of the seventy elders, Exod. 24:9, 10, 11. "Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink."

It is also probable that they had very imperfect notions of what the vision of God was, and of the happiness that consisted in it, and that their notion of this matter, agreeably to the rest of their carnal, childish notions, was of some outwardly splendid and glorious sight, to please the eye and to entertain the fancy. From these words I shall derive two propositions.

- I. It is a truly blessed thing to the soul of man to see God.

II. To be pure in heart, is the certain and only way to attain to this blessedness.

I. It is a truly blessed thing to the soul of man to see God. Here I shall attempt to show,

1. What is meant by seeing God.

First. It is not any sight with the bodily eyes: the blessedness of the soul does not enter in at that door. This would make the blessedness of the soul dependent on the body, or the happiness of man's superior part dependent on the inferior; and this would have confirmed the carnal and childish notions of the Jews.

God is a spirit, and is not to be seen with the bodily eyes. We find it attributed to God, that he is invisible. Heb. 11:27. "As seeing him, who is invisible." Col. 1:15. "Who is the image of the invisible God." It is mentioned as a part of God's glory, 1 Tim. 1:17. "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." That it is not any sight with the bodily eyes, is evident, because the unembodied souls of the saints see God, and the angels also, who are spirits and were never united to bodies. Matt. 18:10. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

It is not any form or visible representation, nor shape, nor colour, nor shining light, that is seen, wherein this great happiness of the soul consists. Indeed God was wont to manifest himself of old in outward glorious appearances. There was a shining light that was called the glory of the Lord. Thus the glory of the Lord was said to descend on mount Sinai, and in the tabernacle of the congregation. There was an outward visible token of God's presence, and the seventy elders, when they saw God in the mount, saw a visible shape. It seems also that when Moses desired to see God's glory, and when God passed by and covered him with his hand in the cleft of the rock,

that Moses saw some visible glory. Exod. 33:18–23. "And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live." But it seems that God then condescended to the infant state of the church, and to the childish notions that were entertained in those days of lesser light; and Moses's request seems to have been answered, by God making his goodness to pass before him, and proclaiming his name, and giving him a strong apprehension of the things contained in that name, rather than by showing him any outward glory.

The saints in Heaven will behold an outward glory as they are in the human nature of Christ, which is united to the Godhead, as it is the body of that person who is God; and there will doubtless be appearances of a divine and inimitable glory and beauty in Christ's glorified body, which it will indeed be a refreshing and blessed sight to see.

But the beauty of Christ's body as seen by the bodily eyes, will be ravishing and delightful, chiefly as it will express his spiritual glory. The majesty that will appear in Christ's body, will express and show forth the spiritual greatness and majesty of the divine nature; the pureness and beauty of that light and glory, will express the perfection of the divine holiness; the sweetness and ravishing mildness of his countenance, will express his divine and spiritual love and grace.

Thus it was when the three disciples beheld Christ at his transfiguration upon the mount. They beheld a wonderful outward glory in Christ's body, an inexpressible beauty in his countenance; but that outward glory and beauty delighted them principally as an expression of the divine excellencies of his mind, as we may see from their manner of speaking of it. It was the sweet mixture of majesty and grace in his countenance, by which they were ravished. 2 Pet.

1:16, 17, 18. "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." But especially from the account which John gives of it. John 1:14. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth;" where John very probably had in his mind what he had seen in the mount at the transfiguration. Grace and truth are not outward, but spiritual, glories.

Secondly. It is an intellectual view by which God is seen. God is a spiritual being, and he is beheld with the understanding. The soul has in itself those powers which are capable of apprehending objects, and especially spiritual objects, without looking through the windows of the outward senses. This is a more perfect way of perception than by the eyes of the body. We are so accustomed and habituated to depend upon our senses, and our intellectual powers are so neglected and disused, that we are ready to conceive that seeing things with the bodily eyes is the most perfect way of apprehending them. But it is not so; the eye of the soul is vastly more perfect than the eye of the body; yet it is not every apprehension of God by the understanding that may be called the seeing of him. As,

1st. The having an apprehension of God merely by hearsay. If we hear of such a being as God, are educated in the belief that there is such a being, are told what sort of being he is, and what he has done, and are rightly told, and we give credit to what we hear; yet if we have no apprehension of God in any other way, we cannot be said to see God in the sense of the text. This is not the beatific sight of God.

2d. If we have an apprehension of God merely by speculative reasoning. If we come to some apprehension of God's being, and of his being almighty, all-wise, and good, by ratiocination, that is not what the Scripture calls seeing God. It is some more immediate way

of understanding and viewing that is called sight; nor will such an apprehension as this merely ever make the soul truly blessed. Nor,

3d. Is every more immediate and sensible apprehension of God, that seeing of him mentioned in the text, and that which is truly beatific. The wicked spirits in the other world have doubtless more immediate apprehensions of the being of God, and of his power and wrath, than the wicked in this world. They stand before God to be judged, they receive the sentence from him, they have a dreadful apprehension of his wrath and displeasure. But yet they are exceedingly remote from seeing God, in the sense of the text.

But to see God, is this. It is to have an immediate, sensible, and certain understanding of God's glorious excellency and love.

1st. There must be a direct and immediate sense of God's glory and excellency. I say direct and immediate, to distinguish it from a mere perception that God is glorious and excellent by means of speculative and distant argumentation, which is a more indirect way of apprehending things. A true sense of the glory of God is that which can never be obtained by speculative ratiocination; and if men convince themselves by argument that God is holy, that never will give a sense of his amiable and glorious holiness. If they argue that he is very merciful, that will not give a sense of his glorious grace and mercy. It must be a more immediate, sensible discovery that must give the mind a real sense of the excellency and beauty of God. He that sees God, has a direct and immediate view of God's great and awful majesty, of his pure and beauteous holiness, of his wonderful and endearing grace and mercy.

2d. There is a certain understanding of his love, there is a certain apprehension of his presence. He that beholds God, does not merely see him as present by his essence, for so he is present with all, both godly and ungodly. But he is more especially present with those whom he loves, he is graciously present with them; and when they see him, they see him and know him to be so; they have an

understanding of his love to them; they see him from love manifesting himself to them. He that has a blessed-making sight of God, not only has a view of God's glory and excellency, but he views it as having a property in it; he sees God's love to him; he receives the testimonies and manifestations of that love.

God's favour is sometimes in Scripture called his face: Psal. 119:58. where it is translated, "I entreated thy favour with my whole heart;" it is in the original "thy face;" and God's hiding his face, is a very common expression to signify his withholding the testimonies of his favour.

To see God, as in the text, implies the sight of him as glorious and as gracious; a vision of the light of his countenance, both as it is understood of the effulgence of his glory, and the manifestations of his favour and love.

The discoveries which the saints have in this world of the glory and love of God, are often in Scripture called the sight of God. Thus it is said of Abraham, that he saw him who is invisible. Heb. 11:27. So the saints are said to see as in a glass the glory of the Lord. 2 Cor. 3:18. "But we all with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Christ speaks of the spiritual knowledge of God. John 14:7. "If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also; and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." The saints in this world have an earnest of what is future, they have the dawnings of future light.

But the more perfect view which the saints have of God's glory and love in another world, is what is especially called the seeing of God. Then they shall see him as he is. That light which now is but a glimmering, will be brought to clear sunshine; that which is here but the dawning, will become perfect day.

Those intellectual views which will be granted in another world, are called seeing God.

1st. Because the view will be very direct; as when we see things with the bodily eyes. God will, as it were, immediately discover himself to their minds, so that the understanding shall behold the glory and love of God, as a man beholds the countenance of his friend. The discoveries which the saints here have of God's excellency and grace, are immediate in a sense; that is, they do not mainly consist in ratiocination; but yet in another sense they are indirect, that is, they are by means of the gospel, as through a glass; but in heaven God will immediately excite apprehensions of himself, without the use of any such means.

2d. It is called seeing, because it will be most certain. When persons see a thing with their own eyes, it gives them the greatest certainty they can have of it, greater than they can have by any information of others. So the sight that they will have in heaven will exclude all doubting. The knowledge of God which the saints have in this world, has certainty in it, but yet the certainty is liable to be interrupted with temptations, and some degree of doubtings, but there is no such thing in heaven. The looking at the sun does not give a greater nor fuller certainty that it shines.

3d. It is called seeing, because the apprehension of God's glory and love is as clear and lively as when any thing is seen with bodily eyes. When we are actually beholding any thing with our eyes in the meridian light of the sun, it does not give a more lively idea and apprehension of it than the saints in heaven have of the divine excellency and love of God. When we are looking upon things our idea is much more clear and perfect, and the impression stronger on the soul, than when we only think of a thing absent. But the intellectual views that the saints in heaven will have of God, will have far the advantage of bodily sight, it will be a much more perfect way of apprehending. The saints in heaven will see the glory of the body of Christ after the resurrection with bodily eyes, but they will have no



more immediate and perfect way of seeing that visible glory than they will of beholding Christ's divine and spiritual glory. They will not want eyes to see that which is spiritual, as well as we can see any thing that is corporeal; they will behold God in an ineffable, and to us now inconceivable, manner.

4th. The intellectual sight which the saints will have of God will make them as sensible of his presence, and give them as great advantages for conversing with him, as the sight of the bodily eyes doth an earthly friend; yea, and more too; for when we see our earthly friends with bodily eyes, we have not the most full and direct sight of their principal part, even their souls. We see the qualities, and dispositions, and acts of their minds, no otherwise than by outward signs of speech and behaviour; strictly speaking, we do not see the man, the soul, at all, but only its tabernacle or dwelling.

But their souls will have the most clear sight of the spiritual nature of God itself. They shall behold his attributes and disposition towards them more immediately, and therefore with greater certainty, than it is possible to see any thing in the soul of an earthly friend by his speech and behaviour; and therefore their spiritual sight will give them greater advantage for conversing with God, than the sight of earthly friends with bodily eyes, or hearing them with our ears, gives us for conversing with them.

2. I shall now give the reasons why the thus seeing God is that which will make the soul truly happy.

First. It yields a delight suitable to the nature of an intelligent creature. God hath made man, and man only, of all the creatures here below, an intelligent creature; and his reason and understanding are that by which he is distinguished from all inferior ranks of beings. Man's reason is, as it were, a heavenly ray, or, in the language of the wise man, it is "the candle of the Lord." It is that wherein mainly consists the natural image of God, it is the noblest

faculty of man, it is that which ought to bear rule over the other powers; being given for that end, that it might govern the soul.

Therefore those delights are most suitable to the nature of man, that are intellectual, which result from the exercises of this noblest, this distinguishing faculty. God, by giving man understanding, made him capable of such delights, and fitted him for them, and designed that such pleasures as those should be his happiness.

Intellectual pleasures consist in the beholding of spiritual excellencies and beauties, but the glorious excellency and beauty of God are far the greatest. God's excellence is the supreme excellence. When the understanding of the reasonable creature dwells here, it dwells at the fountain, and swims in a boundless, bottomless ocean. The love of God is also the most suitable entertainment of the soul of man, which naturally desires the happiness of society, or of union with some other being. The love of so glorious a being is infinitely valuable, and the discoveries of it are capable of ravishing the soul above all other love. It is suitable to the nature of an intelligent being also, as it is that kind of delight that reason approves of. There are many other delights in which men indulge themselves, which, although they are pleasing to the senses and inferior powers, yet are contrary to reason; reason opposes the enjoyment of them, so that unless reason be suppressed and stifled, they cannot be enjoyed without a war in the soul. Reason, the noblest faculty, resists the inferior rebellious powers; and the more reason is in exercise, the more will it resist, and the greater will be the inward war and opposition.

But this delight of seeing God the understanding approves of; it is a thing most agreeable to reason that the soul should delight itself in this, and the more reason is in exercise, the more it approves of it. So that when it is enjoyed, it is with inward peace, and a sweet tranquillity of soul; there is nothing in human nature that is opposite to it, but every thing agrees and conforms to it.

Secondly. The pleasure which the soul has in seeing God, is not only its delight, but it is at the same time its highest perfection and excellency. Man's true happiness is his perfection and true excellency. When any reasonable creature finds that his excellency and his joy are the same thing, then he is come to right and real happiness, and not before. If a man enjoys any kind of pleasure and lives in it, how much soever He may be taken with what he enjoys, yet if he be not the more excellent for his pleasures, it is a certain sign that he is not a truly happy man. There are many pleasures that men are wont violently to pursue, which are no part of their dignity or perfection, but which, on the contrary, debase the man and make him vile. Instead of rendering the mind beautiful and lovely, they only serve to pollute it; instead of exalting its nature, they make it more akin to that of beasts.

But it is quite the contrary with the pleasure that is to be enjoyed in seeing God. To see God is the highest honour and dignity to which the human nature can attain; that intellectual beholding of him is itself the highest excellency of the understanding. The great part of the excellency of man is his knowledge and understanding; but the knowledge of God is the most excellent and noble kind of knowledge.

The delight and joy of the soul in that sight are the highest excellency of the other faculty, viz. the will. The heart of man cannot be brought to a higher excellency than to have delight in God, and complacency in the divine excellency and glory. The soul, while it remains under the power of corruption and depravity, cannot have any delight in God's glory: and when its moral relish is so far changed that it is disposed to delight in it, it is most excellently disposed; and when it actually exercises delight in God, it is the most noble and exalted exercise of which it is capable. So that the soul's seeing of God, and having pleasure and joy in the sight, is the greatest excellency of both the faculties.

Thirdly. The happiness of seeing God is a blessing without any mixture. That pleasure has the best claim to be called man's true

happiness, which comes unmixed, and without alloy. But so doth the joy of seeing God; it neither brings any bitterness, nor will it suffer any.

1. This pleasure brings no bitterness with it. That is not the case with other delights, in which natural men are wont to place their happiness; they are bitter sweets, yielding a kind of momentary pleasure in gratifying an appetite, but wormwood and gall are mingled in the cup. He who plucks these roses, finds that they grow on thorns; he who tastes of this honey is sure to find in it a sting. If men place their happiness in them, reason and conscience will certainly give them inward disturbance in their enjoyment. There will be the sting of continual disappointments, for carnal delights are of such a nature that they keep the soul, that places its happiness in them, always big with expectation and in eager pursuit; while they are evermore like shadows, and never yield what is hoped for. They who give themselves up to them, unavoidably bring upon themselves many heavy inconveniences. If they promote their pleasure in one way, they destroy their comforts in many other ways; and this sting ever accompanies them, that they are but short-lived, they will soon vanish, and be no more.

And as to the pleasure found in the enjoyment of earthly friends, there is a bitterness goes also with that. An intense love to any earthly object, though it may afford high enjoyment, yet greatly multiplies our cares and anxieties through the defects and blemishes, the instability and changeableness, of the object, the calamities to which it is exposed, and the short duration of all such friendships, and of the pleasures thence arising.

Some men take a great deal of pleasure in study, in the increase of knowledge: but Solomon, who had great experience, long ago observed that this also is vanity, because he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. Eccles. 1:17, 18. "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief; and

he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow." But the delight which the sight of God affords to the soul, brings no bitterness with it, there is no disappointment accompanies it, it promises not more than it yields, but on the contrary the pleasure is greater than could be imagined before God was seen. It brings no sting of conscience along with it, it brings no vexing care nor anxiety, it leaves no loathing nor disrelish behind it.

There is nothing in God which gives uneasiness to him who beholds him. The view of one attribute adds to the joy that is raised by another. A sight of the holiness of God, gives unspeakable pleasure to the mind; the idea of it is a perception beyond measure the most delightful that can exist in a created mind. And then the beholding of God's grace adds to this joy, for the soul then considers that the Being who is so amiable in himself, is so communicative, so disposed to love and benevolence. The view of the majesty of God greatly heightens this joy: to behold such grace and goodness, and such goodness and majesty, united together. Especially will the sight of God's love to himself, the person beholding, increase the pleasure, when he considers that so great and glorious a being loves him, and is his God and friend. Again, the beholding of God's infinite power will still add to the pleasure, for he reflects that he, who is his friend, and loves him with so great a love, can do all things for him. So the beholding of his wisdom, because he thereby knows what is best for him, and knows how so to order things, as shall make him most blessed. So the consideration of his eternity and immutability; it will rejoice him to think that his friend and his portion is an eternal and unchangeable friend and portion. The beholding of God's happiness will increase the joy, to consider that he is so happy, who is so much the object of his love. That love of God, in those who shall see God, will cause them exceedingly to rejoice in the happiness of God. Even the sight of God's vindictive justice will add to their joy. This justice of God will appear glorious to them, and will make them prize his love.

2d. This joy is without mixture, not only as it brings not bitterness with it, but also as it will not suffer any. The sight of God excludes every thing that is of a nature different from delight. This light is such, as wholly excludes darkness.

It is not in the power of any earthly enjoyment to drive and shut out all trouble from the heart. If a man has some things in which he takes comfort and pleasure, there are others that yield him uneasiness and sorrow; if he has some things in the world that are sweet, there are others that are bitter, against which it is not in the power of his pleasures to help him. We never can find any thing here below that shall make us so happy, but that we shall have grief and pleasure mixed together. This world, let us make the best of it, will be spotted with black and white, varied with clouds and sunshine, and to them who yield their hearts to it, it will yield pain as well as pleasure. But this pleasure of seeing God can suffer no mixture; for this pleasure of seeing God is so great and strong that it takes the full possession of the heart, it fills it perfectly full, so that there shall be no room for any sorrow, no room in any corner for any thing of an adverse nature from joy. There is no darkness that can bear such powerful light. It is impossible that they who see God face to face, who behold his glory and love so immediately as they do in heaven, should have any such thing as grief or pain in their hearts. When once the saints are come into God's presence, tears shall be wiped from their eyes, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The pleasure will be so great, as fully and perfectly to employ every faculty; the sight of God's glory and love will be so wonderful, so engaging to the mind, and it shall keep all the powers of it in such strong attention, that the soul will be wholly possessed and taken up.

Again. There will be in what they shall see, a sufficient antidote against every thing that would afford uneasiness, or that can have any tendency thereto. If there were sin in the heart before, that used by its exercise to disturb its peace and quiet, and was a seed and spring of trouble, the immediate and full sight of God's glory will at once drive it all away. Sin cannot remain in the heart which thus

beholds God, for sin is a principle of enmity against God; but there can no enmity remain in one, who after this manner sees God's glory. It must and will wholly drive away any such principle, and change it into love. The imperfect sight that the saints have of God's glory here, transforms them in part into the same image; but this perfect sight will transform them perfectly. If there be the hatred of enemies, the vision of the love and power of God will be a sufficient antidote against it; so that it can give no uneasiness. If the saint is removed by death from all his earthly friends, and earthly enjoyments, that will give no uneasiness to him, when he sees what a fulness there is in God. He will see that there is all in him, so that he who possesses him can lose nothing: whatever is taken from him he sustains no loss. And whatever else there may be, that would otherwise afford grief and uneasiness to the soul, it cannot affect him who is in the presence of God and sees his face.

Fourthly. This joy of seeing God is the true blessedness of man, because the fountain that supplies it is equal to man's desire and capacity.

When God gave man his capacity of happiness, he doubtless made provision for the filling of it. There was some good which God had in his eye, when he made the vessel, and made it of such dimensions, which he knew to be sufficient to fill it; and doubtless that, whatever it be, is man's true blessedness; and that good which is found not to be commensurate to man's capacity and natural desires, and never can equal it, is certainly not that wherein man's happiness consists. Man's desires and capacities are commensurate one with another. When once the capacity is filled, the soul desires no more.

Now in order to judge how great man's capacity is, we must consider the capacity of his principal and leading faculty, viz. his understanding. So great as is the capacity of that faculty, so great is man's capacity of enjoyment; so great a good as the soul is capable of understanding, so great a good it is capable of enjoying. As great a good as the soul is capable of comprehending in its perception and

idea, so great a good is it capable of receiving with the other faculty, the will, which keeps pace with the understanding; and that good which the soul can receive with both faculties, of that is it capable of being made the possessor and enjoyer.

But it is easy to perceive that there is nothing here below that can give men such delight as shall be equal to this faculty. Let a man enjoy as great an affluence of earthly comforts as he will, still there is room; man's nature is capable of a great deal more, there are certain things wanting to which the understanding can extend itself, which he could wish were added.

But the fountain that supplies that joy and delight, which the soul has in seeing God, is sufficient to fill the vessel, because it is infinite. He that sees the glory of God, in his measure beholds that of which there is no end. The understanding may extend itself as far as it will; it doth but take its flight into an endless expanse, and dive into a bottomless ocean. It may discover more and more of the beauty and loveliness of God, but it never will exhaust the fountain. The body of man may as well swallow up the ocean, or his soul embrace immensity, as he can extend his faculties to the utmost of God's excellency.

So in like manner it may be said of the love of God. We can never by soaring and ascending come to the height of it; we can never by descending come to the depth of it; or by measuring, know the length and breadth of it. Eph. 3:18, 19. "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." So that let the thoughts and desires extend themselves as they will, here is space enough for them, in which they may expand for ever. How blessed therefore are they that do see God, who are come to this exhaustless fountain! They have obtained that delight which gives full satisfaction; having come to this pleasure, they neither do nor can desire any more. They can sit down fully contented, and take up with



this enjoyment for ever and ever, and desire no change. After they have had the pleasure of beholding the face of God millions of ages, it will not grow a dull story; the relish of this delight will be as exquisite as ever, there is enough still for the utmost employment of every faculty.

Fifthly. This delight in the vision of God hath an unfailing foundation. God made man to endure for ever, and therefore that which is man's true blessedness, we may conclude has a sure and lasting foundation. As to worldly enjoyments, their foundation is a sandy one, that is continually wearing away, and certainly will at last let the building fall. If we take pleasure in riches, riches in a little while will be gone; if we take pleasure in gratifying our senses, those objects whence we draw our gratifications will perish with the using; and our senses themselves also will be gone, the organs will be worn out, and our whole outward form will turn to dust. If we take pleasure in union with our earthly friends, that union must be broken; the bonds are not durable, but will soon wear asunder.

But he who has the immediate intellectual vision of God's glory and love, and rejoices in that, has his happiness built upon an everlasting rock. Isaiah 26:4. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." In the Hebrew it is, "in the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of ages."

The glory of God is subject to no changes nor vicissitudes, it will never cease to shine forth. History gives us an account of the sun's light failing, and becoming more faint and dim for many months together; but the glory of God will never be subject to fade. Of the light of that Sun there never will be any eclipse or dimness, but it will shine eternally in its strength. Isa. 60:19. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." So the love of God, to those who see his face, will never fail, or be subject to any abatement; he loves his saints with an everlasting love. Jer. 31:3. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me,

saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Those streams of pleasure which are at God's right hand, are never dry, but ever flowing and ever full.

How much doth the sense of the sureness of this foundation confirm and heighten the joy! The soul enjoys its delight in a sense of this, free from all fears and jealousies, and with an unspeakable quietness and assurance. Isa. 32:17. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."

From this part of the subject we may derive several important and useful reflections.

1. Here we may see one instance wherein the revelation of Jesus Christ excels all human wisdom. It was a thing that had been beyond the wisdom of the world, to tell wherein man's true happiness consisted; there was a vast variety of opinions about it among the wise men and philosophers of the heathen; indeed on no other subject was there so great difference among them. If I remember right, there were several hundred different opinions reckoned up respecting it, which shows that they were woefully in the dark. Though there were many very wise men among them, men famed through all succeeding ages for their knowledge and wisdom; yet their reason was not sufficient to find out man's true happiness.

We can give reasons for it now that it is revealed, and it seems so rational, that one would think the light of nature sufficient to discover it; but we having always lived in the enjoyment of gospel light, and being accustomed to it, are hardly sensible how dependent we are upon it, and how much we should be in the dark about things that now seem plain to us, if we never had had our reason assisted by revelation.

God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world by the gospel. 1 Cor. 1:20. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer

of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" i.e. he hath shown the foolishness of their wisdom by this brighter light of his revelation. For all that philosophy and human wisdom could do, it was the gospel that first taught the world wherein mankind's true blessedness consisted, and that taught them the way to attain to it.

2. Hence we learn the great privilege we have, who possess such advantages to come to the blessedness of seeing God. We have the true God revealed to us in the word of God, who is the Being in the sight of whom this happiness is to be enjoyed. We have the glorious attributes and perfections of God declared to us. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is discovered in the gospel which we enjoy, his beauties and glories are there as it were pointed forth by God's own hand to our view; so that we have those means which God hath provided for our obtaining those beginnings of this sight of him which the saints have in this world, in that spiritual knowledge which they have of God, which is absolutely necessary in order to our having it perfectly in another world.

The knowledge which believers have of God and his glory, as appearing in the face of Christ, is the imperfect beginning of this heavenly sight, it is an earnest of it, it is the dawning of the heavenly light; and this beginning must evermore precede, or a perfect vision of God in heaven cannot be obtained; and all those that have this beginning, shall obtain that perfection also. Great therefore is our privilege, that we have the means of this spiritual knowledge. We may in this world see God as in a glass darkly, in order to our seeing him hereafter face to face; and surely our privilege is very great, that he has given us that glass from whence God's glory is reflected. We have not only the discoveries of God's glory in the doctrines of his word, but we have abundant directions how to act, so that we may obtain a perfect and beatific sight of God; one of which we have in our text, and of which I shall speak particularly hereafter.

3. This doctrine may lead us to a sense of the blessedness of the heavenly state, and justly cause us to long after it. In heaven the saints do see God, they enjoy that vision of him of which we have been speaking in its perfection. All clouds and darkness are there removed, they there behold the glory and love of God more immediately, and with greater certainty, and a more strong and lively apprehension, than a man beholds his friend when he is with him, and sees his face by the noon-day sun, and with far greater advantages for conversation and enjoyment.

Well may this make the heavenly state appear a blessed state to us, and make us to breathe after it; well may the consideration of these things make the saints wait for and desire their happy change; well may it make them long for the appearing of Christ. This they know, that when he shall appear, they shall "see him as he is." 1 John 3:2. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

This may well be comforting to the saints under the apprehensions of death, and it is a consideration sufficient to take away the sting of it, and uphold them while walking through the midst of that valley. This also may well comfort and uphold them in all troubles and difficulties they meet with here, that after a little while they shall see God; which will immediately dry up all tears, and drive away all sorrow and sighing, and expel for ever every darksome thought from the heart.

4. Hence we learn that a life of holiness is the pleasantest life in this world, because in such a life we have the imperfect beginnings of a blessed and endless sight of God; and so they have somewhat of true happiness while here, they have the seeds of blessedness sown in their souls, and they begin to shoot forth.

As for all others, those who do not live a holy life, they have nothing at all of true happiness, because they have nothing of the knowledge

of God.

II. To be pure in heart, is the certain and only way to attain to this blessedness.

We have shown what this seeing of God is, and have represented in some measure how great is the blessedness of so seeing him; and if what we have heard is believed and cordially received by us, it will be sufficient to awaken our attention to any instructions from the word of God that are to point out the way to us wherein we may attain to this blessedness.

If men should hear of some vast estate, or some rich hidden treasure, and at the same time should hear of some very feasible way in which they might make it all their own; how ready would they be to hear, with what eagerness would they listen to those who should bring such news and give them such directions, provided they had reason to believe that what was told them was true! We are here told of a much truer and greater blessedness, than any treasure of silver, and gold, and pearls can yield; and we are also told of the way whereby we may assuredly become the possessors of it, by him who certainly knows. I shall show,

1. What it is to be pure in heart.
2. That to be pure in heart, is the sure way to gain this blessedness.
3. That it is the only way.

1. I shall inquire what it is to be pure in heart. Purity of heart is here to be understood in distinction from a mere external purity, or a purity of the outward actions and behaviour in those things that appear to men in an external morality, and an outward attendance on ordinances, and a profession of the true religion and pure doctrines, and a making an outward show and appearance of godliness.

Christ had very probably in our text an eye to the formality and hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, and other great saints, as they accounted themselves, and were accounted among the Jews. These were exceedingly exact in their observance of the ordinances of the ceremonial law, they were careful not to deviate from it in the least punctilio. For instance, how exact were they in observing the law of tithes; they were careful to bring the tenth of the herbs in their gardens, as mint, anise, and cumin. They were very careful to keep themselves from all ceremonial uncleanness, and they even added to the law in this particular; they were for being stricter and purer than the law required, and therefore made conscience of washing their hands before every meal. They were very strict to avoid conversing with the Samaritans; they would not eat with them, nor have any dealings with them, lest they should be defiled. They used to say to other nations, "Stand by thyself, come not nigh, for I am holier than thou." They looked upon themselves only as pure, because they were the children of Abraham, and because they were circumcised, and attended the ceremonial law; because they made clean the outside of the cup and the platter, and because of their external purity, they looked upon themselves as the peculiar favourites of heaven, and expected to be admitted to see God, when all the uncircumcised, and those that were not the children of Abraham, should be excluded.

But Christ corrects this their mistake, and teaches that such an external purity will never give a man a title to this blessedness, for it is purity of heart that is requisite in order to attain to it. Matt. 5:20. "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

However exact any man may be in the external observance of moral, instituted duties, if he be careful to wrong no man, and can say, as the young Pharisee did, "All these have I kept from my youth," i.e. as to an external observance, if he be very strict in keeping the sabbath and in coming to the house of God, in attending family and secret prayer, yet if he has not holiness of heart, he is never like to see God.

It is no reformation of manners that is sufficient, but there must be a new heart, and a right spirit. It is the heart that God requires. Prov. 23:26. "My son, give me thine heart." It is the heart that God looks at. However fair and pure an outside there may be, that may be very pleasing to men, yet if there be not purity of heart, the man is not at all the more acceptable to God. 1 Sam. 16:7. "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." If men outwardly behave well and speak well, yet it is not accepted without trying and weighing the heart. Prov. 16:2. "All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits." It is the spirit which is the subject of this blessedness of seeing God, and therefore the qualities of the spirit, and not so much those of the outward man, are regarded.

Now the heart is said to be pure in the sense of the text,

First. With respect to the spiritual defilement from which it is pure;

Secondly. With respect to certain positive qualities that it is endowed with.

The word pure, in its common acceptation, merely signifies something negative, viz. the absence of all mixture or defilement; but in pureness of heart, as it is used in Scripture, seems to be implied both something negative and positive, not only the absence or removal of defilement, but also positive qualities, that are called pure.

First. The heart is said to be pure with respect to the filthiness from which it is pure. Sin is the greatest filthiness. There is nothing that can so defile and render so abominable. It is that which has an infinite abominableness in it; and indeed it is the only spiritual defilement; there is nothing else that can defile the soul. Now there are none in this life who are pure from sin in such a sense that there

is no remainder, no mixture of sin. Prov. 20:9. "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" So that if this were the requisite qualification, none of the children of men would ever come to see God.

But the purity of heart with respect to sin, that may be obtained in this life, consists in the following things:

1st. It implies that the soul sees the filthiness that there is in sin, and accordingly abhors it. Sin, that is so filthy in itself, is become so sensibly to the man whose heart is pure; he sees its odiousness and deformity, and it is become nauseous to him.

To those animals which are of a filthy and impure nature, as swine and dogs, ravens and vermin, those things that are filthy and nauseous to mankind, do not seem at all disgusting; but on the contrary they love them, it is food that suits their appetites. It is because they are of an impure and filthy nature; the nature of the animal is agreeable to such things. So it is with men of impure hearts. They see no filthiness in sin, they do not nauseate it, it is in no way uncomfortable to them to have it hanging about them, they can wallow in it without any reluctance; yea, they take pleasure in it, it is their meat and their drink, because they are of an impure nature. But he who has become pure in heart hates sin; he has antipathy to it; he does not love to be near it; if he sees any of it hanging about him, he abhors himself for it; he seems filthy to himself, he is a burden to himself, he abhors the very sight of it, and shuns the appearance of it. If he sees sin in others, it is a very unpleasant sight to him; as sin, and as committed against God, it is grievous and uncomfortable to him wherever he discovers it. It is because his heart is changed, and God has given him a pure nature.

2d. It implies godly sorrow for sin. The pure heart has not only respect to that spiritual filthiness that is present to abhor it and shun it, but it has also respect to past sin. The consideration of that grieves it; it causes shame and sorrow to think that it ever rejoiced in such



defilement, that it ever was so abominable as to love it and feed upon it. Every transgression leaves a filth behind it upon the soul, and this remaining filth occasions pain to the renewed and purified heart. By godly sorrow the heart exerts itself against the filthiness of past sins, and does, as it were, endeavour to cast it off, and purge itself from it.

3d. It implies that sin is mortified in the heart, so that it is free from the reigning power and dominion of it. Though the heart is not perfectly free from all sin, yet a freedom is begun. Before, spiritual filth had the possession of the heart, corruption had the entire government of the soul, every faculty was so wholly defiled by it, that all its acts were filthy, and only filthy, the heart was entirely enslaved to sin.

But now the power of sin is broken, the strong bands by which it was tied and fastened to the heart are in a great measure loosed, so that corruption has no longer the possession and government of the heart as before. The principal seat, the throne of the heart, that was formerly possessed by corruption, is now purged, and filthiness does now as it were only possess the inferior and exterior parts of the soul. John 13:10. "He that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet."

4th. The heart that is pure will be continually endeavouring to cleanse itself from all remaining filthiness. Though there be remains of impurity, yet the new nature is so contrary to it that it will never rest or be quiet, but will always be cleansing itself; like a vessel of fermenting liquor, it will continue working, till it has worked itself clear, and cast off all the filth and sediment. Or like a stream of good water, if the water be in itself sweet and good, however it may be defiled from the muddy banks, it will refine as it runs, and will run itself clear again, but the fountain that yields impure water will never cleanse itself. So he who is pure in heart will never suffer himself to live in any sin. If he be overtaken in a fault he will return and cleanse himself again by repentance, and reformation, and a more earnest care that he may avoid that sin for the future.

The remaining corruption that is in his heart will be his great and continual burden, and he will be endeavouring to cleanse himself more and more; he will not rest in any supposed degree of purity, so long as he sees any degree of impurity remaining, but he will be striving after progress in the mortification of sin and in the increase of holiness.

5th. The heart is said to be pure, especially with respect to its cleanness from, and opposition to, the lust of uncleanness. This kind of wickedness we find to be more especially called uncleanness and filthiness in Scripture; it brings a peculiar turpitude upon the soul, and defiles the temple of God. 1 Cor. 3:17. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Pureness in Scripture is sometimes used only in this restrained sense, with respect to freedom from fleshly impurities. So it seems to be, Phil. 4:8. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Now this sort of purity of heart is absolutely necessary in order to our coming to see God. There must be a renunciation of all impure and lascivious practices and conversation. They who live in the indulgence of such a lust in one kind of practice or another, or though it be only with their eyes or in their thoughts, are of impure hearts, and shall never come to see God unless they have new hearts given them.

They that have pure hearts, abhor and are afraid of such things. Jude 23. They take heed that they do not prostitute their souls to so much as mental and imaginary, much less to practical, impurities, and works of darkness.

Secondly. The heart is said to be pure, in respect to its being endowed with positive qualities, that are of a contrary nature to

spiritual filthiness.

Though purity in strictness be only a freedom from filth, yet there are positive qualities of mind that seem to be implied in purity of heart; which may be reckoned a part of it, because of their contrariety to filthiness. The heart by reason of them is still more remote from defilement, as a greater light may be said to be purer than a lesser; for although the lesser light has no mixture of darkness, yet the greater light is still more remote from darkness.

1st. He is pure in heart, who delights in holy exercises. Those exercises that are holy are natural and pleasant to him, he sees the beauty there is in holiness, and that beauty has such strong influence upon his heart that he is captivated thereby. He delights in the pure and holy exercise of love to God, in the fear of God, in praising and glorifying God, and in pure and holy love to men. He delights in holy thoughts and meditations. Those exercises of the understanding that are holy, are most agreeable to him, and those exercises of the will. Such inclinations, desires, and affections, are most delightful, which are spiritual and holy.

2d. He is pure in heart, who chooses and takes the greatest delight in spiritual enjoyment. A spiritual appetite is that which governs in his soul, and carries him above the mean lust and defiled enjoyments of this world, towards spiritual and heavenly objects. The enjoyments which he chooses and chiefly desires, such as seeing God and enjoying communion with him, are enjoyments of the most refined and pure nature. He hungers and thirsts after the pure light of the new Jerusalem.

2. To be pure in heart is the sure way to obtain the blessedness of seeing God. This is the divine road to the blissful and glorious presence of God, which, if we take it, will infallibly lead us thither.

God is the giver of the pure heart, and he gives it for this very end; that it may be prepared for the blessedness of seeing him. Thus we

are taught in the Scriptures. The people of God are sanctified, and their hearts are made pure, that they may be prepared for glory, as vessels are prepared by the potter for the use he designs. They are elected from all eternity to eternal life, and have purity of heart given them, on purpose to fit them for that to which they are chosen. Rom. 9:23. "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared to glory."

We read of the church being arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, by which is signified the church's purity; and it was to fit it for the enjoyment of Christ. Rev. 19:7, 8. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready; and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." And in the 21st. chap. 2d verse, the church thus purified, is said to be as a bride adorned for her husband. "And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Therefore if God gives the pure heart to fit and prepare us for the vision of himself, he will obtain his own end; for who can prevent him from doing what he purposes?

God also hath promised it. He hath given his faithful word for it in our text; and to the same purpose is Psal. 24:3, 4. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." And again, Isa. 33:15, 16, 17. "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly: he that despiseth the gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks: bread shall be given him; his water shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off."

3. This is the only way to come to this blessedness.

First. It is no way fit or suitable that those who have not pure hearts, should be admitted to this privilege. It would be most unsuitable for those who are all over defiled with the most loathsome filth, to be admitted into the glorious presence of the King of heaven and earth. It would not become the majesty of God, to allow those who are so abominable to come into his blessed presence; nor is it at all becoming his holiness, whereby he is of purer eyes than to behold such pollution.

It becomes persons when they come into the presence of a king, so to attire themselves, that they may not appear in a sordid habit, and it would be much more unsuitable still, for any to come all defiled with filth; but sin is that which renders the soul much more loathsome in the sight of God. This spiritual filth is of a nature most disagreeable to that pure, heavenly light; it would be most unsuitable to have the pollution of sin and wickedness, and the light of glory, mixed together; and it is what God never will suffer. It would be a most unbecoming thing for such to be the objects of God's favour, and to see the love of God, and to receive the testimonies of that love. It would be most unsuitable for the glorious and most blessed God to embrace in the arms of his love, that that is infinitely more filthy than a reptile.

Secondly. It is naturally impossible that the soul which is impure should see God. The sight of God's glory, and impurity of heart, are not compatible in the same subject. Where spiritual defilement holds possession of the heart, it is impossible that the divine light which discovers God's glory should enter. How can he, who is under the power of enmity against God, and who only hates God, see his beauty and loveliness at the same time? Sin, so long as it has the government and possession of the soul, will blind the mind and maintain darkness. As long as sin keeps possession, the heart will be blinded through its deceitfulness.

Thirdly. If it were possible for them to see God, they could not find any blessedness in it. What pleasure would it give to the soul that

hates holiness, to see the holiness of God; what pleasure to them who are God's enemies, to see his greatness and glory? Wicked men have no relish for such intellectual, pure, and holy delights and enjoyments. As we have observed already, to have a relish for spiritual enjoyments, is one part of the purity of heart spoken of in the text.

Fourthly. It is impossible that such should be the objects of God's favour and complacence, and therefore they cannot have this part of the blessed-making vision of God, viz. the seeing of his love. It is impossible that God should take pleasure in wickedness, or should have complacence in the wicked, and therefore they cannot have the blessed-making vision of God, for seeing the love of God is an essential part of it. If a man sees how glorious God is, and has not this consideration with it, that he has a property in this glory of God; if he cannot consider this glorious being as his friend; if he takes no pleasure in him, but, on the contrary, loathes and abhors him, the sight of God will be to him no blessedness.

## APPLICATION

1. Hence we learn how great a thing it is to be an upright and sincere Christian; for all such are pure in heart, and stand entitled to the blessedness of seeing the most high God. The time is coming when they shall assuredly see him; they shall see him who is infinitely greater than all the kings of the earth; they shall see him face to face, shall see as much of his glory and beauty as the eyes of their souls are capable of beholding. They shall not only see him for a few moments, or an hour, but they shall dwell in his presence, and shall sit down for ever to drink in the rays of his glory. They shall see him invested in all this majesty, with smiles and love in his countenance; they shall see him, and converse with him, as their nearest and best friend.

Thus shall they see him soon. The intervening moments fly swiftly, the time is even at the door, when they shall be admitted to this

blessedness.

2. Let the consideration of this subject put us all upon inquiring, whether we ourselves are pure in heart. Is our religion of that kind which has its seat chiefly in the heart, or doth it chiefly consist in what is outward in morality and formality? Have we ever experienced a change of heart; have we a right spirit renewed within us; have we ever seen the odiousness and filthiness that there is in sin; is it what we hate, wherever we see it; and do we especially hate it in ourselves, and loathe ourselves for it; is it the object of our hatred as sin, and as it is against God?

And are there any that now hear me, who think themselves to be Christians, who do yet, either in their imaginations and thoughts, or in any secret practice, allow and indulge the lust of uncleanness, and live in such a way? If it be so, they had great need to bethink themselves whether or no they are not of that generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not cleansed from their filthiness. If they imagine that they are pure in heart, and live in such wickedness, their confidence is vain presumption. Inquire whether holy exercises and holy employments are the delight of your soul, and what you take pleasure in above all other things in which you can be engaged. Are the enjoyments that you choose, and take the greatest delight in, spiritual and heavenly enjoyments? Is the seeing of God, and conversing with him, and dwelling in his presence for ever, what you should of your own accord choose above all other things?

3. I would earnestly exhort those who hear me, to make to themselves a pure heart. Though it be God's work to give it, yet it is as truly your work to obtain it; though it be God's work to purify the heart, yet the actual, or rather the active, procuring of it is your act. All pure and holy exercises are man's acts, and they are his duty. Therefore we are commanded to make us a new heart, and a right spirit. Ezek. 18:31. "Cast away from you all your transgressions,

whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die?"

We must not think to excuse ourselves by saying that it is God's work, that we cannot purify our own hearts; for though it be God's work in one sense, yet it is equally our work in another. James 4:8. "Draw high to God, and he will draw high to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded." If you do not engage in this work yourselves, and purify your own hearts, they never will be pure. If you do not get a pure heart, the blame of it will be laid to your own backwardness. The unclean soul hates to be purified; it is opposite to its nature; there is a great deal of self-denial in it. But be content to contradict the nature and bent of your own heart, that it may be purified; however grating it may be to you at first, yet consider how blessed the issue will be. Though the road be a little rough in the beginning, yet it will grow pleasanter and pleasanter, till at last it will infallibly lead to that lightsome and glorious country, the inhabitants of which do see and converse with God. Prov. 4:18. "But the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." If you would be in the way to have a pure heart,

1. Purify your hands: cleanse yourself from every external impurity of speech and behaviour; take heed that you never defile your hands in known wickedness; break off all your sins by righteousness; and take heed that you do not give way to impure lusts that would entice to sinful actions. If you set about the work of cleansing yourself, but when a temptation comes then plunge yourself into the mire again, you never will be likely to become pure; but you must be steady in your reformation and the amendment of your ways and doings.

2. Take heed you do not rest in external purity, but seek purity of heart in the ways of God's appointment; seek it in a constant and diligent attendance on all God's ordinances.



3. Be often searching your own heart, and seek and pray that you may see the filthiness of it. If ever you are made pure you must be brought to see that you are filthy; you must see the plague and pollution of your own heart.

4. Beg of God that he would give you his Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God that purifies the soul. Therefore the Spirit of God is often compared to fire, and is said to baptize with fire. He cleanses the heart, as fire cleanses the metals; and burns up the filth and pollution of the mind, and is therefore called the Spirit of burning. Isa. 4:4. "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning."

## **The Peace Which Christ Gives His True Followers**

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. JOHN 14:27

THESE words are a part of a most affectionate and affecting discourse that Christ had with his disciples the same evening in which he was betrayed, knowing that he was to be crucified the next day. This discourse begins with the 31st verse of the 13th, and is continued to the end of the 16th chapter. Christ began his discourse after he partook of the passover with them, after he had instituted and administered the sacrament of the supper, and after Judas was gone out, and none were left but his true and faithful disciples; whom he now addresses as his dear children. This was the last discourse that Christ had with them before his death. As it was his parting discourse, and, as it were, his dying discourse, so it is on many accounts the most remarkable we have recorded in our Bibles.

It is evident this discourse made a deep impression on the minds of the disciples; and we may suppose that it did so, in a special manner, on the mind of John the beloved disciple, whose heart was especially full of love to him, and who had just then been leaning on his bosom. In this discourse Christ had told his dear disciples that he was going away, which filled them with sorrow and heaviness. The words of the text are given to comfort them, and to relieve their sorrow. He supports them with the promise of that peace which he would leave with them, and which they would have in him and with him, when he was gone.

This promise he delivers in three emphatical expressions which illustrate one another. "Peace I leave with you." As much as to say, though I am going away, yet I will not take all comfort away with me. While I have been with you, I have been your support and comfort, and you have had peace in me in the midst of the losses you have sustained, and troubles you have met with from this evil generation. This peace I will not take from you, but leave it with you in a more full possession.

"My peace I give unto you." Christ by calling it his peace signifies two things,

1. That it was his own, that which he had to give. It was the peculiar benefit that he had to bestow on his children, now he was about to leave the world as to his human presence. Silver and gold he had none; for, while in his estate of humiliation, he was poor. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head: Luke 9:58. He had no earthly estate to leave to his disciples who were as it were his family: but he had peace to give them.

2. It was his peace that he gave them; as it was the same kind of peace which he himself enjoyed. The same excellent and divine peace which he ever had in God, and which he was about to receive in his exalted state in a vastly greater perfection and fulness: for the

happiness Christ gives to his people, is a participation of his own happiness: agreeable to chapter 15:11. "These things have I said unto you, that my joy might remain in you." And in his prayer with his disciples at the conclusion of this discourse, chapter 17:13. "And now come I to thee, and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." And verse 22. "And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them."

Christ here alludes to men making their wills before death. When parents are about to leave their children by death, they are wont in their last will and testament to give them their estate; that estate which they themselves were wont to possess and enjoy. So it was with Christ when he was about to leave the world, with respect to the peace which he gave his disciples; only with this difference, that earthly parents, when they die, though they leave the same estate to their children which they themselves heretofore enjoyed; yet when the children come to the full possession of it, they enjoy it no more; the parents do not enjoy it with their children. The time of the full possession of parents and children is not together. Whereas with respect to Christ's peace, he did not only possess it himself before his death, when he bequeathed it to his disciples; but also afterwards more fully: so that they were received to possess it with him.

The third and last expression is, "not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Which is as much as to say, my gifts and legacies, now I am going to leave the world, are not like those which the rich and great men of the world are wont to leave to their heirs, when they die. They bequeath to their children their worldly possessions; and it may be, vast treasures of silver and gold, and sometimes an earthly kingdom. But the thing that I give you, is my peace, a vastly different thing from what they are wont to give, and which cannot be obtained by all that they can bestow, or their children inherit from them.

DOCTRINE

That peace which Christ, when he died, left as a legacy to all his true saints, is very different from all those things which the men of this world bequeath to their children, when they die.

I. Christ at his death made over the blessings of the new covenant to believers, as it were in a will or testament.

II. A great blessing that Christ made over to believers in this his testament was his peace.

III. This legacy of Christ is exceedingly diverse from all that any of the men of this world ever leave to their children when they die.

I. Christ at his death made over the blessings of the new covenant to believers, as it were in a will or testament.

The new covenant is represented by the apostle as Christ's last will and testament. Heb. 9:15, 16. "And for this cause he is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator." What men convey by their will or testament, is their own estate. So Christ in the new covenant conveys to believers his own inheritance, so far as they are capable of possessing and enjoying it. They have that eternal life given to them in their measure, which Christ himself possesses. They live in him, and with him, and by a participation of his life. Because he lives they live also. They inherit his kingdom: the same kingdom which the Father appointed unto him. Luke 22:29. "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." They shall reign on his throne, Rev. 3:21. They have his glory given to them, John 17. And because all things are Christ's, so in Christ all things are the saints', 1 Cor. 3:21, 22.

Men in their wills or testaments most commonly give their estates to their children: so believers are in Scripture represented as Christ's children. Heb. 2:13. "Behold, I, and the children which God hath

given me." Men most commonly make their wills a little before their death: so Christ did, in a very special and solemn manner, make over and confirm to his disciples the blessings of the new covenant, on the evening before the day of his crucifixion, in that discourse of which my text is a part. The promises of the new covenant were never so particularly expressed, and so solemnly given forth by Christ in all the time that he was upon earth, as in this discourse. Christ promises them mansions in his Father's house, chapter 16:1, 2, 3. Here he promises them whatever blessings they should need and ask in his name. Chapter 15:7. 14:23, 24. Here he more solemnly and fully than any where else, gives forth and confirms the promise of the Holy Spirit, which is the sum of the blessings of the covenant of grace. Chap. 14:18. 17:26. 15:25. 16:7. Here he promises them his own and his Father's gracious presence and favour. Chapter 14:18. 19:20, 21. Here he promises them peace, as in the text. Here he promises them his joy. Chapter 15:11. Here he promises grace to bring forth holy fruits. Chapter 15:16. And victory over the world. Chapter 16:33. And indeed there seems to be no where else so full and complete an edition of the covenant of grace in the whole Bible, as in this dying discourse of Christ with his eleven true disciples.

This covenant between Christ and his children is like a will or testament also in this respect, that it becomes effectual, and a way is made for putting it in execution, no other way than by his death; as the apostle observes it is with a will or testament among men. "For a testament is of force after men are dead." Heb. 9:17. For though the covenant of grace indeed was of force before the death of Christ, yet it was of force no otherwise than by his death; so that his death then did virtually intervene; being already undertaken and engaged. As a man's heirs come by the legacies bequeathed to them no otherwise than by the death of the testator, so men come by the spiritual and eternal inheritance no otherwise than by the death of Christ. If it had not been for the death of Christ they never could have obtained it.

II. A great blessing that Christ in his testament hath bequeathed to his true followers, is his peace. Here are two things that I would

observe particularly, viz. That Christ hath bequeathed to believers true peace; and then, that the peace he has given them is his peace.

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ has bequeathed true peace and comfort to his followers. Christ is called the Prince of peace. Isa. 9:6. And when he was born into the world, the angels on that joyful and wonderful occasion sang, Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace; because of that peace which he should procure for and bestow on the children of men; peace with God, and peace one with another, and tranquillity and peace within themselves: which last is especially the benefit spoken of in the text. This Christ has procured for his followers, and laid a foundation for their enjoyment of it, in that he has procured for them the other two, viz. peace with God, and one with another. He has procured for them peace and reconciliation with God, and his favour and friendship; in that he satisfied for their sins, and laid a foundation for the perfect removal of the guilt of sin, and the forgiveness of all their trespasses, and wrought out for them a perfect and glorious righteousness, most acceptable to God, and sufficient to recommend them to God's full acceptance, to the adoption of children, and to the eternal fruits of his fatherly kindness.

By these means true saints are brought into a state of freedom from condemnation, and all the curses of the law of God. Rom. 8:34. "Who is he that condemneth?" And by these means they are safe from that dreadful and eternal misery to which naturally they are exposed, and are set on high out of the reach of all their enemies, so that the gates of hell and powers of darkness can never destroy them; nor can wicked men, though they may persecute, ever hurt them. Rom. 8:31. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Numb. 23:8. "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?" Ver. 23. "There is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." By these means they are out of the reach of death, John 6:4–50, 51. "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." By these means death with respect to them has lost its sting, and is no more worthy of the name of death. 1 Cor. 15:55. "O death, where is thy sting?" By these means they have

no need to be afraid of the day of judgment, when the heavens and earth shall be dissolved. Psal. 46:1, 2. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed: and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Yea, a true saint has reason to be at rest in an assurance, that nothing can separate him from the love of God. Rom. 8:38, 39.

Thus he that is in Christ, is in a safe refuge from every thing that might disturb him; Isa. 32:2. "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." And hence they that dwell in Christ have that promise fulfilled to them which we have in the 18th verse of the same chapter: "And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places."

And the true followers of Christ have not only ground of rest and peace of soul, by reason of their safety from evil, but on account of their sure title and certain enjoyment of all that good which they stand in need of, living, dying, and through all eternity. They are on a sure foundation for happiness, are built on a rock that can never be moved, and have a fountain that is sufficient, and can never be exhausted. The covenant is ordered in all things and sure, and God has passed his word and oath, "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." The infinite Jehovah is become their God, who can do every thing for them. He is their portion who has an infinite fulness of good in himself. "He is their shield and exceeding great reward." As great a good is made over to them as they can desire or conceive of; and is made as sure as they can desire: therefore they have reason to put their hearts at rest, and be at peace in their minds.

Besides, he has bequeathed peace to the souls of his people, as he has procured for them and made over to them the spirit of grace and true

holiness; which has a natural tendency to the peace and quietness of the soul. It implies a discovery and relish of a suitable and sufficient good. It brings a person into a view of divine beauty, and to a relish of that good which is a man's proper happiness; and so it brings the soul to its true centre. The soul by his means is brought to rest, and ceases from restlessly inquiring, as others do, who will show us any good; and wandering to and fro, like lost sheep seeking rest, and finding none. The soul hath found him who is as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, and sits down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet unto his taste. Cant. 2:2. And thus that saying of Christ is fulfilled, John 4:14. "Whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst." And besides, true grace naturally tends to peace and quietness, as it settles things in the soul in their due order, sets reason on the throne, and subjects the senses and affections to its government, which before were uppermost. Grace tends to tranquillity, as it mortifies tumultuous desires and passions, subdues the eager and insatiable appetites of the sensual nature and greediness after the vanities of the world. It mortifies such principles as hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, envyings, and the like, which are a continual source of inward uneasiness and perturbation; and supplies those sweet, calming, and quieting principles of humility, meekness, resignation, patience, gentleness, forgiveness, and sweet reliance on God. It also tends to peace, as it fixes the aim of the soul to a certain end; so that the soul is no longer distracted and drawn by opposite ends to be sought, and opposite portions to be obtained, and many masters of contrary wills and commands to be served; but the heart is fixed in the choice of one certain, sufficient, and unfailing good: and the soul's aim at this, and hope of it, is like an anchor that keeps it steadfast, that it should no more be driven to and fro by every wind.

2. This peace which Christ has left as a legacy to his true followers, is his peace. It is the peace which himself enjoys. This is what I take to be principally intended in the expression. It is the peace that he enjoyed while on earth, in his state of humiliation. Though he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and was every where



hated and persecuted by men and devils, and had no place of rest in this world; yet in God, his Father, he had peace. We read of his rejoicing in spirit, Luke 10:21. So Christ's true disciples, though in the world they have tribulation, yet in God have peace.

When Christ had finished his labours and sufferings, had risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven, he entered into his rest, a state of most blessed, perfect, and everlasting peace: delivered by his own sufferings from our imputed guilt, acquitted and justified of the Father on his resurrection. Having obtained a perfect victory over all his enemies, he was received of his Father into heaven, the rest which he had prepared for him, there to enjoy his heart's desire fully and perfectly to all eternity. And then were those words in the six first verses of the 21st Psalm, which have respect to Christ, fulfilled. This peace and rest of the Messiah is exceeding glorious. Isa. 11:10. "And his rest shall be glorious." This rest is what Christ has procured, not only for himself, but also his people, by his death; and he has bequeathed it to them, that they may enjoy it with him, imperfectly in this, and perfectly and eternally in another, world.

That peace, which has been described, and which believers enjoy, is a participation of the peace which their glorious Lord and Master himself enjoys, by virtue of the same blood by which Christ himself has entered into rest. It is in a participation of this same justification; for believers are justified with Christ. As he was justified when he rose from the dead, and as he was made free from our guilt, which he had as our surety, so believers are justified in him and through him; as being accepted of God in the same righteousness. It is in the favour of the same God and heavenly Father that they enjoy peace. "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." It is in a participation of the same Spirit; for believers have the Spirit of Christ. He had the Spirit given to him not by measure, and of his fulness do they all receive, and grace for grace. As the oil poured on the head of Aaron went down to the skirts of his garments, so the Spirit poured on Christ, the head, descends to all his members. It is

as partaking of the same grace of the Spirit that believers enjoy this peace; John 1:16.

It is as being united to Christ, and living by a participation of his life, as a branch lives by the life of the vine. It is as partaking of the same love of God; John 17:26. "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them."—It is as having a part with him in his victory over the same enemies: and also as having an interest in the same kind of eternal rest and peace. Eph. 2:5, 6." Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,—and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in heavenly places."

III. This legacy of Christ to his true disciples is very different from all that the men of this world ever leave to their children when they die. The men of this world, many of them, when they come to die, have great estates to bequeath to their children, an abundance of the good things of this world, large tracts of ground, perhaps in a fruitful soil, covered with flocks and herds. They sometimes leave to their children stately mansions, and vast treasures of silver, gold, jewels, and precious things, fetched from both the Indies, and from every side of the globe. They leave them wherewith to live in much state and magnificence, and make a great show among men, to fare very sumptuously, and swim in worldly pleasures. Some have crowns, sceptres, and palaces, and great monarchies to leave to their heirs. But none of these things are to be compared to that blessed peace of Christ which he has bequeathed to his true followers. These things are such as God commonly in his providence gives his worst enemies, those whom he hates and despises most. But Christ's peace is a precious benefit, which he reserves for his peculiar favourites. These worldly things, even the best of them, that the men and princes of the world leave for their children, are things which God in his providence throws out to those whom he looks on as dogs; but Christ's peace is the bread of his children. All these earthly things are but empty shadows, which, however men set their hearts upon them, are not bread, and never can satisfy their souls; but this peace of Christ is a truly substantial satisfying food. Isa. 55:2. None of those things, if

men have them to the best advantage, and in ever so great abundance, can give true peace and rest to the soul, as is abundantly manifest not only in reason, but experience; it being found in all ages, that those who have the most of them, have commonly the least quietness of mind. It is true, there may be a kind of quietness, a false peace, in the enjoyment of worldly things; men may bless their souls, and think themselves the only happy persons, and despise others: may say to their souls, as the rich man did, Luke 12:19. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But Christ's peace, which he gives to his true disciples, differs from this peace that men may have in the enjoyments of the world, in the following respects:

1. Christ's peace is a reasonable peace and rest of soul; it is what has its foundation in light and knowledge, in the proper exercises of reason, and a right view of things; whereas the peace of the world is founded in blindness and delusion. The peace that the people of Christ have, arises from their having their eyes open, and seeing things as they are. The more they consider, and the more they know of the truth and reality of things—the more they know what is true concerning themselves, the state and condition they are in; the more they know of God, and what manner of being he is; the more certain they are of another world and future judgment, and of the truth of God's threatenings and promises; the more their consciences are awakened and enlightened, and the brighter and the more searching the light—the more is their peace established. Whereas, on the contrary, the peace that the men of the world have in their worldly enjoyments can subsist no otherwise than by their being kept in ignorance. They must be blindfolded and deceived, otherwise they can have no peace: do but let light in upon their consciences, so that they may look about them and see what they are, and what circumstances they are in, and it will at once destroy all their quietness and comfort. Their peace can live no where but in the dark. Light turns their ease into torment. The more they know what is true concerning God and concerning themselves, the more they are sensible of the truth concerning those enjoyments which they

possess; and the more they are sensible what things now are, and what things are like to be hereafter, the more will their calm be turned into a storm. The worldly man's peace cannot be maintained but by avoiding consideration and reflection. If he allows himself to think, and properly to exercise his reason, it destroys his quietness and comfort. If he would establish his carnal peace, it concerns him to put out the light of his mind, and turn beast as fast as he can. The faculty of reason, if at liberty, proves a mortal enemy to his peace. It concerns him, if he would keep alive his peace, to stupify his mind and deceive himself, and to imagine things to be otherwise than they are. But with respect to the peace which Christ gives, reason is its great friend. The more this faculty is exercised, the more it is established. The more they consider and view things with truth and exactness, the firmer is their comfort and the higher their joy. How vast a difference then is there between the peace of a Christian and the worldling! How miserable are they who cannot enjoy peace any otherwise than by hiding their eyes from the light, and confining themselves to darkness. Their peace is stupidity; it is as the ease that a man has who has taken a dose of stupifying poison, the ease and pleasure that a drunkard may have in a house on fire over his head, or the joy of a distracted man in thinking that he is a king, though a miserable wretch confined in bedlam! Whereas the peace that Christ gives his true disciples is the light of life, something of the tranquillity of heaven, the peace of the celestial paradise that has the glory of God to lighten it.

2. Christ's peace is a virtuous and holy peace. The peace that the men of the world enjoy is vicious: it is vile, depraves and debases the mind, and makes men brutish. But the peace that the saints enjoy in Christ, is not only their comfort, but it is a part of their beauty and dignity. The christian tranquillity, rest, and joy of real saints, are not only unspeakable privileges, but they are virtues and graces of God's Spirit, wherein his image partly consists. This peace has its source in those principles which are in the highest degree virtuous and amiable, such as poverty of spirit, holy resignation, trust in God,

divine love, meekness, and charity; the exercise of the blessed fruits of the Spirit, Gal. 5:22, 23.

3. This peace greatly differs from that which is enjoyed by the men of the world, with regard to its exquisite sweetness. It is a peace so much above all that natural men enjoy in worldly things, that it surpasses their understanding and conception. Phil. 4:7. It is exquisitely sweet and secure, because it has so firm a foundation, the everlasting rock that never can be moved; because perfectly agreeable to reason; because it rises from holy and divine principles, that, as they are the virtue, so are they the proper happiness of men; and because the greatness of the objective good that the saints enjoy, is no other than the infinite bounty and fulness of that God who is the fountain of all good. The fulness and perfection of that provision that is made in Christ and the new covenant, is a foundation laid for the saints' perfect peace; and this hereafter they shall actually enjoy. And though their peace is not now perfect, it is not owing to any defect in the provision made, but to their own imperfection, sin, and darkness. As yet, they partly cleave to the world, and seek peace from thence, and do not perfectly cleave to Christ. But the more they do so, and the more they see of the provision made, and accept of it, and cleave to that alone, the nearer are they brought to perfect tranquillity. Isa. 26:5.

4. The peace of the Christian infinitely differs from that of the worldling, in that it is unfailing and eternal. That peace which carnal men have in the things of the world, is, according to the foundation upon which it is built, of short continuance; like the comfort of a dream, 1 John 2. 1 Cor. 7:31. These things, the best and most durable of them, are like bubbles on the face of the water; they vanish in a moment. Hos. 10:7.—But the foundation of the Christian's peace is everlasting; it is what no time, no change, can destroy. It will remain when the body dies: it will remain when the mountains depart and the hills shall be removed, and when the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll. The fountain of his comfort shall never be diminished, and the stream shall never be dried. His comfort and joy

is a living spring in the soul, a well of water springing up to everlasting life.

## APPLICATION

The use that I would make of this doctrine, is to improve it as an inducement unto all to forsake the world, no longer seeking peace and rest in its vanities, and to cleave to Christ and follow him. Happiness and rest are what all men pursue. But the things of the world, wherein most men seek it, can never afford it; they are labouring and spending themselves in vain. But Christ invites you to come to him, and offers you this peace, which he gives his true followers, and that so much excels all that the world can afford, Isa. 55:2, 3.

You that have hitherto spent your time in the pursuit of satisfaction in the profit or glory of the world, or in the pleasures and vanities of youth, have this day an offer of that excellent and everlasting peace and blessedness, which Christ has purchased with the price of his own blood. As long as you continue to reject those offers and invitations of Christ, and continue in a Christless condition, you never will enjoy any true peace or comfort; but will be like the prodigal, that in vain endeavoured to be satisfied with the husks that the swine did eat. The wrath of God will abide upon, and misery will attend you, wherever you go, which you never will be able to escape. Christ gives peace to the most sinful and miserable that come to him. He heals the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds. But it is impossible that they should have peace, while they continue in their sins. Isaiah 57:19, 20, 21. There is no peace between God and them; for, as they have the guilt of sin remaining in their souls, and are under its dominion, so God's indignation continually burns against them, and therefore they travail in pain all their days. While you continue in such a state, you live in dreadful uncertainty what will become of you, and in continual danger. When you are in the enjoyment of things most pleasing to you, where your heart is best suited, and most cheerful, yet you are in a state of condemnation.

You hang over the infernal pit, with the sword of divine vengeance hanging over your head, having no security one moment from utter and remediless destruction. What reasonable peace can any one enjoy in such a state as this. What though you clothe him in gorgeous apparel, or set him on a throne, or at a prince's table, and feed him with the rarest dainties the earth affords? How miserable is the ease and cheerfulness that such have! what a poor kind of comfort and joy is it that such take in their wealth and pleasures for a moment, while they are the prisoners of divine justice, and wretched captives of the devil! They have none to befriend them, being without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world!

I invite you now to a better portion. There are better things provided for the sinful, miserable children of men. There is a surer comfort and more durable peace: comfort that you may enjoy in a state of safety, and on a sure foundation: a peace and rest that you may enjoy with reason, and with your eyes open. You may have all your sins forgiven, your greatest and most aggravated transgressions blotted out as a cloud, and buried as in the depths of the sea, that they may never be found more. And being not only forgiven, but accepted to favour, you become the objects of God's complacency and delight; being taken into God's family and made his children, you may have good evidence that your names were written on the heart of Christ before the world was made, and that you have an interest in that covenant of grace that is well ordered in all things and sure; wherein is promised no less than life and immortality, an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, a crown of glory that fades not away. Being in such circumstances, nothing shall be able to prevent your being happy to all eternity; having for the foundation of your hope, that love of God which is from eternity to eternity; and his promise and oath, and his omnipotent power, things infinitely firmer than mountains of brass. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, yea, the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, yet these things will never be abolished.

In such a state as this you will have a foundation of peace and rest through all changes, and in times of the greatest uproar and outward calamity be defended from all storms, and dwell above the floods; Psalm 32:6, 7. And you shall be at peace with every thing, and God will make all his creatures throughout all parts of his dominion, to befriend you; Job 5:19–24. You need not be afraid of any thing that your enemies can do unto you, Psal. 3:5, 6. Those things that now are most terrible to you, viz. death, judgment, and eternity, will then be most comfortable, the most sweet and pleasant objects of your contemplation, at least there will be reason that they should be so. Harken therefore to the friendly counsel that is given you this day, turn your feet into the way of peace, forsake the foolish and live; forsake those things which are no other than the devil's baits, and seek after this excellent peace and rest of Jesus Christ, that peace of God which passeth all understanding. Taste and see; never was any disappointed that made a trial. Prov. 24:13, 14. You will not only find those spiritual comforts that Christ offers you to be of a surpassing sweetness for the present, but they will be to your soul as the dawning light that shines more and more to the perfect day; and the issue of all will be your arrival in heaven, that land of rest, those regions of everlasting joy, where your peace and happiness will be perfect, without the least mixture of trouble or affliction, and never be interrupted nor have an end.



# **We Have Peace With God**

*"... we have peace with God." -- Romans 5:1*

1. The nature of it.
2. How it is brought to pass.
3. The distinguishing marks of it.
4. The benefits of it.
5. The course that should be taken in order to it.

## **I. The nature of it.**

Here I would observe that we ought to distinguish between that peace which is real and [which is] sensible.

The one consists in the state of the soul: the other in the sense of the soul. The one is the foundation of the other. That peace of God which is real or that consists in the state of the soul is the ground of that which consists in its sensation or apprehension. Both are called in Scripture by the name of PEACE; and are represented as the peculiar privileges of God's saints. And therefore I will something very briefly consider the nature of each.

1. That peace with God that is *real* is that state of a believer whereby he is in reconciliation and favor with his creator. It consists in two thing: —

1. Something negative — *viz.*, the removal of God's anger and displeasure... forgiveness of sin... total (Isa. 1:18) — 'White as snow,'... compared to the unrolling of a cloud (Isa. 44:22, 23);... as

though they never had been (Jer. 50:20); ‘sought for and shall not be found,’... ‘depths of the sea,’ (Mic. 7:18);... everlasting (Jer. 31:34); “make an end of sin.” (Dan. 9:24).

2. Something positive — *viz.*, as being received and treated as the objects of God’s favor.

As the expression is used in Scripture [it is] something more than merely negative... Title. Manifestation. Treatment.

Difference between love and favor, though sometimes called by the same names — Acceptance. Compliance . . . as entitled to a reward.

2. [That peace with God that is] *sensible* is that inward, holy calm and quietness of soul arising from a sense and apprehension of the soul’s union with God.

A sense of this gives an inexpressibly sweet calm. This is usually intended by Christ. (John 14:27).

This is twofold: —

1. Peace of conscience or a sweet calm from a sense of the pardon of sin and acceptance with God as righteous.

Two things —

A sense of sufficiency.

An apprehension of the faithfulness of the promise.

These things give a sweet rest.

2. That rest of soul that arises from the sense or feeling of a real conformity to and union with [Christ].

Peace of confidence consists in a sense of a relative union.

That is the rest that arises from hope: this from love.

II. How the children of God come to be made partakers of this benefit.

1. The first and highest source and spring of all is from God's eternal foreknowledge... Choosing 'em, the particular persons by the Father.

Jer. 31:3 — "Everlasting love."

The love of the Father. Giving them to the Son.

The Son owing them... predestinating of them. (Eph. 1:4).

Titus 1:2

This is the first foundation.

2. The purchase of this blessing was made by the offering that Christ made to the Father.

Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:6). Peace on earth... Nigh by the BLOOD. (Eph. 2:14). He is our peace. In the text, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The way. Great High Priest. Offering is but one; but it is to be variously considered.

3. The way in which we come to have an interest in this.

Purchase: and so to be actually brought into peace with God is by being united to Christ.

Threefold union.

Most immediately by a legal union... Real union foundation of legal.

Being in Christ, the believer, as it were, necessarily is a partaker.

4. The immediate efficient of this union is the Holy Spirit.

So Christ is in them, and they in Christ. (Rom. 8:9, 10).

The union is first by a communication from Christ; and this is what is communicated.

The vine is united by deriving sap: the womb by deriving life.

Thus the Holy Spirit makes application. In this respect the peace with God is from the Holy Spirit.

5. The work by which the Spirit works in the elect by which this union is effected is faith.

This is the uniting act. Therefore God looks on the sinner as one with Christ, because He has accepted of him; and his soul has united [itself to Christ].

6. The end of this union, but which the soul has sensible peace with God, is sanctification of heart and life... including faith and all other graces.

And thus it is that the Spirit of God gives sensible peace.

This is the seal of the Spirit (Eph. 1:13); earnest of the Spirit. (2 Cor. 1:22). But this 'tis a spirit of adoption.

III. Distinguishing marks of it, whereby it may be distinguished from the false appearances of it.

1. In those that have a true peace with God their sensible peace has its foundation laid in conviction.

There is a false peace.

Preparation... legal conviction.

Immediate foundation:... Spiritual conviction has its foundation in light, and not in darkness... increased by conviction.

2. In those [that have peace] that quietness and rest of soul they have is not only their comfort but their virtue or nature.(?)

3. Christ is the foundation of all.

4. In those [that have peace there is] a sense of glory and suffering precedes a sense of propriety [property, possession].

A more principal foundation.

5. ...a rest of choice and love precedes a rest of hope.

The rest of the faculties of the soul in God is the Church's God...goes before a rest in Him as our God... As a rest in His favor.

6. In those [that have peace] there is a union of heart with God and Christ, attended with an irreconcilable war with God's enemies.

#### IV. Benefits.

1. A being infinitely above the reach of everything that might make them men...

I say infinitely above... Infinitely strong defense... as impossible as to destroy God Himself... infinite wisdom... infinite strength engaged... infinite price... infinite truth...

Dwell "on high" ... infinitely high.

Foundation in that which is eternal: from eternity to eternity...

Oath of God. (Heb. 6:17, 18)...

2. A being at peace with all God's creatures. In different senses.

Angels... Saints... Sun, moon, stars. Beasts. Stones (Job 5:23).

Water and fire (Isa. 43:2). ... Whole creation 'groans.'

Poisonous things (Mark 16:18; Luke 10:19). ... Wicked men and devils — All things for them (1 Cor. 3:21, 22).

3. Communion with God.

4. An holy and sweet walking and friendly conversing with God. Amos 3:3 — "Two walk together." ... "Called you friends."

5. More and more conformity and assimilation to God.

6. Communion with saints (1 John 1:3-7).

7. An irrefragable title to eternal glory.

8. Steadfastness under the changes of life. Anchor to the soul.

A steadfast calm in the midst of storms. A steadfast meekness in the midst of oppositions.

9. A strong and conquering support and comfort under the troubles of life... Waiting our death.

10. Joy unspeakable.

V. Course to be taken in order to the obtaining this peace with God and enjoying the benefit of it.

1. a sense of the great breach...
2. A sense of their misery by reason of the breach, and the absolute necessity of reconciliation. All false rest must be destroyed. The world. Own righteousness.
3. A conviction that God may justly refuse ever to be at peace with us.
4. An eternal divorce of the heart from that which made and which maintains the breach.
5. The Prince of Peace must be resorted to and embraced.
6. An high war must be maintained with God's enemies.
7. A spirit of peace and love must rule in our hearts and lives.

This is the end of union between God and the soul. And this is the end of union between Christians, one with another. If we are much under the influences of a spirit contrary to this, we can't expect to have the sensible peace of God. But if you live in the lively exercise [of this] it will be the way to love.

The feeling of this gives sensible peace, as I observed before.

And it tends to give the other sort of sensible peace, that which consists in hope. "For perfect peace casts out fear."

## ***Dishonesty***

***or***

## ***The Sin of Theft and of Injustice***

*"Thou shalt not steal." -- Exodus 20:15*

**Subject: An unjust usurping of our neighbor's property without his consent is forbidden by the eighth commandment.**

This is one of the ten commandments which constitute a summary of man's duty, as revealed by God. God made many revelations to the children of Israel in the wilderness by Moses. But this made in the ten commandments is the chief. Most of those other revelations contained ceremonial or judicial laws; but this contains the moral law. The most of those other laws respected the Jewish nation; but here is a summary of laws binding on all mankind. Those were to last till Christ should come, and have set up the Christian church. These are of perpetual obligation, and last to the end of the world. God everywhere, by Moses and the prophets, manifests a far greater regard to the duties of these commands than to any of the rites of the ceremonial law.

These commands were given at Mount Sinai, before any of the precepts of the ceremonial or judicial laws. They were delivered by a great voice out of the midst of fire, which made all the people in the camp tremble, and afterwards were engraven on tables of stone, and laid up in the ark; the first table containing the four first commandments; which teach our duty to God; the second table containing the six last, which teach our duty to man. The sum of the duties of the first table is contained in that which Christ says is the first and great commandment of the law; Mat. 22:37, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." The sum of what is required in the second table, is



what Christ calls the second command, like unto the first; verse 39, “The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Of the commands of this second table of the law, the first (which is the *fifth* of the ten), refers to that *honor* which is due to our neighbor; the second respects his *life*; the third his *chastity*; the fourth his *estate*; the fifth his good *name*; the sixth and last respects his *possessions* and enjoyments in general. It is that command which respects our neighbor’s *estate*, and which is the fourth command of the second table, and the eighth of the whole decalogue, on which I am now to insist. And here I shall make the command itself, as the words of it lie before us in the decalogue, my subject: and as the words of the commandment are in the form of a prohibition, forbidding a certain kind of sin. So I shall consider particularly what it is that this command forbids. The sin that is forbidden in this command is called *stealing*; yet we cannot reasonably understand it only of that act, which in the more ordinary and strict sense of the word, is called stealing. But the iniquity which this command forbids, may be summarily expressed thus: — *An unjust usurping of our neighbor’s property, without his consent.*

So much is doubtless comprehended in the text; yet this comprehends much more than is implied in the ordinary use of the word, *stealing*; which is only a secret taking of that which is another’s from his possession, without either his consent or knowledge. But the ten commands are not to be limited to the strictest sense of the words, but are to be understood in such a latitude, as to include all things that are of that nature or kind. Hence Christ reproves the Pharisees’ interpretation of the sixth command, Mat. 5:21, 22; and also their interpretation of the seventh command; see verse 27, 28; by which it appears that the commands are not to be understood as forbidding only these individual sins, which are expressly mentioned, in the strictest sense of the expressions; but all other things of the same nature or kind. — Therefore, what is forbidden in this command is all unjust usurpation of our neighbor’s property. Here it may be observed, that an unjust usurpation of our

neighbor's property is twofold; it may be, either by *withholding* what is our neighbor's, or by *taking* it from him.

## SECTION I

### *The dishonesty of withholding what is our neighbor's.*

There are many ways in which persons may unjustly usurp their neighbor's property, by withholding what is his due. But I shall particularize only two things.

*First*, the unfaithfulness of men in *not fulfilling their engagements*. Ordinarily when men promise anything to their neighbor, or enter into engagements by undertaking any business with which their neighbor entrust them, their engagements invest their neighbor with a right to that which is engaged; so that if they withhold it, they usurp that which belongs to their neighbor. So, when men break their promises, because they find them to be inconvenient, and they cannot fulfill them without difficulty and trouble; or merely because they have altered their minds since they promised. They think they have not consulted their own interest in the promise which they have made, and that if they had considered the matter as much before they promised as they have since, they should not have promised. Therefore they take the liberty to set their own promises aside. Besides, sometimes persons violate this command, by neglecting to fulfill their engagements, through a careless, negligent spirit.

They violate this command, in withholding what belongs to their neighbor, when they are not faithful in any business which they have undertaken to do for their neighbor. If their neighbor [has] hired them to labor for him for a certain time, and they be not careful well to husband the time; if they be hired to a day's labor, and be not careful to improve the day, as they have reason to think that he who hired justly expected of them; or if they be hired to accomplish such a piece of work, and be not careful to do it well, do it not as if it were

for themselves, or as they would have others do for them, when they in like manner betrust them with any business of theirs; or if they be entrusted with any particular affair, which they undertake, but use not that care, contrivance, and diligence, to manage it so as will be to the advantage of him who entrusts them, and as they would manage it, or would insist that it should be managed, if the affair was their own: in all these cases the unjustly withhold what belongs to their neighbor.

*Second*, another way in which men unjustly withhold what is their neighbor's is *in neglecting to pay their debts*. Sometimes this happens, because they run so far into debt that they cannot reasonably hope to be able to pay their debts; and this they do, either through pride and affectation of living above their circumstances, or through a grasping, covetous disposition, or some other corrupt principle. Sometimes they neglect to pay their debts from carelessness of spirit about it, little concerning themselves whether they are paid or not, taking no care to go to their creditor, or to send to him. And if they see him from time to time, they say nothing about their debts. Sometimes they neglect to pay their debts, because it would put them to some inconvenience. The reason why they do it not, is not because they cannot do it, but because they cannot do it so conveniently as they desire. And so they rather choose to put their creditor to inconvenience by being without what properly belongs to him, than to put themselves to inconvenience by being without what doth not belong to them, and what they have no right to detain. In any of these cases they unjustly usurp the property of their neighbor.

Sometimes persons have that by them with which they could pay their debts if they would. But they want to lay out their money for something else, to buy gay clothing for their children, or to advance their estates, or for some such end. They have other designs in hand, which must fail, if they pay their debts. When men thus withhold what is due, they unjustly usurp what is not their own. Sometimes they neglect to pay their debts, and their excuse for it is that their creditor doth not need it; that he hath a plentiful estate, and can well

bear to lie out of his money. But if the creditor be ever so rich, that gives no right to the debtor to withhold from him that which belongs to him. If it be due, it ought to be paid. For that is the very notion of its being due. It is no more lawful to withhold from a man what is his due, without his consent, because he is rich and able to do without it, than it is lawful to steal from a man because he is rich, and able to bear the loss.

## SECTION II

### *The dishonesty of unjustly taking a neighbor's property.*

The principal ways of doing this seem to be these four, by negligence, by fraud, by violence, or by stealing strictly so called.

*First*, the first way of unjustly depriving our neighbor of that which is his, is by *negligence*, by carelessly neglecting that which is expected by neighbors, one of another, and is necessary to prevent our neighbor's suffering in his estate by us, or by anything that is ours: and necessary in order that neighbors may live one by another, without suffering in their lawful interests, rights, and possessions, one by another.

For instance, when proper care is not taken by men to prevent their neighbor's suffering in the produce of his fields or enclosures, from their cattle, or other brute creatures; which may be either through negligence with regard to their creatures themselves, in keeping those that are unruly, and giving them their liberty, though they know that they are not fit to have their liberty, and are commonly wont to break into their neighbor's enclosures greatly to his damage; or through a neglect of that which is justly expected of them, to defend others' fields from suffering by the neighborhood of their own. In such cases men are guilty of unjustly taking from their neighbor what is his property.

It is said in the law of Moses, Exo. 22:5, "If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in

another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his vineyard, shall he make restitution." Now a man may be unjustly the cause of his neighbor's field or vineyard being eaten, either by putting in his beast, and so doing what he should not do; or by neglecting to do what he should do, to prevent his beast from getting into his field. What is said in the 144th Psalm, and two last verses, supposes that a people who carry themselves as becomes a people whose God is the Lord, will take thorough care that beasts do not break into their neighbor's enclosures. "That our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be *no breaking in*, nor *going out*; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

*Second*, taking away that which is our neighbor's by *fraud*, or by deceiving him, is another mode of usurping our neighbor's property. This is the case when men in their dealings take advantage of their neighbor's ignorance, or oversight, or mistake, to get something from him; or when they make their gains, by concealing the defects of what they sell, putting off bad for good, though this be not done by speaking falsely, but only by keeping silence. Or when they take a higher price than what they sell is really worth, and more than they could get for it if the concealed defects were known. Or when they sell that for good, which indeed is not merchantable, which is condemned in Amos 8:6, "Yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat."

If a man puts off something to another with defects that are concealed, knowing that the other receives it as good, and pays such a price for it, under a notion of its having no remarkable defect but what he sees, and takes the price which the buyer under that notion offers; the seller knows that he takes a price of the buyer for that which the buyer had not of him; for the buyer is deceived, and pays for those things which he finds wanting in what he buys. It is just the same thing, as if a man should take a payment that another offers him, through a mistake, for that which he never had of him, thinking that he had it of him, when he had it not.

So a man fraudulently takes away that which is his neighbor's, when he gets his money from him by falsely commending what he hath to sell, above what he knows to be the true quality of it; and attributes those good qualities to it which he knows it has not. Or if he does not that, yet sets forth the good qualities in a degree beyond what he knows to be the true degree; or speaks of the defects and ill qualities of what he has to sell, as if they were much less than he knows they are. Or on the contrary, when the buyer will cry down what he is about to buy, contrary to his real opinion of the value of it. — These things, however common they be in men's dealings one with another, are nothing short of iniquity, and *fraud*, and a great breach of this commandment, upon which we are discoursing. Pro. 20:14, "It is nought, it is nought, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way then he boasteth." — Many other ways there are whereby men deceive one another in their trading, and whereby they fraudulently and unjustly take away that which is their neighbor's.

*Third*, another mode of unjustly invading and taking away our neighbor's property, is by *violence*. This violence may be done in different degrees. — Men may take away their neighbor's goods either by mere open violence, either making use of superior strength, forcibly taking away anything that is his; or by express or implicit threatenings forcing him to yield up what he has into their hands; as is done in open robbery and piracy. Or, by making use of some advantages which they have over their neighbor, in their dealings with him, constrain him to yield to their gaining unreasonably of him; as when they take advantage of their neighbor's poverty to extort unreasonably from him for those things that he is under a necessity of procuring for himself or family. This is an oppression against which God hath shown a great displeasure in his word. Lev. 25:14, "And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour, ye shall not oppress one another." Pro. 22:22, 23, "Rob not the poor, because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them." And Amos 4:1, 2, "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mount of Samaria, which oppress the poor,

which crush the needy, the Lord hath sworn in his holiness, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.”

When the necessity of poor indigent people is the very thing whence others take occasion to raise the price of provisions, even above the market; this is such an oppression. There are many poor people whose families are in such necessity of bread, that they in their extremity will give almost any price for it, rather than go without it. Those who have to sell, though hereby they have an advantage in their hands, yet surely should not take the advantage to raise the price of provisions. We should doubtless think we had just cause to complain, if we were in such necessity as they are, and were reduced to their straits, and were treated in this manner. And let us remember, that it is owing only to the distinguishing goodness of God to us, that we are not in their circumstances. And whatever our present circumstances are, yet we know not but that the time may still come when their case may be ours.

Men may oppress others, though they be not poor, if they will take advantage of any particular necessities of their neighbor, unreasonably to extort from him. The case may be so at particular seasons, that those who are not poor, may stand in particular and extraordinary need of what we have, or what we can do for them. So that it would be greatly to their disadvantage or loss to be without it. Now to take advantage of their urgent circumstances, to get from them an unreasonable price, is a violent dealing with our neighbors.

It is very unreasonable to say, Such men are so rich, and get money so much more easily than I, that it is no hurt for me to take advantage when they are in special need, and make them give me, for work that I do for them, a great deal more than I would desire to ask of other men. Let such consider, whether, if they should by any means hereafter get forward in the world, and come to have plentiful estates, they would like that persons should act upon such principles towards them. That men are rich, gives us no more right to take away from them what is theirs in this way, than it does to steal from them

because they come easily by their property, and can do without it better than we.

Again, another thing that is a kind of violent taking from our neighbor what is his, is taking the advantage of the law to gain from others, when their cause in honesty and conscience is just and good. The circumstances of mankind, their rights, possessions, and dealings one with another, are so various, that it is impossible that any body of human laws should be contrived to suit all possible cases and circumstances. Hence the best laws may be abused and perverted to purposes contrary to the general design of laws, which is to maintain the rights and secure the properties of mankind. Human laws have a regard due to them, but always in subordination to the higher laws of God and nature. Therefore when it so happens, that we have an advantage by the law, to gain what the laws of moral honesty allow not, it is an oppression and violence to take the advantage. That human laws allow it, will not excuse us before God, the Judge of the world, who will judge us another day by his own laws and not by the laws of the commonwealth.

*Fourth*, the fourth way of unjustly taking from our neighbor that which is his, is *stealing* so called. All unjust ways of taking away, or invading, or usurping what is our neighbor's, are called stealing in the most extensive use of the word, and all included in the expression in this command. Yet the word stealing, as it is more commonly used, is not of so great extent, and intends not all unjust invasion of our neighbor's property, but only a particular kind of unjust taking. So that in common speech when we speak of fraudulent dealings, of extortion, unfaithfulness in our trust, and of stealing, we understand different sins by these expressions, though they are an usurpation of what is our neighbor's.

Stealing, strictly so called, may be thus defined. *A designed taking of our neighbor's goods from him, without his consent or knowledge.* It is not merely a withholding of what is our neighbor's, but a taking away. And therein it differs from unfaithfulness in our



undertakings and betrustedments, and also from negligence in the payment of debts. It is a designed or willful depriving of our neighbor of what is his, and so differs from wronging our neighbor in his estate through carelessness or negligence. It is taking of our neighbor's goods without his knowledge. It is a private, clandestine taking away, and so differs from robbery by open violence.

So also it differs from extortion, for in that the person knows what is taken from him. The aim of him that takes is no other than that he should know it; for he makes use of other means than his ignorance, to obtain what is his neighbors, *viz.* violence to constrain him to give it up. So also it differs from fraudulent dealing or trading. For though in fraudulent dealing, the lawful possessor doth not understand the ways and means, by which he parts with his goods, and by which his neighbor becomes possessed of them; yet he knows the *fact*; the deceiver designedly conceals the *manner* only. But in stealing, strictly so called, he that takes, intends not that it shall be *known* that he takes. It also differs from extortion and fraudulent dealing, in that it is wholly without the consent of the owner. For in extortion, though there be no free consent; yet the consent of the owner is in some sort gained, though by oppressive means. So in fraudulent dealing consent is in some sort obtained, though it be by deceit. But in stealing no kind of consent is obtained.

A person may steal from another, yet not take his goods without the knowledge of the owner; because he may know of it accidentally, he may see what is done, unawares to the thief. Therefore I have defined stealing, a designed taking without the consent or knowledge of the owner. If it be accidentally known, yet it is not known in the design and intention of the thief. The thief is so far at least private in it, that he gives no notice to the owner at the time. It must be also without the consent of the owner. A person may take without the knowledge of the owner, and yet not take without his consent. The owner may not know of his taking at the time, or of his taking any particular things; yet there may be his implicit consent. There may have been a general consent, if not expressed, yet implied. The circumstances of

the affair may be such, that his consent may well be presumed upon, either from an established custom, allowed by all, or from the nature of the case; the thing being of such a nature, that it may well be presumed that none would refuse their consent; as in the case of a person's accidentally passing through his neighbor's vineyard in Israel, and eating his fill of grapes; or from the circumstances of the persons, as is the case, in many instances, of the freedom which near neighbors and intimate friends often take, and of that boldness which they use with respect to each other's goods.

In all *such* cases, though the owner [does] not particularly know what is done, yet he that takes, does it not with any contrived designed concealment. And though there is no express, particular consent, yet there is a consent either implied, or justly presumed upon. And he that takes, doth not designedly do it without consent.

It may happen in some cases, that one may take the goods of another both without his knowledge and consent, either explicit or implicit, but through mistake; yet he may not be guilty of stealing. Therefore the *design* of him who takes must come into consideration. When he designedly takes away that which is his neighbor's, without his consent or knowledge, then he steals. So that if it should happen, that he has both his consent and knowledge, without his design, he steals. And if it so happen that he takes without either his neighbor's consent or knowledge, and yet without his own design, he steals not. I desire therefore that this, which I take to be the true definition of theft or stealing, may be borne in mind, *viz.* a designed taking of our neighbor's goods, without his consent or knowledge; because it is needful to clear up many things which I have yet to say on this subject.

### SECTION III

*Dishonest excuses.*

Here I shall particularly take notice of some things, by which persons may be ready to excuse themselves, in privately taking their neighbor's good, which however cannot be a just excuse for it, nor will they make such a taking to be stealing.

*First*, that the person whose goods are privately taken, *owes* or is in debt to him that takes them. Some may be ready to say that they do not take that which is their neighbor's, they take that which is their own, because as much is due to them, their neighbor owes them as much, and unjustly detains it, and they know not whether ever they shall get their due of him. Their neighbor will not do them right, and therefore they must right themselves.

But such pleas as these will not justify a man in going in a private and clandestine manner to take away anything of his neighbor's from his possession, without his consent or knowledge; his doing this is properly stealing. For though something of his neighbor's, which is as valuable as what he takes, may be due to him; that doth not give him such a right to his neighbor's goods, that he may take anything that is his, according to his own pleasure, and at what time and in what manner he pleases. That his neighbor is in debt to him, doth not give him a right to take it upon himself to be his own judge, so that he may judge for himself, which of his neighbor's goods shall be taken from him to discharge the debt; and that he may act merely according to his own private judgment and pleasure in such a case, without so much as acquainting his neighbor with the affair.

In order to warrant such a proceeding as this, everything that his neighbor has, must be his. A man may not take indifferently what he pleases out of a number of goods, without the consent or knowledge of any other person, unless all is his own, to be disposed of as he pleases. Such a way of using goods according to our own pleasure, taking what we will, and at what time we will, can be warranted by nothing but a dominion over the whole. And though he who is in debt may be guilty of great injustice in detaining what is due to another; yet it doth not thence follow, but that he that takes from

him, may also be guilty of great injustice towards him. The course he takes to right himself may be very irregular and unreasonable; and such a course, that if universally allowed and pursued in such cases, would throw human society into confusion.

When men obtain a property in any of the professions of this life, they are at the same time also invested with a right to retain a possession of them, till they are deprived of them in some fair and regular proceeding. Every man has a right to hold his estate, and keep possession of his properties, so that no other can lawfully use them as his own, until he either parts with them of his own accord, or until it be taken from him according to some established rule, in a way of open justice. Therefore he who, under pretense of having just demands upon his neighbor, privately takes his goods without his consent, takes them unjustly, and is guilty of stealing.

*Second*, much less will it make such a private taking not to be stealing, that he who takes, has, in way of kindness or gift, done for the person from whom he takes, as much is equivalent to the *value* of what he takes. If a man do his neighbor some considerable kindness, whether in labor, or in something that he gives him, what he does or gives is supposed to be done voluntarily, and he is not to make his neighbor debtor for it. And therefore if anything be privately taken away, upon any such consideration, it is gross stealing.

For instance, when any person needs to have any services done for him, where a considerable number of hands are necessary; it is common for the neighborhood to meet together and join in helping their neighbor, and frequently some provision is made for their entertainment. If any person who hath assisted on such an occasion, and is a partaker at such an entertainment, shall think within himself, the service I have done is worth a great deal more than what I shall eat and drink here, and therefore shall take liberty privately to take of the provision set before him, to carry away with him, purposely concealing the matter from him who hath entertained him,

this is gross stealing. And it is a very ridiculous plea which they make to excuse so unmanly and vile an act.

Persons in such cases may say to themselves, that the provision is made for them, and set before them; that it is a time wherein considerable liberty is given, and they think, seeing they have done so much for their host, they may take something more than they eat and drink there. But then let them be open in it; let them acquaint those with it who make the entertainment; and let it not be done in any wise, in a secret, clandestine manner, with the least design or attempt to avoid their notice. On the contrary, let care be taken to give them notice and obtain their consent.

When persons do such things in a private manner, they condemn themselves by their own act. Their doing what they do secretly, shows that they are conscious to themselves, that they go beyond what it is expected they should do, and do what would not be allowed, if it were known. Such an act, however light they may make of it, is abominable theft, and what any person of religion or any sense of the dignity of their own nature, would to the greatest degree abhor and detest.

*Third*, it is not sufficient to make a private taking without consent not to be stealing, that it is but a small matter that is taken. If the thing be of little value, yet if it be worth a purposed concealing from the owner, the value is great enough to render the taking of it proper theft. If it be pretended that the thing is of so small consequence, that it is not worth asking for; then surely it is not worth a purposed concealing from the owner, when it is taken. He who, under this pretense, conceals his taking, in the very act contradicts his own pretense; for his action shows that he apprehends, or at least suspects, that, as small a matter as it is, the owner would not like the taking of it, if he knew it; otherwise the taker would not desire to conceal it.

The owner of the goods, and not other people, is the proper judge, whether what he owns be of such a value, that it is worth his while to keep it, and to refuse his consent to the taking of it from him. He who possesses, and not he who takes away, has a right to judge of what consequence his possessions are to him. He has a right to set what value he pleases on them, and to treat them according to that value. Besides, merely that a thing is of small value, cannot give a right to others, purposely and designedly to take it away, without the knowledge or consent of the owner. Because if this only gives a right, then all have a right to take things of small value; and at this rate a great number of persons, each of them taking from a man that which is of small value, might take away all he has.

Therefore, it will not justify persons, in purposely taking such things as fruit from the trees, or gardens, or fields of their neighbors, without their knowledge or consent, that the things which they take are things of small value. Nor is that sufficient to render such an act not an act of theft properly so called. This shows also that the smallness of the value of what is privately taken at feasts and entertainments, doth not render the taking of such things not stealing.

The small value of a thing may in some cases justify an occasional taking of things, so far as we may from thence, and from what is generally allowed, reasonably presume that the owner gives his consent. But if that be the case, and persons really take, as supposing that the owner consents to such occasional taking, then he that takes will not at all endeavor to do what he does secretly, nor in any measure to avoid notice. But merely the smallness of the value of a thing, can never justify a secret taking of what is another's.

#### SECTION IV

*The subject applied. — The dishonest warned.*

The first use I would make of this doctrine, is to *warn* against all injustice and dishonesty, as to what appertains to our neighbor's temporal goods or possessions. Let me warn all to avoid all ways of unjustly invading or usurping what is their neighbor's, and let me press that exhortation of the apostle, Rom. 12:17, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men;" which implies, that those things which we provide for ourselves, and use as our own, should be such as we come honestly by; and especially that we should avoid all clandestine or *underhand* ways of obtaining anything that is our neighbor's, either by fraudulent dealing, or by that taking without our neighbor's knowledge and consent, of which we have been speaking.

I warn you to beware of dishonesty in withholding what is your neighbor's, either by unfaithfulness to your trust in any business which you undertake, or by withholding your neighbor's just and honest dues. Consider that saying of the apostle, Rom. 13:8, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another." Be also warned against wronging your neighbor or injuring him in his enclosures, or in any of his just rights and properties, through careless neglect of what is reasonably expected by neighbors one of another, in order that they may live one by another without mutual injury. Let all beware that they bring not guilt on their souls in the sight of God, by taking an advantage to oppress any person. Especially beware of taking advantage of others' poverty to extort from them. For God will defend their cause, and you will be no gainers by such oppression.

Beware also of all injustice by deceitful and fraudulent dealing. You doubtless meet with abundance of temptation to fraud, and have need to keep a strong guard upon yourselves. There are many temptations to falsehood in trading, both about what you would buy and what you have to sell. There are, in buying, temptations to do as in Pro. 20:14, "It is nought, it is nought, saith the buyer." There are many temptations to take indirect courses, to blind those with whom you deal, about the qualities of what you have to sell, to diminish the defects of your commodities, or to conceal them, and to put off

things for good, which are bad. And there are doubtless many other ways that men meet with temptations to deceive others, which your own experience will better suggest to you than I can.

But here I shall take occasion to speak of a particular kind of fraud, which is very aggravated, and is rather a defrauding of God than man. What I mean is, *the giving of that which is bad for good in public contributions*. Though it be matter of great shame and lamentation that it should be so, yet it is to be feared, from what has sometimes been observed, that there are some who, when there is a public contribution to be made for the poor, or some other pious and charitable use, sometimes take that opportunity *to put off their bad money*. That which they find, or think, their neighbors will refuse to take at their hands, because they will have opportunity to see what is offered them, and to observe the badness of it, even *that* they therefore take opportunity to put off to God.

Hereby they endeavor to save their credit; for they apprehend that they shall be concealed. They appear with others to go to the contribution, as it is not known, but that they put in that which is good. But they cheat the church of God, and defraud the expectations of the poor, or rather, they lie to God, for those who receive what is given, stand as Christ's receivers, and not as acting for themselves in this matter.

They that do thus, do that which is very much of the same nature with that sin, against which God denounces that dreadful curse in Mal. 1:14, "Cursed be the deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." *That hath in his flock a male, i.e.* That has in his flock that which is good and fit to be offered to God. For it was the male of the flock principally that was appointed, in the law of Moses, to be offered in sacrifice. He has in his flock that which is good, but he vows and sacrifices to the Lord "the torn, the lame, and the sick." As it is said in the foregoing verse; ye said also, "Behold what a



weariness is it, and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hands? Saith the Lord.”

Contributions in the Christian church come in the room of sacrifices in the Jewish church. Mercy comes in the room of sacrifice. And what is offered in the way of mercy is as much offered to God, as the sacrifices of old were. For what is done to the poor is done to Christ, and he that hath pity on the poor, lendeth to the Lord; Pro. 19:17. The Jews that offered the sick and lame of the flock, knew that if they had offered it to their governor, and had attempted to put it off, as part of the tribute or public taxes due to their earthly rulers, it would not be accepted, and therefore they were willing to put it off to God. “And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? Saith the Lord of hosts.”

So those persons who purposely put bad money into contributions, know that what they put in would not be accepted if they should offer to pay their public taxes. Yea, they know that their *neighbors* would not accept it at their hands; and therefore they are willing to save themselves, by putting it off to God.

This practice has also very much of the nature of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. What they offered was by way of contribution for charitable uses. The brethren sold what they had, and brought it into a common stock, and put all under the care of deacons, that the poor might every one be supplied. Ananias and Sapphira brought a part of their possessions, and put it into the common stock. And their sin was, that they put it in for more than it really was. It was but a part of what they had, and they put it in, and would have it accepted, as if it had been all. So those among us, of whom I am speaking, put off what they put into the charitable stock, for more than it is. For they put it in, under the notion that it is something of some value. They

intend it shall be so taken by the church that sees them go to the contribution, when indeed they put in nothing at all.

Ananias and Sapphira were charged with lying to God, and doing an act of fraud towards God himself, in what they did. Acts 5:4, “Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” So those who knowingly put bad money for good into a contribution for a charitable use, as much as in them lies commit an act of fraud and deceit towards God. For the deacons who receive what is contributed, receive it not in their own names, but as Christ’s receivers. I hope these things may be sufficient to deter every reader from ever daring to do such a thing for the future.

Again, another thing I would warn you against, is, stealing, properly and strictly so called; or designedly taking away any of your neighbor’s goods without his consent or knowledge. And especially I would now take occasion to warn against a practice which is very common in the country, particularly among children and young people; and that is, stealing fruit from their neighbor’s trees or enclosures. There is a licentious liberty taken by many children and young people, in making bold with their neighbor’s fruit. And it is to be feared, that they are too much countenanced in it by their parents and many elder people.

I am sensible, that the great thing which is pleaded, and made very much the ground of this liberty which is taken and so much tolerated, is a very abusive and unreasonable construction and application of that text of Scripture in Deu. 23:24, “When thou comest into thy neighbour’s vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill. But thou shalt not put any in thy vessel.” Because this text seems to be so much mistaken and misimproved, I shall therefore endeavor particularly to state the matter of persons taking their neighbor’s fruit, and to set it in a just and clear light as concerning this text.

It was to eat their fill of grapes when they *occasionally* came into or passed through their neighbor's vineyard, and not that they should go thither on *purpose* to eat grapes. This is manifest by the manner of expression; "*When thou comest* into thy neighbour's vineyard, thou mayest eat;" *i.e.* when thou art come thither on some other occasion. If God had meant to give them leave to come thither on purpose, for no other end, it would not have been expressed so; but rather thus, *Thou mayest come* into thy neighbour's vineyard, and eat grapes thy fill. — Such were the circumstances of that people, and vineyards among them were so common, that there was no danger that this liberty would be attended with ill consequence. It is manifest throughout the history of Israel, that vineyards among them were so common that the people in general had them. Every husbandman among them was a vine-dresser; and a great part of the business of a husbandman among them, consisted in dressing and taking care of his vineyards. Grapes seem to have been the most common sort of fruit that they had. Besides, there was no liberty given for persons to go on purpose to a vineyard to eat the fruit of it. So that there was no danger of neighbors suffering one by another, by any such liberty. — The liberty did not tend to any such consequence, as the flocking of a great number to eat grapes, whereby the fruit of the vineyard might be much diminished.

Such were the circumstances of the case, that the consent of the owners of vineyards in general might well be presumed upon, though no such express liberty had been given. You may remember that in the definition of stealing, I observed, that explicit consent is not always necessary; because the case may be so circumstanced, that consent may be well presumed on. And the reason why consent might well be presumed on in the case of eating grapes, of which we are now speaking, is, that there could be no sensible injury, nor any danger of any ill consequences, by which a man would sensibly suffer in the benefit of his vineyard. Hence it is the more easy to determine, what would and what would not be justified by this text, among us. Suppose a particular person among us had a vineyard of the same kind with those which the children of Israel had, it would not justify

others in using the same liberty when occasionally passing through it; because it would be a rare thing, and the rarity and scarcity of the fruit would render it of much greater value. Besides, if one man [was] distinguished by such a possession, to allow of such a liberty would have a much greater tendency to ill consequences, than if they were common, as they were in the land of Canaan. There would be danger of many persons falsely pretending, and making occasions, to pass through the vineyard, for the sake of such rare fruit.

Nor would it be a parallel case, if men in general among us had each of them a *few* vines. That would be a very different thing from persons in general having large vineyards. Nor would this text, in such a case, warrant men's eating their fill of grapes when occasionally passing by. — And though all in general had vineyards, as they had in the land of Canaan, this text would not justify men in going into their neighbor's vineyard on purpose to eat the fruit. No such liberty is given in the text. If there had been such liberty, it might have been of ill consequence. For the sake of saving their own grapes, men might make a practice of going and sending their children into their neighbor's vineyard, to eat their fill from time to time.

But the liberty given in this text to the children of Israel, seems to be very parallel with the liberty taken among us, to take up an apple or two and eat, as we are occasionally passing through a neighbor's orchard; which, as our circumstances are, we may do, and justly presume that we have the owner's consent. This is a liberty that we take, and find no ill consequences. It was very much so with vineyards in the land of Canaan, as it is with orchards among us. Apples in some countries are a rare fruit. And there it would by no means be warrantable for persons to take the same liberty when occasionally passing by their neighbor's apple tree, which we warrantably take here, when going through a neighbor's orchard.

The consideration of these things will easily show the great abuse that is made of this text, when it is brought to justify such a resorting

of children and others to their neighbor's fruit trees, as is sometimes, on purpose to take and eat the fruit. Indeed this practice is not only not justified by the law of Moses, but it is in itself unreasonable, and contrary to the law of nature. The consequences of it are pernicious, so that a man can have no dependence on enjoying the fruit of his labor, or the benefit of his property in those things, which possibly he may very much value. He can have no assurance but that he shall be mainly deprived of what he has, and that others will not have the principal benefit of it; and so that his end in planting and cultivating that from which he expected those fruits of the earth, which God hath given for the use, comfort, and delight of mankind, will not be in the main frustrated.

## SECTION V

### *An exhortation to honesty.*

Under this use, I shall confine myself to two particulars, many other things having been already spoken to.

*First*, I shall hence take occasion to exhort *parents* to restrain the children from stealing, and particularly from being guilty of theft in stealing the fruits of their neighbor's trees or fields. Christian parents are obliged to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But how much otherwise do they act, who bring them up in theft! And those parents are guilty of this, who — though they do not directly teach them to steal, by example and setting them about it, yet — *tolerate* them in it.

Parents should take effectual care, not only to instruct their children better, and to warn them against any such thievish practices, but also thoroughly to restrain them. Children who practice stealing, make themselves vile. Stealing, by the common consent of mankind, is a very vile practice. Therefore those parents that will not take thorough care to restrain their children from such a practice, will be guilty of the same sin which God so highly resented, and awfully punished, in

Eli, of which we read, 1 Sam. 3:13, “For I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”

*Second*, I exhort those who are conscious in themselves that they have heretofore wronged their neighbor to make *restitution*. This is a duty the obligation to which is exceedingly plain. If a person was wronged in *taking* away anything that was his, certainly he is wronged also in *detaining it*. And all the while that a person, who has been guilty of wronging his neighbor, neglects to make restitution, he lives in that wrong. He not only lives impenitent as to that first wrong of which he was guilty, but he *continually* wrongs his neighbor. A man who hath gotten anything from another wrongfully, *goes on* to wrong him every day that he neglects to restore it, when he has opportunity to do it. The person injured did not only suffer wrong from the other when his goods were first taken from him, but he suffers new injustice from him all the while they are unjustly kept from him.

Therefore I counsel you who are conscious that you have heretofore wronged your neighbor, either by fraud, or oppression, or unfaithfulness, or stealing, whether lately or formerly, though it may have been a great while ago, speedily to go and make restitution for all the wrong your neighbor has suffered at your hands. That it was done long ago, doth not quit you from obligation to restore. This is a duty with which you must comply; you cannot be acquitted without it. As long as you neglect it, it will be unreasonable in you to expect any forgiveness of God. For what ground can you have to think that God will pardon you, as long as you willfully continue in the same wrong, and wrong the same many still every day, by detaining from him that which is his? You in your prayers ask of God, that he would forgive all your sins; but your very prayers are mockery, if you still willfully continue in those sins. — Indeed, if you go and confess your faults to your neighbor, and he will freely acquit you from making restitution, you will be acquitted from the obligation. For in so doing,

your neighbor gives you what before was his. But otherwise you cannot be acquitted.

I would leave this advice with all, for direction in their behavior on their deathbeds. Indeed you should not by any means put it off till you come to die; and you will run the most fearful risk in so doing. But if you will not do it now, while you are in health, I will leave it with you to remember, when you shall come to lie on your deathbeds. Doubtless, then if you have the use of your reason, you will be concerned for the salvation of your poor souls. And let this be one thing then remembered, as absolutely necessary in order to your salvation, that before you die, you must make restitution for whatever wrong you shall have done any of your neighbors; or at least leave orders that such restitution be made. Otherwise you will, as it were, go out of the world, and go before your great Judge, with stolen goods in your hands. And certainly it will not be very comfortable or safe, to bring them into his infinitely holy and dreadful presence, when he sits on his throne of judgment, with his eyes as a flame of fire, being more pure than to look on iniquity; when he is about to sentence you to your everlasting unalterable state.

Everyone here present, who has been guilty of wronging his neighbor, and has not made restitution, must die. Let all such therefore remember this counsel now given them, on the day when death shall approach, if they shall be so foolish as to neglect it till that time.

## **The Portion of the Righteous**

But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good.  
ROMANS 2:10

THE apostle, having in the preceding verses declared what is the portion of wicked men; viz. indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish; in this verse declares what is the portion assigned to good men. In the words of the text we should observe,

1. The description of a good man; viz. the man that worketh good. Such men are here described by the fruit which they bring forth. Christ has taught us that the tree is known by its fruit. Paul here describes them by that which most distinguishes them; not by the external privileges which they enjoy, or the light under which they live; but by the fruits which they bring forth. For as the apostle says, in verse 13. "Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of it shall be justified." That which distinguishes good men from bad, is not that they hear good, or that they profess good, or that they intend good; but that they do good. They are workers of good.

2. The reward of such a man; viz. "glory, honour, and peace;" in which are mentioned three sorts of good that are assigned to them as their portion. 1. Their moral good, expressed by the word glory. Glory shall be given them; i.e. they shall be made excellent and glorious. They shall be endued with those excellent and glorious qualifications, which will render them beautiful and lovely. They shall have the image of God, and be partakers of his holiness. Thus the word glory is used by St. Paul, 2 Cor. 3:18. We are changed into the same image from glory to glory. 2. Their relative good; Honour. They shall be in most honourable circumstances. They shall be advanced to great dignity, receive a relation to God, and Christ, and the heavenly inhabitants, and God shall put honour upon them. 3. Their natural good; Peace: which, as it is used in the Scriptures, signifies happiness; and includes all comfort, joy, and pleasure.



I shall endeavour to show from the text, that glory, honour, and peace are the portion which God has given to all good men. In describing their happiness, I shall consider the successive parts of it; both here and hereafter.

First. I propose to treat of their happiness in this world. Those who are truly good men have been the subjects of a real thorough work of conversion, and have had their hearts turned from sin to God. Of such persons it may be said, that they are truly blessed. They are often pronounced blessed by God. He is infinitely wise, and sees and knows all things. He perfectly knows who are blessed, and who are miserable. He hath said, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly."—"Blessed is he whose sins are forgiven."—"Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust."—"Blessed are the poor in spirit"—"the meek"—"the merciful"—"the pure in heart."

In considering the happiness of the righteous in this world, I shall pursue the method which the text obviously points out, and shall consider, 1. The excellency; 2. The honour; and, 3. The peace and pleasure, which God bestows upon them in the present life.

I. The excellency or glory. The sum of this consists in their having the image of God upon them. When a person is converted, he has the image of God instamped on him. Coloss. 3:10. "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him." And Ephes. 4:23, 24. "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness." They have their eyes opened, and are led into such a sight of God and thorough acquaintance with him, as changes the soul into the image of God's glory.

What can render a creature more excellent than to have the very image of the Creator? and how blessed a change is that which is wrought in conversion, which brings a man thus to be in the image of God! For though the image of God in Christians in this world is very

imperfect, yet it is real. The real image of God is most excellent, though it be imperfect.

Hence, "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour," and "the saints are the excellent of the earth." The image of God is their glory, and it may well be called glory, for imperfect as it is, it renders them glorious in the eyes of the angels of heaven. The image of God is a greater beauty in their eyes, than the brightness and glory of the sun in the firmament.

Indeed the saints have no excellency, as they are in and of themselves. In them, that is, in their flesh, dwells no good thing. They are in themselves poor, guilty, vile creatures, and see themselves to be so; but they have an excellency and glory in them, because they have Christ dwelling in them. The excellency that is in them, though it be but as a spark, yet it is something ten thousand times more excellent than any ruby, or the most precious pearl that ever was found on the earth; and that because it is something divine, something of God.

This holy heavenly spark is put into the soul in conversion, and God maintains it there. All the powers of hell cannot put it out, for God will keep it alive, and it shall prevail more and more. Though it be but small, yet it is powerful; it has influence over the heart to govern it, and brings forth holy fruits in the life, and will not cease to prevail till it has consumed all the corruption that is left in the heart, and till it has turned the whole soul into a pure, holy, and heavenly flame, till the soul of man becomes like the angels, a flame of fire, and shines as the brightness of the firmament.

II. I would consider the honour to which Christians are advanced in this world; and the sum of this is, that they are the children of God. This is an excellent and glorious degree of honour and dignity to which they are admitted; and that because the Being to whom they are related is an infinitely glorious being, a being of incomprehensible majesty and excellency; and also because the

relation is so near and honourable a relation. It is a great honour to be the servant of God. John the Baptist said of Christ, that he was not worthy to stoop down to loose the latchet of Christ's shoes. But Christians are not only admitted to be the servants of God, but his children; and how much more honourable in a family is the relation of children than that of servants! Gal. 4:7. "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Rom. 8:16, 17. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." 1 John 3:1. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" The honour appears the greater if it be considered how Christians are brought into their relation to God; and that is by Christ. They become the children of God by virtue of their union with the only-begotten and eternal Son of God; they are united to him as his spouse, and members of his body, as his flesh and his bones, and as one spirit; and, therefore, as Christ is the Son of God, so they are sons; therefore are they joint heirs with Christ, because they are joint sons with him. To this end God sent forth his Son, that so they might through him also be sons. Gal. 4:4, 5. "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." And therefore they partaking of the relation of the Son, so are they also of the spirit of the Son; as it follows in the next verse, "and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

Herein Christians are the children of God in a more honourable way than the angels themselves; for the angels are the sons of God by virtue of that relation which they have to God, as they are in themselves singly and separately. But Christians are the children of God, as partaking with Christ, the only-begotten Son, in his sonship, whose sonship is immensely more honourable than that of the angels. And Christians, being the children of God, are honoured of

God as such. They are sometimes owned as such by the inward testimony of the Spirit of God. For, as it is found in the verse already cited from Romans, "the Spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." They are treated as such in the great value God puts upon them, for they are his jewels, those which he has set apart for himself; and he is tender of them as of the apple of his eye. He disregards wicked men in comparison of them. He will give kings for them and princes for their life. He is jealous for them. He is very angry with those that hurt them. If any offend them, it were better for them that a mill-stone were cast about their neck, and they were drowned in the depths of the sea. He loves them with a very great and wonderful love. He pities them as a father pities his children. He will protect them, and defend them, and provide for them, as a father provides for his children. This honour have all they that fear and love God, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ."

III. Peace and pleasure are also the portion of Christians in this world. Their peace and joy in God begin in the present life, and are no less excellent than the glory with which he invests them, and the honour to which he advances them. We ought here to consider, 1. What foundation they have for peace and joy. 2. What peace and joy they actually have.

1st. Their foundation for peace and joy is in their safety and their riches.

1. They have ground for peace because of their safety. They are safe in Jesus Christ from the wrath of God and from the power of Satan. They that are in Christ shall never perish, for none shall pluck them out of his hand. They are delivered from all their dreadful misery, that indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, which shall come on ungodly men. They were naturally exposed to it, but they are delivered from it; their sins are all forgiven them. The handwriting is eternally blotted out. Their sins are all done away; God has cast them behind his back, and buried their sorrows in the depths of the sea, and they shall no more come into remembrance. They are

most safe from misery, for they are built on Christ their everlasting rock. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God. They have the faithful promise of God for their security, that is established as a sure witness in heaven. They have an interest in that covenant, that is well ordered in all things and sure. "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."

2. They have a foundation of unspeakable comfort and joy, because of their riches. They have true and infinite riches. They are the possessors and heirs of something real and substantial, and that is worthy to be called by the name of riches. The things they possess are excellent, more precious than gold and than rubies; all the desirable things of this world cannot equal them, and they have enough of it. The riches that they have given them of God are inexhaustible. It is sufficient for them; there is no end of it. They have a fountain of infinite good for their comfort, and contentment, and joy; for God has given himself to them to be their portion, and he is a God of infinite glory. There is glory in him to engage their contemplation for ever and ever, without ever being satiated. And he is also an infinite fountain of love; for God is love, yea, an ocean of love without shore or bottom! The glorious Son of God is theirs; that lovely one, who was from all eternity God's delight, rejoicing always before him. All his beauty is their portion, and his dying love is theirs, his very heart is theirs, and his glory and happiness in heaven are theirs, so far as their capacity will allow them to partake of it; for he has promised it to them, and has taken possession of it in their name. And the saints are also rich in the principle that is in them. They have inward riches which they carry about with them in their own hearts. They are rich in faith. James 2:5. "Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" They have the grace of God in their hearts, which is a most excellent treasure, and a good foundation of joy; for it is the seed of joy. Light is sown for the

righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. And the seed that is sown in their hearts, is the grace of God there. That is a seed that, however it lies hid, will certainly in due time spring up, and put forth itself, and will bud, and blossom, and will bring forth rich fruit. These riches are the true riches. This is that good which God reserves for his friends. God distributes silver and gold and such like things among his enemies, because he slights them and regards them not. They are contemptible things in his eyes, as we throw husks to swine. But he has reserved better things for his children, of which no ungodly man, though a prince or monarch, shall partake. This is the ground which Christians have of peace and pleasure in this world. However, the saints cannot always take comfort, and do not always taste the sweetness that there is in store for them, by reason of the darkness and clouds that sometimes interpose. But though they may walk in great darkness for a long time, yet they are happy notwithstanding.

2d. They sometimes in this world have the actual enjoyment of peace and pleasure, that are most excellent. Sometimes the clouds that are in the way are removed, and Christians are enabled to behold the ground they have for rejoicing. Though God's glory and love be often hid from them, as it were with a veil, or at least, so as to hinder a clear view of it, yet God sometimes is pleased to remove the veil, to draw the curtain, and to give the saints sweet visions. Sometimes there is, as it were, a window opened in heaven, and Christ shows himself through the lattice; they have sometimes a beam of sweet light breaking forth from above into the soul; and God and the Redeemer sometimes come to them, and make friendly visits to them, and manifest themselves to them. Sometimes Christians have seasons of light and gladness for some considerable period, and at other times their views are more transient. Sometimes their light and joy arise in reading of the Holy Scriptures, sometimes in hearing the word preached, sometimes at the Lord's table, sometimes in the duty of prayer, sometimes in christian conference, sometimes in meditation when they are about their occupations, as in the time of

more set and solemn meditations; and sometimes in the watches of the night.

Those spiritual joys and pleasures which believers possess in this world, are chiefly of three sorts.

1. The joy which they have in a sense of their own good estate; in the sense they have of the pardon of their sins, and their safety from hell; and a sense of the favour of God, and in the hope they have of eternal life.

2. The joy and delight which they have in the apprehension and view of God's excellency and love. The joy of a Christian does not consist merely in the sense of his own good estate, as natural men often are ready to imagine; but there is an excellent, transcendent, soul-satisfying sweetness that sometimes fills the soul in the apprehension of the excellency of God. The soul dwells upon the thought, fixes on it, and takes complacency in God as the greatest good, the most delightful object of its contemplation. This pleasure is the sweetest pleasure that a Christian ever feels, and is the foretaste of the pleasures of heaven itself. Herein sometimes the saints do boast of the clusters of Canaan. This sort of joy is evidence of sincerity above any other joy, a more sure evidence than a rejoicing in our own good estate. From the joy which the Christian has in the view of the glory and excellency of God; the consideration of the love of God to him cannot be excluded. When he rejoices in God as a glorious God, he rejoices in him the more because he is his God, and in consideration of there being a union between him and this God; otherwise, if there were a separation, the view of God's excellency, though it would raise joy one way, would proportionally excite grief another. God is sometimes pleased to manifest his love to the saints, and commonly at those times, when a Christian has the greatest views of God's excellency, he has also of his love; the soul is spiritually sensible of God as being present with it, and as manifesting and communicating himself; and it has sweet communion with God, and tastes the sweetness of his love, and

knows a little what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of that love which passeth knowledge.

3. The third kind of joy is found in doing that which is to the glory of God. The true love of God makes this sweet and delightful to the soul. The joy of a Christian not only arises in knowing and viewing but also in doing; not only in apprehending God, but also in doing for God. For he loves God not only with a love of complacence, but a love of benevolence also; and as a love of complacence delights in beholding, so does a love of benevolence delight in doing for, the object beloved. The peace and pleasure which the Christian has in these things, is far better and more desirable than the pleasures that this world can afford, and especially than the pleasures of wicked men; and that on the following accounts.

1. There is light in this pleasure. The peace and pleasures of wicked men have their foundation in darkness. When wicked men have any quietness or joy, it is because they are blind, and do not see what is their real condition. If it were not for blindness and delusion, they could have no peace nor comfort in any thing. There needs nothing but to open a wicked man's eyes, and let him look about him and see where he is, and it would be enough to destroy all the quietness and comfort of the most prosperous wicked man in the world. But on the contrary, the peace of a godly man, is a peace that arises from light; when he sees things most as they are, then he has most peace; and the distress and trouble which he sometimes feels, arise from clouds and darkness. When a godly man is in the greatest fear and distress, if he did not know what a happy state he were in, he would at the same time rejoice with unspeakable joy; so that his pleasure is not founded, like that of wicked men, in stupidity, but in sensibleness; not in blindness, but in light, and sight, and knowledge.

2. There is rest in this pleasure. He that has found this joy, finds a sweet repose and acquiescence of the soul in it. It sweetly calms the soul and allays its disappointments. Christ says, Matt. 11:28. "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you



rest." There is a sweet contentment in it; the soul that tastes it, desires no better pleasure. There is a satisfaction in it. The soul that has been wandering before, when it comes to taste of this fountain, finds in it that which satisfies its desires and cravings, and discovers that in it which it needs in order to its happiness. John 4:14. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." It is quite otherwise with the pleasures of ungodly men. There is no true rest in them, they are not enjoyed with inward quietness, there is no true peace enjoyed within, neither do they afford contentment. But those wicked men that have the most worldly pleasures, are yet restlessly inquiring, "Who will show us any good?" "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Wicked men in the midst of their enjoyment of pleasure have no true rest, neither do their reflections on it afford rest; but only remorse of conscience, and disquietude of soul, under the guilt that is contracted. But the pleasures of the godly afford rest in the enjoyment, and rest and sweetness in the reflection; it oftentimes calms and refreshes the soul to look on past comforts.

3. There is life in it. It is a pleasure that strengthens and nourishes and preserves the soul, and gives it life, and does not corrupt and destroy and bring it to death, as do sinful pleasures. The pleasures of the wicked are poison to the soul, they tend to enfeeble it, to consume it, and kill it. But the pleasures of the godly feed the soul, and do not consume it; they strengthen, and do not weaken it; they exalt, and do not debase it; they enrich, and do not impoverish it. Death and corruption are the natural fruit of the pleasures of sin, but life is the fruit of spiritual pleasures. Gal. 6:8. "For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." The life in which this joy consists, and to which it tends, is the most excellent life, and the only life worthy of the name; it is spiritual, and the beginning of eternal life: this pleasure is a fountain springing up to everlasting life. John 4:14.

4. There is substance in it. This pleasure is not a mere shadow, an empty delight, as earthly pleasures are, but it is substantial joy. The pleasures of sin last but a little season, they are the crackling of thorns under a pot, or as the blazing meteors of the night, that appear for a moment, and then vanish. But this pleasure is like the durable light of the stars or the sun. Worldly pleasures are easily overthrown; a little thing will spoil all the pleasures of a king's court. Haman, in the midst of all his prosperity and greatness, could say, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." But the joys of the saints are such as the changes of time cannot overthrow. If God lifts up the light of his countenance, this will compose and rejoice the heart under the saddest tidings. They joy in affliction. Their enemies cannot overthrow this joy; the devil and even death itself cannot overthrow it; but oftentimes it lives, and is in its greatest height, in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death. When in the most tormenting death, how often have the martyrs sung in the midst of the flames, and under the hands of their cruel tormentors! Job 35:10. "But none saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night."

5. There is holiness in it. It is the excellency of these joys that they are holy joys. They are not like the polluted stream of sinful pleasures, but they are pure and holy. Rev. 22:1. "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." These pleasures do not defile the soul, but purify it; they do not deform, but beautify it; they not only greatly delight the soul, but render it more excellent; they impart something more of God, more of a divine disposition and temper, dispose to holy actions, and cause the soul to shine as Moses's face did when he had been conversing with God in the mount, and as Stephen's face, which was as the face of an angel, when he saw heaven opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Thus these pleasures make the soul more excellent, and more divine, as well as more happy.

6. There is sometimes glory in it. God sometimes unveils his face, and lets in light more plentifully. This is a delight and joy, the excellency, and sweetness, and admirableness of which cannot be expressed. It is a kind of glory that fills the soul. So excellent is its nature, that the sweetest earthly delight vanishes into nothing, and appears as base and vile as dross and dirt, or as the mere mire of the street. It is bright above all that is earthly, as the sun is brighter than the glow-worm. Of this, the apostle takes notice. 1 Peter 1:8. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Secondly. I proceed to consider the happiness of the saints in death. It may seem a mystery to the world that men should be happy in death, which the world looks upon as the most terrible of all things; but thus it is to the saints. Their happiness is built upon a rock, and it will stand the shock of death: when the storm and floods of death come with their greatest violence, it stands firm, and neither death nor hell can overthrow it. Here,

1. Death is rendered no death to them. It is not worthy of the name of death. As the life of a wicked man is not worthy of the name of life, so the death of a godly man is not worthy of the name of death. It is not looked upon as any death at all in the eyes of God, who sees all things as they are, nor is it called death by him. Hence Christ promises, that those who believe in him shall not die. John 6:50, 51. "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." It is no death to the saints, because it is no destruction to them. The notion of death implies destruction, or perishing, in it; but the godly are not destroyed by death, death cannot destroy them; for as Christ says, they shall never perish. John 3:15. "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." A godly man, when he dies, in no wise perishes. There is no end put to his life as a Christian, for that is a spiritual life that remains unquenched by

death. A wicked man, when he dies, dies indeed, because then an end is put to all the life which he has; for he has no other life but temporal life; but the life of a Christian is hid with Christ, and safely laid up with him in heaven; and therefore death cannot reach his life, because it cannot reach heaven. Death can no more reach the believer's life than Christ's life. No death can reach Christ our life now, though he died once: but now he has for ever sat down at the right hand of God. He says, for the comfort of his saints, Rev. 1:18. "I am he that liveth and was dead: and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death." Death not only cannot destroy a Christian, but it cannot hurt him; Christ carries him on eagle wings aloft on high, out of the reach of death. Death, with respect to him, is disarmed of his power: and every Christian may say, "O death, where is thy sting?" Death was once indeed a terrible enemy, but now he has become weak. He spent all his strength on Christ; in killing him, he killed himself; he was conquered then, and has now no power to hurt his followers. Death is now but the shadow of what he would have been if Christ had not conquered him; he was once a lion, but now he is but a lamb. A good man may indeed be harassed with fears of death, and may be much terrified when going through the valley of the shadow of death, but that is no just ground of any terror, and if the saints are terrified, it is only through their infirmity and darkness. As a child is frightened in the dark where there is no danger, because he is a child, so a good man may be affrighted at the terrible looks of death. But he will find this awful appearance to be only a shadow, that can look terribly, but can do nothing terrible. Death may, through the weakness of the saints, trouble them, and exercise them, but he cannot destroy the ground they have for comfort and support. When death comes to a wicked man, all those things on which he built his comfort fail, their foundation is over-flown with a flood. Job 22:16. But the foundation of the peace and comfort of the godly man is not shaken at such a time. Oftentimes the saints are actually carried above all the fears and terrors of death; they see that it is but a shadow, and are not afraid: not only their foundation of comfort remains, but that peace and comfort itself is undisturbed, the light shines through the

darkness, and the lamb-like nature of death appears through the shadow of the lion. The godly have a God to stand by them when they come to die, in whose love and favour they may shelter themselves, in whose favour is life, yea, life in death; and they have a blessed Saviour to be with them, to uphold them with the right hand of his righteousness. These are the friends they have with them, when they are going to take their leave of all earthly friends. God will be with them when their flesh and heart fails; God will be the strength of their heart, when they are weak and faint, and nature fails. God will put underneath his everlasting arms to support them, and will make all their bed for them in their sickness. Psal. 37:37. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

2. Death is not only no death to them, but it is a translation to a more glorious life, and is turned into a kind of resurrection from the dead. Death is a happy change to them, and a change that is by far more like a resurrection than a death. It is a change from a state of much sin, and sorrow, and darkness, to a state of perfect light, and holiness, and joy. When a saint dies, he awakes, as it were, out of sleep. This life is a dull, lifeless state; there is but a little spiritual life, and a great deal of deadness; there is but a little light, and a great deal of darkness; there is but a little sense, and a great deal of stupidity and senselessness. But when a godly man dies, all this deadness, and darkness, and stupidity, and senselessness are gone for ever, and he enters immediately into a state of perfect life, and perfect light, and activity, and joyfulness. A man's conversion is compared to a resurrection, because then a man rises from spiritual death. Eph. 2:1. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." But though spiritual life is then begun, yet there are great remains of spiritual death after this, and but little life. But when a godly man dies, he rises from all remains of spiritual death, and comes into a state of perfect life. This body is like a prison to the holy soul, it exceedingly clogs, and hinders, and cramps it in its spiritual exercises and comforts. But when a saint dies, the soul is released from this prison, this grave, and comes into a state of glorious freedom and happiness. So that death is not only deprived

of his sting, but is made a servant to the saints, to bring them to Christ in heaven, who is their life. And their ground of comfort does not only last when they are going out of the world, but it is in some respects increased, for then their perfect happiness draws nigh. It is "far better" to depart and be with Christ, than to continue here. And when the saints are enabled to see their own happiness in death, they are enabled exceedingly to rejoice in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death, and to triumph joyfully over the king of terrors. Death to the saints is always a passage or avenue, leading out of a world of vanity, and sin, and misery, into a world of life, light, and glory; but though often a dark avenue, it is at times full of light, the darkness all vanishes away, and the light shines out of that glorious city into which they are entering. It shines through the darkness and fills the soul, and the clouds of death vanish before it. The awful appearance of death is but a mask or disguise that death wears. It is not terrible but joyful in reality, and this light of the new Jerusalem sometimes so clearly shines, that it shines through the frightful disguise, and shows the saints that death is but a servant. Yea, sometimes it is so when death has on its most terrible disguise that ever it wears, and comes in its most dreadful forms, as when the saints are burnt at the stake, and put to all cruel and tormenting deaths. It is oftentimes joyful to the saints when dying, to think that they are now going into the glorious, presence of God, to enjoy God and Christ to the full. The joyful expectation sometimes makes them ready to cry out, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" and "Why is his chariot so long in coming?"

Thirdly. Let us next consider the happiness of the saints, in their state of separation from the body.

1. When the soul departs from the body, it is received by the blessed angels and conducted by them to the third heavens. On the eve of its departure there is a guard of angels standing round the dying bed; and the devils, though eager to seize upon it as their prey, shall by no means be suffered to come nigh. The holy angels shall be a guard to the soul, to keep off all its enemies. We are taught that this is part of

the office in which God employs them. Psal. 34:7. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." Psal. 91:11. "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways;" as it was with Daniel in the lion's den. Dan. 6:22. "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt." And as soon as the soul is loose from the body, it shall be kindly and courteously received by those bright and blessed ones, to be conducted by them into Christ's glorious presence; for the angels are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be the heirs of salvation. This is one way in which they shall minister; viz. to guard and conduct the departed spirits of the saints; which we are plainly taught in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Luke 16:22. "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried." These spirits of holiness and love, when they have received the soul, shall conduct it along through the aerial and starry heavens to the most glorious part of the universe; the highest part of the creation, the place of God's most holy residence, the city and palace of the most high God, where Christ is. There are some who say that there is no such place as heaven; but this is evidently a mistake, for the heaven into which the man Christ Jesus entered with his glorified body, is certainly some place. It is absurd to suppose that the heaven where the body of Christ is, is not a place. To say that the body of Christ is in no place, is the same thing as to say he has no body. The heaven where Christ is, is a place; for he was seen ascending, and will be seen descending again; and the heaven where the departed souls of the saints are, is the same heaven where Christ has ascended. And therefore Stephen, when he was departing this life, saw heaven opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. And he prayed to that same Jesus whom he saw, that he would receive his spirit; i.e. that he would receive it to him, where he saw him, at the right hand of God. And the apostle Paul signifies, that if he should depart, he should be with Christ. Phil. 1:23. "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is

far better:" 2 Cor. 5:8. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Besides, there are some of the saints there already with their bodies, as Enoch and Elijah. Therefore there is some place, where God gloriously manifests himself, and where Christ is, and where saints and angels dwell, and whither the angels carry the souls of the saints when they depart from their bodies; and this place is called Paradise, and the third heaven. 2 Cor. 12:2, 4. The aerial heaven is the first heaven; the starry heaven is the second; and the blessed abode of Christ and saints and angels the third, because it is above the other two; and so Christ is said to be made higher than the heavens. Heb. 7:26. "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," i.e. higher than the visible heaven. This heaven is far above the stars. So it is said that Christ ascended far above all heavens. Eph. 4:10. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things," i.e. far above all the heaven that we see. This is the mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and hither the angels conduct the souls of the saints when they leave their earthly tabernacles. When they come there, they shall be received with a joyful welcome, the doors of this glorious city are opened to them, and they shall have entrance given to them into heaven, as an inheritance to which they have a right. Rev. 22:14. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." And then shall open to view that glorious world, that beautiful city, and delightful paradise, which they had often before heard of, and thought of, and desired; then they shall see it, and possess it as their own. There they shall be welcomed and joyfully received by that glorious company that dwell there, by the angels, and by the saints that went to heaven before them. There was joy among them at their conversion, and now also will there be joy among them when they are brought home to glory. To have one that was dear to them before, because a child of the same family and a disciple of the same Lord, brought home from a strange country to come and dwell with them for ever; how will their fellow-citizens and



brethren in heaven be glad for them, and rejoice with them, and embrace them, when they come there to join them in their praises of God and the Lamb! And then they shall be conducted unto the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory, and shall be presented to him perfectly free from sin, and without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; who will also abundantly welcome them to his glory, and to the blessed enjoying of his love. And then shall their good Shepherd rejoice, when he shall not only have brought home the soul that was lost to a saving close with him, but home to him in his heavenly Father's house. The Saviour shall then rejoice when he shall receive a soul that he loved before the foundation of the world; and for which he laid down his life, and endured such dreadful sufferings. This was the joy that was set before him, to redeem and make happy the souls of his elect; and he will rejoice, therefore, when he sees this accomplished. He will bid them welcome, and make them welcome, and they shall be received into the full enjoyment of his love. The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and he shall present them also to God his Father, having redeemed them to him by his blood, who shall also abundantly welcome them there. Then the soul shall behold that glory and taste that pleasure which it long hoped for, and thought of with delight, and the thoughts of which were wont to be such a support to it when on earth; then shall it know by experience what the joys of heaven are; then shall the great and precious promises of the gospel be fulfilled; then shall faith be turned into vision, and hope into fruition; then shall all sin be eternally left behind; there shall be no more indwelling corruption, wicked thoughts, or sinful dispositions, to torment them. And whatever sorrow and affliction they underwent on earth, God shall now wipe away all tears from their eyes; and though they have lately passed through death, yet there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain, because the former things shall be passed away. Rev. 21:4. If they have lived hardly in this world, and suffered hunger and thirst, there shall be an end of it all; and they that have suffered persecution, and have had their raiment stained with their own blood, shall now suffer no more. "And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great

tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Rev. 7:14, 15, 16, 17. Though they had many enemies to conflict with while on earth, yet now shall they obtain the victory over them; now shall they triumph and sing, being for ever out of the reach of all Satan's temptations, and of all his power to afflict or molest them; now shall they appear in mount Zion with the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands. Rev. 7:9.

3. They shall remain there in a state of exceeding glory and blessedness, till the resurrection. They shall remain there in the enjoyment of God, dwelling with Jesus Christ in a state of perfect rest, without the least disturbance or molestation. Rev. 14:13. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." There they shall dwell in habitations of sweet delight and pleasure in paradise; there they shall drink of those rivers of pleasures for evermore; there they shall dwell in perfect fight and perfect love; there they shall see and converse with God and Christ, and with angels and glorious spirits, and shall contemplate the wonderful love of God to men in sending his only Son; there shall they contemplate the glorious love of God to them, the love he had to them before the foundation of the world. There shall they see and know what love Christ had to them, that influenced him to lay down his life for them; and shall behold the beauty and excellency of Christ, and see face to face, and know even as they are known. 1 Cor. 13:12. There they shall sweetly meditate on the wonderful dealings of God to them while in this lower world, in preserving of them, in granting to them to live under means of grace, when many thousands

and millions of others never had these privileges. They shall contemplate the wonderful mercy of God to them in striving with them by his Spirit, in convincing them of sin, in stirring them up to seek salvation, in converting them, and in bringing them out of darkness into marvellous light. The mercy and grace of God in converting them will then appear otherwise to them than it does now. They shall then contemplate the manifold mercies of God to them through the whole course of their lives; they shall see how God has protected them, and guided them by his counsel, and led them all along; they shall see the wonderful wisdom and mercy of God towards them in these and those dispensations, that now appear most dark to them, shall see the meaning of those that were matter of difficulty to them, and shall see how all things wrought together for their good. These will be sweet meditations to them, and doubtless will be subjects of the saints' conversation with each other. How sweet will it be for the saints to look back and see how God carried them along through the wilderness, through all the storms of this world, and all its dangers, and temptations, and enemies, after they have come to their resting-place; and how sweet will it be for them to converse together of these things, and what ardent praises will it occasion! And then also shall they see the wisdom of God in the government and ordering of the affairs of his church all along, the scheme of divine providence shall be opened to them, and the admirable wisdom of it shall be unfolded; and they shall also see how God brings his purposes and promises to pass in his providence towards his church here on earth; they shall see and rejoice at it when the kingdom of God flourishes in the world. We are told, there is joy in heaven if but one sinner repenteth. Then doubtless the saints of the Old Testament after their entrance into heaven, saw and rejoiced when Christ came into the world; and therefore two of them, Moses and Elijah, came down to converse with Christ, at his transfiguration. Abraham, Moses, and David, and the prophets Isaiah and Daniel, and all the prophets, doubtless saw the fulfilment of the glorious things foretold in their prophecies with exceeding rejoicing. They saw that glorious enlargement of the church that was produced by the preaching of the prophets. And thus also the

apostles and evangelists in heaven, and other primitive Christians and martyrs, saw the glorious flourishing and prevailing of the kingdom of Christ after their death, till the utter downfall of heathenism, and the establishment of Christianity throughout the Roman empire.

The holy martyrs with joy beheld the destruction of those pagan powers that persecuted the church of God. Rev. 6:9, 10, 11. "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." Therefore they rejoiced when they saw it accomplished. And so the saints that died in former ages, they without doubt beheld and rejoiced greatly at the time of the resurrection from popery in the days of Luther and Calvin, and other reformers. And so doubtless the saints that went to heaven, before this remarkable outpouring of the Spirit on this town and other neighbouring towns, especially those that went to heaven from hence, have seen this work and greatly rejoiced at it. And so the saints, that die before the glorious days that are coming at the downfall of antichrist and the calling of the Jews, will rejoice at the conversion of the world to Christianity. We are ready to lament that we shall not probably live to see those times. But if we die and go to heaven, we shall see them nevertheless, and rejoice in them not the less for not being in this world; but we shall rejoice more, for we shall see and understand more of the glory of God in such a work, and have more love to God, and therefore shall rejoice more at the advancement of his kingdom. Thus when the apostle John had visions of the glorious things that should be brought to pass for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, he from time to time mentions the visions he also had of the hosts of heaven rejoicing at it. Rev. 11:15, 16, 17. "And the seventh angel sounded, and there were

great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned." So when the spiritual Babylon, the church of Rome, falls, the holy apostles and prophets, though dead many ages before, are called upon to rejoice. Rev. 18:20. "Rejoice over her, thou heavens, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her." So the multitude of the heavenly hosts are described as rejoicing, and as singing hallelujahs on that occasion; and all heaven is full of praise. Rev. 19:1. "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke went up for ever and ever." These things may give us some notion how the spirits of just men made perfect do employ themselves.

4. They remain in a joyful expectation of their more full and complete blessedness at the resurrection. As the wicked have not their full punishment until after the resurrection, so neither have the saints their complete happiness. Though they have attained to such exceeding glory, yet they are not yet arrived at its highest degrees, for that is reserved for their final state. The reward which the saints receive after the resurrection, is often spoken of as their chief reward. This is the reward that Christ has promised. John 6:40. "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." This is the chief reward that the saints seek and wait for. Rom. 8:23. "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan earnestly within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to we, the redemption of our

body." Philip. 3:11. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." "Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." So the happiness, that shall be given at Christ's second coming, is spoken of as the principal happiness. Titus 2:13. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

This the saints will be in joyful expectation of in heaven; they shall rest in sweet repose on God's promise that it shall be so, their desires of it bringing no uneasiness; they rejoicing in it most in the consideration that it will be in God's time, in the fittest and best time.

Fourthly. I shall consider the glory, honour, and peace, which the godly shall receive at the resurrection and the day of judgment.

1. When the time appointed comes, notice shall be given of it in heaven, which will be to their exceeding joy. God has in his own eternal counsels fixed the time, but now it is kept secret; it is not only not known by any on the earth, but neither is it known in heaven by either saints or angels there, and the man Christ Jesus himself, in his state of humiliation, did not himself know it: Matt. 24:36. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man; no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." The saints and angels in heaven have a joyful expectation of it, but they know not when it is; but when the time comes, God's eternal counsels concerning it shall be made known; the joyful tidings shall be proclaimed through all heaven, that all may prepare to attend the Lord Jesus Christ in his descent to the earth.

2. They shall descend with Christ from the highest heaven towards the earth. When notice is given to the heavenly host, they shall all gather themselves together to attend on this most joyful and glorious occasion; and then the glorious Son of God shall descend, and the holy angels with him, and not only the angels, but the souls of the saints, shall come with Christ. 1 Thess. 4:14. "For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus

will God bring with him." Christ shall descend with the glory of his Father; he shall appear in a glory becoming the Supreme Lord and Judge of heaven and earth. Now heaven will for a time be left empty of its inhabitants; those glorious and blessed abodes will be deserted by those that dwelt there, to attend the judge of the world.

3. The saints on earth shall behold this glorious sight of their Saviour coming in the clouds of heaven, with all his holy angels with him. The first notice that shall be given of this descent shall be in heaven, but soon after there shall be notice of it on earth. Christ shall be seen coming while he is yet at a great distance; every eye shall see him, of both good and bad. And it will be the most joyful sight to the saints that ever they saw. The first notice of it will cause their hearts to overflow with joy and gladness, it will fill the hearts of the godly as full of joy as it will the wicked with terror and amazement. If the saints are then waked out of their sleep at midnight with this sound, that Christ appears in the clouds of heaven coming to judgment, it will be joyful news to them. It is probable many of the saints at that time will be found suffering persecution, for there are several things in Scripture which seem to declare, that the time when Christ is coming shall be a time when wickedness shall exceedingly abound, and the saints shall be greatly persecuted. But this shall set them at liberty; then they may lift up their heads out of prisons and dungeons, and many out of galleys, and mines, and shall see their Redeemer drawing nigh. This sight will drive away their persecutors, it will put an end to all their cruelties, and set God's people at liberty. And then when all the kindreds of the earth shall wail at the sight of Christ in the clouds of heaven, and wicked men every where shall be shrieking and crying with terrible amazement, the saints shall be filled with praise and transport. We read that, when Christ ascended into heaven, the disciples stood stedfastly looking on as he went up. But the saints then on earth shall view Christ with more stedfastness as he descends in his heavenly and exceeding glory; they shall feed and feast their eyes with this majestic sight, beholding in what solemn and glorious pomp their own blessed Redeemer descends. This sight shall put a final end to all sorrow, and their everlasting joy

and glory will commence from it. The hope of the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, is said to be a blessed hope. Titus 2:13. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." But when it comes it will be a more blessed sight.

4. The dead in Christ shall arise at the sound of the last trumpet with glorified bodies, and the living saints shall see them. The holy and blessed souls of saints that descended from heaven with Christ, shall then be re-united to those bodies that shall be prepared by infinite wisdom and skill to be fit organs for a holy and happy soul. The body shall not rise as it was before; there shall be a vast difference in it. 1 Cor. 15:42, 43, 44. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." The glory of that body that the saints shall rise with is what we now cannot conceive of. It shall not be such a dull and heavy-moulded thing as it is now: it shall be active and vigorous as a flame of fire fit for the use of a glorified soul. It will be no clog or hinderance to the soul as it is now, but an organ every way fit for the use of a glorious spirit. It shall not be weak, infirm, and frail as it is now; for, though it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. Now the body is in need of food and sleep continually, to recreate it, but it shall not be so then; now the body is subject to weariness, and to diseases, but it shall not be so then; now if God lets in any great matter of divine light into the soul, the body is ready to sink under it, but it shall not be so then. The glorified body of the saints shall not then fail or flag at all by the most powerful exercises of mind. Now no man can see God and live, but the body would immediately sink and be dissolved; but then the body shall not fail at all by the immediate beholding of God. Now the saints can see but little. When God a little reveals himself, as he doth at times, the saints are forced to beseech God either to strengthen them to see it, or to stay his hand; but then the body shall be so vigorous and spiritual, that the constant and



everlasting view of the glory of God shall not in any wise overcome it, or cause it in the least to fail.

The body shall not only be raised in an exceeding strength, but in wonderful beauty, for we are told that their bodies shall be like to Christ's glorious body. The greatest beauty that ever any human body appeared in in this world, is vile and base in comparison. The beauty of the bodies of the saints shall not only consist in the most lovely proportion of the features of their countenance and parts of their bodies, but in a semblance of the excellencies of their minds, which will appear exceedingly in their countenance; their air and mien will be such as will naturally result from the wisdom, purity, and love of the soul, and shall denote and hold forth an inexpressible sweetness, benevolence, and complacence; and if I may speak what appears to me probable, and what seems to be authorized by the Scriptures, their bodies shall be as it were clothed with garments of light. The prophet Daniel, speaking of the resurrection, says, Dan. 12:2, 3. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." And Christ, speaking of the end of the world, says, Matt. 13:43. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." And there is nothing to hinder our understanding this literally of their bodies, and especially when this shining of the saints is spoken of from time to time as what shall be at the resurrection, and not of their souls in a separate state. Moses's face shone when he had been conversing with God in the mount; much more may it be expected that the bodies of the saints shall shine, when they shall converse a thousand times more intimately with God, not in mount Sinai, but in heaven. We read of Christ, that when his body was transfigured, to teach us what the body of Christ should be in its glorified state, we are told that, when his body was transfigured, his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. Matt. 17:2. But we are told that the bodies of the saints shall be made like unto Christ's glorious body; there therefore seems to be much

ground to think, that at the resurrection the bodies of the saints shall shine with a glorious light, and that they shall be as it were clothed with light. Thus the departed saints shall arise with glorious bodies, they shall lift up their heads out of their graves with joyful and glorious countenances: and at the same time the bodies of the living shall in a moment be changed into the same strength, and activity, and incorruptibility, and beauty and glory, with which those that were dead shall arise. 1 Cor. 15:51, 52, 53. "Behold, I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; (for the trumpet shall sound;) and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

5. Then all the saints shall mount up, as with wings, to meet the Lord in the air, and to be for ever with him. After the dead in Christ are risen, and the living saints changed, then they will be prepared to go to Christ, and to meet the bridegroom. The world will be about to be destroyed, and the wicked shall be in dreadful amazement, but the saints shall be delivered. Dan. 12:1. "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people, and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." They shall take an everlasting farewell of this evil world where there is so much sin, and where they have met with so much trouble, and they shall be caught up in the clouds, and there they shall meet their glorious Redeemer; and a joyful meeting it will be. They shall go to Christ, never any more to be separated from him. 1 Thess. 4:16, 17. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

6. Then shall the good works, which the saints have done, be declared to their peace and glory. We are often told that every man shall be judged according to his works, and Christ keeps a book of remembrance of the good works of the saints as well as of the sins of the ungodly. And however mean and polluted that which the saints do is in itself, yet all the pollution that attends it is hid, and every thing they do for God that has the least sincerity in it is precious in God's eyes. Through his infinite grace it shall in no case lose its reward, neither shall it in any wise lose its honour. At the day of judgment they shall receive praise and glory in reward for it. Christ will declare all the good they have done to their honour; what they did secretly and the world knew it not, and when they did not let their left hand know what their right hand did. Then shall they receive praise and honour for all their labour, for all their self-denial, and all their suffering in the cause of Christ; and those good works of theirs that were despised, and for which they were condemned, and suffered reproach, shall now be set in a true light; and however they were reproached and slandered by men, they shall receive praise of God in the sight of angels and men. 1 Cor. 4:5. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." Those righteous men that have been condemned here before unjust judges, shall be acquitted and honoured then before the righteous Judge of heaven and earth. Heb. 6:10. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Then will be the time when their Lord and Master will say unto them, "Well done, good and faithful servants." Thus, in the description of the day of judgment in the 25th chapter of Matthew, Christ rehearses the good works of the saints. "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." And though the saints there reply, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in?"

or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" Though they thought that nothing that they had done was worthy to be so accounted of as it was by Christ, yet Christ of his grace esteemed it highly, and highly honoured them for it, as it there follows, 40th ver. "And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And if the sins of the saints shall be rehearsed, it shall not be for their shame, but for the glory of divine grace, to give opportunity to them to plead the atonement of that Saviour who will be the Judge, to give occasion to them to produce Christ's righteousness, which will surely be accepted by himself.

7. The saints shall sit on thrones with Christ, to judge wicked men and devils. Christ will put that honour upon them on that day, he will cause them to sit on his right hand as judges with him, and so the saints shall judge the world. Matt. 19:28. "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." 1 Cor. 6:2, 3. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" They shall judge kings and princes who were their persecutors, and the devils, who were their tempters.

8. At the finishing of the judgment Christ shall pronounce the blessed sentence upon them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

This blessed sentence Christ shall pronounce on them with inexpressible manifestations of grace and love. Every word of it will be ravishing to them, and will cause raptures of joy in their hearts; that this glorious person, though he orders with such indignation the wicked to depart from him, yet will so sweetly invite them to come

with him, and that he should accost them after such a manner, saying, "ye blessed of my Father." Christ will pronounce them blessed in the sight of men and angels; and blessed indeed, because blessed by his Father. There will not only be a manifestation of Christ's love to them in this sentence, but a declaration of the father's love, for they are declared to be blessed of him. Christ shall invite them to come with him, and for no less a purpose than to inherit a kingdom. Christ gives them a glorious kingdom; the wealth to which he invites them is the wealth of a kingdom; and the honour he gives them is the honour of kings; and what yet adds to the blessedness is this, that it is a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. God loved them from all eternity, and therefore he has prepared a kingdom for them. God had respect to them in the creation of the world, and then prepared this glorious kingdom for them, and out of love to them. They have therefore a right to it, and now therefore they are invited to come to possess it; and not only to possess it, but to inherit it, that is, to possess it as heirs, as those that have a right to the kingdom by virtue of their being his children.

Thus having considered what glory, honour, and peace the saints have in this life, at death, in a separate state, and at the day of judgment, I now proceed,

Fifthly, To consider their consummate state of happiness after the day of judgment. And here I would consider, 1. Their entrance into this happiness; and 2. Its nature, its degree, and some of the circumstances which attend it.

1st. Their entrance into this state of consummate happiness.

1. When the judgment is ended they shall ascend with Christ in a triumphant and glorious manner into heaven. Christ, when he has passed sentence, shall then return again; he shall pass beyond these aerial heavens, and shall ascend towards the highest heaven, together with ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of glorious spirits, and of the saints with their glorified

bodies. They shall leave this lower world, and all the wicked, to be burnt in everlasting fire, and as they are ascending shall look back and see it all in one vast conflagration. Then shall be fulfilled, in the most remarkable manner, the prophecy in Psal. 47:4, 5. "He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob, whom he loved. God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." And that will be the most joyful procession that ever will be seen. And when they are come to heaven they shall enter in with joy into that new Jerusalem where they are to dwell for ever; and this will be the most joyful day that ever was in heaven. It is probable, that when Christ ascended into heaven after his death and resurrection, it was the most joyful day in heaven that ever had been seen till then; but this second ascension will be a more glorious and joyful day than that.

2. When they have come to heaven, they shall be there actually instated by God and Christ in their ultimate and consummate happiness; and now they shall have complete redemption. To illustrate this, it may be observed,

1. They shall be perfectly happy in the whole man; both body and soul. Before their souls only were happy, while the body lay in a state of putrefaction in the grave. Now they shall be in that state which is natural to the human soul, which is a state of union with the body. It is natural for the soul to act by a body, and to make use of such an organ, and the soul is not complete without the body; and then both body and soul shall be glorified together.

2. Then will the body of Christ be perfect and complete. Then it shall have all its members, no one wanting. Now the body of Christ is incomplete, there are many members wanting; but then it will be perfected, having every member. Now the body of Christ is in a growing state, but then it shall have come to its perfect state, to receive no more addition. Then the body of Christ shall be perfect, not only as it shall have every member, but every member shall be in its perfect state. Now as there are many of the members of Christ's

body wanting, so there are many that are imperfect; many that are ingrafted into Christ have great infirmity, and great remains of corruption, and many of his members are now under affliction. But then every member shall be perfectly freed from all sin and sorrow, and there never will be any more either sin or sorrow, in any member of the body of Christ. Then also the body of Christ will be complete, because those that are brought to a perfect state are wholly brought home; before only the soul was brought home to glory, while the body that was also to be united to Christ, lay in the grave. The body of Christ will then also be in its complete state, because then all the parts will be together; and this is one end of Christ's coming into the world, viz. that he might gather together all in one. Eph. 1:16. Before they were scattered, some in heaven and some on earth, some mixed with wicked men, as wheat with tares, and as lilies among thorns. The church, therefore, now being made complete, will exceedingly rejoice; and Christ, having his mystical body complete, will rejoice; and all his saints will rejoice with him. Christ will rejoice in the completeness of his church, and the church will rejoice in its own completeness.

3. Then will the Mediator have fully accomplished the work for which he came into the world. Then will he have perfected the work of redemption, not only in the impetration, but also in the application of it. Then all that God has given him will be actually and fully redeemed, their bodies as well as souls; then will he have conquered all his enemies, and will triumph over them all; then he will have put down all authority and power. 1 Cor. 15:21, 22. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's, at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Then Christ will surely have obtained that joy that was set before him; then he shall have perfected the full design that was upon his heart from all

eternity; and then Christ will rejoice, and all his members must rejoice with him. Christ shall triumph over his enemies, and the saints shall then triumph over all their enemies, and the joys of the triumph shall last for ever.

4. Then God will have obtained the end of all his great works which he has been doing from the beginning of the world. Then will be the consummation of all things: the deep designs of God will be unfolded, his marvellous contrivances, and his hidden, intricate, and inexplicable works, will appear. The end being obtained, as all things are from God, so will they then all be to him, and will issue in his glory. His power appeared in the beginning of them, and his glory will be manifested in the end and consummation of them. Then will it be seen that all the revolutions and changes which have existed from the beginning of the world are for God's glory; then it will appear how all the wheels of his providence have conspired together to bring about the glory of God and Christ, and the happiness of his people; and this will cause an exceeding accession of happiness to the saints who behold it. Then will God have fully glorified himself, and glorified his Son, and glorified his elect; then he will see that all is very good, and will rejoice in his own works, which will be the joy of all heaven. Then will God rest and be refreshed, and thenceforward will all the inhabitants of heaven keep an eternal sabbath of rest and praise, such as never was kept before.

5. Then will be the marriage of the Lamb. When the church is completely purified and beautified, and nothing wanting, and all the parts of the body in their due proportion and joyful state; then may the Lamb's wife be said to have made herself ready; then will she be as a bride prepared for her husband. And when the church is thus prepared by Christ at such great cost, at the shedding of his own blood; it will be brought to a more glorious union to Christ than ever before, and to a more intimate communion with him, and to a more high enjoyment of his excellency and love. Then will be the highest accomplishment of the joy spoken of in Rev. 19:7, 8, 9. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the



Lamb is come; and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God." It will be the day of the gladness of Christ's heart; the feast, and pomp, and holy mirth, and joy of this marriage day, will be continued to all eternity.

6. Then will Christ present his church to his Father. The Father sent forth Christ into the world on that errand, to redeem a vast number of the children of men, and to bring them home to God, from whom they had apostatized, to bring them back to him, the great Creator and Father of all things, and the fountain of all good. Christ, having accomplished this, will bring them to God, and present them to him; and then may Christ say, as in Heb. 2:13. "Here am I, and the children which thou hast given me;" none of them is missing: "of those that thou hast given me, I have lost nothing." We read that Christ, when he shall have accomplished the work which the Father sent him to do, shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father. 1 Cor. 15:24. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power." And as he shall deliver up the kingdom, he shall present the subjects of the kingdom; and what he has obtained by ruling, he shall present as the fruits of his reign.

7. Then will God make a still more abundant manifestation and communication of himself. God shall be all in all; and the glory of God and the glory of his Son shall be displayed in heaven, in a more abundant manner than ever before; and he will pour forth more plentifully of his Spirit, and will make answerable additions to the glory of the saints, such as will be becoming the commencement of the ultimate and most perfect state of things, and such as will become the joyful occasion of the marriage of the Lamb.

2d. I shall now describe the nature and degree of the consummate and eternal glory and blessedness of the saints.

1. The nature of this glory and blessedness.

1. I would begin with the lowest part of it, viz. the glory of the place. We have already observed that heaven is a place. They shall dwell in the most glorious part of the whole creation of God. It is called paradise. Luke 23:43. "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." 2 Cor. 12:4. "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter." Rev. 2:7. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The word paradise signifies a most pleasant and delightful garden, of which the garden of Eden was a type. The garden of Eden was without doubt a place that was delightful beyond what we can easily conceive; but if this earthly paradise was so delightful, how pleasant and glorious may we conclude the heavenly paradise to be; that was not made merely to be the residence of some of the innocent creatures of God during their time of probation, as Eden was, but was prepared by infinite wisdom and skill for the everlasting dwelling-place of the great King of heaven and earth, and of his Son Jesus Christ; the place where they might show their glory, and wisdom, and love for ever, and which is to be the habitation of confirmed saints and angels! When God made the universe, he made many parts of it for inferior uses, in which he displayed marvellous skill; then he made the earth, and the sun, and moon, and stars, and the visible heavens, which appear truly glorious; but there was one part of the creation that God made more especially for himself, to be his own dwelling-place, the place of his glorious rest; and we may conclude that this is beyond all comparison more glorious than the other parts of it. If some parts of the visible world are so glorious, as the sun, moon, and stars, how glorious may we conclude the highest heavens to be! This is the heavenly mount Zion, the royal city of the great God. It has been the

ambition of earthly monarchs to make the cities where they dwell exceedingly magnificent. Thus the king of Babylon boasted, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" Dan. 4:30. Especially will kings have their own palaces most magnificent. But if those earthly cities and palaces are some of them so glorious, which are for the habitation of worms, how glorious may we think that to be which is for the glorious habitation of God Almighty! As the third heavens are higher than the earth, so we may expect that it is proportionally more glorious than any earthly garden, city, or palace. Heaven is not only the city of God, but his palace; not only his palace, but his throne: Isa. 66:1. "Thus saith the Lord, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me; and where is the place of my rest?" We read how magnificent was Solomon's throne. 1 Kings 10:18, 19, 20. "Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best of gold. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were stays on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom." But what is the throne of a glowworm? God does not want skill to make his palace and throne glorious enough to become the majesty and glory of him whose house and seat it is. The builder is God, and there is no want of skill in the architect. How glorious and magnificent was the temple of Solomon, that was built only to be the place of the special symbols of God's presence on earth among his people Israel! How much more glorious is that heavenly temple which God himself has built, to be the place of his glorious presence among glorified saints and angels throughout all eternity! This is a place contrived on purpose to show the boundless riches of God's grace and love; and therefore, God has not spared as to the delights and glories with which he has adorned the place. God is rich enough to make the place transcend all created glory. Earthly kings build their houses and palaces, and make them magnificent, according to their wealth and ability; but God is infinitely rich, he does not spare for the cost of the treasures to be

laid out in adorning heaven, through fear of impoverishing himself. The glory of his residence is what we cannot conceive of; and this is one of those things spoken of in 1 Cor. 2:9. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Therefore in the descriptions that are given of it in the Scriptures, the images made use of to shadow it forth to us, are the most glorious with which we are conversant in the world. Such is the glorious description of it by John, as represented to him in the apocalyptic vision. Rev. 21:10, 11–18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23. "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper-stone, clear as crystal. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire; the third a chalcedony; the fourth an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Heaven is here represented by a city, whose very walls were made of precious stones. And the foundations were also all precious stones, and the gates were each a single pearl, and the very streets of the city were of pure gold; and yet it was something so excellent, as it appeared to John, that his comparing it to pure gold did not represent the excellency of it; it had also the beautiful transparency of clear glass. The apostle could find nothing on earth excellent enough adequately to represent its surpassing beauty. "The streets of the city were pure gold, like unto clear glass." He goes on with the destruction in the beginning of the next chapter. Rev. 22:1, 2–5.

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. —And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever." This glorious place shall be the residence of the saints for ever. They shall dwell in this house of God, as the king's children dwell with him in their father's house; they shall dwell in this house, for it is Christ's house. He is the heir and owner of it, because he is the only-begotten Son of God; and the church shall dwell in it with Christ, because she is "the Lamb's wife." God has made heaven to be his own peculiar dwelling-place, and the dwelling-place of his children; when he made the world, he made heaven for them, and therefore Christ says to them at the close of their trial, Matt. 25:34. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

2. The glory of the bodies of the saints; but this need not be insisted on here; as I have considered it already, when speaking of the resurrection. I would only observe, that however great the glory of the place is, the glory of their bodies will doubtless be far greater; for the place is made to be a dwelling-place for their glorious bodies, and the inhabitants will doubtless be more glorious than the habitation that is made for them; as the end is of greater value than the means. However bright heaven itself shall shine, the bodies of the saints themselves will shine far brighter, and appear far more beautiful.

3. The glory and beauty which God will put upon their souls, will as far exceed the beauty of their bodies, as the beauty of their bodies will far exceed the beauty of the place. Here will be their principal ornament, and if their bodies shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, how bright will their souls shine in the glorious image of God, made perfect in them! When they shall be presented to Christ, perfectly free from sin, without spot or wrinkle,

or any such thing; when they shall appear holy and without blemish; their bodies shall not only be made like to Christ's glorious body, but their souls like to his holy and glorified soul. They shall then shine with the glory of Christ reflected from them, without any thing to obscure the bright image. Their souls shall be made glorious in wisdom and knowledge; their faculties shall be exceedingly strengthened and enlarged, their eyes made perfectly clear, and divine light shall fill the soul, so that there shall be no darkness within, and perfect love shall reign in the heart. Divine love shall be strong; all the soul shall be as it were love. This love shall be exceedingly great in the principle of it, and shall always be in its highest exercise. Then shall humility also be brought to perfection. None can now express or conceive how pure and holy will be the disposition of the soul of a glorified saint, which shall be, as it were, all love, all sweetness, all humility. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is said to be in the sight of God of great price, in this world; but how precious will such spiritual ornaments be in heaven, when they shall be thus perfected! The souls of the saints are God's jewels; and how bright will God make those his jewels shine in heaven, when he has polished them and fitted them to be gems in his own crown of glory! The soul of man, being spiritual and rational, is susceptible of incomparably greater beauty than the body, because the soul is capable of receiving the image of God, of which the body is not; and the souls of the saints, when God has perfected them, shall appear as the very image of God himself; and in the graces in which they shall shine shall be seen the glory of the divine workmanship in its perfection. And so lovely will they be, that there will be more loveliness and beauty in the soul of one saint than in all the glory and beauty of the place put together.

4. They shall have great delight in the society and enjoyment of one another. We now do not know what enjoyment they will have in conversing together, and in communicating with each other; but doubtless it will be far more perfect than any we have now. The saints in heaven shall all be one society, they shall be united together without any schism, there shall be a sweet harmony, and a perfect

union. There the saints shall see and converse with Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and Paul, and all the holy martyrs; and they shall freely converse with them. It will be a most blessed society; there shall be no jars or contentions, nor breaking out among them; no manner of strife, nor envy, nor jealousy; no ill will, but perfect peace and perfect love through the whole society. Each one shall love every other with a most endeared and strong affection. Each one will be perfectly excellent and lovely, and will appear so in every other's eyes: they will be delighted exceedingly in that lovely and perfect image of God, which each one shall see in every other; they shall manifest their love to each other in the most becoming and amiable manner, without any thing ever to disturb or interrupt the peace of that blessed society. There shall be no mixture of wicked men among them as it is here in this world, to defile or dishonour their company. Here the visible churches of Christ are often defiled and dishonoured by one wicked man or other, but that church above shall always be perfectly pure. Rev. 21:27. "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." This blessed family being all united in one body, as having many members, shall all subserve and contribute to each other's happiness, as the members of a body that is in perfect health. They shall delight to assist each other in their contemplations, communicating their glorious contemplations one to another. How sweetly will they converse together of the glories of God and Christ, and of God's glorious works of power, and wisdom, and mercy! and how will they convey the bright conceptions and the raptures of joy from one soul to another, imparting to each other the sweet communications which they themselves receive from the glorious King of heaven! and how will they help one another in their praises to God and Christ, each one bearing his part in the heavenly melody, extolling the Most High! And what a glorious harmony of celestial voices without number will that be, when the whole assembly of the upper world shall together lift up the praises of God on high! John had this represented to him at a great distance, and tells us, Rev. 14:2. "I heard a voice from

heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps:" so ardent were they, and so great a multitude. And how will they rejoice in their numbers, to see so great a multitude all united, all perfectly holy, all full of mutual love, all fellow-citizens, all brethren!

Here a question may arise, whether the saints, when they go to heaven, have any peculiar comfort in meeting with those who have been their pious friends on earth? I answer in the affirmative, and I think it is evident from 1 Thess. 4:13–18. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." Here it is evident,

1. That what the apostle mentions, as a matter of comfort to Christians respecting their departed christian friends, is that they shall meet them, and see them again. It is not only that their departed friends, though dead, are happy, but they shall see them, and be with them again. This is here plainly asserted. Mourn not for them, says the apostle, as those that have no hope; for when Christ comes, God shall bring them again, and we which are alive shall be caught up with them; and so shall we be ever with the Lord together. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. The apostle therefore must be understood to mean, that they should comfort one another when mourners, with the consideration that they should hereafter be with their departed friends again in a glorious and happy state, and never part more.



2. That there will be something else that will give comfort in meeting them in a future state, than in seeing other saints; otherwise why did the apostle mention it for their comfort, that they should see them again rather than other saints whom they had not seen or heard of? The apostle's speaking thus to the Thessalonians might give them just ground to expect, that the peculiarly strong affection which they had cherished for their departed friends, which was crossed by their departure, would be again gratified by meeting them again; for this crossing of that affection was the ground of their mourning. If the Thessalonians knew, that to see their friends again in another world would be no gratification to the affection which they had for them as their friends, and did no way think or conceive of it as such; then to think of seeing them would be no more comfort to them or remedy to their sorrow, than to think that they should see any other saint that lived or died in another country, or in a past age; and that, because it would be no remedy to the ground and foundation of their mourning, viz. the crossing their affection to them as their friends; and if it would be no remedy to their mourning, to think thus respecting it, it never would have been mentioned to them by the apostle as a ground of comfort, or reason why they need not mourn. That was what they mourned for viz. that they should not have their affections towards them satisfied by seeing them, and conversing with them again. That for which the heathen here spoken of, that have no hope, mourned excessively, was that they should never more have that affection gratified again. Hence it follows that the special affection, which the saints have in this world to other saints who are their friends, will in some respects remain in another world. There is no reason why we should suppose that saints that have dwelt together in this world, and have showed kindness to each other, have been affectionate to each other's true happiness, should not love one another with a love of gratitude for it in another world. There is no reason why good ministers whom God had made the instruments of salvation to others, should not have special joy in meeting their converts in heaven. 2 Cor. 1:14. "As also ye have acknowledged us in part that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus." 1 Thess. 2:19, 20. "For what is our hope, or joy, or

crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." I see no reason why those that love one another with a virtuous love, and from such a love have shown kindness one to another, should not love one another the better for it in another world. There is no reason to think, that the friendship contracted here on earth between saints will be rooted out in another world. All natural affections, so far as founded in animal nature or the infirmity of the present state, will cease in another world; and with respect to any affection that the godly have had to the finally reprobate, the love of God will wholly swallow it up, and cause it wholly to cease. But I see nothing that argues that one saint in glory may not have a special respect to another, because God made use of that other as an instrument to bring him into being, and thus made him the remote occasion of his happiness; or that, when pious parents lose pious children, they may not comfort themselves with the thought that they shall go to them, as probably David did when he said concerning his child, 2 Sam. 12:23. "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me:" or that even a former acquaintance with persons and their virtues may not occasion a particular respect in another world. They may go to heaven with a desire to see them upon that very account. The impressions which they have of their amiable qualifications in consequence of their acquaintance with them here, may yet remain in another world.

5. The saints in heaven shall see and converse with Christ. They shall see Christ in a twofold sense.

1. They shall see him, as appearing in his glorified human nature, with their bodily eyes; and this will be a most glorious sight. The loveliness of Christ as thus appearing will be a most ravishing thing to them; for though the bodies of the saints shall appear with an exceeding beauty and glory, yet the body of Christ will without doubt immensely surpass them, as much as the brightness of the sun does that of the stars. The glorified body of Christ will be the masterpiece

of all God's workmanship in the whole material universe. There shall be in his glorious countenance the manifestations of his glorious spiritual perfections, his majesty, his holiness, his surpassing grace, and love, and meekness. The eye will never be wearied with beholding this glorious sight. When Christ was transfigured in the mount, Peter was for making three tabernacles, that Christ, and Moses, and Elijah might remain there, and that the heavenly vision might never come to an end.

Job had respect to this sight of Christ, and comforted himself with the thoughts of it, when he said, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." This will be the most glorious object that the saints will ever see with their bodily eyes; and there will be far more happiness redounding to the beholders from this sight than from any other; yea, the eyes of the glorified body will be given chiefly that the saints may behold this sight.

2. They shall see him with the eye of the soul. It is said, "They shall see him as he is." 1 John 3:2. "And they shall know even as they are known." 1 Cor. 13:2. They shall have a clear understanding of Christ as Mediator, how he has undertaken from all eternity to accomplish their salvation. They shall understand the glorious covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son; shall see the eternal love Christ had to them before the foundation of the world. They shall in all probability understand the mystery of his incarnation. They shall know and understand the gloriousness of the way of salvation by Christ, "which things the angels desire to look into;" they shall have a full understanding of the infinite wisdom of God in contriving the plan of salvation; shall comprehend the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ to sinners, in undergoing for them the agony of the garden, and the more overwhelming agonies of the cross. Now the heart is dull in the

contemplation of such things. How often are they heard of by the saints on earth with but little affection! How often, when they see them set forth in the Lord's supper, are they cold and lifeless! But then it shall not be so; then the wonderful works of God, and the love of Christ in the work of redemption, will appear as they are: then there will constantly without any interruption be a most lively and full sense of it, without any deadness or coldness; every thing in the work of redemption will appear in its true glory, the understanding shall be wonderfully opened, and it shall be perpetually like the clear hemisphere with the sun in the meridian, and there shall never come over one cloud to darken the mind. And then the saints shall see fully how the excellence and loveliness of Christ appear in all that he did and suffered: they shall see the loveliness of those excellencies that appeared in Christ's human nature when on earth; his wonderful meekness and humility, his patience under suffering, his perfect obedience to the Father. And then shall they also see the beauty that appears in Christ's human nature in its glorified state, wherein the excellencies of it shine without a veil. They shall also see the excellence of the divine nature of Christ; they shall behold clearly and immediately his divine majesty, and his divine and infinite holiness, and grace, and love. They shall see Christ as the perfect image of God, an image wherein all the glory of the divine nature is fully expressed; they shall behold him as the brightness of his Father's glory; and they shall see that bright and perfect image of God which the Father beheld, and was infinitely happy in beholding, from all eternity. But this sight of the glory of Christ in his divine nature belongs to that beatific vision, of which I would speak more particularly hereafter.

2. They shall not only see this glorious person, as at a distance, but they shall be admitted to be near him, and to converse with him. This sight of his glory and loveliness will fill them with the most exalted love, which love will cause them to desire conversation; and they shall be admitted to it, to the full of their desires, and that at all times. Two things may be observed concerning this converse with Christ, to which the saints shall be admitted in heaven.

1. It shall be most free and intimate. There shall be nothing to forbid them or deter them. Though Christ is so glorious a person, in so exalted a state in heaven, being Lord of heaven and earth, yet he will treat them as brethren, and they shall converse with him as friends. He will also honour them and advance them to the dignity of kings, that they may be fit to converse with so glorious a King. Rev. 1:6. "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen." Christ, when on earth, treated his disciples with great familiarity and freedom, he treated them as friends. John 15:15. "I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I call you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." So in heaven he will not keep them at a greater distance, but admit them nearer; because they shall be fitted to be nearer to him and to converse more intimately with him. O how happy will it render them to have so great and honourable a person treating them with such grace and condescension!

Though they shall see the awful majesty of Christ, that will not make them afraid, because they will see his love, and grace, and condescension, equal to his majesty.

2. This converse shall be most full and satisfying. This is evident from that most emphatic expression of the church being "the bride, the Lamb's wife." He will open the infinite and eternal fountain of his love to them, and will pour forth that fountain into their hearts. This love will be as a pure river of water of life, a river of pleasures, constantly flowing into the souls of the saints, that shall be in them as rivers of living water. And they shall also in their converse with Christ manifest their love to him: their hearts shall flow out in an unceasing stream, or ascend continually in a rapturous transport of love. Of those things we can say but little now; yet sometimes when God helps us we can conceive of them a little, but it is but a little at the most.

6. The saints in heaven shall see God. They shall not only see that glorious city, and the saints there, and the holy angels, and the glorified body of Christ; but they shall see God himself. This is promised to the saints. Matt. 5:8. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." 1 Cor. 13:12. "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." This is that which is called by divines, "the beatific vision," because this is that in which the blessedness of the saints in glory does chiefly consist. This is the fountain, the infinite fountain of their blessedness. The sight of Christ, which has already been spoken of, is not here to be excluded, for he is a divine person; the sight of him in his divine nature therefore belongs to the beatifical vision. This vision of God is the chief bliss of heaven, and therefore I would speak of it a little more particularly. And,

1. As to the faculty that is the subject of this vision. It is no sight of any thing with the bodily eyes; but it is an intellectual view. The beatific vision of God is not a sight with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the soul. There is no such thing as seeing God properly with the bodily eyes, because he is a spirit: one of his attributes is, that he is invisible. 1 Tim. 1:17. "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever." Colos. 1:15. "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature." Heb. 11:27. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." This highest blessedness of the soul does not enter in at the door of the bodily senses; this would be to make the blessedness of the soul dependent on the body, or the happiness of man's superior part to be dependent on the inferior. The beatific vision of God is not any sight with the bodily eyes, because the separate souls of the saints, and the angels which are mere spirits, and never were united to body, have this vision. Matt. 18:10. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." It is not in beholding any form or visible representation, or

shape, or colour, or shining light, in which the highest happiness of the soul consists; but it is in seeing God, who is a spirit, spiritually, with the eyes of the soul. We have no reason to think that there is any such thing as God's manifesting himself by any outward glorious appearance, that is, the symbol of his presence in heaven, any otherwise than by the glorified body of Christ. God was wont in the Old Testament, oftentimes to manifest himself by an outward glory, and sometimes in an outward shape, or the form of a man. But when God manifested himself thus, it was by Christ; it was the second person of the Trinity only that was wont thus to appear to men in an outward glory and human shape. John 1:18. "No man hath seen God at anytime; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." But since Christ has actually assumed a human body, there is no need of his assuming any aerial form or shape any more. The Deity now became visible to the bodily eyes in a more perfect manner by his having a real body. The saints that shall see Christ in heaven in his glorified body, much more properly see Christ than if they only saw an assumed shape, or some outward glorious appearance, as the symbol of his presence; for now, that which they see is not only a glorious appearance by which Christ is represented, but the real Christ; it is his own body. The seeing God in the glorified body of Christ, is the most perfect way of seeing God with the bodily eyes that can be; for in seeing a real body, which one of the persons of the Trinity has assumed to be his body, and in which he dwells for ever as his own, the divine majesty and excellency appear as much as it is possible for them to appear in outward form or shape. The saints do actually see a divine person with bodily eyes, and in the same manner as we see one another. But when God showed himself under outward appearances and symbols of his presence only, that was not so proper a sight of a divine person, and it was a more imperfect way of God's manifesting himself, suitably to the more imperfect state of the church under the Old Testament. But now Christ really subsists in a glorified body; those outward symbols and appearances are done away, as being needless and imperfect. This more imperfect way therefore is altogether needless, seeing Christ there appears as a glorified body.

This seems to be one end of God's assuming a human body, viz. that the saints might see God with bodily eyes; that they may see him, not only in the understanding, but in every way of seeing of which the human nature is capable: that we might see God as a divine person as we see one another. And there is no need of God the Father's manifesting himself in any other glorious form; for he that sees the Son, sees the Father, John 14:9. and that because he is the image of the invisible God. Coloss. 1:15.—Heb. 1:3. "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." But if there be any outward symbol by which God the Father represents himself in heaven; seeing that is not the beatific vision, for that is a far more imperfect way of seeing God than seeing him with the eye of the soul; the soul is capable of apprehending God in a thousand times more perfect and glorious manner than the eye of the body is; the soul has in itself those powers whereby it is sufficiently capable of apprehending spiritual objects without looking through the windows of the outward senses. The soul is capable of seeing God more immediately, and more certainly, and more fully and gloriously, than the eye of the body is.

## 2. The act of vision. And,

1. It will be an immediate sight, it will be no apprehension of God's excellency by acquiring it from his works; neither will it be such a spiritual sight of God as the saints have in this world, seeing him in his word and making use of his ordinances, which is called seeing "through a glass darkly." Then they shall see him "face to face." 1 Cor. 13:12. They shall not only see the glory of God as reflected from other things, but they shall see him as we see the sun, by his own light in a clear hemisphere. It will be an intuitive view of God. What knowledge the saints have of God in this world is like the twilight before sun-rising; it is not the direct light of the sun, but the light of the sun reflected, and it is comparatively a dim light; but hereafter the saints shall enjoy the perfect day, they shall see God as we



immediately behold the sun after it is risen above the horizon, and no cloud or vapour in the heavens to hinder its sight.

2. It shall be, according to men's capacity, a perfect sight. It shall not be a perfectly comprehensive sight, because it is impossible that a saint's mind should comprehend God; but yet it shall be perfect in its kind, it shall be perfectly certain, without any doubt or possibility of doubt. There shall be a view of God in his being, and in his power, and wisdom, and holiness, and goodness, and love, and all-sufficiency, that shall be attended with intuitive certainty, without any mixture of unbelief, and with much greater certainty than any sight with the bodily eye. And then it shall be perfectly clear without any view of darkness. Now, how much darkness is there mingled with that spiritual sight, which the saints have of God's glory in this world! But then, there shall be no obscurity, nothing to cloud the understanding, or to hinder the clearness of the view. God shall be hid with no veil, neither shall there be any veil in the heavens. And this sight shall be most enlarged; they shall see vastly more of the glory of God than any of the saints do in this world; the souls of the saints shall be like the angels in extensiveness of understanding.

3. The object of this vision: concerning which I observe,

1. They shall see every thing in God that tends to excite and inflame love, i.e. every thing that is lovely, every thing that tends to exalt their esteem and admiration, to warm and endear the heart. They shall behold the infinite excellency and glory of God, shall have a blessed-making sight of his glorious majesty and of his infinite holiness; shall see as those angels do, of whom we read in Isa. 6:3. "That, standing before the throne, they cry, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts," and shall behold the infinite grace and goodness of God. Then shall that glorious fountain and ocean be opened fully to their view; then shall they behold all its excellency and loveliness, they shall have a clear sight of his immense glory and excellency.

2. They shall see every thing in God that gratifies love. They shall see in him all that love desires. Love desires the love of the beloved. So the saints in glory shall see God's transcendent love to them; God will make ineffable manifestations of his love to them. They shall see as much love in God towards them as they desire; they neither will nor can crave any more. This very manifestation that God will make of himself that will cause the beatific vision, will be an act of love in God: it will be from the exceeding love of God to them that he will give them this vision, which will add an immense sweetness to it. When they see God so glorious, and at the same time see how greatly this God loves them, what delight will it not cause in the soul! Love desires union. They shall therefore see this glorious God united to them, and see themselves united to him. They shall see that he is their Father, and that they are his children. They shall see God gloriously present with them; God with them; and God in them; and they in God. Love desires the possession of its object. Therefore they shall see God, even their own God; when they behold this transcendent glory of God, they shall see him as their own. When they shall see that glory, power, and wisdom of God, they shall see it as altogether engaged for them; when they shall see the beauty of God's holiness, they shall see it as their own, for them to enjoy for ever; when they see the boundless ocean of God's goodness and grace, they shall see it to be all theirs.

4. The manner in which they shall see and enjoy God; and that is as having communion with Christ therein. The saints shall enjoy God, as partaking with Christ of his enjoyment of God; for they are united to him, and are glorified and made happy in the enjoyment of God as his members. As the members of the body partake of the life and health of the head, so the saints in glory shall be happy as partaking of the blessedness of the Son of God; they being in Christ, shall partake of the love of God the Father to Christ. And as the Son knows the Father, so they shall partake with him in his sight of God, as being as it were parts of him. As he is in the bosom of the Father, so are they in the bosom of the Father; as he has immense joy in the

love of the Father, so have they, every one of them in their measure, the same joy in the Father's love.

Herein they shall enjoy God in a more exalted and excellent manner than man would have done if he had never fallen; for doubtless that happiness, that Christ himself partakes of in his Father's bosom, is transcendently sweet and excellent; and how happy therefore are they who are admitted to partake of that portion of delight with him!

5. The agent by whom this vision of God shall be communicated; viz. the Holy Spirit. As it is by the Holy Spirit that a spiritual sight of God is given in this world, so it is the same Holy Spirit by whom the beatific vision is given of God in heaven. The saints in heaven are as dependent on God for all their happiness, and all their holiness, and all their light, as those on earth; there all is from God by his Holy Spirit, just as it is here. They shall have the beatific vision of God because they will be full of God, filled with the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Ghost is the pure river of water of life that proceeds from the throne of God and the Lamb, spoken of in Rev. 22:1.

6. The effects of this vision. And these are, that the soul shall be inflamed with love, and satisfied with pleasure.

1. It shall be inflamed with love. The soul shall not be an inactive spectator, but shall be most active, and in the most ardent exercise of love towards the object seen. The soul shall be as it were all eyes to behold, and yet all act to love. The soul shall be as full of love as it shall be of light, and of both it shall be as full as it can hold. The understanding will be in its most perfect act in beholding, and the will will be in its most perfect act in loving. This love will be perfectly such as it ought to be. It shall be perfectly humble, the soul shall be in its place at all times, adoring at God's feet, and yet embraced in the arms of his love. This love shall excite them to praise. And therefore, singing praises and hallelujahs shall be that in which they shall unweariedly be employed.

2. This sight of God shall satisfy the soul with pleasure. So great will the joy be that the soul will desire no greater. It shall be as full of grace, as the large desires of the soul can receive. So sweet shall it be, that the soul will desire nothing sweeter. So pure and excellent will it be, that the soul will desire nothing better. Ps. 17:15. "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." When the soul beholds the glory and love of God, it shall be at the same time filled with the glory and love of God; it shall receive satisfying pleasure, for it shall receive God. God will communicate, and as it were pour forth, himself into the soul. And with what inexpressible sweetness and complacency will the soul open itself to be thus filled, as the flowers open before the sun to be filled with his light and pleasant influences!

Having thus considered wherein the eternal happiness of the saints consists, I proceed next to consider some circumstances of it.

1. It will add sweetness to the happiness of heaven, that it is all the fruit of free grace, and the dying love of Christ. The saints in this world are of that spirit that they choose the way of salvation by free and sovereign grace; and salvation in this way seems better and sweeter by far, than if they could have it by their own works. Much more will this exceedingly heighten the sweetness of their happiness when they are in heaven, when their love, and their humility, will be perfect, when they will be abundantly more sensible than they are now, what vile creatures they were in this world; and when they consider to what exceeding glory God has advanced them, what a sweet admiration will it excite in them of the free and boundless grace of God! And what a sweetness will it add, that all this glorious blessedness which they possess, is not of themselves, but is the fruit of the love of that glorious person whom they shall then see in his glory, the fruit of his dying love, that it was bought by his own precious blood! It adds greatly to the value of a gift, if we receive it from a dear friend as a token of his love; but how greatly then will heaven be the more prized by the saints, when they consider it as the

fruit of his love who is so glorious and excellent, and who is so exceedingly beloved by them!

2. It will give them the greater sense of their own blessedness, when they contemplate the misery of those who are finally lost, and consider how exceedingly different is their own state. The saints will witness the misery of the wicked, they shall see their state at the day of judgment, they shall see them at the left hand with devils, shall hear the sentence pronounced, and see it executed. This shall greatly heighten the sense of their own happy state, when they consider how different their own state is, how differently God has dealt with themselves from what he has done with the wicked; when they see how dreadful the misery is from which they are delivered, and which they must have unavoidably suffered, had not God graciously redeemed them; when they consider that they deserved this misery as well as those that suffer it, but that Christ has of his free grace redeemed them. This will give exalted thoughts of the free grace of God, and cause them exceedingly to admire it, and will greatly heighten their exercises of love to him who has been so gracious to them, and consequently will heighten their joy in his love. As the damned when they contemplate the happiness of the saints in heaven will find their own misery aggravated, so the saints in heaven when they contemplate the misery of the damned in hell, will feel a greater sense of their own happiness.

3. There are different degrees of happiness and glory in heaven. As there are degrees among the angels, viz. thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers; so there are degrees among the saints. In heaven are many mansions, and of different degrees of dignity. The glory of the saints above will be in some proportion to their eminency in holiness and good works here. Christ will reward all according to their works. He that gained ten pounds was made ruler over ten cities, and he that gained five pounds over five cities. Luke 19:17. 2 Cor. 9:6. "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." And the apostle Paul tells us that, as one star differs from another star in glory, so also it

shall be in the resurrection of the dead. 1 Cor. 15:41. Christ tells us that he who gives a cup of cold water unto a disciple in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward. But this could not be true, if a person should have no greater reward for doing many good works than if he did but few. It will be no damp to the happiness of those who have lower degrees of happiness and glory, that there are others advanced in glory above them: for all shall be perfectly happy, every one shall be perfectly satisfied. Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels far larger than others; and there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven, but perfect love shall reign through the whole society. Those who are not so high in glory as others, will not envy those that are higher, but they will have so great, and strong, and pure love to them, that they will rejoice in their superior happiness; their love to them will be such that they will rejoice that they are happier than themselves; so that instead of having a damp to their own happiness, it will add to it. They will see it to be fit that they that have been most eminent in works of righteousness should be most highly exalted in glory; and they will rejoice in having that done, that is fittest to be done. There will be a perfect harmony in that society; those that are most happy will also be most holy, and all will be both perfectly holy and perfectly happy. But yet there will be different degrees of both holiness and happiness according to the measure of each one's capacity, and therefore those that are lowest in glory will have the greatest love to those that are highest in happiness, because they will see most of the image of God in them; and having the greatest love to them, they will rejoice to see them the most happy and the highest in glory. And so, on the other hand, those that are highest in glory, as they will be the most lovely, so they will be fullest of love: as they will excel in happiness, they will proportionally excel in divine benevolence and love to others, and will have more love to God and to the saints than those that are lower in holiness and happiness. And besides, those that will excel in glory will also excel in humility. Here in this world, those that are above others are the objects of envy, because that others conceive of them as being lifted up with it; but in heaven it will not be so, but those saints in heaven who excel

in happiness will also in holiness, and consequently in humility. The saints in heaven are more humble than the saints on earth, and still the higher we go among them the greater humility there is; the highest orders of saints, who know most of God, see most of the distinction between God and them, and consequently are comparatively least in their own eyes, and so are most humble. The exaltation of some in heaven above the rest will be so far from diminishing the perfect happiness and joy of the rest who are inferior, that they will be the happier for it; such will be the union in their society that they will be partakers of each other's happiness. "Then will be fulfilled in its perfection that which is declared in 1 Cor. 12:22. "If one of the members be honoured all the members rejoice with it."

This happiness of the saints shall never have any interruption. There will never be any alloy to it; there never will come any cloud to obscure their light; there never will be any thing to cool their love. The rivers of pleasure will not fail, the glory and love of God and of Christ will for ever be the same, and the manifestation of it will have no interruption. No sin or corruption shall ever enter there, no temptation to disturb their blessedness: the divine love in the saints shall never cool, there shall be no inconsistency in any of them, the faculties of the saints shall never flag from exercise; and they will never be cloyed, their relish for those delights will for ever be kept up to its height, that glorious society shall not grow weary of their hallelujahs. Their exercises, though they are so active and vigorous, will be performed with perfect ease; the saints shall not be weary of loving, and praising, and fearing, as the sun is never weary of shining.

5. And to sum up this whole description, there shall never be any end to their glory and blessedness. Therefore is it so often called eternal life, and everlasting life. We are told that at the day of judgment, when the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, the righteous shall enter into life eternal. Matt. 25:46. The pleasures which there are at God's right hand, are said to be for evermore; Psal.

16:11. And that this is not merely a long duration, but an absolute eternity, is evident from that which Christ has said, that those who believe on him shall not die. John 6:50. Rev. 22:5. In the description of the new Jerusalem it is said, "And they shall reign for ever and ever." The eternity of this blessedness shall crown all. If the saints knew that there would be an end to their happiness, though at never so great a distance, yet it would be a great damp to their joy. The greater the happiness is, so much the more uncomfortable would the thoughts of an end be, and so much the more joyful will it be to think that there will be no end. The saints will surely know that there will be no more danger of their happiness coming to an end, than there will be that the being of God will come to an end. As God is eternal, so their happiness is eternal; as long as the fountain lasts, they need not fear but they shall be supplied.

## APPLICATION

1. Hence we learn how great a mercy conversion is, because it confers upon him who is exposed to eternal misery a right to all this blessedness. Man, as he is naturally, is very far from this blessedness; we came into the world wretched, miserable, undone creatures, in cruel bondage to sin and Satan, under guilt and under wrath, and at enmity against God, the fountain of blessedness, and in a state of condemnation to everlasting destruction. But when a man is converted there is a great change made in his state; he is that day passed from death to life, he is brought out of that state of woe and misery into a sure title to glory, honour, and peace for ever. When once a man is converted all this blessedness that we have heard of is his, he has an absolute right to it, God's word is passed for it, his faithful promise is given. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but that promise of God shall not fail, but shall be fulfilled: their witness is in heaven, and their record on high. On that day in which a man is converted he enters into a blessed state, he is sure to be a blessed person as long as he lives; and he has a right to all that blessedness we have heard of, at death, and in a state of separation, and at the day of judgment, and to that glory which the saints have in their state



of consummate glory and blessedness. This teaches how great and how blessed a change conversion is in its consequences, and what cause have they who have good ground to think that they have been the subjects of it, to bless, and praise, and extol the name of God, when they consider what a situation they were once in, and what a happy state they are now in; for the bringing them out of that miserable state into so glorious a state is owing only to free and sovereign grace. 1 Cor. 4:7. "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"

2. Hence we may learn the folly of those that are cold and slack in seeking salvation, seeing that the glory and happiness of those who are saved is so exceedingly great. How unreasonable is it to expect to obtain that which is so great without effort! Men will seek worldly riches and honours that are worth so little, and cannot make them happy, and will soon vanish away, with great and indefatigable labour and diligence; and shall men expect to obtain such eternal glory and blessedness in a slack and cold way of seeking it? How unlike the nature and importance of this blessedness do men treat it that seek it in a cold and careless manner! and can it be expected that God will also treat it so unlike its value, as to bestow it upon such seekers?

3. Hence we may solve the difficulty of some Christians meeting with so much affliction and darkness in the world. Some godly persons are the subjects of very great outward afflictions, and some are the subjects of great spiritual darkness; some truly godly persons spend great part of their lives in the dark, in exercising doubts, and anxious thoughts, and distressing fears. And oftentimes God's people make this an argument against themselves. They argue that if God loved them, and had made them his children, he would never leave them in such darkness and distress, he would give them more of the light of his countenance. They are ready to say with themselves, if God loves me, why does he not give me more comfort, why does he see me in

such darkness, and does not comfort me? But what we have heard may solve all the difficulty. If their happiness throughout all eternity be so great, of how little consequence is it what may be their condition for that short moment they continue in this world! What if they are in the dark, what if they walk in darkness and are exercised with great trouble! now little difference will it make, though it be cast into the scales, when weighed against that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! It will prove lighter than vanity. If God gives eternal happiness to them, that is evident proof of his love, and all the darkness and sorrow they can meet with in this world are not worthy to be mentioned. All this darkness, how long soever continued, if we compare it with future glory, vanishes into nothing.

4. This subject furnishes solid ground of consolation to the righteous. What can be matter of greater joy and comfort to any person, than to consider that he is entitled to such eternal blessedness? Here is sufficient consolation under all adversity; whatever changes we meet with in the world, this may be matter of abundant comfort under the greatest and heaviest trials. In these things a Christian may well rejoice, though the fig-tree should not blossom, and there should be no fruit in the vine. Having this firm support and consolation, a Christian will not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Let these things, therefore, comfort thee, who fearest and lovest God and trustest in Christ. What a glorious hope, and incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading inheritance, are reserved in heaven for thee! Hence I would answer an objection or two, that unbelief in the saint may be ready to make against what has been said.

1. Some may be ready to say, this glory and blessedness are so great and wonderful that it seems too great to be given to such creatures as men are; it seems almost incredible that God should so exalt and advance worms of the dust.

Answer. The death and sufferings of Christ made every thing credible that belongs to this blessedness. If God has not thought his own Son too much for us, what will he think too much for us? If God did not spare him, but gave him even to be made a reproach, and a curse, and a victim to death for us, no blessedness, however great, can be incredible which is the fruit of this. Rom. 8:32. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" If God would so contrive to show his love in the manner and means of procuring our happiness, nothing can be incredible in the degree of the happiness itself: if nothing be too much to be given to man, and to be done for man in the manner of procuring his happiness, nothing will be too much to be given to him as the happiness procured, and no degree of happiness too great for him to enjoy. If all that God does about it be consistent, his infinite wisdom will also work to make their happiness and glory great in the degree of it.

2. Some Christians may still be ready to object. It is not too great to be bestowed on others, yet it seems to me too great to be bestowed on such an unworthy creature as I; it seems incredible that God should ever give such glory to such an one as I am, that am so mean, and so worthless, and vile. I not only was once unworthy, but I am so unworthy still, I am so blind, I have so much sin, and so little goodness, I commit so much sin, and do so little good, that it appears incredible that I should have a title to such blessedness. I can far more easily think that others will possess it than myself.

Answer. It is no way incredible that infinite grace should bestow it on the meanest and unworthiest. God's design is to glorify his free grace, and this is one way by which free grace is glorified, viz. by bestowing such great blessedness on the most unworthy. This is of a piece with the rest. Every thing in the work of redemption is wonderful, and therefore one of the names by which Christ is called, is Wonderful. As grace is wonderful in the means of procurement, viz. giving Christ to die, and wonderful in the degree of happiness procured; so it is

wonderful with respect to the subjects of it, that they are in themselves so mean and unworthy.

5. This subject furnishes ground of solemn exhortation to natural men, earnestly to seek this blessedness. And here you may well consider,

1. How poor you are who have no heaven but this world! In this exceeding and eternal glory of which you have heard, you have no lot or portion; you have nothing but a little part of this clod of earth; and what is all that you have worth? If you have a little more land than some of your neighbours, or if you are in a way to make more money than others, if your accommodations are better than others, and you have more worldly conveniences and pleasures than others, or if you are promoted a little higher among men than some others are, what a poor portion is this; and how miserable are you who have no better happiness that you can call your own! How happy do these things make you, what great satisfaction do they yield to you! Are such things as these the rivers of pleasure that you choose for your portion? O, how miserable are you that have your portion in this life! When a few days are passed you must go to the grave and into eternity, and then your glory shall not descend after you; and how wretched are they of whom it may be said, when they have done with worldly enjoyments, that they have received their consolation! Luke 6:24.

2. To what misery are you exposed! You not only have no lot in this happiness and glory, but you are hanging over endless misery, and are in danger every day of being irrecoverably lost.

3. You have now an opportunity to obtain this blessedness. It is true that now you are exposed to this misery, but yet this glory is offered to you; the time is not past wherein the offer is made; you have yet an opportunity to be made happy for ever. The opportunity you now have to obtain the happiness of another world, is worth ten thousands of this world.

But here I would say something by way of direction in answer to this.

Inquiry. What must I be brought to in order to get to heaven?

Answer. 1. You must be brought entirely to renounce all hope of obtaining heaven by any thing that you can do by your own strength, —that you cannot do it either directly or indirectly. Many are sensible that they cannot get to heaven by their own strength directly, but yet they hope to do it indirectly; they hope by their own strength to bring themselves to a disposition to close with Christ, and accept of him for a Saviour; they are hoping to bring themselves to a compliance with the terms of salvation. You must be brought off from all confiding in your own strength; and you must also be brought to renounce your own righteousness as the price of heaven. The consideration of what has been said of the glory and happiness of the saints, may show us the exceeding folly of those that think to purchase so great happiness by their own righteousness. What a vain thought have men of their performances to think them a sufficient price to offer to God to purchase such glory of him! How would God dishonour himself, and dishonour such riches of his own goodness, if he should bestow them on men for their righteousness, and should accept their miserable performances as the price of them!

2. Your heart must be brought to close with him who has purchased heaven. Renouncing all other ways, your heart must entirely close with him, and adhere to him, as the way, the truth, and the life. Your heart must be drawn to him, and it must be pleasing and sweet to you to have heaven as a free gift, as the fruit of mercy and saving grace, and you must assuredly believe that Christ is a sufficient Saviour, and your soul must acquiesce in the way of salvation by him, by his blood and his righteousness, as a wise, holy, sufficient, and excellent way. Your heart must incline to Jesus Christ as a Saviour above your own righteousness and all other ways. Your delight must be in this holy way of salvation.

3. You must choose the God of heaven for your portion. You must be of the same temper and disposition with the psalmist, who says, Psal. 73:25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on the earth whom I desire beside thee." You must esteem and relish the enjoyment of him far above all other things. You must be brought to see that there is that in the enjoyment of God and communion with him that is far better than all the profits or pleasures of the world. It must be so with you, that if you could have your choice of all kinds of happiness you could devise, and have which you would, and in what degree you would, to all eternity, this would be what you would far prefer.

4. Your heart must be brought sincerely to close with the employments of heaven. In heaven they are not idle, but they are continually employed, and their employments are holy employments; they spend their time wholly in holy exercises; in contemplating on God, in praising and serving him. Rev. 22:3. "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him." If ever you go to heaven, your heart must be brought beforehand to such a temper as freely to choose such employments, you must have a relish of them, and must account them excellent and delightful employments.

5. You must be pure in heart, and clean in hands. The pure in heart alone shall see God. Matt. 5:8. They that shall ascend into God's holy hill, are those that are of pure hearts and clean hands. Psal. 24:4. You must hate and abhor all sin, and allow none in your life. Sin must become to you a great burden. You must loathe yourself for it, and fight and strive against it, to purge yourself more and more from it; striving more and more to mortify sin, earnestly desiring and seeking to be more holy, more conformed to the will of God, and to walk more becoming a Christian.

6. You must be brought to sell all for heaven. Matt. 13:44, 45, 46. Heaven must be to you like the treasure hid in a field; or like the pearl of great price. If you would have heaven, you must take it as

your whole portion; you must in your heart part with all other things for it, and it must be your manner actually to part with them whenever they stand in the way of your getting forward towards heaven. If you would have heaven, you must sell your worldly profit and your credit, and the good will of your neighbours, and your worldly pleasures and conveniences, and whatever stands in your way. Many flatter themselves that they shall obtain heaven without this, and think they have a right to heaven, though they were never brought to this, but they are sure to find themselves disappointed.

7. You must never expect to go to heaven in any other than a strait and narrow way. Some expect to get to heaven who are not walking in a narrow way. The way they are walking in is a way of indulging their ease, and of shifting off the hard and difficult parts of religion. It is not the way of self-denial, and toil, and laboriousness, but they walk in a broad way, a way wherein they are not pinched, but can go on without labour, or watchfulness, or bearing the cross. But such as these, let their hopes be what they may, and their profession what it may, and their pretences to experiences what they may, are not like to get to heaven. To some, the way that the Scripture has laid out is too narrow and strait; therefore they are endeavouring to get to heaven in a broad way; but it is in vain for you to contrive this. If you can find out any way of getting to heaven that is not a strait and narrow way, it will be a way that you are the first inventor of. If you go thither, you must go in the way of the footsteps of the flock. If you would go to heaven, you must be content to go there in the way of self-denial and sufferings, you must be willing to take up the cross daily and follow Christ, and through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

6. This subject furnishes ground of solemn exhortation to the godly, to strive earnestly after holiness of life. What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness, who have received such infinite mercy of God, and entertain such glorious hopes; seeing God has admitted you to such happiness, earnestly labour that you may walk in some measure answerably"; seeing God

has admitted you to the happiness of children, walk as children. Eph. 5:1. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; imitate your heavenly Father; he ye holy, for he is holy. Seeing that you are admitted to the blessedness of disciples and friends of Jesus, walk as the friends of Christ, imitate your glorious Lord and Head. Here consider several things: particularly,

1. What great love God hath bestowed upon you in choosing you to such unspeakable blessedness before the foundation of the world. How wonderful was the love of God in giving his Son to purchase this blessedness for you, and how wonderful was the love of the Son of God in shedding his own blood to purchase such glory for you! how ought you therefore to live to God's glory! Let me therefore beseech, by those great mercies of God, that you give yourself up a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Give the utmost diligence that you may keep all the commandments of God: study that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God; study that in all things you may be found approved: seeing God hath so loved you, strive earnestly that you may bring forth the fruits of the love of God; and seeing Christ hath so loved you, see that you love one another; let love be without dissimulation; be ye kindly affectioned one with another with brotherly love; be of the same mind one towards another, in honour preferring one another; have fervent charity among yourselves. Seeing God hath mercy on you, be ye merciful as your Father which is in heaven is merciful. Look not every one on his own things; be pitiful, be courteous; be ready to distribute, willing to communicate; be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another. Christ hath thus loved you while an enemy; therefore recompense to no man evil for evil, but contrariwise blessing; do good to them that do evil to you. Such things as these become those that are the heirs of the glory that we have heard of.

2. Consider how much above the world that blessedness is which God has given; how therefore ought you to live above the world. God has



redeemed you out of the world, and therefore do not live as though you had your portion in this life. Live as pilgrims and strangers; as those that are not at home; as fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. How dishonourable will it be to you that God had so advanced and entitled you to such glory, to set your heart upon the dust of the earth; how you dishonour the grace of God in giving you such blessedness; and how will you dishonour the blessedness that God has given, no more to set your heart on it, and to set it so much on the world!

3. Consider what a vast difference has God made between you and other men, how vastly different is your relative state from theirs, how much more has God done for you than for them. Seek therefore those things which are above, where God is. Will it not be a shame if one that is entitled to such glory conducts no better than a child of the devil? Consider it seriously; and let it not be asked with reference to you, Matt. 5:47. What do ye more than others? Other men love those that love them; other men do good to those that do good to them: walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; and let it appear that you are of a spirit more excellent than your neighbour; manifest more love, and more meekness, and more humility, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing, strengthened with all might according to his glorious power unto all patience and long-suffering. Put ye on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, gentleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another; and let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven. Seeing God has given you so much, God and men may well expect of you, that you should be greatly distinguished in your life from other men.

## ***Pressing into the Kingdom of God***

"The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."  
Luke 16:16

In these words two things may be observed:

**First, Wherein the work and office of John the Baptist consisted, viz. in preaching the kingdom of God, to prepare the way for its introduction to succeed the law and the prophets.**

By the law and the prophets, in the text, seems to be intended the ancient dispensation under the Old Testament, which was received from Moses and the prophets. These are said to be until John; not that the revelations given by them are out of use since that time, but that the state of the church, founded and regulated under God by them, the dispensation of which they were the ministers, and wherein the church depended mainly on light received from them, fully continued till John. He first began to introduce the New Testament dispensation, or gospel-state of the church; which, with its glorious, spiritual, and eternal privileges and blessings, is often called the kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God. John the Baptist preached, that the kingdom of God was at hand. "Repent" says he, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:"-"Since that time," says Christ, "the kingdom of God is preached." John the Baptist first began to preach it; and then, after him, Christ and his disciples preached the same.

Thus Christ preached, Matthew 4:17. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So the disciples were directed to preach, Matthew 10:7. "And, as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was not John

the Baptist, but Christ, that fully brought in, and actually established, this kingdom of God; but he, as Christ's forerunner to prepare his way before him, did the first thing that was done towards introducing it. The old dispensation was abolished, and the new brought in by degrees; as the night gradually ceases, and gives place to the increasing day which succeeds in its room.

First the day-star arises; next follows the light of the sun itself, but dimly reflected, in the dawning of the day; but this light increases, and shines more and more, and the stars that served for light during the foregoing night, gradually go out, and their light ceases, as being now needless, till at length the sun rises, and enlightens the world by his own direct light, which increases as he ascends higher above the horizon, till the day-star itself gradually disappears; agreeable to what John says of himself, John 3:30. "He must increase, but I must decrease." John was the forerunner of Christ, and harbinger of the gospel-day; much as the morning-star is the forerunner of the sun. He had the most honorable office of any of the prophets; the other prophets foretold Christ to come, he revealed him as already come, and had the honour to be that servant who should come immediately before him, and actually introduce him, and even to be the instrument concerned in his solemn inauguration, as he was in baptizing him. He was the greatest of the prophets that came before Christ, as the morning-star is the brightest of all the stars, Matthew 11:11. He came to prepare men's hearts to receive that kingdom of God which Christ was about more fully to reveal and erect. Luke 1:17. "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

**Secondly, We may observe wherein his success appeared, viz. in that since he began his ministry, every man pressed into that kingdom of God which he preached. The greatness of his success appeared in two things:**

1. In the generalness of it, with regard to the subject, or the persons in whom the success appeared; every man. Here is a term of universality; but it is not to be taken as universal with regard to

individuals, but kinds; as such universal terms are often used in Scripture. When John preached, there was an extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit of God that attended his preaching. An uncommon awakening, and concern for salvation, appeared on the minds of all sorts of persons; and even in the most unlikely persons, and those from whom such a thing might least be expected; as the Pharisees, who were exceeding proud, and self-sufficient, and conceited of their own wisdom and righteousness, and looked on themselves fit to be teachers of others, and used to scorn to be taught; and the Sadducees, who were a kind of infidels, that denied any resurrection, angel, spirit, or any future state. So that John himself seems to be surprised to see them come to him, under such concern for their salvation; as in Matthew 3:7. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees come to his baptism, he said to them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" And besides these, the publicans, who were some of the most infamous sort of men, came to him, inquiring what they should do to be saved. And the soldiers, who were doubtless a very profane, loose, and profligate sort of persons, made the same inquiry, Luke 3:12, and 14. "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do?"

2. His success appeared in the manner in which his hearers sought the kingdom of God; they pressed into it. It is elsewhere set forth by their being violent for the kingdom of heaven, and taking it by force. Matthew 11:12. "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

**The Doctrine that I observe from the words is this,- "It concerns every one that would obtain the kingdom of God, to be pressing into it." -In discoursing of this subject, I would,**

**First, Show what is that way of seeking salvation that seems to be pointed forth in the expression of pressing into the**

**kingdom of God.**

**Secondly, Give the reasons why it concerns every one that would obtain the kingdom of God, to seek it in this way.- And then make application.**

**I. I would show what manner of seeking salvation seems to be denoted by "pressing into the kingdom of God."**

1. This expression denotes strength of desire. Men in general who live under the light of the gospel, and are not atheists, desire the kingdom of God; that is, they desire to go to heaven rather than to hell. Most of them indeed are not much concerned about it; but on the contrary, live a secure and careless life. And some who are many degrees above these, being under some degrees of the awakenings of God's Spirit, yet are not pressing into the kingdom of God. But they that may be said to be truly so, have strong desires to get out of a natural condition, and to get an interest in Christ. They have such a conviction of the misery of their present state, and of the extreme necessity of obtaining a better, that their minds are as it were possessed with and wrapped up in concern about it.

To obtain salvation is desired by them above all things in the world. This concern is so great that it very much shuts out other concerns. They used before to have the stream of their desires after other things, or, it may be, had their concern divided between this and them; but when they come to answer the expression of the text, of pressing into the kingdom of God, this concern prevails above all others; it lays other things low, and does in a manner engross the care of the mind. This seeking eternal life should not only be one concern that our souls are taken up about with other things; but salvation should be sought as the one thing needful, Luke 10:42. And as the one thing that is desired, Psalm 27:4.

2. Pressing into the kingdom of heaven denotes earnestness and firmness of resolution. There should be strength of resolution,

accompanying strength of desire, as it was in the psalmist, in the place just now referred to: "one thing have I desired, and that will I seek after." In order to a thorough engagedness of the mind in this affair, both these must meet together. Besides desires after salvation, there should be an earnest resolution in persons to pursue this good as much as lies in their power; to do all that in the use of their utmost strength they are able to do, in an attendance on every duty, and resisting and militating against all manner of sin, and to continue in such a pursuit.

There are two things needful in a person, in order to these strong resolutions; there must be a sense of the great importance and necessity of the mercy sought, and there must also be a sense of opportunity to obtain it, or the encouragement there is to seek it. The strength of resolution depends on the sense which God gives to the heart of these things. Persons without such a sense, may seem to themselves to take up resolutions; they may, as it were, force a promise to themselves, and say within themselves, "I will seek as long as I live, I will not give up till I obtain," when they do but deceive themselves. Their hearts are not in it; neither do they indeed take up any such resolution as they seem to themselves to do. It is the resolution of the mouth more than of the heart; their hearts are not strongly bent to fulfill what their mouth says. The firmness of the resolution lies in the fulness of the disposition of the heart to do what is resolved to be done. Those who are pressing into the kingdom of God, have a disposition of heart to do everything that is required, and that lies in their power to do, and to continue in it. They have not only earnestness, but steadiness of resolution: they do not seek with a wavering unsteady heart, by turns or fits, being off and on; but it is the constant bent of the soul, if possible, to obtain the kingdom of God.

3. By pressing into the kingdom of God is signified greatness of endeavor. It is expressed in Ecclesiastes 10:10. by doing what our hand finds to do with our might. And this is the natural and necessary consequence of the two forementioned things. Where

there is strength of desire, and firmness of resolution, there will be answerable endeavors. Persons thus engaged in their hearts will "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and will be violent for heaven; their practice will be agreeable to the counsel of the wise man, in Proverbs 2 at the beginning, "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." Here the earnestness of desire and strength of resolution is signified by inclining the ear to wisdom, and applying the heart to understanding; and the greatness of endeavor is denoted by crying after knowledge, and lifting up the voice for understanding; seeking her as silver, and searching for her as for hid treasures: such desires and resolutions, and such endeavors go together.

4. Pressing into the kingdom of God denotes an engagedness and earnestness, that is directly about that business of getting into the kingdom of God. Persons may be in very great exercise and distress of mind, and that about the condition of their souls; their thoughts and cares may be greatly engaged and taken up about things of a spiritual nature, and yet not be pressing into the kingdom of God, nor towards it. The exercise of their minds is not directly about the work of seeking salvation, in a diligent attendance on the means that God hath appointed in order to it, but something else that is beside their business; it may be God's decrees and secret purposes, prying into them, searching for signs whereby they may determine, or at least conjecture, what they are before God makes them known by their accomplishment. They distress their minds with fears that they be not elected, or that they have committed the unpardonable sin, or that their day is past, and that God has given them up to judicial and final hardness, and never intends to show them mercy; and therefore, that it is in vain for them to seek salvation. Or they entangle themselves about the doctrine of original sin, and other mysterious doctrines of religion that are above their comprehension.

Many persons that seem to be in great distress about a future eternal state, get much into a way of perplexing themselves with such things as these. When it is so, let them be never so much concerned and engaged in their minds, they cannot be said to be pressing towards the kingdom of God: because their exercise is not in their work, but rather that which tends to hinder them in their work. If they are violent, they are only working violently to entangle themselves, and lay blocks in their own way; their pressure is not forwards. Instead of getting along, they do but lose their time, and worse than merely lose it; instead of fighting with the giants that stand in the way to keep them out of Canaan, they spend away their time and strength in conflicting with shadows that appear by the wayside.

Hence we are not to judge of the hopefulness of the way that persons are in, or of the probability of their success in seeking salvation, only by the greatness of the concern and distress that they are in; for many persons have needless distresses that they had much better be without. It is thus very often with persons overrun with the distemper of melancholy: whence the adversary of souls is wont to take great advantage. But then are persons in the most likely way to obtain the kingdom of heaven, when the intent of their minds, and the engagedness of their spirits, be about their proper work and business, and all the bent of their souls is to attend on God's means, and to do what he commands and directs them to. The apostle tells us, I Corinthians 9:26. "that he did not fight as those that beat the air." Our time is short enough; we had not need to spend it in that which is nothing to the purpose. There are real difficulties and enemies enough for persons to encounter, to employ all their strength; they had not need to waste it in fighting with phantoms.

5. By pressing into the kingdom of God is denoted a breaking through opposition and difficulties. There is in the expression a plain intimation of difficulty. If there were no opposition, but the way was all clear and open, there would be no need of pressing to get along. They therefore that are pressing into the kingdom of God, go on with such engagedness, that they break through the difficulties that are in



the way. They are so set for salvation, that those things by which others are discouraged, and stopped, and turned back, do not stop them, but they press through them. Persons ought to be so resolved for heaven, that if by any means they can obtain, they will obtain. Whether those means be difficult or easy, cross or agreeable, if they are requisite means of salvation, they should be complied with. When anything is presented to be done, the question should not be, Is it easy or hard? is it agreeable to my carnal inclinations or interest, or against them? But is it a required means of my obtaining an interest in Jesus Christ, and eternal salvation? Thus the apostle, Philippians 3:11. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." He tells us there in the context what difficulties he broke through, that he suffered the loss of all things, and was willingly made conformable even to Christ's death, though that was attended with such extreme torment and ignominy.

He that is pressing into the kingdom of God, commonly finds many things in the way that are against the grain; but he is not stopped by the cross that lies before him, but takes it up, and carries it. Suppose there be something incumbent on him to do, that is cross to his natural temper, and irksome to him on that account; suppose something that he cannot do without suffering in his estate, or that he apprehends will look odd and strange in the eyes of others, and expose him to ridicule and reproach, or any thing that will offend a neighbor, and get his ill-will, or something that will be very cross to his own carnal appetite-he will press through such difficulties. Everything that is found to be a weight that hinders him in running this race he casts from him, though it be a weight of gold or pearls; yea, if it be a right hand or foot that offends him, he will cut them off, and will not stick at plucking out a right eye with his own hands. These things are insuperable difficulties to those who are not thoroughly engaged in seeking their salvation; they are stumbling-blocks that they never get over. But it is not so with him that presses into the kingdom of God. Those things (before he was thoroughly roused from his security) about which he was wont to have long parleyings and disputings with his own conscience-employing carnal

reason to invent arguments and pleas of excuse-he now sticks at no longer; he has done with this endless disputing and reasoning, and presses violently through all difficulties.

Let what will be in the way, heaven is what he must and will obtain, not if he can without difficulty, but if it be possible. He meets with temptation: the devil is often whispering in his ear, setting allurements before him, magnifying the difficulties of the work he is engaged in, telling him that they are insuperable, and that he can never conquer them, and trying all ways in the world to discourage him; but still he presses forward. God has given and maintains such an earnest spirit for heaven, that the devil cannot stop him in his course; he is not at leisure to lend an ear to what he has to say.-I come now,

1. To show why the kingdom of heaven should be sought in this manner.-It should be thus sought,

1. On account of the extreme necessity we are in of getting into the kingdom of heaven. We are in a perishing necessity of it; without it we are utterly and eternally lost. Out of the kingdom of God is no safety; there is no other hiding-place; this is the only city of refuge, in which we can be secure from the avenger that pursues all the ungodly. The vengeance of God will pursue, overtake, and eternally destroy, them that are not in this kingdom. All that are without this enclosure will be swallowed up in an overflowing fiery deluge of wrath. They may stand at the door and knock, and cry, Lord, Lord, open to us, in vain; they will be thrust back; and God will have no mercy on them; they shall be eternally left of him. His fearful vengeance will seize them; the devils will lay hold of them; and all evil will come upon them; and there will be none to pity or help; their case will be utterly desperate, and infinitely doleful. It will be a gone case with them; all offers of mercy and expressions of divine goodness will be finally withdrawn, and all hope will be lost. God will have no kind of regard to their well-being; will take no care of them to save them from any enemy, or any evil; but himself will be their

dreadful enemy, and will execute wrath with fury, and will take vengeance in an inexpressibly dreadful manner. Such as shall be in this case will be lost and undone indeed! They will be sunk down into perdition, infinitely below all that we can think. For who knows the power of God's anger? And who knows the misery of that poor worm, on whom that anger is executed without mercy?

2. On account of the shortness and uncertainty of the opportunity for getting into this kingdom. When a few days are past, all our opportunity for it will be gone. Our day is limited. God has set our bounds, and we know not where. While persons are out of this kingdom, they are in danger every hour of being overtaken with wrath. We know not how soon we shall get past that line, beyond which there is no work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom; and therefore we should do what we have to do with our might, Ecclesiastes 9:10.

3. On account of the difficulty of getting into the kingdom of God. There are innumerable difficulties in the way; such as few conquer: most of them that try have not resolution, courage, earnestness, and constancy enough; but they fail, give up, and perish. The difficulties are too many and too great for them that do not violently press forward. They never get along, but stick by the way; are turned aside, or turned back, and ruined. Matthew 7:14. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Luke 13:24. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

4. The possibility of obtaining. Though it be attended with so much difficulty, yet it is not a thing impossible. Acts 8:22. "If perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." II Timothy 2:25. "If peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." However sinful a person is, and whatever his circumstances are, there is, notwithstanding, a possibility of his salvation. He himself is capable of it, and God is able to accomplish it, and has mercy sufficient for it; and there is sufficient provision

made through Christ, that God may do it consistent with the honour of his majesty, justice, and truth. So that there is no want either of sufficiency in God, or capacity in the sinner, in order to this. The greatest and vilest most blind, dead, hard-hearted sinner living, is a subject capable of saving light and grace. Seeing therefore there is such a necessity of obtaining the kingdom of God, and so short a time, and such difficulty, and yet such a possibility, it may well induce us to press into it. Jonah 3:8, 9.

5. It is meet that the kingdom of heaven should be thus sought, because of the great excellency of it. We are willing to seek earthly things, of trifling value, with great diligence, and through much difficulty; it therefore certainly becomes us to seek that with great earnestness which is of infinitely greater worth and excellence. And how well may God expect and require it of us, that we should seek it in such a manner, in order to our obtaining it!

6. Such a manner of seeking is needful to prepare persons for the kingdom of God. Such earnestness and thoroughness of endeavors, is the ordinary means that God makes use of to bring persons to an acquaintance with themselves, to a sight of their own hearts, to a sense of their own helplessness, and to a despair in their own strength and righteousness. And such engagedness and constancy in seeking the kingdom of heaven, prepare the soul to receive it the more joyfully and thankfully, and the more highly to prize and value it when obtained. So that it is in mercy to us, as well as for the glory of his own name, that God has appointed such earnest seeking, to be the way in which he will bestow the kingdom of heaven.

### **APPLICATION**

The use I would make of this doctrine, is of exhortation to all Christless persons to press into the kingdom of God. Some of you are inquiring what you shall do? You seem to desire to know what is the way wherein salvation is to be sought, and how you may be likely to obtain it. You have now heard the way that the holy word of God

directs to. Some are seeking, but it cannot be said of them that they are pressing into the kingdom of heaven. There are many that in time past have sought salvation, but not in this manner, and so they never obtained, but are now gone to hell. Some of them sought it year after year, but failed of it, and perished at last. They were overtaken with divine wrath, and are now suffering the fearful misery of damnation, and have no rest day nor night, having no more opportunity to seek, but must suffer and be miserable throughout the never-ending ages of eternity. Be exhorted, therefore, not to seek salvation as they did, but let the kingdom of heaven suffer violence from you.

Here I would first answer an objection or two, and then proceed to give some directions how to press into the kingdom of God.

Objection. 1. Some may be ready to say, We cannot do this of ourselves; that strength of desire, and firmness of resolution, that have been spoken of, are out of our reach. If I endeavor to resolve and to seek with engagedness of spirit, I find I fail; my thoughts are presently off from the business, and I feel myself dull, and my engagedness relaxed, in spite of all I can do.

Answer. 1. Though earnestness of mind be not immediately in your power, yet the consideration of what has been now said of the need of it, may be a means of stirring you up to it. It is true, persons never will be thoroughly engaged in this business, unless it be by God's influence; but God influences persons by means. Persons are not stirred up to a thorough earnestness without some considerations that move them to it. And if persons can but be made sensible of the necessity of salvation, and also duly consider the exceeding difficulty of it, and the greatness of the opposition, and how short and uncertain the time is, but yet are sensible that they have an opportunity, and that there is a possibility of their obtaining, they will need no more in order to their being thoroughly engaged and resolved in this matter. If we see persons slack and unresolved, and unsteady, it is because they do not enough consider these things.

2. Though strong desires and resolutions of mind be not in your power, yet painfulness of endeavors is in your power. It is in your power to take pains in the use of means, yea very great pains. You can be very painful and diligent in watching your own heart, and striving against sin. Though there is all manner of corruption in the heart continually ready to work, yet you can very laboriously watch and strive against these corruptions; and it is in your power, with great diligence to attend the matter of your duty towards God and towards your neighbour. It is in your power to attend all ordinances, and all public and private duties of religion, and to do it with your might. It would be a contradiction to suppose that a man cannot do these things with all the might he has, though he cannot do them with more might than he has. The dullness and deadness of the heart, and slothfulness of disposition, do not hinder men being able to take pains, though it hinders their being willing. That is one thing wherein your laboriousness may appear, even striving against your own dullness. That men have a dead and sluggish heart, does not argue that they be not able to take pains; it is so far from that, that it gives occasion for pains. It is one of the difficulties in the way of duty, that persons have to strive with, and that gives occasion for struggling and labour. If there were no difficulties attended seeking salvation, there would be no occasion for striving; a man would have nothing to strive about. There is indeed a great deal of difficulty attending all duties required of those that would obtain heaven. It is an exceeding difficult thing for them to keep their thoughts; it is a difficult thing seriously, or to any good purpose, to consider matters of greatest importance; it is a difficult thing to hear, or read, or pray attentively. But it does not argue that a man cannot strive in these things because they are difficult; nay, he could not strive therein if there were not difficulty in them. For what is there excepting difficulties that any can have to strive or struggle with in any affair or business? Earnestness of mind, and diligence of endeavor, tend to promote each other. He that has a heart earnestly engaged, will take pains; and he that is diligent and painful in all duty, probably will not be so long before he finds the sensibleness of his heart and earnestness of his spirit greatly increased.

Objection 2. Some may object, that if they are earnest, and take a great deal of pains, they shall be in danger of trusting to what they do; they are afraid of doing their duty for fear of making a righteousness of it.

Answer. There is ordinarily no kind of seekers that trust so much to what they do, as slack and dull seekers. Though all seeking salvation, that have never been the subjects of a thorough humiliation, do trust in their own righteousness; yet some do it much more fully than others. Some though they trust in their own righteousness, yet are not quiet in it. And those who are most disturbed in their self-confidence, (and therefore in the likeliest way to be wholly brought off from it,) are not such as go on in a remiss way of seeking, but such as are most earnest and thoroughly engaged; partly because in such a way conscience is kept more sensible. A more awakened conscience will not rest so quietly in moral and religious duties, as one that is less awakened. A dull seeker's conscience will be in a great measure satisfied and quieted with his own works and performances; but one that is thoroughly awakened cannot be stilled or pacified with such things as these. In this way persons gain much more knowledge of themselves, and acquaintance with their own hearts, than in a negligent, slight way of seeking; for they have a great deal more experience of themselves. It is experience of ourselves, and finding what we are, that God commonly makes use of as the means of bringing us off from all dependence on ourselves. But men never get acquaintance with themselves so fast, as in the most earnest way of seeking. They that are in this way have more to engage them to think of their sins, and strictly to observe themselves, and have much more to do with their own hearts, than others. Such a one has much more experience of his own weakness, than another that does not put forth and try his strength; and will therefore sooner see himself dead in sin. Such a one, though he hath a disposition continually to be flying to his own righteousness, yet finds rest in nothing; he wanders about from one thing to another, seeking something to ease his disquieted conscience; he is driven from one refuge to another, goes from mountain to hill, seeking rest and finding none; and therefore

will the sooner prove that there is no rest to be found, nor trust to be put, in any creature whatsoever.

It is therefore quite a wrong notion that some entertain, that the more they do, the more they shall depend on it. Whereas the reverse is true; the more they do, or the more thorough they are in seeking, the less will they be likely to rest in their doings, and the sooner will they see the vanity of all that they do. So that persons will exceedingly miss it, if ever they neglect to do any duty either to God or man, whether it be any duty of religion, justice, or charity, under a notion of its exposing them to trust in their own righteousness. It is very true, that it is a common thing for persons, when they earnestly seek salvation, to trust in the pains that they take: but yet commonly those that go on in a more slight way, trust a great deal more securely to their dull services, than he that is pressing into the kingdom of God does to his earnestness. Men's slackness in religion, and their trust in their own righteousness, strengthen and establish one another. Their trust in what they have done, and what they now do, settles them in a slothful rest and ease, and hinders their being sensible of their need of rousing up themselves and pressing forward. And on the other hand, their negligence tends so to benumb them in such ignorance of themselves, that the most miserable refuges are stupidly rested in as sufficient. Therefore we see, that when persons have been going on for a long time in such a way, and God afterwards comes more thoroughly to awaken them, and to stir them up to be in good earnest, he shakes all their old foundations, and rouses them out of their old resting places; so that they cannot quiet themselves with those things that formerly kept them secure. I would now proceed to give some directions how you should press into the kingdom of God.

1. Be directed to sacrifice every thing to your soul's eternal interest. Let seeking this be so much your bent, and what you are so resolved in, that you will make every thing give place to it. Let nothing stand before your resolution of seeking the kingdom of God. Whatever it be that you used to look upon as a convenience, or comfort, or ease, or



thing desirable on any account, if it stands in the way of this great concern, let it be dismissed without hesitation; and if it be of that nature that it is likely always to be a hinderance, then wholly have done with it, and never entertain any expectation from it more. If in time past you have, for the sake of worldly gain, involved yourself in more care and business than you find to be consistent with your being so thorough in the business of religion as you ought to be, then get into some other way, though you suffer in your worldly interest by it. Or if you have heretofore been conversant with company that you have reason to think have been and will be a snare to you, and a hinderance to this great design in any wise, break off from their society, however it may expose you to reproach from your old companions, or let what will be the effect of it. Whatever it be that stands in the way of your most advantageously seeking salvation-whether it be some dear sinful pleasure, or strong carnal appetite, or credit and honour, or the good-will of some persons whose friendship you desire, and whose esteem and liking you have highly valued-and though there be danger, if you do as you ought, that you shall looked upon by them as odd and ridiculous, and become contemptible in their eyes-or if it be your ease and indolence and aversion to continual labour; or your outward convenience in any respect, whereby you might avoid difficulties of one kind or other-let all go; offer up all such things together, as it were, in one sacrifice, to the interest of your soul. Let nothing stand in competition with this, but make every thing to fall before it. If the flesh must be crossed, then cross it, spare it not, crucify it, and do not be afraid of being too cruel to it. Galatians 5:24. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." Have no dependence on any worldly enjoyment whatsoever. Let salvation be the one thing with you. This is what is certainly required of you: and this is what many stick at; this giving up other things for salvation, is a stumbling-block that few get over. While others pressed into the kingdom of God at the preaching of John the Baptist, Herod was pretty much stirred up by his preaching. It is said, he heard him, and observed him, and did many things; but when he came to tell him that he must part with his beloved Herodias, here he stuck; this he never would yield to, Mark

7:18-20. The rich young man was considerably concerned for salvation; and accordingly was a very strict liver in many things: but when Christ came to direct him to go and sell all that he had, and give to the poor, and come and follow him, he could not find in his heart to comply with it, but went away sorrowful. He had great possessions, and set his heart much on his estate, and could not bear to part with it. It may be, if Christ had directed him only to give away a considerable part of his estate, he would have done it; yea, perhaps, if he had bid him part with half of it, he would have complied with it: but when he directed him to throw up all, he could not grapple with such a proposal. Herein the straitness of the gate very much consists; and it is on this account that so many seek to enter in, and are not able. There are many that have a great mind to salvation, and spend great part of their time in wishing they had it, but they will not comply with the necessary means.

2. Be directed to forget the things that are behind: that is, not to keep thinking and making much of what you have done, but let your mind be wholly intent on what you have to do. In some sense you ought to look back; you should look back to your sins. Jeremiah 2:23. "See thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done." You should look back on the wretchedness of your religious performances, and consider how you have fallen short in them; how exceedingly polluted all your duties have been, and how justly God might reject and loathe them, and you for them. But you ought not to spend your time in looking back, as many persons do, thinking how much they have done for their salvation; what great pains they have taken, how that they have done what they can, and do not see how they can do more; how long a time they have been seeking, and how much more they have done than others, and even than such and such who have obtained mercy. They think with themselves how hardly God deals with them, that he does not extend mercy to them, but turns a deaf ear to their cries; and hence discourage themselves, and complain of God. Do not thus spend your time in looking back on what is past, but look forward, and consider what is before you; consider what it is that you can do, and what it is necessary that you should do, and what God calls you

still to do, in order to your own salvation. The apostle, in the third chapter to the Philippians, tells us what things he did while a Jew, how much he had to boast of, if any could boast; but he tells us, that he forgot those things, and all other things that were behind, and reached forth towards the things that were before, pressing forwards towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

3. Labour to get your heart thoroughly disposed to go on and hold out to the end. Many that seem to be earnest have not a heart thus disposed. It is a common thing for persons to appear greatly affected for a little while; but all is soon past away, and there is no more to be seen of it. Labour therefore to obtain a thorough willingness and preparation of spirit, to continue seeking, in the use of your utmost endeavours, without limitation; and do not think your whole life too long. And in order to this, be advised to two things,

(1.) Remember that if ever God bestows mercy upon you, he will use his sovereign pleasure about the time when. He will bestow it on some in a little time, and on others not till they have sought it long. If other persons are soon enlightened and comforted, while you remain long in darkness, there is no other way but for you to wait. God will act arbitrarily in this matter, and you cannot help it. You must even be content to wait, in a way of laborious and earnest striving, till his time comes. If you refuse, you will but undo yourself; and when you shall hereafter find yourself undone, and see that your case is past remedy, how will you condemn yourself for foregoing a great probability of salvation, only because you had not the patience to hold out, and was not willing to be at the trouble of a persevering labour! And what will it avail before God or your own conscience to say, that you could not bear to be obliged to seek salvation so long, when God bestowed it on others that sought it but for a very short time? Though God may have bestowed the testimonies of his favour on others in a few days or hours after they have begun earnestly to seek it, how does that alter the case as to you, if there proves to be a necessity of your laboriously seeking many years before you obtain

them? Is salvation less worth taking a great deal of pains for, because, through the sovereign pleasure of God, others have obtained it with comparatively little pains? If there are two persons, the one of which has obtained converting grace with comparative ease, and another that has obtained it after continuing for many years in the greatest and most earnest labours after it, how little difference does it make at last, when once salvation is obtained! Put all the labour and pains, the long-continued difficulties and strugglings, of the one in the scale against salvation, and how little does it subtract; and put the ease with which the other has obtained in the scale with salvation, and how little does it add! What is either added or subtracted is lighter than vanity, and a thing worthy of no consideration, when compared with that infinite benefit that is obtained. Indeed if you were ten thousand years, and all that time should strive and press forward with as great earnestness as ever a person did for one day, all this would bear no proportion to the importance of the benefit; and it will doubtless appear little to you, when once you come to be in actual possession of eternal glory, and to see what that eternal misery is which you have escaped. You must not think much of your pains, and of the length of time; you must press towards the kingdom of God, and do your utmost, and hold out to the end, and learn to make no account of it when you have done. You must undertake the business of seeking salvation upon these terms, and with no other expectations than this, that if ever God bestows mercy it will be in his own time; and not only so, but also that when you have done all, God will not hold himself obliged to show you mercy at last.

(2.) Endeavour now thoroughly to weigh in your mind the difficulty, and to count the cost of perseverance in seeking salvation. You that are now setting out in this business, (as there are many here who have very lately set about it;-Praised be the name of God that he has stirred you up to it!) be exhorted to attend this direction. Do not undertake in this affair with any other thought but of giving yourself wholly to it for the remaining part of your life, and going through many and great difficulties in it. Take heed that you do not engage

secretly upon this condition, that you shall obtain in a little time, promising yourself that it shall be within this present season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, or with any other limitation of time whatsoever. Many, when they begin, (seeming to set out very earnestly,) do not expect that they shall need to seek very long, and so do not prepare themselves for it. And therefore, when they come to find it otherwise, and meet with unexpected difficulty, they are found unguarded, and easily overthrown. But let me advise you all who are now seeking salvation, not to entertain any self-flattering thoughts; but weigh the utmost difficulties of perseverance, and be provided for them, having your mind fixed in it to go through them, let them be what they will. Consider now beforehand, how tedious it would be, with utmost earnestness and labour, to strive after salvation for many years, in the mean time receiving no joyful or comfortable evidence of your having obtained. Consider what a great temptation to discouragement there probably would be in it; how apt you would be to yield the case; how ready to think that it is in vain for you to seek any longer, and that God never intends to show you mercy, in that he has not yet done it; how apt you would be to think with yourself, "What an uncomfortable life do I live! How much more unpleasantly do I spend my time than others that do not perplex their minds about the things of another world, but are at ease, and take the comfort of their worldly enjoyments!" Consider what a temptation there would probably be in it, if you saw others brought in that began to seek the kingdom of heaven long after you, rejoicing in a hope and sense of God's favour, after but little pains and a short time of awakening; while you, from day to day, and from year to year, seemed to labour in vain. Prepare for such temptations now. Lay in beforehand for such trials and difficulties, that you may not think any strange thing has happened when they come.

I hope that those who have given attention to what has been said, have by this time conceived, in some measure, what is signified by the expression in the text, and after what manner they ought to press into the kingdom of God. Here is this to induce you to a compliance with what you have been directed to; if you sit still, you die; if you go

backward, behold you shall surely die; if you go forward, you may live. And though God has not bound himself to any thing that a person does while destitute of faith, and out of Christ, yet there is great probability, that in a way of hearkening to this counsel you will live; and that by pressing onward, and persevering, you will at last, as it were by violence, take the kingdom of heaven. Those of you who have not only heard the directions given, but shall through God's merciful assistance, practise according to them, are those that probably will overcome. These we may well hope at last to see standing with the Lamb on mount Sion, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands; when all your labour and toil will be abundantly compensated, and you will not repent that you have taken so much pains, and denied yourself much, and waited so long. This self-denial, this waiting, will then look little, and vanish into nothing in your eyes, being all swallowed up in the first minute's enjoyment of that glory that you will then possess, and will uninterruptedly possess and enjoy to all eternity.

4th Direction. Improve the present season of the pouring out of the Spirit of God on this town. Prudence is any affair whatsoever consists very much in minding and improving our opportunities. If you would have spiritual prosperity, you must exercise prudence in the concerns of your souls, as well as in outward concerns when you seek outward prosperity. The prudent husbandman will observe his opportunities; he will improve seed-time and harvest; he will make his advantage of the showers and shines of heaven. The prudent merchant will discern his opportunities; he will not be idle on a market-day; he is careful not to let slip his seasons for enriching himself: So will those who prudently seek the fruits of righteousness, and the merchandise of wisdom, improve their opportunities for their eternal wealth and happiness.

God is pleased at this time, in a very remarkable manner, to pour out his Spirit amongst us; (glory be to his name!) You that have a mind to obtain converting grace, and to go to heaven when you die, now is your season! Now, if you have any sort of prudence for your own

salvation, and have not a mind to go to hell, improve this season! Now is the accepted time! Now is the day of salvation! You that in time past have been called upon, and have turned a deaf ear to God's voice, and long stood out and resisted his commands and counsels, hear God's voice today, while it is called today! Do not harden your hearts at such a day as this! Now you have a special and remarkable price put into your hands to get wisdom, if you have but a heart to improve it.

God hath his certain days or appointed seasons of exercising both mercy and judgment. There are some remarkable times of wrath, laid out by God for his awful visitation, and the executions of his anger; which times are called days of vengeance, Proverbs 6:34. Wherein God will visit sin, Exodus 32:34. And so, on the contrary, God has laid out in his sovereign counsels seasons of remarkable mercy, wherein he will manifest himself in the exercises of his grace and loving-kindness, more than at other times. Such times in Scripture are called by way of eminency, accepted times, and days of salvation, and also days of God's visitation; because they are days wherein God will visit in a way of mercy; as in Luke 19:44. "And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." It is such a time now in this town; it is with us a day of God's gracious visitation. It is indeed a day of grace with us as long as we live in this world, in the enjoyment of the means of grace; but such a time as this is especially, and in a distinguishing manner, a day of grace. There is a door of mercy always standing open for sinners; but such a day as this, God opens an extraordinary door.

We are directed to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near, Isaiah 55:6. If you that are hitherto Christless, be not strangely besotted and infatuated, you will by all means improve such an opportunity as this to get heaven, when heaven is brought so near, when the fountain is opened in the midst of us in so extraordinary a manner. Now is the time to obtain a

supply of the necessities of your poor perishing souls! This is the day for sinners that have a mind to be converted before they die, when God is dealing forth so liberally and bountifully amongst us; when conversion and salvation work is going on amongst us from sabbath to sabbath, and many are pressing into the kingdom of God! Now do not stay behind, but press in amongst the rest! Others have been stirred up to be in good earnest, and have taken heaven by violence; be entreated to follow their example, if you would have a part of the inheritance with them, and would not be left at the great day, when they are taken!

How should it move you to consider that you have this opportunity now in your hands! You are in the actual possession of it! If it were past, it would not be in your power to recover it, or in the power of any creature to bring it back for you; but it is not past; it is now, at this day. Now is the accepted time, even while it is called today! Will you sit still at such a time? Will you sleep in such a harvest? Will you deal with a slack hand, and stay behind out of mere sloth, or love to some lust, or lothness to grapple with some small difficulty, or to put yourself a little out of your way, when so many are flowing to the goodness of the Lord? You are behind still; and so you will be in danger of being left behind, when the whole number is completed that are to enter in, if you do not earnestly bestir yourself! To be left behind at the close of such a season as this, will be awful-next to being left behind on that day when God's saints shall mount up as with wings to meet the Lord in the air-and will be what will appear very threatening of it.

God is now calling you in an extraordinary manner: and it is agreeable to the will and word of Christ, that I should now, in his name, call you, as one set over you, and sent to you to that end; so it is his will that you should hearken to what I say, as his voice. I therefore beseech you in Christ's stead now to press into the kingdom of God! Whoever you are, whether young or old, small or great; if you are a great sinner, if you have been a backslider, if you have quenched the Spirit, be who you will, do not stand making



objections, but arise, apply yourself to your work! Do what you have to do with your might. Christ is calling you before, and holding forth his grace, and everlasting benefits, and wrath is pursuing you behind; wherefore fly for your life, and look not behind you! But here I would particularly direct myself to several sorts of persons.

**I. To those sinners who are in a measure awakened, and are concerned for their salvation. You have reason to be glad that you have such an opportunity, and to prize it above gold. To induce you to prize and improve it, consider several things.**

1. God has doubtless a design now to deal forth saving blessings to a number. God has done it to some already, and it is not probable that he has yet finished his work amongst us: we may well hope still to see others brought out of darkness into marvellous light. And therefore,

2. God comes this day, and knocks at many persons' doors, and at your door among the rest. God seems to be come in a very unusual manner amongst us, upon a gracious and merciful design; a design of saving a number of poor miserable souls out of a lost and perishing condition, and of bringing them into a happy state and eternal glory! This is offered to you, not only as it has always been in the word and ordinances, but by the particular influences of the Spirit of Christ awakening you! This special offer is made to many amongst us; and you are not passed over. Christ has not forgot you; but has come to your door; and there as it were stands waiting for you to open to him. If you have wisdom and discretion to discern your own advantage, you will know that now is your opportunity.

3. How much more easily converting grace is obtained at such a time, than at other times! The work is equally easy with God at all times; but there is far less difficulty in the way as to men at such a time, than at other times. It is, as I said before, a day of God's gracious visitation; a day that he has as it were set apart for the more liberally and bountifully dispensing of his grace; a day wherein God's hand is

opened wide. Experience shows it. God seems to be more ready to help, to give proper convictions, to help against temptations, and let in divine light. He seems to carry on his work with a more glorious discovery of his power, and Satan is more chained up than at other times. Those difficulties and temptations that persons before struck at, from year to year, they are soon helped over. The work of God is carried on with greater speed and swiftness, and there are often instances of sudden conversion at such a time. So it was in the apostles' days, when there was a time of the most extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit that ever was. How quick and sudden were conversions in those days! Such instances as that of the jailer abounded then, in fulfillment of that prophecy, Isaiah 66:7, 8. "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came she was delivered of a man-child. Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." So it is in some degree, whenever there is an extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit of God; more or less so, in proportion to the greatness of that effusion. There is seldom such quick work made of it at other times. Persons are not so soon delivered from their various temptations and entanglements; but are much longer wandering in a wilderness, and groping in darkness. And yet,

4. There are probably some here present that are now concerned about their salvation, that will never obtain. It is not to be supposed that all that are now moved and awakened, will ever be savingly converted. Doubtless there are many now seeking that will not be able to enter. When has it been so in times past, when there has been times of great outpourings of God's Spirit, but that many who for a while have inquired with others, what they should do to be saved, have failed, and afterwards grown hard and secure? All of you that are now awakened, have a mind to obtain salvation, and probably hope to get a title to heaven, in the time of this present moving of God's Spirit: but yet, (though it be awful to be spoken, and awful to be thought) we have no reason to think any other, than that some of you will burn in hell to all eternity. You all are afraid of hell, and

seem at present disposed to take pains to be delivered from it; and yet it would be unreasonable to think any other, than that some of you will have your portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Though there are so many that seem to obtain so easily, having been but a little while under convictions, yet, for all that, some never will obtain. Some will soon lose the sense of things they now have; though their awakenings seem to be very considerable for the present, they will not hold; they have not hearts disposed to hold on through very many difficulties. Some that have set out for heaven, and hope as much as others to obtain, are indeed but slighty and slack, even now, in the midst of such a time as this. And others, who for the present seem to be more in earnest, will probably, before long, decline and fail, and gradually return to be as they were before. The convictions of some seem to be great, while that which is the occasion of their convictions is new; which, when that begins to grow old, will gradually decay and wear off. Thus, it may be, the occasion of your awakening has been the hearing of the conversion of some person, or seeing so extraordinary a dispensation of Providence as this in which God now appears amongst us; but by and by the newness and freshness of these things will be gone, and so will not affect your mind as now they do; and it may be your convictions will go away with it.

Though this be a time wherein God doth more liberally bestow his grace, and so a time of greater advantage for obtaining it; yet there seems to be, upon some accounts, greater danger of backsliding, than when persons are awakened at other times. For commonly such extraordinary times do not last long; and then when they cease, there are multitudes that lose their convictions as it were together.

We speak of it as a happy thing, that God is pleased to cause such a time amongst us, and so it is indeed: but there are some to whom it will be no benefit; it will be an occasion of their greater misery; they will wish they had never seen this time; it will be more tolerable for those that never saw it, or any thing like it, in the day of judgment, than for them. It is an awful consideration, that there are probably those here, whom the great Judge will hereafter call to a strict

account about this very thing, why they no better improved this opportunity, when he set open the fountain of his grace, and so loudly called upon them, and came and strove with them in particular, by the awakening influences of his Spirit; and they will have no good account to give to the Judge, but their mouths will be stopped, and they will stand speechless before him.

You had need therefore to be earnest, and very resolved in this affair, that you may not be one of those who shall thus fail, that you may so fight, as not uncertainly, and so run, as that you may win the prize.

5. Consider in what sad circumstances times of extraordinary effusion of God's Spirit commonly leave persons, when they leave them unconverted. They find them in a doleful, because in a natural, condition; but commonly leave them in a much more doleful condition. They are left dreadfully hardened, and with a great increase of guilt, and their souls under a more strong dominion and possession of Satan. And frequently seasons of extraordinary advantage for salvation, when they pass over persons, and they do not improve them, nor receive any good in them, seal their damnation. As such seasons leave them, God for ever leaves them, and gives them up to judicial hardness. Luke 19:41, 42. "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

6. Consider, that it is very uncertain whether you will ever see such another time as this. If there should be such another time, it is very uncertain whether you will live to another time, it is very uncertain whether you will ever whether you will live to see it. Many that are now concerned for their salvation amongst us, will probably be in their graves, and it may be in hell, before that time; and if you should miss this opportunity, it may be so with you. And what good will that do you, to have the Spirit of God poured out upon earth, in the place where you once lived, while you are tormented in hell? What will it avail you, that others are crying, What shall I do to be

saved? while you are shut up for ever in the bottomless pit, and are wailing and gnashing your teeth in everlasting burnings?

Wherefore improve this opportunity, while God is pouring out his Spirit, and you are on earth, and while you dwell in the place where the Spirit of God is thus poured out, and you yourself have the awakening influences of it, that you may never wail and gnash your teeth in hell, but may sing in heaven for ever, with others that are redeemed from amongst men, and redeemed amongst us.

7. If you should see another such time, it will be under far greater disadvantages than now. You will probably then be much older, and will have more hardened your heart; and so will be under less probability of receiving good. Some persons are so hardened in sin, and so left of God, that they can live through such a time as this, and not be much awakened or affected by it; they can stand their ground, and be but little moved. And so it may be with you, by another such time, if there should be another amongst us, and you should live to see it. The case in all probability will be greatly altered with you by that time.

If you should continue Christless and graceless till then, you will be much further from the kingdom of God, and much deeper involved in snares and misery; and the devil will probably have a vastly greater advantage against you, to tempt and confound you.

8. We do not know but that God is now gathering in his elect, before some great and sore judgment. It has been God's manner before he casts off a visible people, or brings some great and destroying judgments upon them, first to gather in his elect, that they may be secure. So it was before the casting off the Jews from being God's people. There was first a very remarkable pouring out of the Spirit, and gathering in of the elect, by the preaching of the apostles and evangelists, as we read in the beginning of the Acts: but after this the harvest and its gleanings were over, the rest were blinded, and hardened; the gospel had little success amongst them, and the nation

was given up, and cast off from being God's people, and their city and land was destroyed by the Romans in a terrible manner; and they have been cast off by God now for a great many ages, and still remain a hardened and rejected people. So we read in the beginning of the 7th chapter of the Revelations, that God, when about to bring destroying judgments on the earth, first sealed his servants in the forehead. He set his seal upon the hearts of the elect, gave them the saving influences and indwelling of his Spirit, by which they were sealed to the day of redemption. Revelation 7:1-3. "And after these things, I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."

And this may be the case now, that God is about, in a great measure, to forsake this land, and give up this people, and to bring most awful and overwhelming judgments upon it, and that he is now gathering in his elect, to secure them from the calamity. The state of the nation, and of this land, never looked so threatening of such a thing as at this day. The present aspect of things exceedingly threatens vital religion, and even those truths that are especially the foundation of it, out of this land. If it should be so, how awful will the case be with those that shall be left, and not brought in, while God continues the influences of his Spirit, to gather in those that are to be redeemed from amongst us!

9. If you neglect the present opportunity, and be finally unbelieving, those that are converted in this time of the pouring out of God's Spirit will rise up in judgment against you. Your neighbors, your relations, acquaintance, or companions that are converted, will that day appear against you. They will not only be taken while you are left, mounting up with joy to meet the Lord in the air-at his right

hand with glorious saints and angels, while you are at the left with devils-but how they will rise up in judgment against you.

However friendly you have been together, and have taken pleasure in one another's company, and have often familiarly conversed together, they will then surely appear against you. They will rise up as witnesses, and will declare what a precious opportunity you had, and did not improve; how you continued unbelieving, and rejected the offers of a Saviour, when those offers were made in so extraordinary a manner, and when so many others were prevailed upon to accept of Christ; how you was negligent and slack, and did not know the things that belonged to your peace, in that your day. And not only so, but they shall be your judges, as assessors with the great Judge; and as such will appear against you; they will be with the Judge in passing sentence upon you. I Corinthians 6:2. "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" Christ will admit them to the honour of judging the world with him: "They shall sit with him in his throne," Revelation 3:21. "They shall sit with Christ in his throne of government, and they shall sit with him in his throne of judgment, and shall be judges with him when you are judged, and as such shall condemn you.

10. And lastly, You do not know that you shall live through the present time of the pouring out of God's Spirit. You may be taken away in the midst of it, or you may be taken away in the beginning of it; as God in his providence is putting you in mind, by the late instance of death in a young person in the town.\* God has of late been very awful in his dealings with us, in the repeated deaths of young persons amongst us. This should stir every one up to be in the more haste to press into the kingdom of God, that so you may be safe whenever death comes. This is a blessed season and opportunity; but you do not know how little of it you may have. You may have much less of it than others; may by death be suddenly snatched away from all advantages that are here enjoyed for the good of souls. Therefore make haste, and escape for thy life. One moment's delay is dangerous; for wrath is pursuing, and divine vengeance hanging over

every uncovered person.

Let these considerations move every one to be improving this opportunity, that while others receive saving good, and are made heirs of eternal glory, you may not be left behind, in the same miserable doleful circumstances in which you came into the world, a poor captive to sin and Satan, a lost sheep, a perishing, undone creature, sinking down into everlasting perdition; that you may not be one of them spoken of, Jeremiah 17:6. "That shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good comes." If you do not improve this opportunity, remember I have told you, you will hereafter lament it; and if you do not lament it in this world, then I will leave it with you to remember it throughout a miserable eternity.

**II. I would address myself to such as yet remain unawakened. It is an awful thing that there should be any one person remaining secure amongst us at such a time as this; but yet it is to be feared that there are some of this sort. I would here a little expostulate with such persons.**

\* Joseph Clark's wife, a young woman lately married, that died suddenly the week before this was delivered.

1. When do you expect that it will be more likely that you should be awakened and wrought upon than now? You are in a Christless condition; and yet without doubt intend to go to heaven; and therefore intend to be converted some time before you die; but this is not to be expected till you are first awakened, and deeply concerned about the welfare of your soul, and brought earnestly to seek God's converting grace. And when do you intend that this shall be? How do you lay things out in your own mind, or what projection have you about this matter? Is it ever so likely that a person will be awakened, as at such a time as this? How do we see many, who before were secure, now roused out of their sleep, and crying, What shall I do to be saved? But you are yet secure! Do you flatter yourself that it will be more likely you should be awakened when it is a dull and dead time? Do you lay matters out thus in your own mind, that though you



are senseless when others are generally awakened, that yet you shall be awakened when others are generally senseless? Or do you hope to see another such time of the pouring out of God's Spirit hereafter? And do you think it will be more likely that you should be wrought upon then, than now? And why do you think so? Is it because then you shall be so much older than you are now, and so that your heart will be grown softer and more tender with age? or because you will then have stood out so much longer against the calls of the gospel, and all means of grace? Do you think it more likely that God will give you the needed influences of his Spirit then, than now, because then you will have provoked him so much more, and your sin and guilt will be so much greater? And do you think it will be any benefit to you, to stand it out through the present season of grace, as proof against the extraordinary means of awakening there are? Do you think that this will be a good preparation for a saving work of the Spirit hereafter?

2. What means do you expect to be awakened by? As to the awakening awful things of the word of God, you have had those set before you times without number, in the most moving manner that the dispensers of the word have been capable of. As to particular solemn warnings, directed to those that are in your circumstances, you have had them frequently, and have them now from time to time. Do you expect to be awakened by awful providences? Those also you have lately had, of the most awakening nature, one after another. Do you expect to be moved by the deaths of others? We have lately had repeated instances of these. There have been deaths of old and young: the year has been remarkable for the deaths of young persons in the bloom of life; and some of them very sudden deaths. Will the conversion of others move you? There is indeed scarce any thing that is found to have so great a tendency to stir persons up as this: and this you have been tried with of late in frequent instances; but are hitherto proof against it. Will a general pouring out of the Spirit, and seeing a concern about salvation amongst all sorts of people, do it? This means you now have, but without effect. Yea, you have all these things together; you have the

solemn warnings of God's word, and awful instances of death, and the conversion of others, and see a general concern about salvation: but all together do not move you to any great concern about your own precious, immortal, and miserable soul. Therefore consider by what means it is that you expect ever to be awakened.

You have heard that it is probable some who are now awakened, will never obtain salvation; how dark then does it look upon you that remain stupidly unawakened! Those who are not moved at such a time as this, come to adult age, have reason to fear whether they are not given up to judicial hardness. I do not say they have reason to conclude it, but they have reason to fear it. How dark doth it look upon you, that God comes and knocks at so many persons' doors, and misses yours! that God is giving the strivings of his Spirit so generally amongst us, while you are left senseless!

3. Do you expect to obtain salvation without ever seeking it? If you are sensible that there is a necessity of your seeking in order to obtaining, and ever intend to seek, one would think you could not avoid it at such a time as this. Inquire therefore, whether you intend to go to heaven, living all your days a secure, negligent, careless life.- Or,

4. Do you think you can bear the damnation of hell? Do you imagine that you can tolerably endure the devouring fire, and everlasting burnings? Do you hope that you shall be able to grapple with the vengeance of God Almighty, when he girds himself with strength, and clothes himself with wrath? Do you think to strengthen yourself against God, and to be able to make your part good with him? I Corinthians 10:22. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" Do you flatter yourself that you shall find out ways for your ease and support, and to make it out tolerably well, to bear up your spirit in those everlasting burnings that are prepared for the devil and his angels? Ezekiel 22:14. "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?"-

It is a difficult thing to conceive what such Christless persons think, that are unconcerned at such a time.

### **III. I would direct myself to them who are grown considerably into years, and are yet in a natural condition.**

I would now take occasion earnestly to exhort you to improve this extraordinary opportunity, and press into the kingdom of God. You have lost many advantages that once you had, and now have not the same advantages that others have. The case is very different with you from what it is with many of your neighbours. You, above all, had need to improve such an opportunity. Now is the time for you to bestir yourself, and take the kingdom of heaven!-Consider,

1. Now there seems to be a door opened for old sinners. Now God is dealing forth freely to all sorts: his hand is opened wide, and he does not pass by old ones so much as he used to do. You are not under such advantages as others who are younger; but yet, so wonderfully has God ordered it, that now you are not destitute of great advantage. Though old in sin, God has put a new and extraordinary advantage in your hands. O! improve this price you have to get wisdom. You that have been long seeking to enter in at the strait gate and yet remain without, now take your opportunity and press in! You that have been long in the wilderness, fighting with various temptations, labouring under discouragements, ready to give up the case, and have been often tempted to despair, now, behold the door that God opens for you! Do not give way to discouragements now; this is not a time for it. Do not spend time in thinking, that you have done what you can already, and that you are not elected, and in giving way to other perplexing, weakening, disheartening temptations. Do not waste away this precious opportunity in such a manner. You have no time to spare for such things as these; God calls you now to something else. Improve this time in seeking and striving for salvation, and not in that which tends to hinder it.-It is no time now for you to stand talking with the devil; but hearken to God, and apply yourself to that which he does now so loudly call you to.

Some of you have often lamented the loss of past opportunities, particularly, the loss of the time of youth, and have been wishing that you had so good an opportunity again; and have been ready to say, "O! if I was young again, how would I improve such an advantage!" That opportunity which you have had in time past is irrecoverable; you can never have it again; but God can give you other advantages of another sort, that are very great, and he is so doing at this day. He is now putting a new opportunity into your hands; though not of the same kind with that which you once had, and have lost, yet in some respects as great of another kind. If you lament your folly in neglecting and losing past opportunities, then do not be guilty of the folly of neglecting the opportunity which God now gives you. This opportunity you could not have purchased, if you would have given all that you had in the world for it. But God is putting it into your hands himself, of his own free and sovereign mercy, without your purchasing it. Therefore when you have it, do not neglect it.

2. It is a great deal more likely with respect to such persons than others, that this is their last time. There will be a last time of special offer of salvation to impenitent sinners-"God's Spirit shall not always strive with man," Genesis 6:3. God sometimes continues long knocking at the doors of wicked men's hearts; but there are the last knocks, and the last calls that ever they shall have. And sometimes God's last calls are the loudest; and then if sinners do not hearken, he finally leaves them. How long has God been knocking at many of your doors that are old in sin! It is a great deal more likely that these are his last knocks. You have resisted God's Spirit in times past, and have hardened your heart once and again; but God will not be thus dealt with always. There is danger, that if now, after so long a time, you will not hearken, he will utterly desert you, and leave you to walk in your own counsels.

It seems by God's providence, as though God had yet an elect number amongst old sinners in this place, that perhaps he is now about to bring in. It looks as though there were some that long lived under Mr. Stoddard's ministry, that God has not utterly cast off,

though they stood it out under such great means as they then enjoyed. It is to be hoped that God will now bring in a remnant from among them. But it is more likely that God is now about finishing with them, one way or other, for their having been so long the subjects of such extraordinary means. You have seen former times of the pouring out of God's Spirit upon the town, when others were taken and you left, others were called out of darkness into marvelous light, and were brought into a glorious and happy state, and you saw not good when good came. How dark will your circumstances appear, if you shall also stand it out through this opportunity, and still be left behind! Take heed that you be not of those spoken of, Hebrews 6:7, 8. that are like the "earth that has rain coming oft upon it, and only bears briers and thorns." As we see there are some pieces of ground, the more showers of rain fall upon them, the more fruitful seasons there are, the more do the briers, and other useless and hurtful plants, that are rooted in them, grow and flourish. Of such ground the apostle says, "It is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." The way that the husbandman takes with such ground, is, to set fire to it, to burn up the growth of it.-If you miss this opportunity, there is danger that you will be utterly rejected, and that your end will be to be burned. And if this is to be, it is to be feared, that you are not far from, but nigh unto, cursing.

Those of you that are already grown old in sin, and are now under awakenings, when you feel your convictions begin to go off, if ever that should be, then remember what you have now been told; it may well then strike you to the heart!

**IV. I would direct the advice to those that are young, and now under their first special convictions. I would earnestly urge such to improve this opportunity, and press into the kingdom of God.-Consider two things,**

1. You have all manner of advantages now centering upon you. It is a time of great advantage for all; but your advantages are above others. There is no other sort of persons that have now so great and happy

an opportunity as you have.-You have the great advantage that is common to all who live in this place, viz. That now it is a time of the extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit of God. And have you not that great advantage, the awakening influences of the Spirit of God on you in particular? and besides, you have this peculiar advantage, that you are now in your youth. And added to this, you have another unspeakable advantage, that you now are under your first convictions. Happy is he that never has hardened his heart, and blocked up his own way to heaven by backsliding, and has now the awakening influences of God's Spirit, if God does but enable him thoroughly to improve them! Such above all in the world bid fair for the kingdom of God. God is wont on such, above any kind of persons, as it were easily and readily to bestow the saving grace and comforts of his Spirit. Instances of speedy and sudden conversion are most commonly found among such. Happy are they that have the Spirit of God with them, and never have quenched it, if they did but know the price they have in their hands!

If you have a sense of your necessity of salvation, and the great worth and value of it, you will be willing to take the surest way to it, or that which has the greatest probability of success; and that certainly is, thoroughly to improve your first convictions. If you so go, it is not likely that you will fail; there is the greatest probability that you will succeed.-What is it not worth, to have such an advantage in one's hands for obtaining eternal life? The present season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, is the first that many of you who are now under awakenings have ever seen, since you came to years of understanding. On which account, it is the greatest opportunity that ever you had, and probably by far the greatest that ever you will have. There are many here present who wish they had such an opportunity, but they never can obtain it; they cannot buy it for money; but you have it in your possession, and can improve it if you will. But yet,

2. There is on some accounts greater danger that such as are in your circumstances will fail of thoroughly improving their convictions,

with respect to steadfastness and perseverance, than others. Those that are young are more unstable than elder persons. They who never had convictions before, have less experience of the difficulty of the work they have engaged in; they are more ready to think that they shall obtain salvation easily, and are more easily discouraged by disappointments; and young persons have less reason and consideration to fortify them against temptations to backsliding. You should therefore labour now the more to guard against such temptations. By all means make but one work of seeking salvation! Make thorough work of it the first time! There are vast disadvantages that they bring themselves under, who have several turns of seeking with great intermissions. By such a course, persons exceedingly wound their own souls, and entangle themselves in many snares. Who are those that commonly meet with so many difficulties, and are so long labouring in darkness and perplexity, but those who have had several turns at seeking salvation; who have one while had convictions, and then have quenched them, and then have set about the work again, and have backslidden again, and have gone on after that manner? The children of Israel would not have been forty years in the wilderness, if they had held their courage, and had gone on as they set out; but they were of an unstable mind, and were for going back again into Egypt.-Otherwise, if they had gone right forward without discouragement, as God would have led them, they would have soon entered and taken possession of Canaan. They had got to the very borders of it when they turned back, but were thirty-eight years after that, before they got through the wilderness. Therefore, as you regard the interest of your soul, do not run yourself into a like difficulty, by unsteadiness, intermission, and backsliding; but press right forward, from henceforth, and make but one work of seeking, converting, and pardoning grace, however great, and difficult, and long a work that may be.

# Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer

Will he always call upon God? - JOB 27:10

CONCERNING these words, I would observe,

1. Who it is that is here spoken of, viz. the hypocrite; as you may see, if you take the two preceding verses with the verse of the text. "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him! Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" Job's three friends, in their speeches to him, insisted much upon it, that he was a hypocrite. But Job, in this chapter, asserts his sincerity and integrity, and shows how different his own behaviour had been from that of hypocrites. Particularly he declares his stedfast and immovable resolution of persevering and holding out in the ways of religion and righteousness to the end; as you may see in the six first verses. In the text, he shows how contrary to this stedfastness and perseverance the character of the hypocrite is, who is not wont thus to hold out in religion.

2. We may observe what duty of religion it is, with respect to which the hypocrite is deciphered in the text, and that is the duty of prayer or calling upon God.

3. Here is something supposed of the hypocrite relating to this duty, viz. That he may continue in it for a while; he may call upon God for a season.

4. Something asserted, viz. That it is not the manner of hypocrites to continue always in this duty. Will he always call upon God? It is in the form of an interrogation; but the words have the force of a strong assertion, that however the hypocrite may call upon God for a season, yet he will not always continue in it.

DOCTRINE



However hypocrites may continue for a season in the duty of prayer, yet it is their manner, after a while, in a great measure to leave off.

In speaking upon this doctrine, I shall show,

I. How hypocrites often continue for a season to call upon God.

II. How it is their manner, after a while, in a great measure to leave off the practice of this duty.

III. Give some reasons why this is the manner of hypocrites.

I. I would show how hypocrites often continue for a season in the duty of prayer.

1. They do so for a while after they have received common illuminations and affections. While they are under awakenings, they may through fear or hell call upon God, and attend very constantly upon the duty of secret prayer. And after they have had some melting affections, having their hearts much moved with the goodness of God, or with some affecting encouragements, and false joy and comfort; while these impressions last they continue to call upon God in the duty of secret prayer.

2. After they have obtained a hope, and have made profession of their good estate, they often continue for a while in the duty of secret prayer. For a while they are affected with their hope: they think that God hath delivered them out of a natural condition, and given them an interest in Christ, thus introducing them into a state of safety from that eternal misery which they lately feared. With this supposed kindness of God to them, they are much affected, and often find in themselves for a while a kind of love to God, excited by his supposed love to them. Now, while this affection towards God continues, the duties of religion seem pleasant to them; it is even with some delight that they approach to God in their closets; and for the present it may be, they think of no other than continuing to call upon God as long as they live.

Yea, they may continue in the duty of secret prayer for a while after the liveliness of their affections is past, through the influence of their former intentions. They intended to continue seeking God always; and now suddenly to leave off would be too shocking to their own minds. And the force of their own preconceived notions, viz. That godly persons continue in religion, may have some effect. Therefore, though they have no love to the duty of prayer, and begin to grow weary of it, yet as they love their own hope, they are somewhat backward to take a course, which will prove it to be a false hope, and so deprive them of it.

If they should all at once bear the sign of a false hope, they would scare themselves. Their hope is dear to them, and it would fright them to see any plain evidence that it is not true. Hence, for a considerable time after the force of their illuminations and affections is over, and after they hate the duty of prayer—and would be glad to have done with it, if they could without showing themselves to be hypocrites—they hold up a kind of attendance upon the duty of secret prayer.—This may keep up the outside of religion in them for a good while, and occasion it to be somewhat slowly that they are brought to neglect it. They must not leave off suddenly, because that would be too great a shock to their false peace.—But they must come gradually to it, as they find their consciences can bear it, and as they can find out devices and salvos to cover the matter, and make their so doing consistent, in their own opinion, with the truth of their hope.—But,

II. It is the manner of hypocrites, after a while, in a great measure to leave off the practice of this duty. We are often taught, that the seeming goodness and piety of hypocrites is not of a lasting and persevering nature. It is so with respect to their practice of the duty of prayer in particular, and especially of secret prayer. They can omit this duty, and their omission of it not be taken notice of by others, who know what profession they have made. So that a regard to their own reputation doth not oblige them still to practise it. If others saw how they neglect it, it would exceedingly shock their charity towards them. But their neglect doth not fall under their observation; at least

not under the observation of many. Therefore they may omit this duty, and still have the credit of being converted persons.

Men of this character can come to a neglect of secret prayer by degrees without shocking their peace. For though indeed for a converted person to live in a great measure without secret prayer, is very wide of the notion they once had of a true convert; yet they find means by degrees to alter their notions, and to bring their principles to suit with their inclinations; and at length they come to a notion, that a man may be a convert, and yet live very much in neglect of this duty. In time, they can bring all things to suit well together; as a hope of heaven, an indulgence of sloth, gratifying carnal appetites, and living in a great measure a prayerless life. They cannot indeed suddenly make these things agree; it must be a work of time; and length of time will effect it. By degrees they find out ways to guard and defend their consciences against those powerful enemies; so that those enemies, and a quiet, secure conscience, can at length dwell together.

Whereas it is asserted in the doctrine, that it is the manner of hypocrites, after a while, in a great measure to leave off this duty; I would observe to you,

1. That it is not intended but that they may commonly continue to the end of life in an external attendance on prayer with others. They may commonly be present at public prayers in the congregation, and also at family prayer. This, in such places of light as this is, men commonly do before they are so much as awakened. Many vicious persons, who make no pretence to serious religion, commonly attend public prayers in the congregation, and also more private prayers in the families in which they live, unless it be when carnal designs interfere, or when their youthful pleasures and diversions, and their vain company, call them; and then they make no conscience of attending family prayer. Otherwise they may continue to attend upon prayer as long as they live, and yet may truly be said not to call upon God. For such prayer, in the manner of it, is not their own. They are

present only for the sake of their credit, or in compliance with others. They may be present at these prayers, and yet have no proper prayer of their own. Many of those concerning whom it may be said, as in Job 15:4. that they cast off fear and restrain prayer before God, are yet frequently present at family and public prayers.

2. But they in a great measure leave off the practice of secret prayer. They come to this pass by degrees. At first they begin to be careless about it, under some particular temptations. Because they have been out in young company, or have been taken up very much with worldly business, they omit it once: after that they more easily omit it again. Thus it presently becomes a frequent thing with them to omit it; and after a while, it comes to that pass, that they seldom attend it. Perhaps they attend it on sabbath-days, and sometimes on other days. But they have ceased to make it a constant practice daily to retire to worship God alone, and to seek his face in secret places. They sometimes do a little to quiet conscience, and just to keep alive their old hope; because it would be shocking to them, even after all their subtile dealing with their consciences, to call themselves converts, and yet totally to live without prayer. Yet the practice of secret prayer they have in a great measure left off.—I come now,

III. To the reasons why this is the manner of hypocrites.

1. Hypocrites never had the spirit of prayer. They may have been stirred up to the external performance of this duty, and that with a great deal of earnestness and affection, and yet always have been destitute of the true spirit of prayer. The spirit of prayer is a holy spirit, a gracious spirit. We read of the spirit of grace and supplication; Zech. 12:10. "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications."—Wherever there is a true spirit of supplication, there is the spirit of grace. The true spirit of prayer is no other than God's own spirit dwelling in the hearts of the saints. And as this spirit comes from God, so doth it naturally tend to God in holy breathings and pantings. It naturally leads to God to converse with him by prayer.

Therefore the Spirit is said to make intercession for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered, Rom. 8:26.

The Spirit of God makes intercession for them, as it is that Spirit which in some respect indites their prayers, and leads them to pour out their souls before God. Therefore the saints are said to worship God in the spirit; Phil. 3:3. "We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit;" and John 4:23. "The true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth." The truly godly have the spirit of adoption, the spirit of a child, to which it is natural to go to God and call upon him, crying to him as to a father.

But hypocrites have nothing of this spirit of adoption: they have not the spirit of children; for this is a gracious and holy spirit, given only in a real work of regeneration. Therefore it is often mentioned as a part of the distinguishing character of the godly, that they call upon God. Psalm 145:18, 19. "The Lord is high to them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he will also hear their cry, and will save them." Joel 2:32. "It shall come to pass, that whosoever calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

It is natural to one who is truly born from above to pray to God, and to pour out his soul in holy supplications before his heavenly Father. This is as natural to the new nature and life as breathing is to the nature and life of the body. But hypocrites have not this new nature. Those illuminations and affections which they had, went away, and left no change of nature. Therefore prayer naturally dies away in them, having no foundation laid in the nature of the soul. It is maintained awhile only by a certain force put upon nature. But force is not constant; and as that declines, nature will take place again.

The spirit of a true convert is a spirit of true love to God, and that naturally inclines the soul to those duties wherein it is conversant with God, and makes it to delight in approaching him. But a hypocrite hath no such spirit. He is left under the reigning power of

enmity against God, which naturally inclines him to shun his presence.

The spirit of a true convert is a spirit of faith and reliance on the power, wisdom, and mercy of God, and such a spirit is naturally expressed in prayer. True prayer is nothing else but faith expressed. Hence we read of the prayer of faith; James 5:15. True Christian prayer is the faith and reliance of the soul breathed forth in words. But a hypocrite is without the spirit of faith. He hath no true reliance or dependence on God, but is really self-dependent.

As to those common convictions and affections which the hypocrite had, and which made him keep up the duty of prayer for a while; they not reaching the bottom of the heart, nor being accompanied with any change of nature, a little thing extinguishes them. The cares of the world commonly choke and suffocate them, and often the pleasures and vanities of youth totally put an end to them, and with them ends their constant practice of the duty of prayer.

2. When a hypocrite hath had his false conversion, his wants are in his sense of things already supplied, his desires are already answered; and so he finds no further business at the throne of grace. He never was sensible that he had any other needs, but a need of being safe from hell. And now that he is converted, as he thinks, that need is supplied. Why then should he still go on to resort to the throne of grace with earnest requests? He is out of danger; all that he was afraid of is removed: he hath got enough to carry him to heaven, and what more should he desire?—While under-awakenings, he had this to stir him up to go to God in prayer, that he was in continual fear of hell. This put him upon crying to God for mercy. But since in his own opinion he is converted, he hath no further business about which to go to God. And although he may keep up the duty of prayer in the outward form a little while, for fear of spoiling his hope, yet he will find it a dull business to continue it without necessity, and so by degrees he will let drop the practice. The work of the hypocrite is

done when he is converted, and therefore he standeth in no further need of help.

But it is far otherwise with the true convert. His work is not done; but he finds still a great work to do, and great wants to be supplied. He sees himself still to be a poor, empty, helpless creature, and that he still stands in great and continual need of God's help. He is sensible that without God he can do nothing. A false conversion makes a man in his own eyes self-sufficient. He saith he is rich, and increased with goods, and hath need of nothing; and knoweth not that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. But after a true conversion, the soul remains sensible of its own impotence and emptiness, as it is in itself, and its sense of it is rather increased than diminished. It is still sensible of its universal dependence on God for every thing. A true convert is sensible that his grace is very imperfect; and he is very far from having all that he desires. Instead of that, by conversion are begotten in him new desires which he never had before. He now finds in him holy appetites, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a longing after more acquaintance and communion with God. So that he hath business enough still at the throne of grace; yea, his business there, instead of being diminished, is rather increased.

3. The hope which the hypocrite hath of his good estate takes off the force that the command of God before had upon his conscience; so that now he dares neglect so plain a duty. The command which requires the practice of the duty of prayer is exceeding plain: Matt. 26:41. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Eph. 6:18. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints." Matt. 6:6. "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." As long as the hypocrite was in his own apprehension in continual danger of hell, he durst not disobey these commands. But since he is, as he thinks, safe from hell, he is grown bold, he dares to live in the neglect of the plainest command in the Bible.

4. It is the manner of hypocrites, after a while, to return to sinful practices, which will tend to keep them from praying. While they were under convictions, they reformed their lives, and walked very exactly. This reformation continues, after their supposed conversion, while they are much affected with hope and false comfort. But as these things die away, their old lusts revive, and by degrees they return like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. They return to their sensual, worldly, proud, and contentious practices, as before. And no wonder this makes them forsake their closets. Sinning and praying agree not well together. If a man be constant in the duty of secret prayer, it will tend to restrain him from wilful sinning. So, on the other hand, if he allow himself in sinful practices, it will restrain him from praying. It will give quite another turn to his mind, so that he will have no disposition to the practice of such a duty: it will be contrary to him. A man who knows that he lives in sin against God, will not be inclined to come daily into the presence of God; but will rather be inclined to fly from his presence, as Adam, when he had eaten of the forbidden fruit, ran away from God, and hid himself among the trees of the garden.

To keep up the duty of prayer after he hath given loose to his lusts, would tend very much to disquiet a man's conscience. It would give advantage to his conscience to testify aloud against him. If he should come from his wickedness into the presence of God, immediately to speak to him, his conscience would, as it were, fly in his face. Therefore hypocrites, as they by degrees admit their wicked practices, exclude prayer.

5. Hypocrites never counted the cost of perseverance in seeking God, and of following him to the end of life. To continue instant in prayer with all perseverance to the end of life, requires much care, watchfulness, and labour. For much opposition is made to it by the flesh, the world, and the devil; and Christians meet with many temptations to forsake this practice. He that would persevere in this duty must be laborious in religion in general. But hypocrites never



count the cost of such labour; i.e. they never were prepared in the disposition of their minds to give their lives to the service of God, and to the duties of religion. It is therefore no great wonder they are weary, and give up, after they have continued for a while, as their affections are gone, and they find that prayer to them grows irksome and tedious.

6. Hypocrites have no interest in those gracious promises which God hath made to his people, of those spiritual supplies which are needful in order to uphold them in the way of their duty to the end. God hath promised to true saints that they shall not forsake him; Jer. 32:40. "I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." He hath promised that he will keep them in the way of their duty; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24. "And the God of peace sanctify you wholly. And I pray God your spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."—But hypocrites have no interest in these and such like promises; and therefore are liable to fall away. If God do not uphold men, there is no dependence on their steadfastness. If the Spirit of God depart from them, they will soon become careless and profane, and there will be an end to their seeming devotion and piety.

The application may be in a use of exhortation, in two branches.

I. I would exhort those who have entertained a hope of their being true converts—and who since their supposed conversion have left off the duty of secret prayer, and ordinarily allow themselves in the omission of it—to throw away their hope. If you have left off calling upon God, it is time for you to leave off hoping and flattering yourselves with an imagination that you are the children of God. Probably it will be a very difficult thing for you to do this. It is hard for a man to let go a hope of heaven, on which he hath once allowed himself to lay hold, and which he hath retained for a considerable time. True conversion is a rare thing; but that men should be brought off from a false hope of conversion—after they are once settled and

established in it, and have continued in it for some time—is much more rare.

Those things in men which, if known, would be sufficient to convince others that they are hypocrites, will not convince themselves; and those things which would be sufficient to convince them concerning others, will not be sufficient to convince them concerning themselves. They can make larger allowances for themselves than they can for others. They can find out ways to solve objections against their own hope, when they can find none in the like case for their neighbour.

But if your case be such as is spoken of in the doctrine, it is surely time for you to seek a better hope, and another work of God's Spirit, than ever you have yet experienced; something more thorough and effectual. When you find by experience, that the seed which was sown in your hearts, though at first it sprang up and seemed flourishing, is withering away, as by the heat of the sun, or is choked, as with thorns; this shows in what sort of ground the seed was sown, that it is either stony or thorny ground; and that therefore it is necessary you should pass through another change, whereby your heart may become good ground, which shall bring forth fruit with patience.

Insist not on that as a reason why you should not throw away your hope, that you had the judgment of others, that the change of which you were the subject was right. It is a small matter to be judged of man's judgment, whether you be approved or condemned, and whether it be by minister or people, wise or unwise. 1 Cor. 4:3. "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment." If your goodness have proved to be as the morning cloud and early dew; if you be one of those who have forsaken God, and left off calling upon his name, you have the judgment and sentence of God in the Scriptures against you, which is a thousand times more than to have the judgment of all the wise and godly men and ministers in the world in your favour.

Others, from your account of things, may have been obliged to have charity for you, and to think that—provided you were not mistaken, and in your account did not misrepresent things, or express them by wrong terms—you were really converted. But what a miserable foundation is this, upon which to build a hope as to your eternal state!

Here I request your attention to a few things in particular, which I have to say to you concerning your hope.

1. Why will you retain that hope which by evident experience you find poisons you? Is it reasonable to think, that a holy hope, a hope that is from heaven, would have such an influence? No, surely; nothing of such a malignant influence comes from that world of purity and glory. No poison groweth in the paradise of God. The same hope which leads men to sin in this world, will lead to hell hereafter. Why therefore will you retain such a hope, of which your own experience shows you the ill tendency, in that it encourages you to lead a wicked life? For certainly that life is a wicked life wherein you live in the neglect of so well-known a duty, as that of secret prayer, and in the disobedience of so plain a command of God, as that by which the duty is enjoined. And is not a way of disobedience to God a way to hell?

If your own experience of the nature and tendency of your hope will not convince you of the falseness of it, what will? Are you resolved to retain your hope, let it prove ever so unsound and hurtful? Will you hold it fast till you go to hell with it? Many men cling to a false hope, and embrace it so closely, that they never let it go till the flames of hell cause their arms to unclench and let go their hold.—Consider how you will answer it at the day of judgment, when God shall call you to an account for your folly in resting in such a hope. Will it be a sufficient answer for you to say, that you had the charity of others, and that they thought your conversion was right?

Certainly it is foolish for men to imagine, that God had no more wisdom, or could contrive no other way of bestowing comfort and hope of eternal life, than one which should encourage men to forsake him.

## **Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer, Part II**

Will he always call upon God? - JOB 27:10

FROM these words, our doctrine was, That however hypocrites may continue for a season in the duty of prayer, yet it is their manner, after a while, in a great measure to leave it off. This was our subject in the preceding discourse, in which, after having shown—how hypocrites often continue for a season to call upon God—how it is their manner, after a while, in a great measure to leave it off—and having given the reasons why this is their manner, I came at length to make application, which I proposed to do in a use of exhortation, in two branches; and first to exhort those who entertain a hope of their good estate, and yet live in the neglect of secret prayer, to reject their hope. One particular consideration I have already laid before men of this character, to the end just mentioned; and I now proceed to say to them,

2. How is your conduct consistent with loving God above all. If you have not a spirit to love God above your dearest earthly friends, and your most pleasant earthly enjoyments; the Scriptures are very plain and full in it, that you are not true Christians. But if you had indeed such a spirit, would you thus grow weary of the practice of drawing near to him, and become habitually so averse to it, as in a great measure to cast off so plain a duty, which is so much the life of a child of God? It is the nature of love to be averse to absence, and to love a near access to those whom we love. We love to be with them;

we delight to come often to them, and to have much conversation with them. But when a person who hath heretofore been wont to converse freely with another, by degrees forsakes him, grows strange, and converses with him but little, and that although the other be importunate with him for the continuance of their former intimacy; this plainly shows the coldness of his heart towards him.

The neglect of the duty of prayer seems to be inconsistent with supreme love to God also upon another account, and that is, that it is against the will of God so plainly revealed.—True love to God seeks to please him in every thing, and universally to conform to his will.

3. Your thus restraining prayer before God is not only inconsistent with the love, but also with the fear, of God. It is an argument that you cast off fear, as is manifest by that text, Job 15:4. "Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God." While you thus live in the transgression of so plain a command of God, you evidently show, that there is no fear of God before your eyes. Psal. 36:1. "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes."

4. Consider how living in such a neglect is consistent with leading a holy life. We are abundantly instructed in Scripture, that true Christians do lead a holy life; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, Heb. 12:14. and that every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure, 1 John 3:3. In Prov. 16:17. it is said, The highway of the upright is to depart from evil, i.e. the common beaten road in which all the godly travel. To the like purpose is Isa. 35:8. "A highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those:" i.e. those redeemed persons spoken of in the foregoing verses. It is spoken of in Rom. 8:1. as the character of all believers, that they walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

But how is a life, in a great measure prayerless, consistent with a holy life? To lead a holy life is to lead a life devoted to God; a life of

worshipping and serving God; a life consecrated to the service of God. But how doth he lead such a life who doth not so much as maintain the duty of prayer? How can such a man be said to walk by the Spirit, and to be a servant of the most high God? A holy life is a life of faith. The life that true Christians live in the world, they live by the faith of the Son of God. But who can believe that the man lives by faith who lives without prayer, which is the natural expression of faith? Prayer is as natural an expression of faith, as breathing is of life; and to say a man lives a life of faith, and yet lives a prayerless life, is every whit as inconsistent and incredible, as to say, that a man lives without breathing. A prayerless life is so far from being holy, that it is a profane life: he that lives so, lives like a heathen, who calleth not on God's name; he that lives a prayerless life, lives without God in the world.

5. If you live in the neglect of secret prayer, you show your good-will to neglect all the worship of God. He that prays only when he prays with others, would not pray at all, were it not that the eyes of others are upon him. He that will not pray where none but God seeth him, manifestly doth not pray at all out of respect to God, or regard to his all-seeing eye, and therefore doth in effect cast off all prayer. And he that casts off prayer, in effect casts off all the worship of God, of which prayer is the principal duty. Now, what a miserable saint is he who is no worshipper of God! He that casts off the worship of God, in effect casts off God himself: he refuses to own him, or to be conversant with him as his God. For the way in which men own God, and are conversant with him as their God, is by worshipping him.

6. How can you expect to dwell with God for ever, if you so neglect and forsake him here? This your practice shows, that you place not your happiness in God, in nearness to him, and communion with him. He who refuses to visit and converse with a friend, and who in a great measure forsakes him, when he is abundantly invited and importuned to come; plainly shows that he places not his happiness in the company and conversation of that friend. Now, if this be the case with you respecting God, then how can you expect to have it for

your happiness to all eternity, to be with God, and to enjoy holy communion with him?

Let those persons who hope they are converted, and yet have in a great measure left off the duty of secret prayer, and whose manner it is ordinarily to neglect it, for their own sake seriously consider these things. For what will it profit them to please themselves with that, while they live, which will fail them at last, and leave them in fearful and amazing disappointment?

It is probable, that some of you who have entertained a good opinion of your state, and have looked upon yourselves as converts—but have of late in a great measure left off the duty—will this evening attend secret prayer, and so may continue to do for a little while after your hearing this sermon, to the end that you may solve the objection which is made against the truth of your hope. But this will not hold. As it hath been in former instances of the like nature, so what you now hear will have such effect upon you but a little while.—When the business and cares of the world shall again begin to crowd a little upon you, or the next time you shall go out into young company, it is probable you will again neglect this duty. After the next frolic to which you go, it is highly probable you will neglect not only secret, but also family prayer. Or at least, after a while, you will come to the same pass as before, in casting off fear, and restraining prayer before God.

It is not very likely that you will ever be constant and persevering in this duty, until you shall have obtained a better principle in your hearts. The streams which have no springs to feed them will dry up. The drought and heat consume the snow-waters. Although they run plentifully in the spring, yet when the sun ascends higher with a burning heat, they are gone. The seed that is sown in stony places, though it seem to flourish at present, yet as the sun shall rise with a burning heat, will wither away. None will bring forth fruit with patience, but those whose hearts are become good ground.

Without any heavenly seed remaining in them, men may, whenever they fall in among the godly, continue all their lives to talk like saints. They may, for their credit sake, tell of what they have experienced: but their deeds will not hold.—They may continue to tell of their inward experiences, and yet live in the neglect of secret prayer, and of other duties.

II. I would take occasion from this doctrine to exhort all to persevere in the duty of prayer. This exhortation is much insisted on in the word of God. It is insisted on in the Old Testament; 1 Chron. 16:11. "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." Isa. 62:7. "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence;" i.e. be not silent as to the voice of prayer, as is manifest by the following words, "and give him no rest till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." Israel of old is reproved for growing weary of the duty of prayer. Isa. 43:22. "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, thou hast been weary of me, O Israel."

Perseverance in the duty of prayer is very much insisted on in the New Testament; as Luke 18. at the beginning, "A man ought always to pray and not to faint;" i.e. not to be discouraged or weary of the duty; but should always continue in it. Again, Luke 21:36. "Watch ye therefore, and pray always." We have the example of Anna the prophetess set before us, Luke 1:35, &c. who, though she had lived to be more than a hundred years old, yet was not weary of this duty. It is said, "She departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Cornelius also is commended for his constancy in this duty. It is said, that he prayed to God always; Acts 10:2. The apostle Paul in his epistles, insists very much on constancy in this duty; Rom. 12:12. "Continuing instant in prayer." Eph. 6:18, 19. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Col. 4:2. "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same." 1 Thess. 5:17. "Pray without ceasing." To the same effect the apostle Peter, 1 Pet. 4:7. "Watch unto prayer."—Thus abundantly the Scriptures insist upon it, that we should persevere in the duty of prayer; which shows that it is



of very great importance that we should persevere. If the contrary be the manner of hypocrites, as hath been shown in the doctrine, then surely we ought to beware of this leaven.

But here let the following things be particularly considered as motives to perseverance in this duty.

1. That perseverance in the way of duty is necessary to salvation, and is abundantly declared to be so in the Holy Scriptures; as Isa. 64:5. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth, for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved." Heb. 10:38, and 39. "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Rom. 11:22. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue, in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."—So in many other places.

Many, when they think they are converted, seem to imagine that their work is done, and that there is nothing else needful in order to their going to heaven. Indeed perseverance in holiness of life is not necessary to salvation in the same way as the righteousness by which a right to salvation is obtained. Nor is actual perseverance necessary in order to our becoming interested in that righteousness by which we are justified. For as soon as ever a soul hath believed in Christ, or hath put forth one act of faith in him, it becomes interested in his righteousness, and in all the promises purchased by it.

But persevering in the way of duty is necessary to salvation, as a concomitant and evidence of a title to salvation. There is never a title to salvation without it, though it be not the righteousness by which a title to salvation is obtained. It is necessary to salvation, as it is the necessary consequence of true faith. It is an evidence which universally attends uprightness, and the defect of it is an infallible

evidence of the want of uprightness. Psalm 125:4, 5. There such as are good and upright in heart, are distinguished from such as fall away or turn aside: "Do good, O Lord, to those that are good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. But peace shall be upon Israel."—It is mentioned as an evidence that the hearts of the children of Israel were not right with God, that they did not persevere in the ways of holiness. Psalm 78:8. "A generation that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God."

Christ gives this as a distinguishing character of those that are his disciples indeed, and of a true and saving faith, that it is accompanied with perseverance in obedience to Christ's word. John 8:31. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." This is mentioned as a necessary evidence of an interest in Christ, Heb. 3:14. "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

Perseverance is not only a necessary concomitant and evidence of a title to salvation; but also a necessary prerequisite to the actual possession of eternal life. It is the only way to heaven, the narrow way that leadeth to life. Hence Christ exhorts the church of Philadelphia to persevere in holiness from this consideration, that it was necessary in order to her obtaining the crown. Rev. 3:11. "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." It is necessary not only that persons should once have been walking in the way of duty, but that they should be found so doing when Christ cometh. Luke 12:43. "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."—Holding out to the end is often made the condition of actual salvation. Matt. 10:22. "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved:" and Rev. 2:10. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

2. In order to your own perseverance in the way of duty, your own care and watchfulness is necessary. For though it be promised that true saints shall persevere, yet that is no argument that their care and watchfulness is not necessary in order to it; because their care to keep the commands of God is the thing promised. If the saints should fail of care, watchfulness, and diligence to persevere in holiness, that failure of their care and diligence would itself be a failure of holiness. They who persevere not in watchfulness and diligence, persevere not in holiness of life, for holiness of life very much consists in watchfulness and diligence to keep the commands of God. It is one promise of the covenant of grace, that the saints shall keep God's commandments. Ezek. 11:19, 20.—Yet that is no argument that they have no need to take care to keep these commandments, or to do their duty. So the promise of God, that the saints shall persevere in holiness, is no argument that it is not necessary that they should take heed lest they fall away.

Therefore the Scriptures abundantly warn men to watch over themselves diligently, and to give earnest heed lest they fall away. 1 Cor. 16:13. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." 1 Cor. 10:12. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Heb. 3:12–14. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Heb. 4:1. "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." 2 Pet. 3:17. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness." 2 John 8. "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."—Thus you see how earnestly the Scriptures press on Christians exhortations to take diligent heed to themselves that they fall not away. And certainly these cautions are not without reason.

The Scriptures particularly insist upon watchfulness in order to perseverance in the duty of prayer. Watch and pray, saith Christ; which implies, that we should watch unto prayer, as the apostle Peter says, 1 Pet. 4:7. It implies, that we should watch against a neglect of prayer, as well as against other sins. The apostle, in places which have been already mentioned, directs us to pray with all prayer, watching thereunto with all perseverance, and to continue in prayer, and watch in the same.—Nor is it any wonder that the apostles so much insisted on watching in order to a continuance in prayer with all perseverance; for there are many temptations to neglect this duty; first to be inconstant in it, and from time to time to omit it; then in a great measure to neglect it. The devil watches by temptation to draw us away from God, and to hinder us from going to him in prayer. We are surrounded with one and another tempting object, business, and diversion: particularly we meet with many things which are great temptations to a neglect of this duty.

3. To move you to persevere in the duty of prayer, consider how much you always stand in need of the help of God. If persons who have formerly attended this duty, leave it off, the language of it is, that now they stand in no further need of God's help, that they have no further occasion to go to God with requests and supplications: when indeed it is in God we live, and move, and have our being. We cannot draw a breath without his help. You need his help every day for the supply of your outward wants; and especially you stand in continual need of him to help your souls. Without his protection they would immediately fall into the hands of the devil, who always stands as a roaring lion, ready, whenever he is permitted, to fall upon the souls of men and devour them.—If God should indeed preserve your lives, but should otherwise forsake and leave you to yourselves, you would be most miserable: your lives would be a curse to you.

Those that are converted, if God should forsake them, would soon fall away totally from a state of grace into a state far more miserable than ever they were in before their conversion. They have no strength of their own to resist those powerful enemies who surround them.

Sin and Satan would immediately carry them away, as a mighty flood, if God should forsake them.—You stand in need of daily supplies from God. Without God you can receive no spiritual light nor comfort, can exercise no grace, can bring forth no fruit. Without God your souls will wither and pine away, and sink into a most wretched state. You continually need the instructions and directions of God. What can a little child do in a vast howling wilderness, without some one to guide it, and to lead it in the right way? Without God you will soon fall into snares, and pits, and many fatal calamities.

Seeing therefore you stand in such continual need of the help of God, how reasonable is it that you should continually seek it of him, and perseveringly acknowledge your dependence upon him, by resorting to him, to spread your needs before him, and to offer up your requests to him in prayer.—Let us consider how miserable we should be, if we should leave off prayer, and God at the same time should leave off to take care of us, or to afford us any more supplies of his grace. By our constancy in prayer, we cannot be profitable to God; and if we leave it off, God will sustain no damage: he doth not need our prayers; Job 35:6, 7.—But if God cease to care for us and to help us, we immediately sink: we can do nothing: we can receive nothing without him.

4. Consider the great benefit of a constant, diligent, and persevering attendance on this duty. It is one of the greatest and most excellent means of nourishing the new nature, and of causing the soul to flourish and prosper. It is an excellent mean of keeping up an acquaintance with, and of growing in the knowledge of, God. It is the way to a life of communion with God. It is an excellent mean of taking off the heart from the vanities of the world, and of causing the mind to be conversant in heaven. It is an excellent preservative from sin and the wiles of the devil, and a powerful antidote against the poison of the old serpent. It is a duty whereby strength is derived from God against the lusts and corruptions of the heart, and the snares of the world.

It hath a great tendency to keep the soul in a wakeful frame, and to lead us to a strict walk with God, and to a life that shall be fruitful in such good works, as tend to adorn the doctrine of Christ, and to cause our light so to shine before others, that they seeing our good works shall glorify our Father who is in heaven. And if the duty be constantly and diligently attended, it will be a very pleasant duty. Slack and slothful attendance upon it, and unsteadiness in it, are the causes which make it so great a burden as it is to some persons. Their slothfulness in it hath naturally the effect to beget a dislike of the duty, and a great indisposition to it. But if it be constantly and diligently attended, it is one of the best means of leading not only a christian and amiable, but also a pleasant life; a life of much sweet fellowship with Christ, and of the abundant enjoyment of the light of his countenance.

Besides, the great power which prayer, when duly attended, hath with God, is worthy of your notice. By it men become like Jacob, who as a prince had power with God, and prevailed, when he wrestled for the blessing. See the power of prayer represented in James 5:16–18. By these things you may be sensible how much you will lose, if you shall be negligent in this great duty of calling upon God; and how ill you will consult your own interest by such a neglect.

I conclude my discourse with two directions in order to constancy and perseverance in this duty.

1. Watch against the beginnings of a neglect of this duty. Persons who have for a time practised, and afterwards neglect it, commonly leave it off by degrees. While their convictions and religious affections last, they are very constant in their closets, and no worldly business, or company, or diversion hinders them. But as their convictions and affections begin to die away, they begin to find excuses to neglect it sometimes. They are now so hurried; they have now such and such things to attend to; or there are now such inconveniences in the way, that they persuade themselves they may very excusably omit it for this time. Afterwards it pretty frequently so

happens, that they have something to hinder, something which they call a just excuse. After a while, a less thing becomes a sufficient excuse than was allowed to be such at first. Thus the person by degrees contracts more and more a habit of neglecting prayer, and becomes more and more indisposed to it. And even when he doth perform it, it is in such a poor, dull, heartless, miserable manner, that he says to himself, he might as well not do it at all, as do it thus. Thus he makes his own dulness and indisposition an excuse for wholly neglecting it, or at least for living in a great measure in its neglect.—After this manner do Satan and men's own corruptions inveigle them to their ruin.

Therefore beware of the first beginnings of a neglect: watch against temptations to it: take heed how you begin to allow excuses. Be watchful to keep up the duty in the height of it; let it not so much as begin to sink. For when you give way, though it be but little, it is like giving way to an enemy in the field of battle: the first beginning of a retreat greatly encourages the enemy, and weakens the retreating soldiers.

2. Let me direct you to forsake all such practices as you find by experience do indispose you to the duty of secret prayer. Examine the things in which you have allowed yourselves, and inquire whether they have had this effect. You are able to look over your past behaviour, and may doubtless, on an impartial consideration, make a judgment of the practices and courses in which you have allowed yourselves.

Particularly let young people examine their manner of company keeping, and the round of diversions in which with their companions they have allowed themselves. I only desire that you would ask at the mouth of your own consciences what has been the effect of these things with respect to your attendance on the duty of secret prayer. Have you not found that such practices have tended to the neglect of this duty? Have you not found that after them you have been more indisposed to it, and less conscientious and careful to attend it? Yea,

have they not, from time to time, actually been the means of your neglecting it?

If you cannot deny that this is really the case, then, if you seek the good of your souls, forsake these practices. Whatever you may plead for them, as that there is no harm in them, or that there is a time for all things, and the like; yet if you find this harm in the consequence, it is time for you to forsake them. And if you value heaven more than a little worldly diversion; if you set a higher price on eternal glory, than on a dance or a song, you will forsake them.

If these things be lawful in themselves, yet if your experience show, that they are attended with such a consequence as I have now mentioned, that is enough. It is lawful in itself for you to enjoy your right hand and your right eye: but if by experience you find they cause you to offend, it is time for you to cut off the one, and pluck out the other, as you would rather go to heaven without them than go to hell with them, into that place of torment where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

**TEMPTATION AND DELIVERANCE;**

**OR,**



## **JOSEPH'S GREAT TEMPTATION AND GRACIOUS DELIVERANCE\***

And he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.  
GENESIS 39:12

WE have here, and in the context, an account of that remarkable behaviour of Joseph in the house of Potiphar, which was the occasion both of his great affliction, and also of his high advancement and prosperity in the land of Egypt.

We read in the beginning of the chapter, how Joseph, after he had been so cruelly treated by his brethren, and sold into Egypt for a slave, was advanced in the house of Potiphar, who had bought him. Joseph was one that feared God, and therefore God was with him; and so influenced the heart of Potiphar his master, that instead of keeping him as a mere slave, to which purpose he was sold, he made him his steward and overseer over his house, and all that he had was put into his hands; in so much, that we are told, ver. 6. "that he left all that he had in his hand; and he knew not ought that he had, save the bread which he did eat."—While Joseph was in these prosperous circumstances, he met with a great temptation in his master's house. We are told that, he being a goodly person and well favoured, his mistress cast her eyes upon and lusted after him, and used all her art to tempt him to commit uncleanness with her.

Concerning this temptation, and his behaviour under it, many things are worthy to be noted. Particularly

We may observe, how great the temptation was, that he was under. It is to be considered, that Joseph was now in his youth; a season of life, when persons are most liable to be overcome by temptations of this nature. And he was in a state of unexpected prosperity in Potiphar's house; which has a tendency to lift persons up, especially

young ones, whereby commonly they more easily fall before temptations.

And then, the superiority of the person that laid the temptation before him, rendered it much the greater. She was his mistress, and he a servant under her. And the manner of her tempting him. She did not only carry herself so towards Joseph, as to give him cause to suspect that he might be admitted to such criminal converse with her; but she directly proposed it to him; plainly manifesting her disposition to it. So that here was no such thing as suspicion of her unwillingness to deter him, but a manifestation of her desire to entice him to it. Yea, she appeared greatly engaged in the matter. And there was not only her desire manifested to entice him, but her authority over him to enforce the temptation. She was his mistress, and he might well imagine, that if he utterly refused a compliance, he should incur her displeasure; and she, being his master's wife, had power to do much to his disadvantage, and to render his circumstances more uncomfortable in the family.

And the temptation was the greater, in that she did not only tempt him once, but frequently, day by day, verse 10. And at last became more violent with him. She caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me.

His behaviour was very remarkable under these temptations. He absolutely refused any compliance with them: he made no reply that manifested as though the temptation had gained at all upon him; so much as to hesitate about it, or at all deliberate upon it. He complied in no degree, either to the gross act she proposed, or any thing tending towards it, or that should at all be gratifying to her wicked inclination. And he persisted resolute and unshaken under her continual solicitations, ver. 10. "And it came to pass as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her." He, to his utmost, avoided so much as being where she was. And the motives and principles, from which he acted, manifested by his reply to her solicitations, are remarkable.—He first

sets before her, how injuriously he should act against his master, if he should comply with her proposal: "Behold, my master—hath committed all that he hath to my hand; there is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me, but thee, because thou art his wife." But he then proceeded to inform her of that, which, above all things, deterred him from a compliance, viz. that it would be great wickedness, and sin against God.—"How shall I do this, and sin against God?" He would not do any such thing, as he would not injure his master; but that which influenced more than all on this occasion, was the fear of sinning against God. On this account he persisted in his resolution to the last.

In the text we have an account of his behaviour under the last and greatest temptation that he had from her. This temptation was great, as it was at a time when there was nobody in the house but he and his mistress, ver. 11. there was an opportunity to commit the fact with the greatest secrecy. And at this time it seems that she was more violent than ever before. She caught him by the garment, &c. She laid hold on him, as though she were resolute to attain her purpose of him.

Under these circumstances he not only refused her, but fled from her, as he would have done from one that was going to assassinate him; he escaped, as for his life. He not only would not be guilty of such a fact, but neither would he by any means be in the house with her, where he should be in the way of her temptation.—This behaviour of Joseph is doubtless recorded for the instruction of all. Therefore from the words I shall observe, that it is our duty, not only to avoid those things that are themselves sinful, but also, as far as may be, those things that lead and expose to sin.

## SECT. I

Why we should avoid what tends to sin

THUS did Joseph: he not only refused actually to commit uncleanness with his mistress, who enticed him; but refused to be there, where he should be in the way of temptation, ver. 10. He refused to lie by her, or be with her. And in the text we are told, "he fled and got him out;" would by no means be in her company. Though it was no sin in itself, for Joseph to be in the house where his mistress was; but under these circumstances it would expose him to sin. Joseph was sensible he had naturally a corrupt heart, that tended to betray him to sin; and therefore he would by no means be in the way of temptation; but with haste he fled, he ran from the dangerous place. Inasmuch as he was exposed to sin in that house, he fled out of it with as much haste as if it had been on fire; or full of enemies, who stood ready with drawn swords to stab him to the very heart. When she took him by the garment, he left his garment in her hands; he had rather lose his garment, than stay a moment there, where he was in such danger of losing his chastity.

I said, that persons should avoid things that expose to sin, as far as may be; because it is possible that persons may be called to expose themselves to temptation; and when it is so, they may hope for divine strength and protection under temptation.

It may be a man's indispensable duty to undertake an office, or a work, attended with a great deal of temptation. Thus ordinarily a man ought not to run into the temptation of being persecuted for the true religion; lest the temptation should be too hard for him; but should avoid it, as much as may be: therefore Christ thus directs his disciples, Matt. 10:23. "When ye be persecuted in one city, flee to another." Yet, the case may be so, that a man may be called not to flee from persecution; but to run the venture of such a trial, trusting in God to uphold him under it. Ministers and magistrates may be obliged to continue with their people in such circumstances; as Nehemiah says, Neh. 6:11. "Should such a man as I flee?" So the apostles.—Yea, they may be called to go into the midst of it; to those places where they cannot reasonably expect but to meet with such

temptations. So Paul went up to Jerusalem, when he knew beforehand, that there bonds and affliction awaited him, Acts 20:23.

So in some other cases, the necessity of affairs may call upon men to engage in some business that is peculiarly attended with temptations. But when it is so, they are indeed least exposed to sin; for they are always safest in the way of duty. Prov. 10:9. "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely." And though there be many things by which they may have extraordinary temptations, in the affairs they have undertaken, yet if they have a clear call, it is no presumption to hope for divine support and preservation in it.

But for persons needlessly to expose themselves to temptation, and to do those things that tend to sin, is unwarrantable, and contrary to that excellent example set before us. And that we ought to avoid not only those things that are in themselves sinful, but also those things that lead and expose to sin, is manifest by the following arguments.

1. It is very evident that we ought to use our utmost endeavours to avoid sin; which is inconsistent with needlessly doing those things, that expose and lead to sin. And the greater any evil is, the greater care, and the more earnest endeavours, does it require to avoid it. Those evils that appear to us very great and dreadful, we use proportionably great care to avoid. And therefore the greatest evil of all, requires the greatest and utmost care to avoid it.

Sin is an infinite evil, because committed against an infinitely great and excellent Being, and so a violation of infinite obligation: therefore however great our care be to avoid sin, it cannot be more than proportionable to the evil we would avoid. Our care and endeavour cannot be infinite, as the evil of sin is infinite; but yet it ought to be to the utmost of our power; we ought to use every method that tends to the avoiding of sin. This is manifest to reason.— And not only so, but this is positively required of us in the word of God. Josh. 22:5. "Take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the

Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your soul." Deut. 4:15, 16. "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, lest ye corrupt yourselves." Chap. 12:30. "Take heed to thyself, that thou be not snared," &c. Luke 11:36. "Take heed and beware of covetousness." 1 Cor. 10:12. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Deut. 4:9. "Take heed to thyself, keep thy soul diligently." These and many other texts of Scripture, plainly require of us the utmost possible diligence and caution to avoid sin.

But how can he be said to use the utmost possible diligence and caution to avoid sin, that voluntarily does those things which naturally expose and lead to sin? How can he be said with the utmost possible caution to avoid an enemy, that voluntarily lays himself in his way? How can he be said to use the utmost possible caution to preserve the life of his child, that suffers it to go on the edge of precipices or pits; or to play on the borders of a deep gulf; or to wander in a wood, that is haunted by beasts of prey?

2. It is evident that we ought to avoid those things that expose and lead to sin; because a due sense of the evil of sin, and a just hatred of it, will necessarily have this effect upon us, to cause us so to do.—If we were duly sensible of the evil and dreadful nature of sin, we should have an exceeding dread of it upon our spirits. We should hate it worse than death, and should fear it worse than the devil himself; and dread it even as we dread damnation. But those things that men exceedingly dread, they naturally shun; and they avoid those things that they apprehend expose to them. As a child, that has been greatly terrified by the sight of any wild beast, will by no means be persuaded to go where it apprehends that it shall fall in its way.

As sin in its own nature is infinitely hateful, so in its natural tendency it is infinitely dreadful. It is the tendency of all sin, eternally to undo the soul. Every sin naturally carries hell in it! Therefore, all sin ought to be treated by us as we would treat a thing that is infinitely terrible. If any one sin, yea, the least sin, do not necessarily bring eternal ruin

with it, this is owing to nothing but the free grace and mercy of God to us, and not to the nature and tendency of sin itself. But certainly, we ought not to take the less care to avoid sin, or all that tends to it, for the freeness and greatness of God's mercy to us, through which there is hope of pardon; for that would be indeed a most ungrateful and vile abuse of mercy. Were it made known to us, that if we ever voluntarily committed any particular act of sin, we should be damned without any remedy or escape, should we not exceedingly dread the commission of such? Should we not be very watchful and careful to stand at the greatest distance from that sin; and from every thing that might expose us to it; and that has any tendency to stir up our lusts, or to betray us to such an act of sin? Let us then consider, that though the next voluntary act of known sin shall not necessarily and unavoidably issue in certain damnation, yet it will certainly deserve it. We shall thereby really deserve to be cast off, without any remedy or hope; and it can only be owing to free grace, that it will not certainly and remedilessly be followed with such a punishment. And shall we be guilty of such a vile abuse of God's mercy to us, as to take encouragement from it, the more boldly to expose ourselves to sin?

3. It is evident that we ought not only to avoid sin, but things that expose and lead to sin; because this is the way we act in things that pertain to our temporal interest.—Men avoid not only those things that are themselves the hurt or ruin of their temporal interest, but also the things that tend or expose to it. Because they love their temporal lives, they will not only actually avoid killing themselves, but they are very careful to avoid those things that bring their lives into danger; though they do not certainly know but they may escape.

They are careful not to pass rivers and deep waters on rotten ice, though they do not certainly know that they shall fall through and be drowned. They will not only avoid those things that would be in themselves the ruin of their estates—as setting their own houses on fire, and burning them up with their substance; taking their money and throwing it into the sea, &c.—but they carefully avoid those

things by which their estates are exposed. They have their eyes about them; are careful with whom they deal; are watchful, that they be not overreached in their bargains, and that they do not lay themselves open to knaves and fraudulent persons.

If a man be sick of a dangerous distemper, he is careful to avoid every thing that tends to increase the disorder; not only what he knows to be mortal, but other things that he fears may be prejudicial to him. Men are in this way wont to take care of their temporal interest. And therefore, if we are not as careful to avoid sin, as we are to avoid injury in our temporal interest, it will show a regardless disposition with respect to sin and duty; or that we do not much care though we do sin against God. God's glory is surely of as much importance and concern as our temporal interest. Certainly we should be as careful not to be exposed to sin against the Majesty of heaven and earth, as men are wont to be of a few pounds; yea, the latter are but mere trifles, compared with the former.

4. We are wont to do thus by our dear earthly friends.—We not only are careful of those things wherein the destruction of their lives, or their hurt and calamity in any respect, directly consist; but are careful to avoid those things that but remotely tend to it. We are careful to prevent all occasions of their loss; and are watchful against that which tends, in any wise, to deprive them of their comfort or good name; and the reason is, because they are very dear to us. In this manner, men are wont to be careful of the good of their own children, and dread the approaches of any mischief that they apprehend they are, or may be, exposed to. And we should take it hard if our friends did not do thus by us.

And surely we ought to treat God as a dear friend: we ought to act towards him, as those that have a sincere love and unfeigned regard to him; and so ought to watch and be careful against all occasions of that which is contrary to his honour and glory. If we have not a temper and desire so to do, it will show that, whatever our pretences are, we are not God's sincere friends, and have no true love to him.—



If we should be offended at any that have professed friendship to us, if they treated us in this manner, and were no more careful of our interest; surely God may justly be offended, that we are no more careful of his glory.

5. We would have God, in his providence towards us, not to order those things that tend to our hurt, or expose our interest; therefore certainly we ought to avoid those things that lead to sin against him.

We desire and love to have God's providence such towards us, as that our welfare may be well secured. No man loves to live exposed, uncertain and in dangerous circumstances. While he is so, he lives uncomfortably, in that he lives in continual fear. We desire that God would so order things concerning us, that we may be safe from fear of evil; and that no evil may come high our dwelling; and that because we dread calamity. So we do not love the appearance and approaches of it; and love to have it at a great distance from us. We desire to have God to be to us as a wall of fire round about us, to defend us; and that he would surround us as the mountains do the valleys, to guard us from every danger, or enemy; that so no evil may come high us.

Now this plainly shows, that we ought, in our behaviour towards God, to keep at a great distance from sin, and from all that exposes to it: as we desire God, in his providence to us, should keep calamity and misery at a great distance from us, and not to order those things that expose our welfare.

6. Seeing we are to pray we may not be led into temptation, certainly we ought not to run ourselves into it.—This is one request that Christ directs us to make to God in that form of prayer, which he taught his disciples—"Lead us not into temptation." And how inconsistent shall we be with ourselves, if we pray to God, that we should not be led into temptations; and at the same time, we are not careful to avoid temptation; but bring ourselves into it, by doing those things that lead and expose to sin. What self-contradiction is it, for a man to

pray to God that he may be kept from that, which he takes no care to avoid! By praying that we may be kept from temptation, we profess to God that being in temptation is a thing to be avoided; but by running into it we show that we choose the contrary, viz. not to avoid it.

7. The apostle directs us to avoid those things that are in themselves lawful, but tend to lead others into sin; surely then we should avoid what tends to lead ourselves into sin.—The apostle directs, 1 Cor. 8:9. "Take heed lest—this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak." Rom. 14:13. "That no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way." Ver. 15. "But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat." Ver. 20, 21. "For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."—Now if this rule of the apostle be agreeable to the word of Christ, as we must suppose, or expunge what he says out of the canon of the Scripture; then a like rule obliges more strongly in those things that tend to lead ourselves into sin.

8. There are many precepts of Scripture, which directly and positively imply, that we ought to avoid those things that tend to sin.

This very thing is commanded by Christ, Matt. 26:41. where he directs us to "watch lest we enter into temptation." But certainly running ourselves into temptation, is the reverse of watching against it.—We are commanded to abstain from all appearance of evil; i.e. do by sin as a man does by a thing, the sight or appearance of which he hates; and therefore will avoid any thing that looks like it; and will not come near or in sight of it.

Again, Christ commanded to separate from us those things that are stumbling-blocks, or occasions of sin, however dear they are to us. Matt. 5:29. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from

thee." Ver. 30. "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." By the right hand offending us, is not meant its paining us; but the word in the original signifies, being a stumbling-block; if thy right hand prove a stumbling-block, or occasion to fall; i.e. an occasion to sin. Those things are called offences or stumbling-blocks in the New Testament, which are the occasions of falling into sin.—Yea, Christ tells us, we must avoid them, however dear they are to us, though as dear as our right hand or right eye. If there be any practice that naturally tends and exposes us to sin, we must have done with it; though we love it never so well, and are never so loth to part with it; though it be as contrary to our inclination, as to cut off our own right hand, or pluck out our own right eye; and that upon pain of damnation, for it is intimated that if we do not, we must go with two hands and two eyes into hell fire.

Again, God took great care to forbid the children of Israel those things that tended to lead them into sin. For this reason, he forbade them marrying strange wives, (Deut. 7:3, 4.) "Neither shall thou make marriages with them,—for they will turn away thy sons from following me, that they may serve other gods." For this reason they were commanded to destroy all those things, that the nations of Canaan had used in their idolatry; and if any were enticed over to idolatry, they were to be destroyed without mercy; though ever so near and dear friends. They were not only to be parted with, but stoned with stones; yea, they themselves were to fall upon them, and put them to death, though son or daughter, or their bosom friend. (Deut. 13:6, &c.) "If thy brother,—or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods,—thou shalt not consent unto him,—neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shall thou conceal him. But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death."

Again, The wise man warns us to avoid those things that tend and expose us to sin; especially the sin of uncleanness. Prov. 6:27. "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? Can one go

upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?—So, whosoever touches her, shall not be innocent." This is the truth held forth; avoid those customs and practices that naturally tend to stir up lust. And there are many examples in Scripture, which have the force of precept; and recorded, as not only worthy, but demand our imitation. The conduct of Joseph is one; and that recorded of king David, is another. Psal. 39:1, 2. "I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good"—even from good—that is, he was so watchful over his words, and kept at such a great distance from speaking what might in any way tend to sin; that he avoided, in certain circumstances, speaking what was in itself lawful; lest he should be betrayed into that which was sinful.

9. A prudent sense of our own weakness, and exposedness to yield to temptation, obliges us to avoid that which leads or exposes to sin.

Whoever knows himself, and is sensible how weak he is, and his constant exposedness to run into sin—how full of corruption his heart is, which, like fuel, is ready to catch fire, and bring destruction upon him—how much he has in him to incline him to sin, and how unable he is to stand of himself—who is sensible of this, and has any regard of his duty, will he not be very watchful against every thing that may lead and expose to sin? On this account Christ directed us, Matt. 26:41. "To watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation." The reason is added, the flesh is weak! He who, in confidence of his own strength, boldly runs the venture of sinning, by going into temptation, manifests great presumption, and a sottish insensibility of his own weakness. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Prov. 28:26.

The wisest and strongest, and some of the most holy men in the world, have been overthrown by such means. So was David; so was Solomon,—his wives turned away his heart. If such persons so eminent for holiness were this way led into sin, surely it should be a

warning to us. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

## SECT. II

What things lead and expose to sin

IF any thing be made out clearly, from reason and the word of God, to be our duty, this would be enough with all Christians. Will a follower of Christ stand objecting and disputing against what is irrefragably proved and demonstrated to be his duty?

But some may be ready to inquire, How shall we know what things do lead and expose to sin? Let a man do what he will, he cannot avoid sinning, as long as he has such a corrupt heart within him. And there is nothing a man can do, but he may find some temptation in it. And though it be true, that a man ought to avoid those things that lead and expose to sin—and that those things which have a special tendency to expose men to sin, are what we ought to shun, as much as in us lies—yet how shall we judge and determine what things have a natural tendency to sin, or do especially lead to it?

I would answer in some particulars which are plain and easy; and which cannot be denied without the greatest absurdity.

1. That which borders on those sins, to which the lusts of men's hearts strongly incline them, is of this sort. Men come into the world with many strong and violent lusts in their hearts, and are exceeding prone of themselves to transgress; even in the safest circumstances in which they can be placed. And surely so much the nearer they are to that sin, to which they are naturally strongly inclined; so much the more are they exposed. If any of us who are parents should see our children near the brink of some deep pit, or close by the edge of the precipice of a high mountain; and not only so, but the ground upon which the child stood slippery, and steeply descending directly toward the precipice; should we not reckon a child exposed in such a

case? should we not be in haste to remove the child from its very dangerous situation?

It was the manner among the Israelites, to build their houses with flat roofs, so that persons might walk on the tops of their houses. And therefore God took care to make it a law among them, that every man should have battlements upon the edges of their roofs; lest any person should fell off and be killed. Deut. 22:8. "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fell from thence." And certainly we ought to take the like care that we do not fall into sin; which carries in it eternal death. We should, as it were, fix a battlement, a guard, to keep us from the edge of the precipice. Much more ought we to take care, that we do not go upon a roof that is not only without battlements, but when it is steep, and we shall naturally incline to fall.—Men's lusts are like strong enemies, endeavouring to draw them into sin. If a man stood upon a dangerous precipice, and had enemies about him, pulling and drawing him, endeavouring to throw him down; would he, in such a case, choose or dare to stand near the edge? Would he look upon himself safe, close on the brink? Would he not endeavour, for his own safety, to keep at a distance?

2. Those things that tend to feed lusts in the imagination, are of this kind.—They lead and expose men to sin. Those things that have a natural tendency to excite in the mind the imagination of that which is the object of the lust, certainly tend to feed and promote that lust. What can be more evident, than that a presenting of the object tends to stir up the appetite? Reason and experience teach this.—Therefore, all things, whether words or actions, which have a tendency and expose to sin, tend also to raise in the mind imaginations of what the lust tends to. It is certainly wrong to feed a lust, even in the imagination. It is quite contrary to the holy rules of God's words. Prov. 24:9. "The thought of foolishness is sin." Matt. 5:28. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery." A man, by gratifying his lusts in his imagination and thoughts, may make his soul in the sight of God to

be a hold of foul spirits, and like a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. And sinful imaginations tend to sinful actions, and outward behaviour in the end. Lust is always first conceived in the imagination, and then brought forth in the outward practice. You may see the progress of it in Jam. 1:15. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin."—Such things are abominable in the sight of a pure and holy God. We are commanded to keep at a great distance from spiritual pollution; and to hate even the very "garment spotted with the flesh." Jude 23.

3. Those things that the experience and observation of mankind show to be ordinarily attended or followed with sin, are of this sort. Experience is a good rule to determine by in things of this nature. How do we know the natural tendency of any thing, but by observation and experience? Men observe and find, that some things are commonly attended and followed with other things; and hence mankind pronounce, that they have a natural tendency to them. We have no other way to know the tendency of any thing. Thus men by observation and experience know that the warmth of the sun, and showers of rain, are attended with the growth of plants; and hence they learn, that they have a tendency to it. So they find by experience, that the bite of some kinds of serpents is commonly followed with illness, and often with death; and hence they learn, that the bite of such serpents has a natural tendency to bring disorder upon the body, and exposes to death.—And so, if experience and common observation shows, that any particular practice or custom is commonly attended with that which is very sinful, we may safely conclude that such a practice tends to sin; that it leads and exposes to it.

Thus we may determine that tavern-haunting and gaming are things that tend to sin; because common experience and observation show, that those practices are attended with a great deal of sin and wickedness. The observation of all ages and all nations, with one voice, declares it. It shows, where taverns are much frequented for drinking and the like, they are especially places of sin, of

profaneness, and other wickedness; and it shows, that those towns, where there is much of this, are places where no good generally prevails. And it also shows, that those persons that are given much to frequenting taverns are most commonly vicious persons. And so of gaming; as playing at cards, experience shows, that those persons that practise this, do generally fall into much sin. Hence these practices are become infamous among all sober virtuous persons.

4. Another way by which persons may determine of some things, that they lead and expose to sin, is by their own experience, or what they have found in themselves.—This surely is enough to convince them, that such things actually lead and expose to sin; for what will convince men, if their own experience will not? Thus if men have found by undeniable experience, that any practice or custom stirs up lust in them, and has betrayed them into foolish and sinful behaviour, or sinful thoughts; they may determine that they lead to sin. If they, upon examining themselves, must own that a custom or practice has disposed them to the omission of known duty, such as secret or family prayer, and has indisposed them to reading and religious meditation—or if they find, since they have complied with such a custom, they are less watchful of their hearts, less disposed to any thing that is serious; that the frame of their mind is more light, and their hearts less disposed on the things of another world, and more after vanity—these are sinful effects; and therefore if experience shows a custom or practice to be attended with these things, then experience shows that they lead and expose to sin.

5. We may determine whether a thing be of an evil tendency or not, by the effect that an outpouring of the Spirit of God, and a general flourishing of religion, has with respect to it. If this puts a stop to any practice or custom, and roots it out; surely it argues, that that practice or custom is of no good tendency. For if there be no hurt in it, and it tends to no hurt, why should the Spirit of God destroy it? The Spirit of God has no tendency to destroy any thing that is neither sinful, nor has any tendency to sin. Why should it? Why should we



suppose, that he is an enemy to that which has no hurt in it; nor has any tendency to that which is hurtful?

The flourishing of religion has no tendency to abolish or expel any thing that is no way against religion. That which is not against religion, religion will not appear against. It is a rule that holds in all contraries and opposites: the opposition is equal on both sides. So contrary as light is to darkness, so contrary is darkness to light. So contrary as the flourishing of religion is to any custom, just so contrary is that custom to the flourishing of religion. That custom that religion tends to destroy, that custom, if it prevail, tends also to destroy religion. Therefore, if the flourishing of religion, and the outpouring of the Spirit of God, tends to overthrow any custom, that takes place or prevails, we may surely determine, that that custom is either in itself sinful, or tends and exposes to evil.

6. We may determine, by the effect that a general decay of religion has with respect to them, whether they be things of a sinful tendency or not. If they be things that come with a decay of religion, that creep in as that decays, we may determine they are things of no good tendency. The withdrawing of good does not let in good but evil. Evil, not good, comes in, as good gradually ceases. What is it but darkness that comes in, as light withdraws?

Therefore, if there be any decay of religion in the town, or in particular persons, and upon this, any certain customs or practices take place and are allowed, which were wholly abstained from and renounced, when religion was in a more flourishing state; we may safely conclude that such customs and practices are contrary to the nature of true religion; and therefore in themselves sinful, or tending to sin.

7. We may in many things determine whether any custom be of a good tendency, by considering what the effect would be, if it was openly and universally owned and practised. There are many things which persons practise somewhat secretly, and which they plead to

be not hurtful; but which if they had suitable consideration to discern the consequence of every body openly practising the same, would soon show a most woeful state of things. If therefore there be any custom, that will not bear universal open practice and profession; we may determine that that custom is of an ill tendency. For if it is neither sinful in itself, nor tends to any thing sinful, then it is no matter how open it is: for we need not be afraid of that custom being too prevalent and universal, that has no ill tendency in it.

### SECT. III

A serious warning to all, and especially young people

THUS I have mentioned some general rules, by which to determine and judge, what things are of a bad and sinful tendency. And these things are so plain, that for a person to deny them, would be absurd and ridiculous.—I would now, in the name of God, warn all persons to avoid such things, as appear by these rules to lead and expose to sin. And particularly, I would take occasion to warn young people, as they would approve themselves fearers of God, to avoid all such things in company, that being tried by these rules, will appear to have a tendency to sin. Avoid all such ways of talking and acting as have a tendency to this; and follow the example of Joseph. Not only gross acts of uncleanness, but all degrees of lasciviousness, both in talking and acting, are strictly forbidden in Scripture; as what should not be so much as once named among saints or Christians. Gal. 5:9. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness." Eph. 5:3, 4, 5. "But fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; for this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God." We should hate even the garments spotted with the flesh, i.e. should hate and shun all that, in the least degree, approaches to any such thing.

And I desire that certain customs, too common among young people, may be examined by those rules that have been mentioned. That custom in particular, of young people of different sexes reclining together—however little is made of it, and however ready persons may be to laugh at its being condemned—if it be examined by the rules that have been mentioned, it will appear, past all contradiction, to be one of those things that lead and expose to sin. And I believe experience and fact abundantly bear witness to it. It has been one main thing that has led to the growth of uncleanness in the land. And there are other customs and liberties, customarily used among young people in company, which they who use them know that they lead to sin. They know that they stir up their lusts; and this is the very end for which they do it, to gratify their lusts in some measure. Little do such persons consider, what a holy God they are soon to be judged by, who abominates the impurities of their hearts.—If therefore they do actually stir up and feed lust, then certainly they tend to further degrees and more gross acts. That which stirs up lust, makes it more violent, and does therefore certainly the more expose persons to be overcome by it. How evident and undeniable are these things; and how strange that any should make a derision of them!

Possibly you may be confident of your own strength; and may think with yourself, that you are not in danger, that there is no temptation in these things, but what you are able easily to overcome. But you should consider that the most self-confident are most in danger. Peter was very confident that he should not deny Christ, but how dreadfully otherwise was the event! If others that have fallen into gross sins, should declare how it was with them; doubtless they would say, that they at first thought there was no danger; they were far from the thought that ever they should commit such wickedness; but yet by venturing further and further, they fell at last into the foulest and grossest transgressions. Persons may long withstand temptation, and be suddenly overcome at last. None so much in danger, as the most bold. They are most safe, who are most sensible of their own weakness; most distrustful of their own hearts; and most sensible of their continual need of restraining grace. Young

persons, with respect to the sin of uncleanness, are dealt with by the devil, just as some give an account of serpents charming birds and other animals down into their mouths. If the serpent takes them with his eyes, though they seem to be affrighted by it, yet they will not flee away, but will keep the serpent in sight, and approach nearer and nearer to him, till they fall a prey.

Another custom that I desire may be examined by the fore-mentioned rules, is that of young people of both sexes getting together in companies for mirth, and spending the time together till late in the night, in their jollity. I desire our young people to suffer their ears to be open to what I have to say upon this point; as I am the messenger of the Lord of hosts to them; and not determine that they will not hearken, before they have heard what I shall say. I hope there are but few persons among us so abandoned, as to determine that they will go on in a practice, whether they are convinced that it is unlawful or not; or though it should be proved to them to be unlawful by undeniable arguments.—Let us then examine this custom and practice by what has been said. It has been proved undeniably, that we ought not to go on in a practice that leads and exposes to sin; and rules have been laid down to judge what does thus expose and lead to it, which I think are plain and undeniable. Certainly a Christian will not be unwilling to have his practices examined and tried by the rules of reason and God's word; but will rather rejoice in it. And I desire particularly that the practice may be tried by that sure touch-stone of experience. This is one of the rules of trial that have been mentioned; that any custom which the experience and observation of mankind show to be ordinarily attended with sin, may be concluded to be unlawful. And if we look abroad in the country, I doubt not but these two things will be found.

1. That as to those places, where there is most of this carried on among young people, (as there is more of it in some places than others,) it will be found, as a thing that universally holds, that the young people there are commonly a loose, vain, and irreligious generation; little regarding God, heaven or hell, or any thing but

vanity. And that commonly in those towns where most frolicking is carried on, there are the most frequent breakings out of gross sins; fornication in particular.

2. If we go though the country, we shall for the most part find, that those persons who are most addicted to this practice, are the furthest from serious thought, and are the vainest and loosest upon other accounts. And whence should this be, if such a practice was not sinful, or had not a natural tendency to lead persons into sin.

Now I appeal to those who have made pretences to serious religion and saving piety. You have formerly pretended to keep up religion in your closets, and in your own souls; now seriously ask yourselves whether or no you have not found, that this practice has indisposed you to serious religion, and taken off your minds from it? Has it not tended to your neglect of secret prayer? And, if you have not wholly neglected it, have you not found, that you have been abundantly more ready to turn it off in any manner, and glad to have done with it? more backward to reading and serious meditation, and such things? And, that your mind has been exceedingly diverted from religion, and that for some time?—I do not send you far off to find out whether this custom be not of bad tendency—not beyond the sea, but your own breast; there let the matter be determined.

Let us now try this custom by the effect which the outpouring of the Spirit of God on a people has with respect to it. This we are under great advantage to do; because there has lately been, in this place, the most remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God, that has ever been in New England, and it may be in the world, since the apostles' days. And it is well known, that before then, the custom did prevail in the town; but after, the custom was altogether laid aside; and was so for several years.—No account can be given why the Spirit of God, and the flourishing of religion, should abolish such a custom, unless that custom be either in its nature or tendency an enemy to the Spirit of God, and to religion.—The fruits of the Spirit of God are good, and therefore it is good that this custom should be removed; for this is

plainly one of the effects. And if so, it is because the custom is bad, either in its nature or tendency; otherwise there would be no good in its being removed. The Spirit of God abolished this custom for this reason, because if it had been kept up in the town, it would have had a direct tendency to hinder that work which the Spirit was about to do amongst us. This was undeniably the reason.

Supposing such a custom had been begun and set up, by the young people all over the town, in the midst of the time of the late outpouring of the Spirit, all of a sudden; would any wise persons, that have truly the cause of religion at heart, rejoiced at it? Would not every one have concluded, without any hesitation, that there was great danger that it would take off people's minds from religion, and make them vain; and so put an end to the flourishing of religion? Would not every considerate person have thought thus of it? And if such a custom would have had an ill tendency then, so it will now.

OBJECTION. The town is not in such circumstances now, as it was then: it might have done hurt then, by putting an end to the great concern; but now it may do no hurt; for there is now no such great concern to be interrupted by it.

ANSWER. Though the town is not in such circumstances now as it was then, yet there ought to be as much engagedness of mind about religion, as much concern among sinners, and as much engagedness among the godly, as then; and it is to our shame that there is not. And if such a practice would have tended to destroy such a religious concern then, it certainly tends to prevent it now. It is a rule that will hold, that what has a tendency to destroy a thing when it is, tends to prevent when it is not. And are we not praying from sabbath to sabbath, and from day to day, for such a concern again? And do not those who pretend to be converted, and yet have lately set up this custom, pray for the same? Are you a convert, a saint, and yet not desire that there should be any more pouring out of the Spirit of God? The town has cause to be ashamed of such converts, if it has any such. And if ye do, why do you do what tends to prevent it.

Again, Let this practice be tried by the effect that a general decay of religion has with respect to it. Now we have a trial: it is now a time that religion is greatly decayed amongst us; and the effect is, that this custom comes in with this decay. Young people begin again to set up their old custom of frolicking, (as it is called,) and spending a great part of the night in it, to the violation of family order. What is the reason, if this custom is not bad, either in its nature or tendency, that it did not come in before, when religion was lively? Why does it stay till it can take the advantage of the withdrawment of religion? This is a sign that it is a custom that shuns a spirit of lively religion, as darkness shuns the light, and never comes in till light withdraws.

And here again, I would send persons to their own experience. How did this practice come in with you in particular; you, that two or three years ago seemed to be so engaged in religion? Did it not come in, did you not begin to practise it, as the sense of religion wore off? And what is the matter? Why did not you set up the practice then, when your heart was taken up about reading, meditation, and secret prayer to God? If this do not at all stand in the way of them, and is no hinderance to them, why was you not engaged in both together? What account can you give of it? Why did you leave off this practice and custom, or abstain from it? To what purpose is this changing? One while it must be avoided as evil, and another while practised and pleaded for as good? The making such an alteration does not look well, nor will it be for the honour of religion in the eye of the world. For whether the practice be lawful or not, yet such a thing will surely be improved to our disadvantage. For your avoiding it then has this appearance in the eye of the country, that then you condemned it; and therefore your now returning to it, will appear to them as backsliding in you. Such changelings are evermore, in the eye of the world, greatly to the dishonour of their profession, let it be what it will.

Indeed, this custom, as it is practised, does not only tend to sin, but is in itself very disorderly, sinful, and shameful. For it is attended late in the night, and in the dead of the night, to the neglect of family

prayer, and violating all family order; which is disorder and profaneness. Is it lawful to rob God of his ordinary sacrifices, for the sake of your pleasure, diversion, and jollity? Are you of that mind, that it is a decent thing that the stated worship of the great God should give way to your mirth, and your diversions? Is this the way of God's holy children? Those works that are commonly done in the dead of night, seem to have a black mark set upon them by the apostle, and Christians are exhorted to avoid them, Rom. 13:12, 13. "Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness; not in chambering and wantonness." The word here rendered rioting is of far different signification from the term, as used in our laws; for the forcible doing an unlawful thing, by three or more persons assembled together for that purpose. But the word here properly signifies, a disorderly convention of persons in order to spend their time together in pleasure and jollity. So the word is commonly used in Scripture: Prov. 23:20. "Be not amongst riotous eaters of flesh." Prov. 28:7. "He that is a companion of riotous men, shameth his father." Luke 15:13.—"wasted his substance with riotous living."—Again, a black mark seems to be set on such in Scripture, as in 1 Thess. 5:5–7. "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night."

Many of you that have lately set up this practice of frolicking and jollity, profess to be children of the light and of the day; and not to be the children of darkness. Therefore walk as in the day; and do not those works of darkness, that are commonly done at unseasonable hours of the night. Such things are not only condemned by the apostle, but are looked upon as infamous in all ages among sober people, as all past writings manifest. Therefore it is a thing of bad report, and so forbidden. Phil. 4:8. "Whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue—any praise, think on these things."



OBJECTION. But the wise man allows of this practice, when he says, Eccles. 3:4. "There is a time to mourn and a time to dance."

ANSWER. This is nothing to the purpose; for the utmost that any can pretend that it proves, is that it may be used under some circumstances; but not at all, that dancing and other things used by our young people in their frolics are lawful, in those circumstances: any more than what is said in the same chapter, ver. 3.—"there is a time to kill," proves that it is lawful for a man to commit murder.—To deny that dancing, under any circumstances whatever, was lawful, would be absurd; for there was a religious dancing in the Jewish church, which was a way of expressing their spiritual mirth. So David danced before the Lord. And he calls upon others to praise God in the dance. So there may be other circumstances wherein dancing may not be unlawful. But all this makes nothing to the present purpose; to prove that this particular custom is not of a bad tendency. Besides, when the wise man says, "there is a time to dance," that does not prove, that the dead of the night is the time for it. The same wise man doth not justify carnal mirth, but condemns it. Eccl. 2:2. "I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doth it?"

OBJECTION. If we avoid all such things, it will be the way for our young people to be ignorant how to behave themselves in company.

ANSWER. But consider what this objection comes to. It certainly comes to this, viz. That the pouring out of the Spirit of God upon a people, tends to banish all good conduct, good breeding, and decent behaviour from among them; and to sink them down into clownishness and barbarity! The Spirit of God did actually put an end to this practice among us.—But who is not ashamed to make such an objection? Will any of our young converts talk thus? Will you, that think you were converted by the late pouring out of the Spirit of God, and are made holy persons, heirs of eternal life, talk so blasphemously of it?

If our young people are resolute still to go on notwithstanding all that has been said, I hope that those of them who call themselves converted, will first find out some rational, satisfying answer to the arguments that have been used against it. This at least may be reasonably expected of them, seeing they make such a profession. You have this day been partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, and therein solemnly renewed your profession.—If after such light set before you, and such mercy given, you will go on, be it known to you, that your eating now, and at other times, will prove only an eating and drinking judgment to yourselves.

And I desire heads of families, if they have any government over their children, or any command of their own houses, would not tolerate their children in such practices, nor suffer such conventions in their houses.—I do not desire that young people should be abridged of any lawful and proper liberties. But this custom can be of no benefit or service in the world: it tends only to mischief.—Satan doubtless would be glad to have such an interest amongst us as he used to have; and is therefore striving to steal in, while we are sleeping: but let us rouse up ourselves, and vigorously oppose his encroachments. I shall repeat those words of the apostle, Rom. 13:12–14. and leave them to the serious consideration of all persons, old and young. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

## **Hope and Comfort Usually Follow Genuine Humiliation and Repentance**

*"And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the*

*days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." -- Hosea 2:15*

**In the context, the church of Israel is first threatened with the awful desolation which God was about to bring upon her for her dealing so falsely and treacherously with God; because though, in the bold language of the prophet, she had been married to God, she had yet gone after other lovers, and had committed adultery with them. "For she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread, and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." Therefore God threatened that he would strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst, and that he would discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and destroy her vines and fig trees, and make them a forest. So the prophet goes on terribly threatening her to the end of the thirteenth verse. And those things were fulfilled in the captivity of Israel in the land of Assyria. But in the verse preceding the text, and in the remainder of the chapter, there follows a gracious promise of mercy, which God would show her in the days of the gospel. "Therefore, behold I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." "I will allure her," that is, I will court or woo her again, as a young man woos a virgin, whom he desires to make his wife. God, for her committing adultery with other lovers, had threatened that he would give her a bill of divorce, as verse second, "Plead with your mother, plead; for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband." But here in the latter part of the chapter, God promises that in gospel times he would make her his wife again, as in the sixteenth verse, "And it shall be at that**

day that thou shalt call me Ishi;" that is "my husband." And so in verse 19, 20, "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, in loving-kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness." Here in the fourteenth verse, God promises that he will woo her, and in the latter part of the verse, he shows in what manner he will deal with her when he is about to woo or allure her. He would first bring her into the wilderness; that is, he would bring her into trouble and distress, and so humble her, and then allure her by speaking comfortably or pleasantly to her, as a young man does to a maid whom he woos. Then follow the words of the text.

I. We may observe what God would give to the children of Israel; *viz.* Hope and comfort. He promises to give her vineyards; which being spiritually interpreted as most of the prophecies of gospel times are to be interpreted, signifies spiritual comforts. Vineyards afford wine, which is comfort to those who are of heavy hearts. Pro. 31:6, "Give wine to those that are of heavy hearts." Wine is to make glad the heart of man. Psa. 104:15. Gospel rest and peace are sometimes prophesied of, under the metaphor of every man's sitting under his vine and under his own fig tree. God promises to give her hope, to open a door of hope for her, and to give her songs; that is, to give her spiritual joy, and both cause and disposition joyfully to sing praises to God.

II. We may observe after what manner God would bestow those benefits. *First*, they should be given after great trouble and abasement. Before she had this hope and comfort given, she should be brought into great trouble and distress to humble her. He promises to give her her vineyards from thence; that is, from the wilderness spoken of in the foregoing verse, into which it is said that God

would bring her, before he spoke comfortably to her. God would bring her into the wilderness, and then give her vineyards. God's bringing her into the wilderness was to humble her, and fit her to receive vineyards, and to make her see her dependence on God for them, that she might not attribute her enjoyment of them to her idols, as she had done before, for which reason God took them away, as in the twelfth verse, "And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest." There it is threatened that God will turn her vineyards into a forest, or wilderness. Here it is promises that he would turn the wilderness into vineyards, as Isa. 32:15, "Until the Spirit be poured on us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." She should first be in a wilderness, where she shall see that she cannot help herself, nor any of her idols help, or give her any vineyards. And then God will help her, that she shall see that it is God, and not any of her idols or lovers. God would first bring her into a wilderness, and thence give her vineyards, as God first brought the children of Israel into a dreadful wilderness. So God opened a door of hope to them in the valley of Achor, which is a word that signifies trouble, and was so called from the trouble which the children of Israel suffered by the sin of Achor. So God is wont first to make their sin a great trouble to them, an occasion of a great deal of distress, before he opens a door of hope. God promises to make her sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. This plainly refers to the joyful song which Moses and the children of Israel sang when they came up out of the Red sea. The children of Israel there had great joy and comfort; but just before they had great trouble. They had been in extreme distress by the oppression of their taskmasters; and just before this triumphant song, they were brought to extremity and almost to despair,

when Pharaoh and the Egyptians appeared ready to swallow them up.

*Second*, this hope and comfort should be bestowed on the slaying and forsaking of sin. That is the troubler of the soul. It should be given in the valley of Achor, which was the valley where the troubler of Israel was slain as you may see in Jos. 7:26; and the place where the children of Israel sang, when they came up out of the land of Egypt. The eastern shore of the Red sea was the place where they saw their enemies and old taskmaster, the types of men's lusts, which are sinners' taskmasters, lie dead on the sea-shore, and of whom they took their final leave. And God had told them, that their enemies whom they had seen that day, they should see no more forever.

## DOCTRINE

God is wont to cause hope and comfort to arise in the soul after trouble and humbling for sin, and according as the troubler is slain and forsaken. I would show,

I. That it is thus with respect to the first true hope and comfort which is given to the soul at conversion.

II. That God is wont to bestow hope and comfort on Christians from time to time in this way.

I. God is wont to cause hope and comfort to arise to the soul in conversion after trouble and humbling for sin, and upon the slaying of the troubler.

*First*, it is God's manner to bestow hope and comfort on a soul in conversion after trouble and humbling for sin. Under this head are three things to be observed. 1. The trouble itself. 2. The cause, *viz.* sin. 3. The humbling.

**1. Souls are wont to be brought into trouble before God bestows true hope and comfort. The corrupt hearts of men naturally incline to stupidity and senselessness before God comes with the awakening influences of his Spirit. They are quiet and secure. They have no true comfort and hope, and yet they are quiet; they are at ease. They are in miserable slavery, and yet seek not a remedy. They say, as the children of Israel did in Egypt to Moses, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." But if God has a design of mercy to them, it is his manner before he bestows true hope and comfort on them, to bring them into trouble, to distress them, and spoil their ease and false quietness, and to rouse them out of their old resting and sleeping places, and to bring them into a wilderness. They are brought into great trouble and distress, so that they can take no comfort in those things in which they used to take comfort. Their hearts are pinched and stung, and they can find no ease in anything. They have, as it were, an arrow sticking fast in them, which causes grievous and continual pain, an arrow which they cannot shake off, or pull out. The pain and anguish of it drinks up their spirit. Their worldly enjoyments were a sufficient good before; but they are not now. They wander about with wounded hearts, seeking rest, and finding none; like one wandering in a dry and parched wilderness under the burning, scorching heat of the sun, seeking for some shadow where he may sit down and rest, but finding none. Wherever he goes the beams of the sun scorch him. Or he seeks some fountain of, cool water to quench his thirst, but finds not a drop. He is like David in his trouble, who wandered about in the wilderness, Saul pursuing him wherever he went, driving and hunting him from one wilderness to another, from one mountain to another, and from one cave to another, giving him no rest. To such sinners, all things look dark, and they know not what to do, nor whither to turn. If they look forward or backward, to the right hand or the left, all is**

**gloom and perplexity. If they look to heaven, behold darkness. If they look to the earth, behold trouble, and darkness, and dimness of anguish. Sometimes they hope for relief, but they are disappointed, and so again and again they travail in pain, and a dreadful sound is in their ears. They are terrified and affrighted, and they seek refuge, as a poor creature pursued by an enemy. He flies to one refuge and there is beset, and that fails; then he flies to another, and then is driven out of that. And his enemies grow thicker and thicker about, encompassing him on every side. They are like those of whom we read in Isa. 24:17, 18. Fear, and the pit, and the snare are upon them, and when they flee from the noise of the fear they are taken in the pit; and if they come up out of the pit, they are taken in the snare. So that they know not what to do. They are like the children of Israel, while Achor troubled them. They go forth against their enemies, and they are smitten down and flee before them. They call on God, but he does not answer, nor seem to regard them. Sometimes they find something in which they take pleasure for a little time, but it soon vanishes away, and leaves them in greater distress than before. And sometimes they are brought to the very borders of despair. Thus they are brought into the wilderness, and into the valley of Achor, or of trouble.**

**2. Sin is the trouble or the cause of this trouble. Sin is the disease of the soul, and such a disease as will, if the soul is not benumbed, cause exceeding pain. Sin brings guilt, and that brings condemnation and wrath. All this trouble arises from conviction of sin. Awakened sinners are convinced that they are sinful. Before the sinner thought well of himself, or was not convinced that he was very sinful. But now he is led to reflect first on what he has done, how wickedly he has spent his time, what wicked acts or practices he has been guilty of. And afterwards in the progress of his awakenings, he is made sensible of**



something of the sin and plague of his heart. They are made sensible of the guilt and wrath which sin brings. The threatening of God's law, are set home, and they are made sensible that God is angry, and that his wrath is dreadful. They are led to consider the dreadfulness of that punishment, which God has threatened. The affection or principle, which is wrought upon to cause this trouble, is fear. They are afraid of the punishment of sin, and God's wrath for it. They are commonly afraid of many things here in this world as the fruit of sin. They are afraid that God will not hear their prayers, that he is so angry with them, that he will never give them converting grace. They are afraid oftentimes that they have committed the unpardonable sin, or at least that they have been guilty of such sin as God will never pardon; that their day is past, and that God has given them up to judicial hardness of heart and blindness of mind. Or if they are not already, they are afraid they shall be. They are afraid oftentimes, that the Spirit of God is not striving with them now, that their fears are from some other cause. Sometimes they are afraid that it is only the devil, who terrifies and afflicts them; and that if the Spirit of God is striving with them, he will be taken from them, and they shall be left in a Christless state. They are afraid that if they seek salvation, it will be to no purpose, and that they shall only make their case worse and worse; that they are farther and farther from anything which is good, and that there is less probability now of their being converted, than when they began to seek. Sometimes they fear, that they have but a short time to live, and that God will soon cast them to hell; that none ever were as they were, who ever found mercy; that their case is peculiar, and that all wherein they differ from others is for the worse. They have fears on every side. Oftentimes they are afraid of everything. Everything looks dark, and they are afraid that everything will prove ruinous to them. But in the issue of all they are afraid they shall

perish forever. They are afraid that when they die they shall go down to hell, and there have their portion appointed them in everlasting burnings. This is the sum of all their fears. And the cause of this fear is a consciousness of the guilt of sin. It is sin, which is the cruel taskmaster, which oppresses them, and chastises them; and sin is the cruel Pharaoh, which pursues them. As the children of Israel, before they came to sing with joy after they came out of the land of Egypt, were under great trouble from their taskmasters, and sighed by reason of the hard bondage, and then were pursued, and put into dreadful fear at the Red sea. It was their taskmasters who made them all this trouble. So it is sin which makes all the trouble which a sinner suffers under awakenings. Their trouble for sin is no gracious, godly sorrow for sin; for that does not arise merely from fear, but from love. It is not an evangelical, but legal, repentance of which we are speaking, which is not from love to God, but only self love.

3. The end of this trouble in those to whom God designs mercy is to humble them. God leads them into the wilderness before he speaks comfortably to them, for the same cause that he led the children of Israel into the wilderness before he brought them into Canaan, which we are told was to humble them. Deu. 8:2, "And thou shalt remember all the way, which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart." Man naturally trusts in himself and magnifies himself. And for man to enjoy only ease and prosperity and quietness tends to nourish and establish such a disposition. Deu. 32:15, "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." But by trouble and distress, and by a sense of a heavy load of guilt, God brings men down into the dust. God brings souls thus into the wilderness to show them their own helplessness, to let them see that they have nothing to which they can turn for

help, to make them sensible that they are not rich and increased with goods, but wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked; to show them that they are utterly undone and ruined, to make them sensible of their exceeding wickedness, and to bring them to be sensible how justly God might cast them off forever. Those legal troubles tend to show them their utter inability to help themselves, as their fears put them on using their utmost endeavors, and trying their utmost strength; and by continuing in that way their experience teaches them their weakness, and they find they can do nothing. It puts them upon repeated trials, and they have as repeated disappointments. But repeated disappointments tend to bring a man to give up the case, and to despair of help in that way in which he has tried for it. It tends to make men sensible of the utter insufficiency of their wisdom, and bring them to see their own exceeding blindness and ignorance. For fear, and concern, and distress, necessarily put a person on intensely thinking, and studying, and contriving for relief. But when men have been thus trying their own wisdom and invention to their utmost, and find it fails, and signifies nothing, and is altogether to no purpose, it makes them more and more sensible of their weakness and blindness, and brings them to confess themselves fools, and blind, as to those things which concern their relief. They are like one who is placed in the midst of a vast hideous wilderness. At first it may be he may not be sensible but that he knows the way home, and can directly go in the way which leads out of the wilderness. But after he has tried and has traveled awhile, and finds that he cannot find the way, and that he spends himself in vain, and only goes round and round, and comes to the same place again at last, he is brought to confess that he knows not where to go, nor what to do, and that he is sensible that he, like one who is perfectly lost, and altogether in darkness, and is brought at last to yield the case and stand

still, and do nothing but call for help, that if possible any one may hear, and lead him in the wilderness. For this end God leads men into the wilderness before he speaks comfortably to them. The troubles which they have for sin tend to bring them to be sensible how justly God may cast them off forever. And this brings them to reflect on their sins; for these are the things of which they are afraid. When a man is terribly afraid of things with which he is surrounded, this engages his eyes to behold; he looks intensely on them, and sees more and more how frightful and terrible they are. When they are in fear, they take much more notice of their sins than at other times. They think more how wickedly they have lived, and observe more the corrupt and wicked working of their own hearts, and so are more and more sensible what vile creatures they are. This makes them more and more sensible how angry God is, and how terrible his anger is. They try to appease and to reconcile God by their own righteousness, but it fails. God still appears as an angry God, refusing to hear their prayers, or appear for their help, till they despair in their own righteousness, and yield the case. And by more and more of a sight of themselves are brought to confess that they lie justly exposed to damnation, and have nothing by which to defend themselves. God appears more and more as a terrible being to them, till they have done with any imaginations, that they have anything sufficient to recommend them, or reconcile them to such a God. Thus God is wont first to bring the soul into trouble by reason of sin, and so to humble the soul, before he gives true hope and comfort in conversion.

*Second*, this hope and comfort are given upon the slaying of the troubler. Whatever troubles there are for sin, yet if the sin is not slain, it cannot be expected but that there will be trouble still. Before there will be no true comfort. The soul may return to stupidity and carelessness, and may

receive a false peace and hope, and sin be kept alive; but no true hope. Persons may be exceedingly troubled for sin, and yet sin be saved alive. Persons may seem to lament they have done thus and thus, and weep many tears, and cry out of their sinfulness and wickedness, and yet the life of sin be whole in them. But if so, they never shall receive true comfort. They may refrain from sin; there may be a great reformation, and exact life for a time. Or there may be a total reformation of some particular ways of sin, and yet not true hope; because sin is only restrained; it is not slain. Many men are brought to restrain sin, and to give it slight wounds, who cannot be brought to kill it. Wicked men are loth to kill sin. They have been very good friends to it ever since they have been in the world, and have always treated it as one of their most familiar and best friends. They have allowed it the best room in their hearts, and have given it the best entertainment they could, and they are very loth to destroy it. But until this be done, God never will give them true comfort. If ever men come to have a true hope, they must do as the children of Israel did by Achan. Jos. 7:24, 25, 26, “And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had; and they brought them into the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called the valley of Achor unto this day.” So if ever men come to have any true hope, they must take sin which is the troubler, and all which belongs to it, even that which seems most dear and precious, though it be as choice as Achan’s silver and wedge of gold, and

utterly destroy them, and burn them with fire, to be sure to make a thorough end of them, as it were, bury them and raise over them a great heap of stones, to lay a great weight upon them, to make sure of it that they shall never rise more. Yea, and thus they must serve all his sons and daughters. They must not save some of the accursed brood alive. All the fruits of sin must be forsaken. There must not be some particular lust, some dear sinful enjoyment, some pleasant child of sin, spared. But all must be stoned and burned. If we do thus, we may expect to have trouble cease, and light to arise, as it was in the camp of Israel after slaying the troubler.

*Inquiry.* Here it may be inquired, what is implied in slaying sin at conversion? And it implies these several things:

*First*, there must be a conviction of the evil of it as against God. All is carried on by conviction. Those legal troubles, which are before conversion, arise from some conviction of the being of sin, and the guilt and danger of it. And the slaying of sin is by conviction of its evil and hateful nature. To slay the troubler, we must find him out, as the children of Israel did before they slew Achan. They rose early in the morning, and searched, and brought all Israel by their tribes. And then searched the tribe, which was taken by families, and the family by particular persons, and so found him.

*Second*, it is to have the heart turned from, and turned against, it in hatred. The troubler is never slain, but by a thorough and saving change of heart and renovation of nature, so that that which before loved sin and chose it, may now hate and abhor it, and may disrelish it, and all its ways, and especially hate their former ways of sin.

***Third***, forsaking and renouncing it. Let men pretend what they may, their hearts are not turned from sin, if they do not forsake it. He is not converted, who is not really come to a disposition utterly to forsake all ways of sin. If ever sinners have true hope and comfort, they must take a final leave of sin, as the children of Israel did of the Egyptians at the Red sea. Persons may have a great deal of trouble from sin, and many conflicts and struggles with it, and seem to forsake it for a time, and yet not forsake it finally; as the children of Israel had with the Egyptians. They had a long struggle with them before they were freed from them. How many judgments did God bring upon the Egyptians, before they would let them go? And sometimes Pharaoh seemed as if he would let them go; but yet when it came to the proof he refused. And when they departed from Rameses doubtless they thought then they had got rid of them. They did not expect to see them any more. But when they arrived at the Red sea, and looked behind them, they saw them pursuing them. They found it a difficult thing wholly to get rid of them. But when they were drowned in the Red sea, then they took an everlasting leave of them. The king and all the chiefs of them were dead. And therefore God said to them [in] Exo. 14:13, "The Egyptians, whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more forever." So sinners must not only part with sin for a little time, but they must forsake it forever, and be willing never to see or have anything to do with their old sinful ways and enjoyments. They must forsake that which is their iniquity, the sin which most easily besets them, and to which by their constitution or custom they have been most addicted, which has been, as it were, the dearest of all, and most respected, as a king among the army of sins; though that must be slain too, as Pharaoh, the king of the Egyptians, was in the Red sea. And we must not do as Saul did, when God sent him to kill the Amalekites; but he saved the king of the Amalekites alive, which cost him his kingdom.

***Fourth***, it implies embracing Christ, and trusting in him as the Savior from sin. We must look to him not only as a Savior from the punishment of sin, but we must receive and embrace him as a Savior from sin itself. We cannot deliver ourselves from sin. We cannot slay this enemy of ourselves. He is too strong an enemy for us. We can no more slay sin ourselves, that the children of Israel, who were themselves a poor feeble company, a mixed multitude, unprepared to resist such a force, could themselves slay Pharaoh, and all his mighty army with chariots and horsemen. It was Christ in the pillar of cloud and fire, who fought for them. They had nothing to do but trust in him. Exo.14:14, “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” They could never have drowned the Egyptians in the sea. It was Christ who did it; for the pillar of cloud stood between them and the Israelites, and when they were up out of the sea, then Christ brought on them the waters of the sea. Our enemies must be drowned in the all-sufficient fountain, and as it were, sea of Christ’s blood, as the Egyptians were in the Red sea, and then we may sing, as the children of Israel did in the day when they came up out of the land of Egypt. When sin is thus slain, then God is wont to open a door of hope, a door through which there flashes a sweet light out of heaven upon the soul. Then comfort arises, and then is there a new song in the mouth, even praise unto God.

**II.** God is wont to bestow hope and comfort from time to time in the same manner on Christians. In the consideration of this matter I would show,

***First***, that Christians are frequently in darkness, and their hope is often greatly obscured.

***Second***, that it is sin which is the occasion of this darkness.



***Third,*** their trouble is commonly much increased a little before the renewal of light and hope.

***Fourth,*** their darkness is not perpetual, but God is wont to cause hope and comfort to rise again.

***Fifth,*** that hope and comfort are renewed to them on the slaying of the troubler.

***First,*** it is often the case that Christians are under darkness, and their hope is greatly clouded. God is wont to give his saints hope and comfort at their first conversion, which sometimes remains without any great interruption for a considerable time. And some Christians live abundantly more in the light than others. Some for many years together have but little darkness. God is pleased to distinguish them from their neighbors. He mercifully keeps them from those occasions of darkness, into which he suffers others to fall, and gives them of the light of his countenance. God exercises his sovereignty in this matter, as he does in giving converting grace. As he bestows that on whom he pleases, so he bestows on some of those who are converted more light, on others less, according as it pleases him. But many Christians meet with a great deal of darkness, and see times in which their hopes are much clouded. Sometimes the sweet and comfortable influences of God's Spirit are withdrawn. They were wont to have spiritual discoveries made of God and Christ to their souls, but now they have none. Their minds seem to be darkened, and they cannot see spiritual things, as they have done in times past. Formerly, when they read the Scriptures, they used often to have light come in, and they seemed to have an understanding and relish for what they read, and were filled with comfort. But now when they read, it is all a dead

letter and they have no taste for it, and are obliged to force themselves to read. They seem to have no pleasure in it, but it is a mere task and burden. Formerly they used to have passages of Scripture come to their minds, when they were not reading, which brought much light and sweetness with them. But now they have none. Formerly they used to feel the sweet exercises of grace. They could trust in God, and could find a spirit of resignation to his will, and had love drawn forth, and sweet longings after God and Christ, and a sweet complacency in God; but now they are dull and dead. Formerly they used to meet with God in the ordinances of his house. It was sweet to sit and hear the word preached, and it seemed to bring light and life. They used to feel life and sweetness in public prayers, and their hearts were elevated in singing God's praises. But now it is otherwise. Formerly they used to delight in the duty of prayer. The time which they spent in their closet between God and their own souls was sweet to them. But now when they go thither, they do not meet God; and they take no delight in drawing near to God in their closets. When they do pray, it seems to be a mere lifeless, heartless performance. They utter such and such words, but they seem to be nothing but words; their hearts are not engaged. Their minds are continually wandering and going to and fro, after one vanity and another. With this decay of the exercise of grace, their hope greatly decays; and the evidences of their piety are exceedingly clouded. When they look into their hearts, it seems to them that they can see nothing there, from which they should hope. And when they consider after what manner they live, it seems to them to argue, that they have no grace. They have but little of anything which is new, to furnish comfortable evidence to them of their good estate; and as to their old evidences, they are greatly darkened. Their former experience, in which they took great comfort, looks dim, and a great way off, and out of sight to them. They have almost forgotten it,

and have no pleasure in thinking or speaking of it. And sometimes true Christians are brought into terrible distress. They are not only deprived of their former comforts, and have their former hopes obscured, but they have inward distressing darkness. God does not only hide his face, but they have a sense of his anger. He seems to frown upon them. So it appears to have been with David. Psa. 42:7, “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” So with Heman. Psa. 88:6, 7, “Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves.”

*Second*, it is sin which is the occasion of this trouble and darkness. Whenever the godly meet with such darkness, there is some Achan in their souls which is the occasion of all this; and this is sin. This is the occasion of the darkness of the godly, as well as the troubles which natural men have under awakenings. It is not for want of love in God towards his saints, or readiness to grant comfort to them. Neither is God’s hand shortened, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy, that he cannot hear. It is their sin which hides God’s face from them. Isa. 59:1, 2. Sin is the occasion of this darkness of the saints, in these three ways:

1. Sometimes it is owing to the weakness and small degree of grace infused in conversion, and the strength of remaining corruption. The work of God is the same in all who are converted, so far that their sin is mortified, and that which reigned before does not reign now. The heart is changed from darkness to light, and from death to life, and turned from sin to God. And yet the work is very different with respect to the degree of mortification of sin, and the degree of grace which is infused. Some have more spiritual light given in their first conversion than others; have greater discoveries, and are brought at once to a much

greater acquaintance with God, and have their hearts more humbled, and more weaned from sin and the world, and more filled with the love of God and Christ, and are brought nearer to heaven than others. Some at first conversion have a much more eminent work of grace in their hearts than others. Some have emphatically but little grace infused, and consequently their corruptions are left in much greater strength. When it is so, it is no wonder that such have a weaker hope, and less light and comfort, than others. The natural tendency of indwelling sin in the saints, is to cloud and darken the mind; and therefore, the more of it remains, the more will it have this effect. Persons can know their own good estate in no other way than by seeking, or perceiving grace in their hearts. But certainly the less of it there is, with the more difficulty will it be seen or felt. As indwelling sin prevails, so does it the more obscure and cloud grace, as a great smoke clouds and hides a spark. And therefore the more there is of this indwelling sin, the more will grace be hid. The greater the strength in which corruption is left, the more rare will be the good frames which the godly have, and the more frequent and of longer continuance will be their times of darkness. It may be, the darkness with which the saints meet is from some particular corruption, which has always hitherto been in too great prevalence and strength, and has never yet been mortified to such a degree, but that it continues a great troubler in the soul. Grace being weak, the sin of the constitution takes advantage, whether that be a proud and haughty temper, or a covetous spirit, or an addictedness to some sensuality, or a peevish, fretful, discontented spirit, or ill temper, or a quarrelsome spirit, or disposition to high resentment. Or whether it be any other corrupt disposition, which is the sin to which they are chiefly exposed by natural temper, or by their education and former custom. If the grace which is infused at conversion, be comparatively weak, this constitutional

sin will take the advantage, and will dreadfully cloud the mind, and hinder spiritual comfort, and bring trouble and darkness. There is a great variety in the work of grace upon men's hearts, as to the particular discoveries which are then given, and the particular graces which are in chief exercise; whereby it comes to pass, that some in their conversion are more assisted against that particular corruption which is its opposite. Hence some particular corruptions may be left in much greater prevalence than others, and so be a greater occasion of darkness. Thus some, in the particular experiences which they have, may not be so especially assisted against pride as others, whereby their pride may take occasion to work. And when they have had spiritual discoveries and comfort, they may be lifted up with them. And this may be an occasion of displeasing and grieving his Holy Spirit, and so of their having a great deal of darkness. They may not have seen so much of their own emptiness as some others, and so their corruption may work much more by self-confidence than others; and no wonder that self-confident persons meet with darkness. No wonder that when men trust in themselves for light and grace, that their confidence fails, and they go without that for which they trusted in themselves.

2. Sometimes the saints are in great darkness on occasion of some gross transgression into which they have fallen. So it was with David, when he fell into gross sin in the matter of Uriah. He exceedingly quenched the influences of the Spirit of God by it, and God withdrew those influences from him, and the comforts which they had imparted; as appears by his earnestly praying for their restoration. *Psa. 51:12*, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." When Christians fall into gross transgression, it is commonly the fact that an exceedingly deep darkness follows.

3. When they do not fall into any particular gross and scandalous transgression, yet they sometimes exceedingly darken their minds by corrupt frames and evil habits, into which they fall. There is much remaining corruption in the hearts of Christians, and oftentimes they get into very ill frames. Some particular corruptions grow very prevalent. Sometimes they grow proud and conceited of themselves, either on account of their own godliness, and the good opinion others have of them, or on some other account. Sometimes they fall into a worldly frame, and spiritual things grow more tasteless to them, and their hearts are desperately bent on the acquisition of worldly good. Sometimes their minds grow light and vain, and their affections are wholly fixed on the vanities of youth, on dress, and gaiety, and fashion. Some, because their minds are not occupied as once they were, with spiritual enjoyments and delights, sweetly meditating on heavenly things, breathing and longing after them, and earnestly seeking them, become the slaves of their sensual appetites. Others grow contentious and quarrelsome, are often angry with those around them, and cherish habitual rancor against them in their hearts. They become willful and obstinate, and stir up strife, and oppose others with vehemence; determining at all hazards to carry their own measures, and delighting to have those who oppose them defeated and humbled. It hurts them to have others prosper. Their minds and hearts are full of turmoil, and heat, and vehemence against one and another. Others fall into a discontented, fretful, and impatient frame at the disposals of Providence. And oftentimes many of these things go together. And as these persons sink into such unhappy frames in their hearts, so they pursue very sinful courses of conduct. They behave themselves unsuitably, so as to dishonor God, and greatly to wound religion. They do not appear to others to savor of a good spirit. They fall into the practice of allowing themselves too great liberties in

indulging their sensual appetites, in the gratification of covetousness and pride, in strife, backbiting, and a violent pursuit after the world. They slide into those corrupt frames and evil ways commonly by means of their first giving way to a slothful spirit. They are not so diligent and earnest in religion as they once were; but indulge their slothful disposition, and discontinue their watch, and so lie open to temptation. Thus ill frames imperceptibly creep upon them, and they insensibly more and more fall into sinful practices. So it was with David. Their sin, into which they fall in consequence of this degenerate and sinful state of the affections and the life, is the occasion of a great deal of darkness. God withdraws his Spirit from them, their light goes out, and the evidences of their piety grow dim and obscure. They seem to be in a great measure as they were before they were converted, and they have no sensible communion with God. Thus sin is the occasion of trouble and darkness to the Christian.

*Third*, when it is thus with Christians, their trouble is commonly greatly increased a little before the renewal of hope and comfort. When sin prevails, as has been said, in the hearts of Christians, they are not wont to be easy and quiet like secure sinners. There is commonly more or less of an inward struggling and uneasiness. Grace in the heart, though it be dreadfully oppressed, and, as it were, overwhelmed, yet will be resisting its enemy and struggling for liberty. So that it is not with Christians in their ill frames, and under the prevalence of corruption, altogether as it is with carnal, wicked men who are secure. And there is this good reason for it, that the former have a principle of spiritual life in their souls, which the latter have not. Yet Christians in their ill frames may fall into a great deal of security and senselessness; for sin is of a stupefying nature, and wherever it prevails, will have more or less of that effect. When they fall into a sinful, worldly, proud, or

contentious frame, they are wont to have a great degree of senselessness and stupidity with it. And especially when they fall into gross sins, has it a tendency greatly to stupefy the soul. It obviously had this effect on David. He seems to have been strangely stupefied, when Nathan came to him with the parable of the rich man, who injuriously took the poor man's ewe lamb from him. He was enraged with the man in the parable, but did not seem to reflect on himself, or think how parallel his case was with his. And while they are thus senseless, their trouble is not so great; and if they feel the weight of sin it is not so burdensome to them. But God is wont, before he renews comfort and hope to them, to bring them into greater trouble. As a sinner before his first comfort in his conversion is brought into trouble, so it is wont to be with the saints after their backslidings and decays, before renewed hope and comfort is granted. There is a work of awakening wrought upon them. While they remain in their corrupt frames, they are, as it were, asleep. They are like the ten foolish virgins who slumbered and slept; and as persons who are asleep, they are unconscious, not sensible where they are, nor what are their circumstances. Therefore when God is coming and returning to them by his Spirit, commonly his first work upon them is a work of awakening, to wake them out of sleep, and rouse them to some sensibility, to make them sensible of the great folly of their ways, and how they have displeased and offended God, and what mischief they have done. Thus God leads them into the wilderness, and brings them into the valley of Achor or trouble. Then they are in greater trouble than they were before, and have more sensible darkness, and more distress abundantly. But yet it is really much better with them now, than before they began to come to themselves. Their circumstances are much more eligible and more hopeful, though sometimes they are in distress and almost insupportable. And a little before God renews light and comfort, they have a very



great sense of God's anger, and his wrath lies heavy upon them. So it seems to have been with David a little before the restoration of spiritual comfort to him, which made him speak of the bones which God had broken, when he was praying for the renewal of comfort. Psa. 51:8, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." And probably he has respect to the same thing in Psa. 38 which he calls his psalm to bring to remembrance. Verses 2, 3, 4, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." And often when God is about to bring them to themselves, and to restore comfort to them, he first brings them into some very great and sore temporal calamity and trouble, and awakens them by that, and in this first brings them into the wilderness before he speaks comfortably to them. Job 33:16, etc. "Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain; so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones, that were not seen, stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth. He shall pray unto God, and he shall be favourable unto him, and he shall see his face with joy; for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men,

and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.” Thus those who are very weak in grace sometimes meet with great and sore trouble, both of body and mind, which is an occasion of a new work, as it were, of grace upon their hearts; so that they are more eminent saints afterwards, and have much more comfort.

*Fourth*, when the saints are in darkness, their darkness is not perpetual, but God will restore hope and comfort to them again. When one of Christ’s sheep wanders away, and gets into the wilderness, Christ the good Shepherd will not leave him in the wilderness, but will seek him, and will lay him on his shoulders, and bring him home again. We cannot tell how long God may leave his saints in the dark, but yet surely their darkness shall not last forever; for light is sown to the righteous, and gladness to the upright in heart. Psa. 97:11. God, in the covenant of grace in which they have an interest, has promised them joy and comfort. He has promised them everlasting joy. Isa. 61:7. Satan may be suffered for a time to bring them into darkness, but they shall be brought out again. God may be provoked to hide his face from them for a time; and if it seems long, yet it is indeed but a little time. Isa. 54:7, 8, “For a small moment I have forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.” Psa. 30:5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

*Fifth*, hope and comfort are renewed to them on the slaving of the troubler. All sin is truly mortified in conversion, or has its death wounds then. And all the exercises of it

afterwards are, in some respects, as the efforts and strugglings of a dying enemy. But yet all life is not actually extinct, and therefore it needs to be further mortified, to receive more deadly wounds. Sin is slain in the godly after trouble and darkness, and before the renewing of comfort, in these three ways:

1. It is slain as to former degrees of it. All remains of corruption are not extirpated. Sin does not cease to be in the heart; but it ceases to be any more in such strength as it has been. It ceases to have that prevalence.

2. It is slain as to former ways of exercise. The former ways of sin are forsaken. They are further afterwards from such ways of sin than ever before. The heart is fortified against them. Thus if a godly man has been in a way of contention and strife, when he comes to himself again, he slays his contention. He kills sin as to that way of exercising it. Or if it be some way of sensuality, when he comes to himself, he will slay his sensuality, and cast it out from him.

3. It is totally and perfectly slain in his will and inclination.

There is that renewed opposition made against it, which implies a mortal inclination and design against it. What the saint seeks when he comes to himself after a time of great declension, is to be the death of sin, which has been so prevalent in him, and perfectly to extirpate it. He acts in what he does as a mortal enemy. And if he does not perfectly destroy it at one blow, it is not for want of inclination, but for want of strength. The godly man does not deal mercifully and tenderly with sin, but as far as in him lies, he deals with it as the children of Israel dealt with Achan, as it were, stones it with stones, and burns it with fire with all which belongs to it. They do not at all spare it, as wicked men do; they aim at the very life, and nothing

short of it. The saints' slaying the troubler after great backslidings and ill frames, implies the following things.

(1). There is a conviction of the evil of their sin. They are brought to consideration. They think on their ways before they turn their feet. Psa. 119:59. They consider how they have behaved themselves, how unworthily, how unfaithful they have been to their profession, how ungratefully, and disagreeably to the mercies they have received. They consider how they have provoked God, and have deserved his wrath. They find the troubler led them to see a great deal more of the sinfulness and corruption of their hearts commonly than before. In this respect the work of God with saints after great declinings is agreeable to his work in the heart of a natural man in order to his conversion.

(2). There is a gracious humiliation of soul before God for it. The gracious soul, when convinced of sin after great declensions, and recovered out of them, is deeply humbled; for it is brought to the dust before God. There is an evangelical repentance. The heart is broken for sin. That sacrifice is offered to God, which David offered rather than burnt offerings after his great fall. Psa. 51:16, 17, "For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." They are brought as Job was, after he had sinned, in complaining of God's dealings with him, to abhor themselves. Job 42:6. And they are in a meeker frame, as the Christian Corinthians were, after they had greatly gone out of the way, and had been reprov'd by the apostle Paul. 2 Cor. 7:11, "For behold the self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what vehement desire, yea what zeal, yea what revenge." They were filled with sorrow, and with a

kind of indignation, zeal, and spirit of revenge against themselves for their folly, and so ungratefully treating God. When Christians are convinced of their sin after remarkable miscarriages and ill frames, they are commonly convinced of many of the same things of which they were convinced under their first humiliation, but to a greater degree than ever before. They are brought to a new conviction, and a greater conviction than ever before, of their own emptiness, and to be sensible what poor, feeble, helpless creatures, and what sinful, vile, utterly unworthy creatures, they are; how undeserving they are of any mercy, and how much they deserve God's wrath. And this conviction works by a gracious humbling of the soul. The grace of humility is greatly increased by it, and very commonly they are more poor in spirit and lowly of heart during all their future life. They see more what cause there is for them to lay their hands on their mouths, and to walk humbly with God, and lie low before him.

(3). There is a renewed application to Christ as a Savior from sin.

There is a renewed act of reliance on him for justification, of faith in his blood to cleanse them, and of trust in his righteousness to cover their nakedness and filthiness. And Christ as a Savior becomes more precious to them. As they have a greater sense of their own emptiness and vileness, so they have a more entire dependence on Christ's fullness.

(4). The heart is farther separated from those ways of sin, and more confirmed against them, than ever. After it they commonly have a greater dread of it, and greater abhorrence, look upon it more as an enemy, and remember what they have suffered from it; and their hearts are more confirmed against it than ever. They have stronger resolutions to all which savors of the like, and all which

might lead to it. Therefore this is mentioned among the effects of the repentance of the Corinthians after their going astray. "What carefulness it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what fear, yea what earnest desire." There was a more than ordinary fear and dread of the like sin for the future, and more carefulness to shun it, and a more earnest desire of the contrary. The work of God in the heart of a saint after declension oftentimes, in many respects, resembles the work of God in a sinner at his conversion; though it is not in all respects like it, because of the great difference in the subject. When the troubler comes to be thus slain after times of trouble and darkness in the godly, then God is wont to open a door of hope. The darkness which has covered them, which was greatest a little before, is now scattered, and light arises. It may be before there had been a long night of clouds and darkness. But now the clouds begin to scatter, and the sweet refreshing beams begin to break forth, and come down into the heart. The soul, which has been wounded, is now healed. God pours in the oil of comfort. The renewed sense, which is given, of Christ's fullness and sufficiency, gives new life and hope and joy. The troubler being slain, God now grants renewed discoveries of his glory, and renewed manifestations of his grace. And the soul, which was before in darkness, is now entertained with sweet views. And now that hope, which was so weakened, and was almost ready to fail, is revived, and greatly confirmed. Now the soul is enabled to take comfort in the promises. Now the saint sees evidences of his own good estate by the renewed manifestations which God makes of himself, and renewed exercises of grace. Before the soul was greatly exercised with doubts and fears and dark clouds; and much time was spent in reviewing past experiences, and looking over and examining those things which were formerly regarded as evidences of piety; and all in vain. They pored on past experiences, but to no satisfaction. And the reason was, the

troubler was not slain, but still remained alive. But now God gives them new light, and new experiences, which in a few moments do more towards scattering their clouds, and removing their fears, than all their poring on past experiences could do for months, and probably for years. Before their hearts seemed in a great measure dead as to spiritual exercises. But now there is, as it were, new life. Now when they read the Scripture, and when they hear the Word preached, it is with a savor and relish of it. Now they can find God in his word and ordinances. Now Christ comes to them, and manifests himself to them, and they are admitted again to communion with God. When Christians have comfort and hope thus renewed, their comforts are commonly purer than ever. Their joys are more humble joys, freer from any mixture and taint of self-righteousness, than before.

Having thus shown that God is wont to cause hope and comfort to arise to the soul after trouble and humbling for sin, and upon slaying the troubler, both at first conversion and afterwards, after sad declinings, I would now give the reasons of the doctrine.

I. I would show why God is wont to give comfort after trouble and humbling for sin; or why he is wont to bring the soul into the wilderness before he speaks comfortably to it, and leads it into the valley of Achor, before he opens a door of hope.

*First*, it is that the soul may be prepared for a confiding application of itself to Christ for comfort. It is the will of God that men should have true hope and comfort conferred upon them in no other way, than by Jesus Christ. It is only by him that sinners have comfort at their conversion. And it is by him only that the saints have renewed hope and comfort after their declensions. And

therefore the way to obtain this comfort is to look to him, to fly for refuge to him. And in order to this, persons have need to be brought to a sense of their necessity of him. And that they may be so, it is needful that they should be sensible of their calamity and misery, that they should be in trouble, and be brought to see their utter helplessness in themselves. And not only natural men, but Christians also, who are fallen into sin, and are in a dead and senseless frame, need something to make them more sensible of their necessity of Christ. Indeed the best are not so sensible of their need of Christ but that they need to be made more sensible. But especially those who are in ill and dead frames, and a declining state, need trouble and humbling to make them sensible of their need of Christ, and to prepare their minds for a renewed confiding application to Christ as their only remedy. The godly in such a case are sick with a sore disease, and Christ is the only Physician who can heal them; and they need to be sensible of their disease, that they may see their need of a physician. They, as well as natural men, need to be in a storm and tempest to make them sensible of their need to fly to him who is a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest. A Christian, who wanders away from God, is like Noah's dove, which flew from the ark. She flew about till weary and spent, seeking rest somewhere else, but found no rest for the sole of her foot, and then she returned to the ark. So it is needful that the soul of a godly man, who wanders from Christ, should become weary, and find no rest for the sole of his foot, that so he may see his need of returning to Christ. Therefore it is said concerning the children of Israel in Hos. 2:6, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up they way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths." And in our context, "She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with



me than now.” When gracious souls wander from Christ, their husband, following after other lovers, God is wont to bring them into trouble and distress, and make them see, that their other lovers cannot help them, that so they may see, that it is best for them to return to their first husband.

*Second*, another end of God in it is, that comfort and hope may be the more prized when obtained. We see in temporal things, that the worth and value of any enjoyment is learned by the want of it. He who is sick, knows the worth of health. He who is in pain, knows how to prize ease. He who is in a storm at sea, knows how to prize safety on shore. And people who are subject to the grievances of war, know how to value peace. He who endures the hardships of captivity and slavery, is thereby taught how to value liberty. And so it is in spiritual things. He who is brought to see his misery in being without hope, is prepared to prize hope when obtained. He who is brought into distress through fear of hell and God’s wrath, is the more prepared to prize the comfort which arises from the manifestation of the favor of God, and a sense of safety from hell. He who is brought to see his utter emptiness and extreme poverty and necessity, and his perishing condition on that account, is thoroughly prepared to prize and rejoice in the manifestation of a fullness in Christ. And those godly persons who are fallen into corrupt and senseless frames, greatly stand in need of something to make them more sensible of their want of spiritual comfort and hope. Their living as they do shows that they have too little sense of the worth and value of that comfort, and those inestimable spiritual and saving blessings, which God has bestowed upon them. Otherwise they never would deal so ungratefully with God, who has bestowed them. If they did not greatly err in slighting spiritual comfort, as the children of Israel did manna, their hearts would never, to such a degree, have gone out after vanity, and earthly

enjoyments, and carnal delights. They need to be brought into trouble and darkness to make them sensible of the worth of hope and comfort, and to teach them to prize it. They need to be brought into the wilderness, and left for a time to wander and suffer hunger and thirst in a barren desert, to teach them how to prize their vineyards. A sense of the pardon of sin, and the favor of God, and a hope of eternal life, do not afford comfort and joy to the soul any farther than they are valued and prized. So that the trouble and darkness which go before comfort, serve to render the joy and comfort the greater when obtained, and so are in mercy to those for whom God intends comfort.

*Third*, it is so ordered that divine power and grace may be acknowledged in giving hope and comfort. There is naturally in men an exceeding insensibility of their dependence on God, and a great disposition to ascribe those things which they enjoy to themselves, or to second causes. This disposition reigns in natural men. They are wholly under the power of it. Therefore they need to be taught their own helplessness, and utter insufficiency, and utter unworthiness. Otherwise, if hope and comfort should be bestowed upon them, they would surely ascribe all to themselves, or the creature, and so would be lifted up by it, and would not give God the glory. Therefore it is God's manner first to humble sinners before he comforts them. And all this self-confident disposition is not extirpated out of the hearts of the godly, and especially when they get into ill frames does it prevail. And it is very requisite, that before any remarkable comfort is bestowed upon them, they should be the subjects of renewed humbling. They need renewedly to see what helpless creatures they are, that so, when light is bestowed, they may be sensible how it is owing to God, and not to themselves, or any other. And that they may, by their troubles and humblings, be prepared the more to admire God's power and mercy, and

free and rich grace to them. While men are continued in fullness in a fruitful land, they will not learn their own helplessness; and therefore God will cast them out of this fullness into a wilderness. This is plainly intimated to be the reason of God's so dealing with the children of Israel, as is said in the text. The church of Israel, before God thus led her into the wilderness, did not ascribe her comforts to God, as in the eighth verse, "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." But they ascribed them to her idols. Verse fifth, "For she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." And verse twelfth, "These are my rewards, that my lovers have given me." For this reason it is that God takes away those things, as in verse ninth, "Therefore will I return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness." And verses 11, 12, "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them." God took them away, and turned her vineyards into a forest, and made her sensible that they were from him; and then he restored them again. For these reasons God is wont to bring souls into trouble, and to humble them for sin before he comforts them. I proceed.

II. To give the reasons why hope and comfort are not obtained till sin, which is the troubler, is slain.

*First*, while sin is harbored and preserved alive, it tends to provoke God to frown and express his anger. Sin is God's mortal enemy. It is that which his soul infinitely hates, and to which he is an irreconcilable enemy. And therefore if we

harbor this and suffer it to live in our hearts, and to govern our practice, we can expect no other than that it will provoke God's frowns. Spiritual comfort consists in the manifestation of God's favor, and in friendly communion with God. But how can we expect this at the same time that we harbor his mortal enemy? We see what God said to Joshua, while Achan was alive. Jos. 7:12, "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed thing from among you."

*Second*, the natural tendency of sin is to darken the mind, and trouble the conscience. There is nothing which wounds a well-informed conscience but sin. Sin is the enemy of grace, and therefore the natural tendency of it is to oppose and keep down the exercises of grace, and so to extinguish spiritual comfort; for spiritual comfort comes in no other way than by the exercise of grace. That which prevents the exercises of grace darkens the evidences of a man's good estate. For there are no evidences of this but the exercises of grace. Sin does as much tend to keep out spiritual comfort, as clouds tend to hide the light of the sun. And therefore it is necessary that this should be removed in order to our receiving light and comfort. It is impossible in its own nature that any should have spiritual light and comfort before sin is mortified. If sinners had comfort while sin is in reigning power, it could be spiritual comfort; for spiritual comfort is the same with gracious comfort. But how can there be gracious comfort where grace has no place? But if there be grace, sin will not be in reigning power; for the nature of grace is to mortify sin. And as there can be no spiritual comfort without a degree of mortification of sin in those in whom sin is mortified, spiritual comfort cannot be any more than in proportion as sin is mortified.

***Third***, a hope of eternal life, if given before the slaying of sin, would be misimproved and abused. If it were possible that a sinner could obtain a title to eternal life before sin was mortified, and so could have his own safety and God's favor manifested to him, he would only improve it to encourage and embolden himself in sin. Hope, if they had it then, would have a pernicious influence and tendency. Till sin is slain, they stand in need of fear to restrain sin. If fear were once gone before sin is slain, they would soon run into all manner of wickedness, and without restraint. And so Christians themselves, while they are in corrupt frames, stand in need of fear to restrain sin; for at such times love is in a great degree dormant. It is of necessity that persons should have some principle or other to restrain them from sin. But there is no principle which can be effectual to restrain men from sin any farther than it is in exercise. If love is not in exercise it will not restrain men. So that at such times the saints need fear. And therefore God has wisely ordered it, that at such times their evidences should be darkened and their hopes clouded, that they may have fear, when love is not awake, to restrain them. The godly themselves, if their hope were all alive at those times when they are in carnal and thoughtless frames, and grace is asleep, would be in great danger to abuse their hope, and taken encouragement from it to indulge their lusts, or at least, to be the less careful to restrain and resist them. For we see that in such frames, though their hopes are clouded, and they have a considerable degree of fear, yet they are careless and negligent. But how much more so would they be, if they had no fear to restrain them!

## **APPLICATION**

### **I. Use of instruction.**

***First***, hence we may observe the wonderful wisdom of God in his dealings with the souls of men. When we consider what has been said, with the reasons of it, we may see just cause to admire the divine wisdom in his ordinary dealings with respect to those for whom he intends comfort. His wisdom is admirable in his dealing with natural men in fitting and preparing them for comfort, in bringing them into such troubles and distress, and hedging up their way with thorns, as it is expressed in the context, and leaving them in their distress to follow after their lovers, their idols, without being able to overtake them; in taking away their vineyards, and all those things in which they trusted, and making them a forest; and so showing them what poor, destitute, helpless creatures they are, before he gives them comfort. And so we may well admire the divine wisdom in his method of dealing with his saints, who decline and fall into sin, or get into corrupt frames and ill ways. God knows how to order things concerning them; and there is a marvelous wisdom observable in his manner of dealing with them in such cases. We may well admire how wisely God orders things in what has been said, for his own glory, to secure the glory due to his power and free grace, and to bring men to a sense of their dependence on him, and to ascribe all to him. And how he orders things for the glory of his Son, that he may have all the glory of the salvation of men, who is worthy of it, in that he laid down his life for their salvation. And also how wisely God orders things for the good of his own elect people, how he brings good out of evil, and light out of darkness. How wisely he consults their good and comfort in those things, which appear to them to be most against them. How he wisely prepares them for good, and makes way for their receiving comfort, and for its being the more sweet, the more prized and delighted in, when it is obtained. And oftentimes in bringing about this in those things, which they think at the time to be signs of God's hatred. And how wisely God orders things for

preventing men's abusing a sense of their own safety, to giving the reins to their lusts. It is ordered so, that at those times when sin prevails, and there would be danger of this, the evidences of their safety are hid from their eyes, and the fear of hell comes on to keep them in awe; and that hope and comfort should be given only at such times and in such manner that they should have influence to draw men off from sin, and to prompt them to diligence in duty and the service of God; and that when it would have most of this tendency, then they should have most of it. When we consider these things, we may well cry out with the apostle, "O, the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

*Second*, hence we may learn, that souls, who are in darkness, and as it were, in a wilderness, have no cause to be discouraged. For by the doctrine we learn that this is the way often, in order to hope and comfort. Persons are very often ready to be discouraged by this. God seems to frown. They have a sense of his anger. They cry to him, and he does not seem to hear their prayers. They have been striving for relief, but it seems to be to no purpose. They are in such circumstances, that everything looks dark; everything seems to be against them. They are lost in a wilderness. They cannot find the way out. They have gone round and round, and returned again to the same place. They know not which way to turn themselves, or what to do. Their hearts are ready to sink. But you may gather encouragement from this doctrine; for by it you may learn that you have no cause to despair. For it is frequently God's manner to bring persons into such circumstances, in order to prepare them for hope and comfort. The children of Israel were ready to be discouraged at the Red sea, when they saw Pharaoh and his hosts pursuing them. But it was only to prepare them for the greater joy after their

deliverance. Joshua and the hosts of Israel were ready to be discouraged when they were smitten at Ai, as you may see in Jos. 7:5, etc. So that you, who are in the wilderness, may take encouragement from hence, still earnestly to seek God, and hope for light and comfort in his time.

**II. Use of self-examination.** By this persons may try their hopes and comforts, whether they are of the right kind. If they are such as have arisen after the manner, as is spoken of in the doctrine; if it is a hope which you found in the valley of Achor, in the sense which has been explained; it is a sign that it is a hope which God has given you, and so a hope which you are not to cast away; but which you are to retain, and rejoice in, and bless God for it. Therefore particularly inquire concerning your hopes and comforts, whether they have arisen in your souls when humbled for sin, and in the slaying of sin.

*First*, inquire whether your hopes and comforts have been given you upon your soul's being humbled for sin. You may try this by three things.

**1.** Whether you have seen what a miserable, helpless creature you were. When your hopes and comforts have arisen in your heart, has it been upon your soul's receiving such a sight of yourself. Or has your hope been accompanied with such a sense of soul? When hope was given at first, was it implanted in a heart thus prepared? And when you have had remarkable comfort and joy from time to time, has your joy been accompanied with such a sense and frame of mind? At the same time that you have had a strong hope of God's favor, and that Christ was yours, have you been nothing in your own eyes. Have you at such times appeared to yourself to be a poor, little, helpless, unworthy creature, deserving nothing at the hands of God? And do not only inquire whether in your



own apprehension you had some such sight of yourself at first, before your first comfort. If you ever had a right understanding of yourself, of your own heart, and your own state, you will never wholly lose it. It will revive from time to time. If you had it when you received your first comfort, the same sense will come again. When your comforts are revived, this will revive with them. If the first joy was granted to a heart thus prepared, there will from time to time be a sense of your own emptiness and worthlessness, arising with your joys and comforts. It will be with a deep sense of what a poor, miserable, and exceedingly sinful creature you are. True comfort is wont to come in such a manner. There is usually a self-emptying, a soul-abasing, sense of heart accompanying it. So that at the same time that God lifts up the soul with comfort, and joy, and inward sweetness, he casts it down with abasement. Evangelical and gracious humiliation and spiritual comfort are companions, which go one with the other, and keep company together. When one comes, the other is wont to come with it. It is not wont to be so with false comforts and joys. But pride and self-fullness are wont to be the companions of false comfort. Indeed, there may be a counterfeit abasement going with it. But if you examine it, you will find, that that very seeming abasement or humiliation lifts the man up, and fills him full of himself. The hypocrite, in the times of his greatest joy, and most confident hopes, looks large in himself. His thoughts are very busily employed about his own excellencies, how holy he is, how eminent a saint he is, how much better he is than most of his neighbors, how there are few equal to him; and therefore how it must be that God loves him better than most others; how much God distinguishes him, how much he experiences, and how good he is, and what delight he takes in them on that account.

**But true spiritual comfort works in another way. Gracious joy and poverty of spirit go hand in hand, and rejoice, as it were, in each other's company. The godly may at some times have comforts and joys, which do not accompany such abasement. They may be lifted up with joy and conceit of, and confidence in, themselves at the same time. But those joys are not spiritual, they are hypocritical, joys. Such comforts are not from the Spirit of God. A godly man may have false joys. He is liable to this exercise of corruption, as well as others. And there may be a mixture of one with the other, or false joy and pride may take occasion from true ones, afterwards to appear. But a gracious joy is linked together with poverty of spirit, and never forsakes it. And hence,**

**2. You may try this by examining what your hopes and comforts are built upon; whether on Christ only, or on your own righteousness. If you would know of what kind your comforts are, follow them up to the fountain, and see what is their source and spring. If you would know of what kind your hope is, examine the bottom of it, and see upon what foundation it stands. If your hope is that which has been given in the valley of Achor, your own righteousness is not the foundation of it. Inquire therefore what it is, which gives you ease with respect to your past sins, what it is which quiets your conscience about them. Is it any sense you have of the free, and sovereign, and infinite grace and mercy of God in Christ? Is it what you have seen in Christ, or the gospel of his grace, which has lightened your burden with respect to your sins? Or is that now you think with yourself that you have done such and such things, or have met with such things, have such workings of affection towards God, that you are become lovely in his sight, so that he, seeing what holy affections and experiences your heart has been filled with, and what discoveries you have had, he is on that account reconciled to you, and you are**

become lovely in his eyes? What makes you hope that you are in favor with God? Is it because you conceive of God as looking down from heaven upon your heart, on your gracious experiences, and so being, as it were, taken with, and receiving you into his favor on account of that? Or is your hope of God's favor built on a sense which you have of Christ's worthiness, and the saving mercy of God in him, and his faithfulness to the promises, which he has made through him?

3. Inquire concerning the effect of your comforts, whether they cause an ardent disposition and desire to exalt God, and to lie low before him. True comforts and joys, which are from the Spirit of God, and are well founded, are wont to work after this manner. They excite an inward intense desire that God may be exalted, and to lie in the dust. Such a one as the psalmist seems to have had, when he says, Psa. 115:1, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." The repeating of the expression seems to show how ardent his heart was. When God is pleased to lift up the light of his countenance upon the soul, and to impart inward sweetness from a manifestation of his glory, there is wont to be an inward longing to be in the dust. At such times the Christian sees how it becomes him to be humble, and how worthy God and Christ are of all the glory, more than he does at other times. He perceives and laments that he cannot bow enough; that he is not abased as low before God as becomes such a sinner as himself. Hence arises an intense desire after self-abasement; and the soul breathes and pants after humiliation before God.

*Second*, inquire whether your hope and comfort are such as have arisen on the slaying of sin. If your hope is that which you obtained before this, you obtained it too soon, and had better be without it than with it. It is not sufficient evidence of your hope, that it was given after much trouble

and great terrors, or great relentings of heart for sin, and bewailing that you had done so wickedly, or that it was after reformations, and abstaining from former ways of sin, and a total reformation of some particular evil practices. But if it be a true hope, it was given after the slaying of sin. And in order the better to determine this point, let the following inquiries be made.

1. Whether your hope has been accompanied with a heart and a life turned from sin? Or is there no remarkable difference in this respect now from what there was before? We all own conversion to be a great change. And we have all been sufficiently taught, that the change consists in this; in turning from sin to God. Therefore there must be a great change in this respect. Is there a great change in this respect in you? I do not inquire whether there be a great change in you in respect to hope and comfort; that whereas formerly you did not suppose yourself to be in Christ, and had no hope of it, now you have hope, and a confident hope, which oftentimes is an occasion of new and peculiar joy and elevation of spirit. There may be a great change in you in this respect, and yet you may remain in a Christless state. But is there a great change with respect to the turning of your heart from sin, and against sin? You may reply to this, I see abundance of corruption and wickedness in my heart; and so far is it from being delivered from corruption, that I seem at times to discover more than ever. But whether you see more or less corruption in your heart, is your heart turned against the corruption which you see? Is there a great difference in you in this respect from what there used to be with respect to your being turned against your own sin, and finding within yourself a nature opposite to it, a nature to resist it, to carry it as an uneasy burden? And is your heart turned against yourself for it, in abhorrence of yourself, and in indignation against yourself? And is your will turned from sin, that though you

**find a great deal of corruption in your heart, yet you do not allow it, you keep a strict watch upon it, and will not let it walk at liberty to appear in your life and conversation? Is there no lust harbored, which is prevalent in you, and which is neglected, and suffered to range and to walk on every side? Is there no sin wittingly tolerated? Do you aim strictly to keep all God's commandments; and is that your actual care and watch, that you may avoid every evil, and every false way; and that you may in all things, so far as in you lies, please and honor God? And do you find that this is the tendency of your hope; that your hope has a sanctifying influence upon you, that it turns you against sin, and stirs you up to seek after purity from sin? With respect to most who are here present, who entertain hope, there has been much opportunity for experience in this matter, since you have had your hope, so that one would think by an impartial and strict examination you might be able to answer these inquiries.**

**2. Those of you, who have obtained your hope again after special and remarkable departings from God, should inquire in what manner hope has been restored. Indeed hypocrites are not so apt to have their hope abated by such things, as those who have a true hope. A hypocrite's hopes and false comforts will subsist, and it may be continue as lively as ever, under such great sins, and such a course of ill practices, as, if a godly man should fall into them, would bring him into exceeding darkness. Some hypocrites will live in very immoral ways, and yet keep up their confidence, seem not to have their hope much shaken, and boast of as much comfort and joy at such times as at any other. But this is not the manner of a true comfort. A true comfort, which flows from the exercise and the breathings of the Spirit of God in the heart, must, of necessity, at such times be exceedingly suppressed; and commonly great trouble and darkness is the effect. But if it has not been**

altogether thus with you, but you have found that at times, when you have greatly sinned and gone on in ill practices, your hope has decayed, and in the time of it your conscience told you that the way in which you lived was contrary to known rules, and so was in doubt about your hope, but since that you have grown strong again in your hope, inquire in what manner you have obtained your hope again. Unsound professors in such cases are not wont to obtain hope again in the same manner as the truly godly do, in a deep humbling for sin, and in slaying the troubler, as has been described. But it may be only this, that now they do better than they did, and so hope comes again. If they lived in a way of some vile sensuality for a time, and afterwards cease to do so, they look on their reformation as an atonement; and so their hope is renewed without any humbling or abasement, without any special convictions of the evil of their ways, any special repentance, or renewed sense of their own vileness, or any renewed flying to the mercy of God in Christ for refuge, or any further alienation of their hearts from those evil ways in which they have walked. If your comforts and confidence have been renewed after remarkable aberrations from the way of duty without something of this nature, it is to be feared that you make your own righteousness the ground of your hope and comfort.

3. Inquire whether at those times, when you have most hope and comfort, above all others, you are most disposed to be careful to avoid sin, and to strive to live holy. Sometimes the hope of hypocrites is very confident; and therefore the degree of confidence which attends a hope is not certain evidence of its truth and genuineness. But we should examine what effect this strong confidence has upon us. Do we find, when our hope is strongest and our comfort greatest, that then our hearts are most set against sin, and that then we feel the greatest desires to live holy,

and have most of a disposition to keep a strict watch, and maintain an earnest warfare against sin, and are most desirous in everything to do our duty? Or do we find, on the contrary, when our hope is strong, and we are most satisfied that our condition is safe, that then we are least careful to avoid sin, and are least disposed to take pains to curb our lusts, and resist temptation, or lay ourselves in the way of duty? If it be thus, it is a very bad sign and black mark on our hopes and comforts. A true hope has a tendency to prompt him who has it to purify himself, and watch and strive more earnestly against all impurity. 1 John 3:3, "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." They are condemned who, because they think they are righteous, and so that they shall certainly have eternal life, will trust in that hope to give themselves the greater liberty in sin. Eze. 33:13, "When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remember; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die."

III. Use of direction. If it be so, that God is wont to cause hope and comfort to arise after trouble and humbling for sin, and upon slaying the troubler, this may be of direction to souls under spiritual trouble and darkness, what course to pursue for hope and comfort.

*First*, thoroughly to renounce and forsake all ways of sinful behavior. For you have heard that hope and comfort are never to be expected, till sin is slain or forsaken. He who is not thorough in his reformation, cannot reasonably hope for comfort, how much soever he may abound in some particular duties. Persons who are under awakenings, and would seek a true hope of salvation, should in the first

place see, that they thoroughly renounce every wicked practice. They should search their ways, and consider what is wrong in them: what duties they have omitted, which ought to have been done; and what practices they have allowed, which ought to be forsaken. And [they] should immediately reform, retaining no one way of sin, denying all ungodliness, omitting nothing which is required; and should see that they persevere in it, that it be not merely a temporary, short-lived restraint, but an everlasting renunciation. This is the way to have the troubler slain.

*Second*, earnestly to seek humiliation. To that end they should labor to be convinced of sin. They should be much engaged in searching their own hearts, and keeping a watchful eye upon them. They should not rest in their own efforts, but earnestly seek to God to give them a right sight of themselves, and a right conviction of sin, and show them that they have deserved God's everlasting wrath. And in order to this they should carefully watch against backsliding; for backsliding prevents humiliation. If there has been any progress made by the conviction of God's Spirit towards it, it is all lost by backsliding. This again blinds and stupefies the heart, and sets the man further than ever from a right knowledge of himself, and sight of his own heart.

*Third*, to search and endeavor to find out the troubler. You have heard that when the godly are in darkness, it is not for want of love in God to them, or a readiness in him to give them comfort; but that sin is doubtless the cause of their darkness in one way or another. Their troubler lies at their own door. There is doubtless some troubler in the camp, which causes God to withdraw. And therefore if you have light revive, and have the comfortable presence of God again, the first thing which you do must be to search, and find out the troubler. Many, when they are in darkness,



proceed in a wrong way. They go to examining past experience. And that they should do; but what is wrong in it is, that they do that only. They spend their time in seeking for something in themselves which is good. Whereas they ought to spend more of it in seeking out that which is bad. Whatever good there is, they are never likely to find it out, till they find out the sin which obscures and hides it. And whatever they reflect upon, which they formerly thought was good, is not likely to afford any satisfaction to them, till that bad thing be removed out of the way which troubled them. They wonder what the cause is, that they are so in the dark. They verily thought in time past, that they were right, and that they had experienced a right work of God's Spirit on their hearts, and thought that they were the children of God. But now God hides his face from them, and they wonder what is the matter; as Joshua seemed to be astonished when Israel was smitten down at Ai. Sometimes they almost conclude, that it is because they are not the children of God. They pray to God to renew his comforts to them, and spend much time. And they ought to pray. But they have more need to do something else. Joshua spent a great deal of time in prayer when Israel was troubled. He fell upon his face till eventide, complaining to God about his withdrawing from them. But God says to him. Jos. 7:10, 11, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" As much as to say, you had more need to be doing something else, than lie there. "Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant, which I commanded them; for they have even taken of the accursed thing." And verse 13, "Up, sanctify yourselves." This teaches you, who are under darkness, and have your hopes darkened, and comforts deadened, what you should do. You must arise and search, and find out the troubler. If you do not do this, it will signify nothing to you to lie crying and complaining to God about your darkness. You have other business which you have more need to do, though prayer

should not be left undone. Let me beseech you, therefore, to be thorough in this. You have need to be thorough, for it is an exceedingly difficult thing to find out the accursed thing in such cases. Men's hearts do like Achan, who hid the accursed thing in the earth in the midst of his tent. Jos. 7:21. He hid it very closely. He did not content himself with hiding it in the most secret place in his tent, but he dug in the ground and buried it in the earth under his feet, that there might be no sign of it above ground. So are men's deceitful hearts wont to hide the accursed thing which troubles them. When they are put upon searching for the cause of their trouble and darkness, they think of one thing and another, but commonly overlook the chief cause of all their trouble. It does not so much as enter their minds. They search the tent, but that is not enough. They must search the very ground, or they will not find it out. When they tell of their darkness, and are put upon searching to see whether some sinful way is not the cause, they readily own that it is their fault. But yet they mistake the true Achan, notwithstanding all they confess of the corruption of their hearts. It is not merely corruption in their hearts, working in their thought, which is the cause; but it is some way of outward sin and wickedness, in which they have of late in a great measure allowed themselves. That is the principal cause of their trouble; some way of pride, or covetousness, or some way of envy, or evil-speaking, or ill will to their neighbors, or self-will, or some other way of unsuitable carriage, which is the chief cause of their darkness. In some respects, it is a great deal easier to find out little sins than greater sins, which causes many to strain at a gnat who swallows a camel. Sins which are common to all, and of which all complain, such as corrupt workings of heart, they are willing to feel that it is no disgrace to have them. And the godly commonly tell of such things, and it does not affright them to see them. But such things as malice, a proud behavior, and many other things

which might be mentioned, are disagreeable. They are not willing to see such things in themselves. They therefore call them by good names, and put good constructions on them, and hide them, as Achan did his accursed thing underground. The sin which troubles them most, has greatest possession of their hearts, and does most blind and prejudice their minds, is passed over. They can soon enough discover and see such things in others, in one of an opposite party, or the like, but they cannot see them in themselves; and so they continue still under darkness. It is an exceedingly difficult thing to find out the troubler. You have need, therefore, to be exceedingly thorough in searching for this matter, and not to spare yourself, or bribe your conscience at all, but labor to be impartial in the search. And to induce you to this, consider what God said to Joshua. Jos. 7:12, "Neither will I be with you any more, unless you destroy the accursed thing from among you." And, therefore,

*Fourth*, when you have found out the troubler, be sure thoroughly to destroy it. Renounce it with detestation, as a vile serpent that has secretly lain under your head for a long time, and infected you with his poisons time after time, and bit you, when you were asleep, made you sick and filled you with pain, and you knew it not. Would not a man, when he has found out the serpent in such a case, destroy it with indignation, and be forever afterwards thoroughly watchful that he is not caught with such a calamity again? You cannot be too thorough in destroying such an enemy, and laboring to root it out, and extirpate all its race. Whoever of you are under darkness and trouble, I am bold to say, if God help you to follow these directions, your darkness will soon be scattered, and hope and comfort will arise. And this is the surest, and readiest, and most direct course which any of you can take in order to the renewing of comfort in your soul. And without this, do not promise

**yourself any considerable degree of light or comfort while you live, however many examinations of past experiences and prayers to God for light you may make.**

## **The Unreasonableness of Indetermination in Religion**

**And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. 1 KINGS 18:21**

**IT is the manner of God, before he bestows any signal mercy on the people, first to prepare them for it; and before he removes any awful judgments which he hath brought upon them for their sins, first to cause them to forsake those sins which procured those judgments. We have an instance of this in the context.—It was a time of sore famine in Israel. There had been neither rain nor dew for the space of three years and six months. This famine was brought upon the land for their idolatry. But God was now about to remove this judgment; and therefore, to prepare them for it, sends Elijah to convince them of the folly of idolatry, and to bring them to repentance for it.—In order to this, Elijah, by the command of the Lord, goes and shows himself to Ahab, and directs him to send and gather all Israel to him at mount Carmel, and all the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves that ate at Jezebel's table, four hundred, that they might**

determine the matter and bring the controversy to an issue, whether Jehovah or Baal were God. To this end, Elijah proposes, that each should take a bullock, that he should take one, and the prophets of Baal another, that each should cut his bullock to pieces, lay it on the wood, and put no fire under; and that the God who should answer by fire should be concluded to be God.

The text contains an account of what Elijah said to all the people at their first meeting, and of their silence: "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." To which the people, it seems, made no reply. In these words, we may observe,

1. How Elijah expostulates with the people about their halting so long between two opinions; in which expostulation may be observed,

- (1.) What the two opinions were, between which they halted, viz. Whether the Lord were God, or whether Baal were God. The case in Israel seems to have been this: there were some who were altogether for Baal, and wholly rejected the true God; of which number, to be sure, were Jezebel and the prophets of Baal. And there were some among them who were altogether for the God of Israel, and wholly rejected Baal; as God told Elijah, that "he had yet left in Israel seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal, and whose mouths had not kissed him," 1 Kings 19:18.

But the rest of the people halted between two opinions. They saw that some were for one, and some for the other, and they did not know which to choose; and, as is commonly the case when difference of opinion prevails, there were many who had no religion at all; they were not

settled in any thing; the different opinions prevalent in Israel distracted and confounded them. Many who professed to believe in the true God, were yet very cold and indifferent, and many were wavering and unsettled. They saw that the king and queen were for Baal; and Baal's party was the prevailing party; but their forefathers had been for the Lord; and they knew not which were right. Thus they halted between two opinions.

(2.) In this expostulation is implied the unreasonableness of their thus halting between two opinions. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Which implies that they ought to determine one way or the other.

2. We may observe their silence on this occasion: "And the people answered him not a word," as being convicted in their own consciences of the unreasonableness of their being for so long a time wavering and unresolved; they had nothing to reply in excuse for themselves.

**DOCTRINE.** Unresolvedness in religion is very unreasonable.

**I. PROP.** Many persons remain exceedingly undetermined with respect to religion. They are very much undetermined in themselves whether to embrace religion or to reject it. Many who are baptized, and make a profession of religion, and seem to be Christians, are yet in their own minds halting between two opinions: they never yet came fully to a conclusion whether to be Christians or not. They are taught the Christian religion in their childhood, and have the Bible, the word preached, and the means of grace, all their days; yet continue, and grow up, and many grow old, in an unresolvedness whether to embrace Christianity or not; and many continue unresolved as long as they live.

**1. There are some persons who have never come to a settled determination in their own minds, whether or no there be any truth in religion. They hear of the things of religion from their childhood all their days; but never come to a conclusion in their own minds whether they be real or fabulous. Particularly, some have never come to any determination in their own minds, whether there be any such thing as conversion. They hear much talk about it, and know that many pretend to be the subjects of it; but they are never resolved whether all be not merely designed hypocrisy and imposture.**

**Some never come to any determination whether the Scriptures be the word of God, or whether they be the invention of men; and whether the story concerning Jesus Christ be any thing but a fable. They fear it is true, but sometimes very much doubt of it. Sometimes when they hear arguments for it, they assent that it is true; but upon every little objection or temptation arising, they call it in question; and are always wavering and never settled about it.**

**So it seems to have been with many of the Jews in Christ's time; they were always at a loss what to make of him, whether he were indeed the Christ, or whether he were Elias, or one of the old prophets, or a mere impostor. John 10:24, 25. "Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not." Some have never so much as come to a resolution in their own minds, whether there be a God or not. They know not that there is, and oftentimes very much doubt of it.**

**2. There are some who never have come to any determination in their own minds whether to embrace**

religion in the practice of it. Religion consists not merely, or chiefly, in theory or speculation, but in practice. It is a practical thing; the end of it is to guide and influence us in our practice: and considered in this view, there are multitudes who never have come to a conclusion whether to embrace religion or not. It is probably pretty general for men to design to be religious some time or other before they die; for none intend to go to hell. But they still keep it at a distance; they put it off from time to time, and never come to any conclusion which determines them in their present practice. And some never so much as fix upon any time. They design to be religious some time before they die, but they know not when.

There are many who have always continued unresolved about the necessity of striving and being earnestly engaged for salvation. They flatter themselves that they may obtain salvation, though they be not so earnestly engaged; though they mind the world and their worldly affairs more than their salvation. They are often told how necessary it is that they make haste and not delay, that they do whatever their hand findeth to do with their might; that a dull, slack way of seeking salvation is never likely to be effectual. But of these things they are never thoroughly convinced. Some seem to resolve to be in earnest, and seem to set out with some engagedness of mind; but soon fail, because they have never been fully convinced of its necessity.

Many have never come to a determination what to choose for their portion. There are but two things which God offers to mankind for their portion: one is this world, with the pleasures and profits of sin, together with eternal misery ensuing; the other is heaven and eternal glory, with a life of self-denial and respect to all the commands of God. Many, as long as they live, come to no settled determination which of these to choose. They must have



one or the other, they cannot have both; but they always remain in suspense, and never make their choice.

They would fain have heaven and this world too; they would have salvation and the pleasures and profits of sin too. But considering heaven and the world, as God offers them, they will have neither. God offers heaven only with the self-denial and difficulty which are in the way to it; and they are not willing to have heaven on these conditions. God offers the world and the pleasures of sin to men not alone, but with eternal misery in connexion with them; and so neither are they willing to have the world. They would fain divide heaven from the holiness and self-denial which are the way to it, and from the holiness which reigns in it, and then they would be glad to have heaven. They would fain divide sin from hell, and then they would fully determine for ever to cleave to sin.

But God will not make such a division for them. They must have one or the other of these for their portion, as God offers; and therefore they never make any choice at all.—Indeed they do practically and in effect choose sin and hell. But they do not come to any resolution in their own minds which they will have for their portion, whether heaven and holiness, or the world and hell: they are always wavering and halting between two opinions. Sometimes they seem to determine for the one, and sometimes for the other. When they meet with no difficulty or temptation, and can, as they say, do their duty without hurting themselves or much crossing their carnal inclinations, they seem to choose heaven and holiness. At other times, wherein they meet with difficulty in the way of duty, and great temptations of worldly profits or pleasures are laid before them, then they choose the world, and let heaven and holiness alone.—There are among us vast multitudes before whom these

**two things have been set hundreds of times, who have never to this day come to a determination which to have.**

**So they have never yet determined which shall be their master, whether God or mammon. There are but few who have undertaken the service of God, and are come to a resolution and preparedness of mind to serve God and follow Christ at all times, and to whatever difficulties it may expose them. Yet, at the same time, neither are they determined that they will continue to serve Satan: they are afraid to draw up such a conclusion.—Thus many spend their lives without making their choice, though they do in the mean time practically choose the service of Satan. These are the persons of whom the apostle James speaks in chap. 1:8. "The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."**

**II. To continue thus undetermined and unresolved in the things of religion, is very unreasonable, and that upon the following accounts.**

**1. In the things of religion we are to the highest degree interested. The truth or falsehood of the doctrines of religion concerns us to the highest degree possible. It is no matter of indifference to us whether there be a God or not; or whether the Scriptures be the word of God; or whether Christ be the Son of God; or whether there be any such thing as conversion. It makes an infinite difference to us, whether these things be so or not. Therefore we are under the greatest obligation in point of interest to resolve in our minds whether they be true or false. They who are undetermined whether there be any truth in religion, and are contented to be so, not inquiring, nor thoroughly using the means to be determined, act very unreasonably. They remain in doubt whether there be any such thing as heaven or hell; are quiet and easy to continue ignorant in this**

matter; are not engaged in their minds to come to a determination; do not search and inquire what arguments there are to prove any such things; nor diligently weigh and consider the force of them; but busy their minds about other things of infinitely less importance; and act as if they thought it did not much concern them whether there be a future and eternal state.

If they think that there is not, yet it is a matter of so great importance, that no wise man would rest until he had satisfied himself; because if there be such a future state as the Scriptures assert, then we must have our part in it, either in a state of eternal rewards, or in a state of eternal punishment.—So it is no matter of indifference to us what we have for our portion, whether this world with hell, or a life of holiness and self-denial with heaven. These opposite portions relate, not merely to a few days in this world, but to eternity. It is infinite madness therefore not to come to a determination.

So it is no matter of indifference what master we serve, whether God or mammon; or what interest we will pursue, whether our temporal or eternal interest; or which we prefer, the commands of God, or our pleasures, our ease, and convenience. We ought therefore to come to some determination which we will choose.

2. God hath made us reasonable creatures, and capable of rationally determining for ourselves. Doubtless God hath made man capable of discovering the truth in matters of religion, of coming to a good determination in these questions, whether the Scriptures be the word of God, whether there be a future state, and the like. The resolution of these questions, which it so much concerns us to determine, is not above our capacities. God hath not set these things beyond the extent of our faculties.

**God hath made us capable of making a wise choice for ourselves, as to the life we shall choose to lead. He hath given man so much understanding, as to make him capable of determining which is best; to lead a life of self-denial, and enjoy eternal happiness, or to take our swing in sinful enjoyments, and burn in hell for ever. The question is of no difficult determination.—It is so far from being a matter too hard for our reason, that the reason of a child is sufficient to determine this matter. Therefore men in remaining undetermined in these matters, do not act as reasonable creatures, but make themselves like "the horse and the mule, which have no understanding," Psal. 32:9.**

**3. God puts into our hands a happy opportunity to determine for ourselves. What better opportunity can a man desire to consult his own interest, than to have liberty to choose his own portion? God setteth life and death before us. Deut. 30:19. "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed after thee may live." See also Ezek. 18:31, 32. and chap. 33:11. What better opportunity can we desire for securing to ourselves the greatest good, than to have eternal life and unchangeable happiness set before us, and offered to our choice? Therefore those who neglect coming to a resolution, act unreasonably, because they stand so much in their own light, and neglect so glorious an opportunity.**

**4. The things among which we are to make our choice are but few in number; there are but two portions set before us, one of which must be our portion; either life or death, either blessing or cursing; either a life of universal and persevering obedience, with eternal glory, or a worldly, carnal, wicked life, with eternal misery. If there were many terms in the offer made us, many things of nearly an equal**

value, one of which we must choose, to remain long in suspense and undetermined would be more excusable; there would be more reason for long deliberation before we should fix. But there are only two terms, there are but two states in another world, in one or the other of which we must be fixed to all eternity.

And there are but two states in this world, a state of sin, and a state of holiness; a natural state, and a converted state. There is but one way in which we can come to life, which renders the determination of reason much the easier. There are but two masters, to one of which we must be reputed the servants, Baal and Jehovah, God and Mammon: there are but two competitors for the possession of us, Christ and the devil.—There are but two paths, in one of which you are to travel, either in the straight and narrow way which leadeth unto life, or the broad way which leadeth unto destruction.

This shows the unreasonableness of those who live under light, and have the offers of the gospel made to them, and yet remain from year to year unfixed and undetermined, halting between two opinions.

5. God hath given us all needed helps to determine us. We have all needful helps to determine our understandings, as to the truth of the things of religion, as whether there be a God, whether the Scriptures be the word of God, whether there be a future state, &c. We are not left in the dark as to these things, as the poor heathens are, who are under great disadvantages to come to the knowledge of the truth, though they be not under an impossibility, for "they may haply feel after God and find him," Acts 17:27. But we have a clear sunshine to guide us, we have a particular description of those things which are set before us for truth, and have great opportunity to examine them. The

**Scripture lies open before us, and all the doctrines of the gospel are particularly set forth, with the reasons on which their evidence is founded. We may search and try their force and sufficiency, as we please.**

**We have great helps to a wise and rational determination in our choice; to determine whether it be best for us to choose a life of sin or a life of holiness, the service of God or the service of Baal. We have very plainly set before us the advantages of both sides; the loss and gain are particularly stated. Christ hath dealt by us faithfully, and hath told us what we shall get and what we shall lose by being his followers. He hath also told us what we shall get and what we shall lose by a life of sin. He hath not dealt by us deceitfully. He hath not pretended greater advantages in godliness than there really are, nor greater disadvantages or dangers in sin. John 14:2. "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you."**

**He hath told us plainly that we must take up the cross daily and follow him; that we must hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, and our own life also, in order to become his disciples; and that we must cut off our right hands, and pluck out our right eyes, in order to enter into heaven. Thus we have a fair opportunity to count the costs on both sides, and are directed so to do; Luke 14:28.—How unreasonable therefore is it for men who have all these helps and advantages, to remain in suspense, and to come to no conclusion whether they will be Christians or heathens, whether they will be for God or the devil; though they have lived under the preaching of the word and offers of the gospel for many years.**

**6. We have no reason to expect to be under better advantages to determine hereafter than we are now. We never shall have a clearer revelation of gospel truth; never**

shall have the advantages and disadvantages of both sides more plainly set before us, than they are already in the word of God; nor are we ever like to be under better advantages to know what will be best for us, and most for our interest. Those therefore who delay, gain nothing by their delays, but give Satan more opportunity to darken their minds, to deceive them, and lead them astray in their choice. Therefore their delay of coming to a resolution is unreasonable.

7. If they come not to a determination in this life, God will determine for them, and will appoint them their portion with the wicked. If sinners, by refusing to choose either life or death, either heaven or hell, could thereby avoid both, or if in this case the matter would remain undetermined, till they should determine it; the folly and unreasonableness of delaying a determination would not be so great. But that is not the case; if they go on halting between two opinions, God will determine for them, and that quickly; he will determine where their portion shall be, viz. among the unbelievers, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone for ever. God will not wait upon them always, to see what they will choose; but he will put an issue to the matter by his unalterable sentence.—Therefore it becomes all, if they are afraid to have their lot assigned them in hell, to come soon to a determination.

8. Delay in this case is unreasonable, because those who delay know not how soon the opportunity of choosing for themselves will be past. This opportunity will last no longer than life; when once life is past, they will no more have the offer made them; the sentence will be past; the matter will be closed.

Those who delay their choice in this world will be glad to choose afterwards; then they will not be at a loss which to

**choose; they will be able easily to determine. The judgments of sinners, after this life, are soon resolved, whether there be any truth in religion or not; they can soon determine which is most eligible; a life of obedience and self-denial, with heaven for a reward, or a life of irreligion and sin, with hell for a punishment. They no longer halt between two opinions; but it is too late, their opportunity is past. They would give all the world for another opportunity to choose; they would then soon come to a determination. But it will not be granted them.**

## **APPLICATION**

**I. Let this put every one upon examining himself, whether or no he have ever yet come to a full determination in the affair of religion.**

**First, Inquire whether you have yet come to a full determination with respect to the truth of the things of religion. Have you ever been fully convinced? Is it a question which has been answered and determined with you, whether there be a future state; or does it yet remain a question with you unresolved? Are you not yet to seek whether there be any future state, and whether or no the story about Jesus Christ be any more than a fable? Here I desire you to note two things.**

**1. If the main reason why you assent to the truth of religion be, that others believe so, and you have been so instructed from your childhood; you are of those with whom the truth of religion yet remains undetermined. Tradition and education will never fix and settle the mind in a satisfactory and effectual belief of the truth. Though men, taking religion upon trust, may seem to give a full assent to the truth of religion, and not to call it in question; yet such a faith will not stand a shock; a temptation easily**



**overthrows it. The reason of man in time of trial will not rest on so poor an evidence.**

**There are multitudes who seem to grant the truth of religion, with whom the main foundation of their faith is the tradition of their fathers, or the profession of their neighbours; and it is to be feared, it is so with many who count themselves good Christians. But as to all such persons as never have seen any other evidence to satisfy them, either of the truth or falsehood of religion, they only halt between two opinions.—The same may be said of those who are unstable in their disposition with regard to Christ or the things which he taught.**

**2. If you are fully come to a determination concerning the things of religion, that they are true, they will be of weight with you above all things in the world. If you be really convinced that these things are no fable, but reality, it is impossible but that you must be influenced by them above all things in the world; for these things are so great, and so infinitely exceed all temporal things, that it cannot be otherwise. He that really is convinced that there is a heaven and hell, and an eternal judgment; that the soul, as soon as parted from the body, appears before the judgment-seat of God; and that the happiness and misery of a future state is as great as the Scripture represents it; or that God is as holy, just, and jealous, as he hath declared concerning himself in his word; I say, he that is really convinced, and hath settled it with himself, that these things are certainly true, will be influenced by them above all things in the world. He will be more concerned by far how he shall escape eternal damnation, and have the favour of God and eternal life, than how he shall get the world, gratify the flesh, please his neighbours, get honour, or obtain any temporal advantage whatsoever. His main inquiry will not**

**be, what shall I eat, and what shall I drink, &c. but he will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.**

**Examine yourselves therefore by this: Are not your hearts chiefly set upon the world and the things of it? Is it not more your concern, care, and endeavour to further your outward interest, than to secure an interest in heaven? And is not this the very reason that you have never seen the reality of eternal things?**

**Secondly, Inquire whether you have ever yet come to a determination about religion with respect to the practice of it; whether you have chosen heaven with the way to it, viz. the way of obedience and self-denial, before this world and the ways of sin; whether you have determined upon it as most eligible, to devote yourselves to the service of God.— Here I shall mention three or four things which are signs that men halt between two opinions in this matter.**

**1. To put off duty till hereafter. When persons love to keep their duty at a distance, engage not in it for the present, but think of engaging when they shall be under better conveniences for it;—when they are very good intenders concerning what they will do to-morrow, but very poor performers to-day; when they say, as Felix, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee;"—it is a sign that they halt between two opinions, and have never as yet come to a full determination with respect to the practice of religion. Those that have once fully determined that religion is necessary and eligible, will not desire to put it off, but will make it their present and immediate business.**

**2. It is a sign of the same thing when persons are strict and conscientious in some things, but not universal in their obedience; do some duties, but live in the omission of**

others; avoid some sins, but allow themselves in others; are conscientious with respect to the duties of worship public and private, but not in their behaviour to their neighbours; are not just in their dealings, nor conscientious in paying their debts; nor do to others as they would that they should do to them; but have crooked perverse ways in their dealings among mankind.

The same may be said when they are just in their dealings and trade with men, but are not conscientious in other things; indulge sensual appetites, drink to excess, or allow themselves in wanton practices: or are honest and temperate, but licentious in using their tongues, backbiting and reproaching their fellow-men, 2 Tim. 3:6, 7.

3. It is a sign that you halt between two opinions, if you sometimes are wont to be considerably engaged in religion, but at other times neglect it; sometimes forming a resolution to be in good earnest, then dropping it again; sometimes seeming to be really engaged in seeking salvation, and very earnest in religious duties; at other times wholly taken up about the things of the world, while religion is neglected, and religious duties are omitted.

These things show that you are yet unsettled, have never yet come to a full determination concerning religion, but are halting between two opinions, and therefore are thus unstable in all your ways, and proceed thus by fits and starts in religion, James 1:6, 7, 8. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." If your determination were fixed in religion, you would lie more steady in your practice.

**4. It is a sign that you are halting between two opinions, if it be your manner to balk your duty whenever any notable difficulty comes in the way, considerably cross to your interest, or very inconsistent with your ease or convenience, or your temporal honour. Whatever zeal you may seem to have, whatever concern about the things of religion, and however strict you be in ordinary, you have never, if this be your manner, come to a full determination; have never fully made choice of religion and the benefits of it for your only portion; and at best have got no further than king Agrippa, who was almost persuaded to be a Christian, Acts 26:28. You are in the state of the stony-ground hearers, you have no root in yourselves, and like a tree without root, are easily blown down by every wind.**

**II. I shall conclude with an earnest exhortation to all, no longer to halt between two opinions, but immediately to come to a determination whether to be Christians or not. Let me insist upon it, that you now make a choice, whether you will have heaven, with a life of universal and persevering obedience, for your portion; or hell, with a life spent in the pursuit of this world.—Consider those things which have been said, showing the unreasonableness of continuing in such irresolution about an affair of infinite importance to you, and as to which you have so short an opportunity to make your choice.—Consider two things in addition to what hath been already said.**

**1. Those who live under the gospel, and thus continue undetermined about religion, are more abominable to God than the heathen. He hates those persons who continue from year to year, under the calls, and warnings, and instructions, and entreaties of God's word; who yet can be brought to nothing; who will come to no determination at all; will neither be Christians nor heathens. These are they who are spoken of in Rev. 3:15, 16. "I know thy works, that**

**thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."—And Ezek. 20:39. "As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God, Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols."—These are (2 Tim. 3:7.) "ever learning, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth."**

**2. If you still refuse to come to a determination whether to be Christians or not, how just will it be, if God shall give you no further opportunity! If you refuse to make any choice at all—after all that hath been done to bring you to it, in setting life and death so often before you, in calling and warning you, how just will it be, if God shall wait no longer upon you; but shall, by his unalterable sentence, determine the case himself, and fix your state with the unbelievers, and teach you the truth and eligibleness of religion, by sad and fatal experience, when it will be too late for you to choose your portion.**

## **THE PRECIOUSNESS OF TIME, AND THE**

# **IMPORTANCE OF REDEEMING IT\***

**Redeeming the time. EPH. 5:16**

**CHRISTIANS should not only study to improve the opportunities they enjoy, for their own advantage, as those who would make a good bargain; but also labour to reclaim others from their evil courses; that so God might defer his anger, and time might be redeemed from that terrible destruction, which, when it should come, would put an end to the time of divine patience. And it may be upon this account, that this reason is added, Because the days are evil. As if the apostle had said, the corruption of the times tends to hasten threatened judgments; but your holy and circumspect walk will tend to redeem time from the devouring jaws of those calamities.—However, thus much is certainly held forth to us in the words; viz. That upon time we should set a high value, and be exceeding careful that it be not lost; and we are therefore exhorted to exercise wisdom and circumspection, in order that we may redeem it. And hence it appears, that time is exceedingly precious.**

## **SECT. I**

**Why time is precious**

**TIME is precious for the following reasons:**

**1. Because a happy or miserable eternity depends on the good or ill improvement of it. Things are precious in proportion to their importance, or to the degree wherein they concern our welfare. Men are wont to set the highest value on those things upon which they are sensible their interest chiefly depends. And this renders time so**

exceedingly precious, because our eternal welfare depends on the improvement of it.—Indeed our welfare in this world depends upon its improvement. If we improve it not, we shall be in danger of coming to poverty and disgrace; but by a good improvement of it, we may obtain those things which will be useful and comfortable. But it is above all things precious, as our state through eternity depends upon it. The importance of the improvement of time upon other accounts, is in subordination to this.

Gold and silver are esteemed precious by men; but they are of no worth to any man, only as thereby he has an opportunity of avoiding or removing some evil, or of possessing himself of some good. And the greater the evil is which any man hath advantage to escape, or the good which he hath advantage to obtain, by any thing that he possesses, by so much the greater is the value of that thing to him, whatever it be. Thus if a man, by any thing which he hath, may save his life, which he must lose without it, he will look upon that by which he hath the opportunity of escaping so great an evil as death, to be very precious.—Hence it is that time is so exceedingly precious, because by it we have opportunity of escaping everlasting misery, and of obtaining everlasting blessedness and glory. On this depends our escape from an infinite evil, and our attainment of an infinite good.

2. Time is very short, which is another thing that renders it very precious. The scarcity of any commodity occasions men to set a higher value upon it, especially if it be necessary and they cannot do without it. Thus when Samaria was besieged by the Syrians, and provisions were exceedingly scarce, "an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver." 2 Kings 6:25.—So time is the more to be prized by men, because a whole eternity depends

upon it; and yet we have but a little of time. "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return." Job 16:22. "My days are swifter than a post. They are passed away as the swift ships; as the eagle that hasteth to the prey." Job 9:25, 26. "Our life; what is it? it is but a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Jam. 4:14. It is but as a moment to eternity. Time is so short, and the work which we have to do hi it is so great, that we have none of it to spare. The work which we have to do to prepare for eternity, must be done in time, or it never can be done; and it is found to be a work of great difficulty and labour, and therefore that for which time is the more requisite.

3. Time ought to be esteemed by us very precious, because we are uncertain of its continuance. We know that it is very short, but we know not how short. We know not how little of it remains, whether a year, or several years, or only a month, a week, or a day. We are every day uncertain whether that day will not be the last, or whether we are to have the whole day. There is nothing that experience doth more verify than this.—If a man had but little provision laid up for a journey or a voyage, and at the same time knew that if his provision should tail, he must perish by the way, he would be the more choice of it.—How much more would many men prize their time, if they knew that they had but a few months, or a few days, more to live! And certainly a wise man will prize his time the more, as he knows not but that it will be so as to himself. This is the case with multitudes now in the world, who at present enjoy health, and see no signs of approaching death: many such, no doubt, are to die the next month, many the next week, yea, many probably to-morrow, and some this night; yet these same persons know nothing of it, and perhaps think nothing of it, and neither they nor their neighbours can say that they are more likely soon to be taken out of the world



than others. This teaches us how we ought to prize our time, and how careful we ought to be, that we lose none of it.

4. Time is very precious, because when it is past, it cannot be recovered. There are many things which men possess, which if they part with, they can obtain them again. If a man have parted with something which he had, not knowing the worth of it, or the need he should have of it; he often can regain it, at least with pains and cost. If a man have been overseen in a bargain, and have bartered away or sold something, and afterwards repent of it, he may often obtain a release, and recover what he had parted with.—But it is not so with respect to time; when once that is gone, it is gone for ever; no pains, no cost will recover it. Though we repent ever so much that we let it pass, and did not improve it while we had it, it will be to no purpose. Every part of it is successively offered to us, that we may choose whether we will make it our own, or not. But there is no delay; it will not wait upon us to see whether or no we will comply with the offer. But if we refuse, it is immediately taken away, and never offered more. As to that part of time which is gone, however we have neglected to improve it, it is out of our possession and out of our reach.

If we have lived fifty, or sixty, or seventy years, and have not improved our time, now it cannot be helped; it is eternally gone from us: all that we can do, is to improve the little that remains. Yea, if a man have spent all his life but a few moments unimproved, all that is gone is lost, and only those few remaining moments can possibly be made his own; and if the whole of a man's time be gone, and it be all lost, it is irrecoverable.—Eternity depends on the improvement of time; but when once the time of life is gone, when once death is come, we have no more to do with

time; there is no possibility of obtaining the restoration of it, or another space in which to prepare for eternity. If a man should lose the whole of his worldly substance, and become a bankrupt, it is possible that his loss may be made up. He may have another estate as good. But when the time of life is gone, it is impossible that we should ever obtain another such time. All opportunity of obtaining eternal welfare is utterly and everlastingly gone.

## SECT. II

### Reflections on time past

**YOU** have now heard of the preciousness of time; and you are the persons concerned, to whom God hath committed that precious talent. You have an eternity before you. When God created you, and gave you reasonable souls, he made you for an endless duration. He gave you time here in order to a preparation for eternity, and your future eternity depends on the improvement of time.—Consider, therefore, what you have done with your past time. You are not now beginning your time, but a great deal is past and gone; and all the wit, and power, and treasure of the universe, cannot recover it. Many of you may well conclude, that more than half of your time is gone; though you should live to the ordinary age of man, your glass is more than half run; and it may be there are but few sands remaining. Your sun is past the meridian, and perhaps just setting, or going into an everlasting eclipse. Consider, therefore, what account you can give of your improvement of past time. How have you let the precious golden sands of your glass run?

Every day that you have enjoyed has been precious; yea, your moments have been precious. But have you not wasted your precious moments, your precious days, yea

**your precious years? If you should reckon up how many days you have lived, what a sum would there be! and how precious hath every one of those days been! Consider, therefore, what have you done with them? what is become of them all? What can you show of any improvement made, or good done, or benefit obtained, answerable to all this time which you have lived? When you look back, and search, do you not find this past time of your lives in a great measure empty, having not been filled up with any good improvement? And if God, that hath given you your time, should now call you to an account, what account could you give to him?**

**How much may be done in a year! how much good is there opportunity to do in such a space of time! How much service may persons do for God, and how much for their own souls, if to their utmost they improve it! How much may be done in a day! But what have you done in so many days and years that you have lived? What have you done with the whole time of your youth, you that are past your youth? What is become of all that precious season of life? Hath it not all been in vain to you? Would it not have been as well or better for you, if all that time you had been asleep, or in a state of non-existence?**

**You have had much time of leisure and freedom from worldly business; consider to what purpose you have spent it. You have not only had ordinary time, but you have had a great deal of holy time. What have you done with all the sabbath-days which you have enjoyed? Consider those things seriously, and let your own consciences make answer.**

### **SECT. III**

**Who are chiefly deserving of reproof from the subject of the preciousness of time**

**How little is the preciousness of time considered, and how little sense of it do the greater part of mankind seem to have! and to how little good purpose do many spend their time! There is nothing more precious, and yet nothing of which men are more prodigal. Time is with many, as silver was in the days of Solomon, as the stones of the street, and nothing accounted of. They act as if time were as plenty as silver was then, and as if they had a great deal more than they needed, and knew not what to do with it. If men were as lavish of their money as they are of their time, if it were as common a thing for them to throw away their money, as it is for them to throw away their time, we should think them beside themselves, and not in the possession of their right minds. Yet time is a thousand times more precious than money; and when it is gone, cannot be purchased for money, cannot be redeemed by silver or gold.—There are several sorts of persons who are reproved by this doctrine, whom I shall particularly mention.**

**1. Those who spend a great part of their time in idleness, or in doing nothing that turns to any account, either for the good of their souls or bodies; nothing either for their own benefit, or for the benefit of their neighbour, either of the family or of the body-politic to which they belong. There are some persons upon whose hands time seems to lie heavy, who, instead of being concerned to improve it as it passes, and taking care that it pass not without making it their own, act as if it were rather their concern to contrive ways how to waste and consume it; as though time, instead of being precious, were rather a mere encumbrance to them. Their hands refuse to labour, and rather than put themselves to it, they will let their families suffer, and will suffer themselves: Prov. 19:15. "An idle soul shall suffer**

**hunger." Prov. 22:21. "Drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."**

**Some spend much of their time at the tavern, over their cups, and in wandering about from house to house, wasting away their hours in idle and unprofitable talk which will turn to no good account: Prov. 14:23. "In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to poverty". The direction of the apostle, in Eph. 4:28. is, that we should "labour, working with our hands the thing that is good, that we may have to give to him that needeth." But indolent men, instead of gaining any thing to give to him that needeth, do but waste what they have already: Prov. 18:9. "He that is slothful in his work, is brother to him that is a great waster."**

**2. They are reprov'd by this doctrine who spend their time in wickedness, who do not merely spend their time in doing nothing to any good purpose, but spend it to ill purposes. Such do not only lose their time, but they do worse; with it they hurt both themselves and others.—Time is precious, as we have heard, because eternity depends upon it. By the improvement of time, we have opportunity of escaping eternal misery, and obtaining eternal blessedness. But those who spend their time in wicked works, not only neglect to improve their time to obtain eternal happiness, or to escape damnation, but they spend it to a quite contrary purpose, viz. to increase their eternal misery, or to render their damnation the more heavy and intolerable.**

**Some spend much time in revelling, and in unclean talk and practices, in vicious company-keeping, in corrupting and insnaring the minds of others, setting bad examples, and leading others into sin, undoing not only their own souls, but the souls of others. Some spend much of their precious time in detraction and backbiting; in talking**

against others; in contention, not only quarrelling themselves, but fomenting and stirring up strife and contention. It would have been well for some men, and well for their neighbours, if they had never done any thing at all; for then they would have done neither good nor hurt. But now they have done a great deal more hurt than they have done or ever will do good. There are some persons whom it would have been better for the towns where they live, to have been at the charge of maintaining them in doing nothing, if that would have kept them in a state of inactivity.

Those who have spent much of their time in wickedness, if ever they shall reform, and enter upon a different mode of living, will find, not only that they have wasted the past, but that they have made work for their remaining time, to undo what they have done. How will many men, when they shall have done with time, and shall look back upon their past lives, wish that they had had no time! The time which they spend on earth will be worse to them than if they had spent so much time in hell; for an eternity of more dreadful misery in hell will be the fruit of their time on earth, as they employ it.

3. Those are reprov'd by this doctrine, who spend their time only in worldly pursuits, neglecting their souls. Such men lose their time, let them be ever so diligent in their worldly business; and though they may be careful not to let any of it pass so, but that it shall some way or other turn to their worldly profit. They that improve time only for their benefit in time, lose it; because time was not given for itself, but for that everlasting duration which succeeds it.— They, therefore, whose time is taken up in caring and labouring for the world only, in inquiring what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed; in contriving to lay up for themselves treasures

upon earth, how to enrich themselves, how to make themselves great in the world, or how to live in comfortable and pleasant circumstances, while here; who busy their minds and employ their strength in these things only, and the stream of whose affections is directed towards these things; they lose their precious time.

Let such, therefore, as have been guilty of thus spending their time, consider it. You have spent a great part of your time, and a great part of your strength, in getting a little of the world; and how little good doth it afford you, now you have gotten it? What happiness or satisfaction can you reap from it? will it give you peace of conscience, or any rational quietness or comfort? What is your poor, needy, perishing soul the better for it? and what better prospects doth it afford you of your approaching eternity? and what will all that you have acquired avail you when time shall be no longer?

#### **SECT. IV**

##### **An exhortation to improve time**

**CONSIDER** what hath been said of the preciousness of time, how much depends upon it, how short and uncertain it is, how irrecoverable it will be when gone. If you have a right conception of these things, you will be more choice of your time than of the most fine gold. Every hour and moment will seem precious to you.—But besides those considerations which have been already set before you, consider also the following.

- 1. That you are accountable to God for your time.** Time is a talent given us by God; he hath set us our day; and it is not for nothing, our day was appointed for some work; therefore he will, at the day's end, call us to an account. We

must give account to him of the improvement of all our time. We are God's servants; as a servant is accountable to his master, how he spends his time when he is sent forth to work, so are we accountable to God. If men would aright consider this, and keep it in mind, would they not improve their time otherwise than they do? Would you not behave otherwise than you do, if you considered with yourselves every morning, that you must give an account to God, how you shall have spent that day? and if you considered with yourselves, at the beginning of every evening, that you must give an account to God, how you shall have spent that evening? Christ hath told us, that "for every idle word which men speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment," Matt. 12:36. How well, therefore, may we conclude, that we must give an account of all our idle mispent time!

2. Consider how much time you have lost already. For your having lost so much, you have the greater need of diligently improving what yet remains. You ought to mourn and lament over your lost time; but that is not all, you must apply yourselves the more diligently to improve the remaining part, that you may redeem lost time.—You who are considerably advanced in life, and have hitherto spent your time in vanities and worldly cares, and have lived in a great measure negligent of the interests of your souls, may well be terrified and amazed, when you think how much time you have lost and wasted away.—In that you have lost so much time, you have the more need of diligence, on three accounts.

(1.) As your opportunity is so much the shorter.—Your time at its whole length is short. But set aside all that you have already lost, and then how much shorter is it! As to that part of your time which you have already lost, it is not to be reckoned into your opportunity; for that will never be any



more; and it is no better, but worse to you, than if it never had been.

**(2.) You have the same work to do that you had at first, and that under greater difficulties. Hitherto you have done nothing at all of your work, all remains to be done, and that with vastly greater difficulties and opposition in your way than would have been if you had set about it seasonably. So that the time in which to do your work is not only grown shorter, but your work is grown greater. You not only have the same work to do, but you have more work; for while you have lost your time, you have not only shortened it, but you have been making work for yourselves. How well may this consideration awaken you to a thorough care, not to let things run on in this manner any longer, and rouse you up immediately to apply yourselves to your work with all your might!**

**(3.) That is the best of your time which you have lost. The first of a man's time, after he comes to the exercise of his reason, and to be capable of performing his work, is the best. You who have lived in sin till past your youth, have lost the best part. So that here are all these things to be considered together, viz. that your time in the whole is but short, there is none to spare; a great part of that is gone, so that it is become much shorter; that which is gone is the best; yet all your work remains, and not only so, but with greater difficulties than ever before attended it; and the shorter your time is, the more work you have to do.**

**What will make you sensible of the necessity of a diligent improvement of remaining time, if these things will not? Sometimes such considerations as these have another effect, viz. to discourage persons, and to make them think, that seeing they have lost so much time, it is not worth their while to attempt to do any thing now. The devil makes**

fools of them; for when they are young, he tells them, there is time enough hereafter, there is no need of being in haste, it will be better seeking salvation hereafter; and then they believe him. Afterwards, when their youth is past, he tells them, that now they have lost so much, and the best of their time, that it is not worth their while to attempt to do any thing; and now they believe him too. So that with them no time is good. The season of youth is not a good time; for that is most fit for pleasure and mirth, and there will be enough afterwards; and what comes afterwards is not a good time, because the best of it is gone. Thus are men infatuated and ruined.

But what madness is it for persons to give way to discouragement, so as to neglect their work, because their time is short! What need have they rather to awake out of sleep, thoroughly to rouse up themselves, and to be in good earnest, that if possible they may yet obtain eternal life? Peradventure God may yet give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth, that they may be saved. Though it be late in the day, yet God calls upon you to rouse, and to apply yourselves to your work; and will you not hearken to his counsel in this great affair, rather than to the counsel of your mortal enemy?

3. Consider how time is sometimes valued by those who are come near to the end of it. What a sense of its preciousness have poor sinners sometimes, when they are on their death-beds! Such have cried out, O, a thousand worlds for an inch of time! Then time appears to them indeed precious. An inch of time could do them no more good than before, when they were in health, supposing a like disposition to improve it, nor indeed so much; for a man's time upon a death-bed is attended with far greater disadvantage for such an improvement as will be for the good of his soul, than when he is in health.—But the near

approach of death makes men sensible of the inestimable worth of time. Perhaps, when they were in health, they were as insensible of its value as you are, and were as negligent of it. But how are their thoughts altered now! It is not because they are deceived, that they think time to be of such value, but because their eyes are opened; and it is because you are deceived and blind that you do not think as they do.

4. Consider what a value we may conclude is set upon time by those who are past the end of it. What thoughts do you think they have of its preciousness, who have lost all their opportunity for obtaining eternal life, and are gone to hell? Though they were very lavish of their time while they lived, and set no great value upon it; yet how have they changed their judgments! How would they value the opportunity which you have, if they might but have it granted to them! What would they not give for one of your days, under the means of grace!—So will you, first or last, be convinced. But if you be not convinced except in the manner in which they are, it will be too late

There are two ways of making men sensible of the preciousness of time. One is, by showing them the reason why it must be precious, by telling them how much depends on it, how short it is, how uncertain, &c. The other is experience, wherein men are convinced how much depends on the improvement of time. The latter is the most effectual way; for that always convinces, if nothing else doth.—But if persons be not convinced by the former means, the latter will do them no good. If the former be ineffectual, the latter, though it be certain, yet is always too late. Experience never fails to open the eyes of men, though they were never opened before. But if they be first opened by that, it is no way to their benefit. Let all therefore be persuaded to improve their time to their utmost.

## **SECT. V**

### **Advice respecting the improvement of time**

**I SHALL conclude with advising to three things in particular.**

**1. Improve the present time without any delay. If you delay and put off its improvement, still more time will be lost; and it will be an evidence that you are not sensible of its preciousness. Talk not of more convenient seasons hereafter; but improve your time while you have it, after the example of the psalmist, Psal. 119:60. "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."**

**2. Be especially careful to improve those parts of time which are most precious. Though all time is very precious, yet some parts are more precious than others; as, particularly, holy time is more precious than common time. Such time is of great advantage for our everlasting welfare; therefore, above all, improve your sabbaths, and especially the time of public worship, which is the most precious part. Lose it not either in sleep, or in carelessness, inattention, and wandering imaginations. How sottish are they who waste away, not only their common, but holy time, yea the very season of attendance on the holy ordinances of God!—The time of youth is precious, on many accounts. Therefore, if you be in the enjoyment of this time, take heed that you improve it. Let not the precious days and years of youth slip away without improvement. A time of the strivings of God's Spirit is more precious than other time. Then God is near; and we are directed, in Isa. 55:6. "To seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near." Such especially is an accepted time, and a day of salvation: 2 Cor. 6:2. "I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in a day of**

salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

**3. Improve well your time of leisure from worldly business. Many persons have a great deal of such time, and all have some. If men be but disposed to it, such time may be improved to great advantage. When we are most free from cares for the body, and business of an outward nature, a happy opportunity for the soul is afforded. Therefore spend not such opportunities unprofitably, nor in such a manner that you will not be able to give a good account thereof to God. Waste them not away wholly in unprofitable visits, or useless diversions or amusements. Diversion should be used only in subserviency to business. So much, and no more, should be used, as doth most fit the mind and body for the work of our general and particular callings.**

**You have need to improve every talent, advantage, and opportunity, to your utmost, while time lasts; for it will soon be said concerning you, according to the oath of the angel, in Rev. 10:5, 6. "And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer."**

***Praise, One of the Chief Employments of  
Heaven***

***"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps." - Revelation 14:2***

We may observe in these words (1.) What it was that John heard, *viz.* the voice and melody of a company praising God. It is said in the next verse that they sung a new song before the throne. (2.) Whence he heard this voice, "I heard," says he, "a voice from heaven." This company that he heard praising God was in heaven. It is said in the following verse, "They sung this song before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders." But the throne of God, and the four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders, are all represented in these visions of John, as being in heaven. So that this voice was the voice of the heavenly inhabitants, the voice of the blessed and glorious company that is in heaven, before the throne of God there. (3.) The kind of voice, which is here set forth in a very lively and elegant manner. It is said to be as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, and as the voice of harpers harping with their harps. Hereby several things are represented in a very striking manner. 1. The distance of the voice. 2. That it was the voice of a vast and innumerable multitude, so that it was as the voice of many waters. How naturally does this represent the joint, continual, and loud voice of a vast multitude at a distance, that it resembled the voice of many waters. 3. The loudness of the voice. It was as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; which describes the extraordinary fervency of their praises, and how lively and vigorous they were therein, and how that everyone praised God with all his might. They all, joining together, sung with such fervency, that heaven did as it were ring with their praises. The noise of thunder, and the roaring of many waters, are the most great and majestic sounds ever heard upon earth,

and are often spoken of in the Scriptures as the mightiest sounds. John could not distinctly hear what they sang, but they being in heaven, at a great distance, he knew not what better to compare it to, than to the roaring of the sea, or a great thunder. Yet, 4. It was a melodious sound, signified by this expression, I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. The harp was a stringed instrument that David made much use of in praising God. John represents the matter thus to us, That the voice which he heard, being at a great distance, it was in distinct; and being of such a vast multitude, and such a mighty fervent voice, that it seemed in some measure like distant thunder, or the roaring of water, and yet he could perceive the music of the voice at the same time. Though it was in some respects as thunder and the noise of water, yet there was a sweet and excellent melody in it. In short, though these comparisons of which John makes use, to signify to us what kind of a voice and sound it was that he heard, are exceedingly lively and elegant. Yet this seems to be evident from them, that what he heard was inexpressible, and that he could find nothing that could perfectly represent it. That a voice should be as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, and yet like the voice of harpers, is to us not easily to be conceived of. But the case was, that John could find no earthly sound that was sufficient to represent it; and therefore such various and different similitudes are aggregated and cast together to represent it. But thus much seems to be signified by it, that it seemed to be the voice of an innumerable multitude, and that they were exceedingly fervent and mighty in their praises. That the voice of this multitude was very great, and exceedingly full of majesty, and yet a most sweet and melodious voice at the same time.

*Doctrine.* The work of the saints in heaven doth very much consist in praising God.

**I. *Proposition.*** The saints in heaven are employed. They are not idle. They have there much to do. They have a work before them that will fill up eternity.

We are not to suppose, when the saints have finished their course and done the works appointed them here in this world, and are got to their journey's end, to their Father's house, that they will have nothing to do. It is true, the saints when they get to heaven, rest from their labors and their works follow them. Heaven is not a place of labor and travail, but a place of rest. Heb. 4:9. There remaineth a rest for the people of God. And it is a place of the reward of labor. But yet the rest of heaven does not consist in idleness, and a cessation of all action, but only a cessation from all the trouble and toil and tediousness of action. The most perfect rest is consistent with being continually employed. So it is in heaven. Though the saints are exceedingly full of action, yet their activity is perfectly free from all labor, or weariness, or unpleasantness. They shall rest from their work, that is, from all work of labor and self-denial, and grief, care, and watchfulness, but they will not cease from action. The saints in glory are represented as employed in serving God, as well as the saints on earth, though it be without any difficulty or opposition. Rev. 22:3, "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him." Yea, we are told, that they shall serve God day and night, that is, continually or without ceasing. Rev. 7:15, "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." And yet this shall be without any manner of trouble, as it follows in the next verse. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat." In this world saints labor, as it were, in the wearisome heat of the sun. But there, though they shall still serve God, yet shall the sun not light on them nor any heat. In one sense, the



**saints and angels in heaven rest not day nor night, Rev. 4:8, that is, they never cease from their blessed employment. Perfection of happiness does not consist in idleness, but on the contrary, it very much consists in action. The angels are blessed spirits, and yet they are exceedingly active in serving God. They are as a flame of fire, which is the most active thing that we see in this world. God himself enjoys infinite happiness and perfect bliss, and yet he is not inactive, but is himself in his own nature a perfect act, and is continually at work in bringing to pass his own purposes and ends. That principle of holiness that is in its perfection in the saints in heaven, is a most active principle. So that though they enjoy perfect rest, yet they are a great deal more active than they were when in this world. In this world they were exceedingly dull, and heavy, and inactive, but now they are a flame of fire. The saints in heaven are not merely passive in their happiness. They do not merely enjoy God passively, but in an active manner. They are not only acted upon by God, but they mutually act towards him, and in this action and re-action consists the heavenly happiness.**

**II. *Proposition.* Their employment consists very much in praising God.**

**John the beloved disciple had often visions of heaven, and in almost every instance had a vision of the inhabitants as praising God. So in the fourth chapter he tells us, that he looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven, and he was called up thither, and that he saw the throne of God and him that sat on the throne. And there he gives us an account how those that were round about the throne were praising God. The four living creatures rest not day nor night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him, the four**

and twenty elders fall down before him and worship him, etc., etc. Again in the fifth chapter, we have an account how they sing praises to Christ, Rev. 5:8, 9, etc. And so in Rev. 7:9, 10, 11, 12. And in Rev. 11:16, 17. And in the twelfth chapter, 10th verse. And in Rev. 15:2, 3, 4. And in the beginning of the nineteenth chapter we have an account how the hosts of heaven sing hallelujahs to God. By all which it most evidently appears, that their work very much consists in praising God and Christ. We have but a very imperfect knowledge of the future state of blessedness, and of their employment. Without doubt they have various employments there. We cannot reasonably question but they are employed in contributing to each other's delight. They shall dwell together in society. They shall also probably be employed in contemplating on God, his glorious perfections, and glorious works, and so gaining knowledge in these things. And doubtless they will be employed many ways, that we know nothing of: but this we may determine, that much of their employment consists in praising God, and that for the following reasons.

*First*, because they there see God. This is a blessedness promised to the saints, that they shall see God, Mat. 5:8. That they see God, sufficiently shows the reason why they praise him. They that see God cannot but praise him. He is a Being of such glory and excellency that the sight of this excellency of his will necessarily influence them that behold it to praise him. Such a glorious sight will awaken and rouse all the powers of the soul, and will irresistibly impel them, and draw them into acts of praise. Such a sight enlarges their souls, and fills them with admiration, and with an unspeakable exultation of spirit.

'Tis from the little that the saints have seen of God, and know of him in this world that they are excited to praise him in the degree they do here. But here they see but as in a

glass darkly; they have only now and then a little glimpse of God's excellency. But then they shall have the transcendent glory and divine excellency of God set in their immediate and full view. They shall dwell in his immediate glorious presence and shall see face to face, 1 Cor. 13:12. Now the saints see the glory of God but by a reflected light, as we in the night see the light of the sun reflected from the moon. But in heaven they shall directly behold the Sun of righteousness, and shall look full upon him when shining in all his glory. This being the case, it can be no otherwise, but that they should very much employ themselves in praising God. When they behold the glorious power of God, they cannot but praise that power. When they see God's wisdom that is so wonderful, and infinitely beyond all created wisdom, they cannot but continually praise that wisdom. When they view the infinitely pure and lovely holiness of God, whereby the heavens themselves are not pure in comparison with him, how can they avoid with an exalted heart to praise that beauty of the divine nature! When they see the infinite grace of God, and see what a boundless ocean of mercy and love he is, how can they but celebrate that grace with the highest praise!

*Second*, they will have another sense of the greatness of the fruits of God's mercy than we have here in this world. They will not only have a sight of the glorious attributes of God's goodness and mercy in their beatific vision of God, but they will be sensible of the exceeding greatness of the fruits of it; the greatness of the benefits that he has bestowed. They will have another sense of the greatness and manifoldness of the communications of his goodness to his creation in general. They will be more sensible how that God is the fountain of all good, the Father of lights, from whom proceeds every good and perfect gift. We do now but little consider, in comparison with what we should do, how full the world is of God's goodness, and how it appears in the

sun, moon, and stars, and in the earth and seas, with all their fullness, and wheresoever we turn our eyes, and how all ranks and orders of being, from the highest angel to the lowest insect, are dependent upon, and maintained by, the goodness of God. These the saints in heaven clearly see. They see how the universe is replenished with his goodness, and how the communications of his goodness are incessantly issuing from God as from an everflowing fountain, and are poured forth all around in vast profusion into every part of heaven and earth, as light is every moment diffused from the sun. We have but faint imperfect notions of these things, but the saints in heaven see them with perfect clearness. They have another sense of the greatness of God's goodness to mankind, and to the church, and to them in particular, than any of us have. They have another sense of the greatness of God's goodness in the temporal mercies which God bestowed upon them while they were here in this world, though they know that spiritual mercies are infinitely greater. But especially they have an immensely greater sense of the exceeding greatness of the fruits of God's grace and mercy bestowed in redemption. They have another sense how great a gift the gift of God's only-begotten Son is. They have another sense of the greatness and dignity of the person of Christ, and how great a thing it was for him to become man, and how great a thing it was for him to lay down his life, and to endure the shameful and accursed death of the cross. They have another sense how great the benefits are that Christ has purchased for men, how great a mercy it is to have sin pardoned, and to be delivered from the misery of hell. They have another sense how dreadful that misery is, for the damned are tormented in the presence of the holy angels and saints, and they see the smoke of their torment; and have another sense what eternity is, and so are proportionably more sensible how great a mercy it is to be delivered from that torment. They have another sense how

great a fruit of God's grace it is to be the children of God, and to have a right and title to eternal glory. They are sensible of the greatness of the benefits that Christ has purchased, by their experience. For they are in possession of the blessedness and glory that he has purchased. They taste the sweetness of it. And therefore they are more sensible what cause they have to praise God for these things. The grace and goodness of God in the work of redemption appears so wonderful to them that their thoughts of it do excite them to the most ardent praise. When they take a view of the grace of God and of the love of Christ in redemption, they see that there is cause that they should exert the utmost of their capacities, and spend an eternity in praising God and the Lamb. It is but a very little that we at best can conceive of the greatness of the benefits of redemption, and therefore we are but little affected by it, and our praises for it are low and dull things.

*Third*, another reason is [that] they will be perfect in humility. In order to a person's being rightly disposed to the work of praise, he must be an humble person. A proud person is for assuming all praise to himself and is not disposed to ascribe it to God. It is humility only that will enable us to say from the heart, "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be the glory." The humble person admires the goodness and grace of God to him. He sees more how wonderful it is that God should take such notice of him, and show such kindness to him, that is so much below his notice. Now the saints in heaven have this grace of humility perfected in them. They do as much excel the saints on earth in humility as in other graces. Though they are so much above the saints on earth in holiness and in their exalted state, yet they are vastly more humble than the saints on earth be. They are as much lower in humility as they are higher in honor and happiness. And the reason of it is that they know more of God. They see more of his

greatness and infinite highness, and therefore are more sensible how wonderful it is that God should take so much notice of them, to have such communion with them, and give them such a full enjoyment of him. They are far more sensible what unworthy creatures they have been, that God should bestow such mercies upon them, than the saints on earth. They have a greater sight of the evil of sin. They see more what filthy vile creatures they were by nature, and how dreadfully they provoked God by actual sin, and how they have deserved God's hatred and wrath. The saints in heaven have as much greater a sense of their unworthiness in their natural state than the saints on earth as they have a greater sense of God's glorious excellency. For it is the sight of God's excellency which gives them a sight of their own unworthiness. And therefore they do proportionally admire the love of God to them in giving Christ to die for them, and the love of Christ in being willing to offer himself for their sins, and of the wonderful mercy of God in their conversion, and bestowing eternal life upon them. The humble sense the saints have of their own unworthiness, doth greatly engage and enlarge their hearts in praise to him for his infinite mercy and grace.

*Fourth*, their love to God and Christ will be perfect. Love is a principal ingredient in the grace of thankfulness. There is a counterfeit thankfulness in which there is no love. But there is love in exercise in all sincere thankfulness. And the greater any person's love is, the more will he be disposed to praise. Love will cause him to delight in the work. He that loves God, proportionably seeks the glory of God, and loves to give him glory. Now the hearts of the saints in heaven are all, as it were, a pure flame of love. Love is the grace that never faileth. Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail, whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. Faith shall cease in vision, and hope in fruition, but love never faileth. The grace of love will be exalted to its

**greatest height and highest perfection in heaven. And love will vent itself in praise. Heaven will ring with praise because it is full of love to God. This is the reason that great assembly, that innumerable host, [praises] God with such ardency, that their praise is as the voice of many waters, and as the mighty thunderings, because they are animated by so ardent, vigorous, and powerful a principle of divine love.**

## **APPLICATION**

**I. This subject may be applied in the way of INSTRUCTION.**

***First*, hence we may learn the excellency of this work of praising God. That it is a most excellent employment, appears because it is a heavenly employment. It is that work wherein the saints and angels are continually employed.**

**If we sincerely and frequently praise God, we shall therein be like the heavenly inhabitants, and join with them.**

**That it is the work of heaven shows it to be the most honorable work. No employment can be a greater honor to a man than to praise God. It is the peculiar dignity of the nature of man, and the very thing wherein his nature is exalted above things without reason, and things without life, that he is made capable of actively glorifying his Creator. Other creatures do glorify God. The sun, moon, and stars, and the earth and waters, and all the trees of the field, and grass and herbs, and fishes and insects do glorify God. Psa. 19:1-6; Job 12:7, 8. But herein is the peculiar dignity of the nature of man, that he is capable of glorifying him as a cause, by counsel, understandingly and voluntarily, which is a heavenly work.**

***Second*, this doctrine may give us an idea of the glorious and happy state of the saints in heaven. It shows how joyfully and gloriously they spend their time. Joy is a great ingredient in praise. There is an exultation of spirit in fervent praise. Praise is the most joyful work in the world. And how joyful a society are they that join together, so many thousands and millions of them, with one heart and one soul, to sing a new song before the throne, that fill heaven with their glorious melody! How joyful they are in their work, appears in the text, by their fervency in it, so that their voices resounded as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder. What ineffable joy was there in those harpers whom John heard harping with their harps!**

**This shows how different a state the saints are in in heaven, from what they are in this world. Here much of the work to which the saints are called, consists in laboring, in fighting, in toilsome traveling in a waste howling wilderness, in mourning and suffering, and in offering up strong crying and tears. But there in heaven, their work continually is to lift up their joyful songs of praise.**

**This world is a valley of tears, a world filled with sighs and groans. One is groaning under some bodily pain. Another is mourning and lamenting over a dear departed friend. Another is crying out by reason of the arm of the oppressor. But in heaven there is no mixture of such sounds as these. There is nothing to be heard amongst them but the sweet and glorious melody of God's praises. There is a holy cheerfulness to be seen throughout that blessed society. Rev. 21:4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying." They shall never have anything more to do with sighing and crying; but their eternal work henceforward shall be praise.**



**This should make us long for heaven, where they spend their time so joyfully and gloriously. The saints especially have reason to be earnestly breathing after that happy state, where they may in so joyful a manner praise God.**

***Third*, this may put natural persons upon reflecting on their own state, that they have no part nor lot in this matter. You are an alien from the commonwealth of Israel. You are not one of the people of God. You do not belong to their society that are to spend their eternity after that joyful manner, which you have now heard. You have no right nor portion in heaven. If you hereafter come and offer yourself to be admitted into this blessed society, in your present state; if you come and try to be admitted, you will be thrust out. You will be driven away. If you come and knock, and cry to be admitted to the wedding, saying, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, all will be to no purpose! You will hear no other word except *Depart!* You shall be shut out into outer darkness. You shall not be permitted to sing among the children, but shall be driven out, to howl among dogs. Rev. 22:14, 15, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city; for without are dogs,” etc. You are in danger of spending eternity, not in joyfully singing praises, but in a quite contrary manner; in weeping, in wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and blaspheming God because of your pains and because of your plagues. You shall see others coming from the east and the west, and sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, taking their places among that blessed, happy society, and joining their voices in their heavenly music. But you see your lot. You shall have other work to do. Isa. 65:14, “Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit.”**

**II. In the way of EXHORTATION. —** If it be so that praising God is very much the employment of heaven, hence let all be exhorted to the work and duty of praising God. The following considerations will show why we should be stirred up by this doctrine to this work.

*First*, let it be considered that the church on earth is the same society with those saints who are praising God in heaven. There is not one church of Christ in heaven, and another here upon earth. Though the one be sometimes called the church triumphant, and the other the church militant, yet they are not indeed two churches. By the church triumphant is meant the triumphant part of the church. And by the church militant, the militant part of it, for there is but one universal or catholic church. Song 6:9, “My dove, my undefiled, is but one.” Christ has and hath many members.” The glorious assembly and the saints on earth make but one family. Eph. 3:15, “Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Though some are in heaven, and some on earth, in very different circumstances, yet they are all united. For there is but *one body, and one spirit, and one Lord Jesus Christ. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.* God hath in Christ united the inhabitants of heaven, and the holy inhabitants of this earth, and hath made them one. Eph. 1:10, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of time, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him.” Heaven is at a great distance from the earth. It is called a *far country*. Mat. 25:14. Yet the distance of place does not separate them so as to make two societies. For though the saints on earth, at present, are at a distance from heaven, yet they belong there. That is their proper home. The saints that are in this world are strangers here. And therefore the apostle reproveth the Christians in his day, for acting as though they belonged to this world. Col.

**2:20, “Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?”**

**Some of a people may be in their own land, and some in a strange land. And yet be but one people. Some of a family may be at home, and some sojourning abroad. And yet be but one family. The saints on earth, though they be not actually in heaven, yet have their inheritance in heaven, and are traveling towards heaven, and will arrive there in a little time. They are nearly related to the saints in heaven. They are their brethren, being children of the same Father, and fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. In Eph. 2:19, the saints on earth are said to be *fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*. And the apostle tells the Christian Hebrews, Heb. 12:22-24, that they were “come to mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” But how were they *come* to this heavenly city, and this glorious assembly, when they were yet here on earth? They were come to them, ere they were brought and united to them in the same family. But this is what I would inculcate by all this, that the church of God on earth ought to be employed in the same work with the saints in heaven, because they are the same society. As they are but one family, have but one Father, one inheritance, so they should have but one work. The church on earth ought to join with the saints in heaven in their employment, as God hath joined them in one society by his grace.**

**We profess to be of the visible people of Christ, to be Christians and not heathens, and so belong to the universal church. We profess therefore to be of the same society, and**

shall not walk answerably to our profession, unless we employ ourselves in the same work.

*Second*, let it be considered, that we all of us hope to spend an eternity with the saints in heaven, and in the same work of praising God. There is, it may be, not one of us but who hopes to be a saint in heaven, and there continually to sing praises to God and the Lamb. But how disagreeable will it be with such a hope, to live in the neglect of praising God now! We ought now to begin that work which we intend shall be the work of another world. For this life is given us on purpose that therein we might prepare for a future life. The present state is a state of probation and preparation, a state of preparation for the enjoyments and employment of another, future, and eternal state. And no one is ever admitted to those enjoyments and employments, but those who are prepared for them here. If ever we would go to heaven, we must be fitted for heaven in this world. We must here have our souls molded and fashioned for that work and that happiness. They must be formed for praise, and they must begin their work here. The beginnings of future things are in this world. The seed must be sown here. The foundation must be laid in this world. Here is laid the foundation of future misery, and of future happiness. If it be not begun here, it never will be begun. If our hearts be not in some measure tuned to praise in this world, we shall never do anything at the work hereafter. The light must dawn in this world, or the sun will never rise in the next. As we therefore all of us would be, and hope to be, of that blessed company which praise God in heaven, we should now inure ourselves to the work.

*Third*, those works of God's mercy for which the saints in heaven will chiefly praise him, have been wrought amongst us in this world.

**The mercy and grace of God for which the saints in heaven will chiefly praise him is his mercy exercised in his work of redemption, which work has been wrought out in this world. This love of God is the chief object of their admiration, and what they chiefly contemplate, and that employs their most ardent praises.**

**The grace of Christ, about which their praises will be principally employed is that he should so love sinful man as to undertake for him, to take upon him man's nature, and lay down his life for him. We find that is the subject of their praises in Rev. 5:8, 9, "And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders, fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints; and they sang a new song, Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."**

**They will chiefly praise God for these fruits of his mercy, because these are the greatest fruits of it that ever have been, far greater than the glorifying of saints. The saints in heaven will praise God for bestowing glory upon them. But the actual bestowment of glory upon them, after it has been purchased by the blood of Christ, is in no measure so great a thing as the purchasing of it by his blood. For Christ, the eternal Son of God, to become man, and to lay down his life, was a far greater thing than the glorifying of all the saints that ever have been, or ever will be glorified, from the beginning of the world to the end of it. The giving Christ to die, comprehends all other mercies. For all other mercies are through this. The giving of Christ is a greater thing than the giving of all things else for the sake of Christ. This evidently appears, from Rom. 8:32, "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" So that the work of redemption is that for which the saints in heaven**

do chiefly praise God. But this work has been wrought here, among us in this world. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” The incarnation of Christ was a thing that was brought to pass in this world, and the sufferings and death of Christ were also accomplished on earth. Shall heaven be filled with praises for what was done on earth, and shall there be no praises on earth where it was done?

*Fourth*, if you praise God sincerely in this world, it will be a sign that you are really to be one of those that shall praise him in heaven. If any man be found sincerely glorifying God, he will in due time be brought to them, as one who is fit to be of their company. Heaven is the appointed place of all sincere praisers of God. They are all to be gathered together there. And no man can sincerely praise God unless he be one of those who are redeemed from among men, one that God has separated from the rest of the world, and set apart for himself.

*Fifth*, if we begin now to exercise ourselves in the work of heaven, it will be the way to have foretastes of the enjoyments of heaven. The business and the happiness go together. This will be the way to have your heart filled with spiritual joy and comfort. If you heartily praise God, you shall rejoice in him, and he will show you more of himself, of his glory and love, that you may still have greater cause of praise.

I proceed to give some DIRECTIONS for the performance of this work.

*First*, be directed, in order to your acceptably performing this duty, to repent of your sins, and turn to God. If you have not a work of conversion wrought in you, you will do nothing to any purpose in this work of praise. An unconverted person never once sincerely or acceptably

praises God. If you would do the work of the saints in heaven, you must be, not only in profession, but really, one of their society. For there are none else can do their work. As in the verse following the text: “And they sung as it were a new song, before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no man could learn that song, but the hundred and forty-four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.” A hundred and forty-four thousand is a mystical number for the church of God, or the assembly of the saints, or those that are redeemed from the earth.. There is no man can learn the song that they sing in heaven, but those of that number. It is beyond the reach of all natural men, let them be persons of ever so great abilities and sagacity. They never can learn that heavenly song, if they be not of that number. For it is only the sanctifying, saving instruction of the Spirit of God, that can teach us that song.

*Second*, labor after more and more of those principles from whence the praise of the saints in heaven doth arise. You have already heard that the saints in heaven do praise the Lord so fervently because they see him. Labor therefore that you, though you have not an immediate vision of God, as they have, may yet have a clear spiritual sight of him, and that you may know more of God, and have frequent discoveries of him made to you.

You have heard that the saints in heaven make praise so much their work, because of the great sense they have of the greatness and wonderfulness of the fruits of the Lord’s goodness. Labor therefore to get your minds more deeply impressed with such a sense.

The saints in glory are so much employed in praise, because they are perfect in *humility*, and have so great a sense of the infinite distance between God and them. They

have a great sense of their own unworthiness, that they are by nature unworthy of any of the mercy of God. Labor therefore that you may obtain more of a sense of your own littleness, and vileness; that you may see more what you are, how ill you have deserved at the hands of God, and how you are less than the least of all his mercies.

The hearts of the saints in heaven are all inflamed with divine *love*, which continually influences them to praise God. Seek that this principle may abound in you, and then you likewise will delight in praising God. It will be a most sweet and pleasant employment to you.

*Third*, labor, in your praises, to praise God, so far as may be, in the same manner that the saints do in heaven. They praise him *fervently*, with their whole heart, and with all their strength, as was represented in vision to John by the exceeding loudness of their praise. Labor therefore that you may not be cold and dull in your praises, but that you also may praise God fervently.

The saints in heaven praise God *humbly*. Let it also be your delight to abase yourselves, to exalt God, and set him upon the throne, and to lie at his footstool.

The saints in heaven praise God *unitedly*. They praise him with one heart and one soul, in a most firm union. Endeavor that you may thus praise God in union with his people, having your hearts knit to them in fervent love and charity, which will be a great help to your praising and glorifying God unitedly with them.

III. In the way of REPROOF to those who neglect the *singing* of God's praises. Certainly, such a neglect is not consonant to the hope and expectation of spending an eternity in that work. It is an appointment of God, that we



should not only praise in our prayers, but that we should *sing* his praises. It was a part of divine worship, not only under the Old Testament, but the New. Thus we read that Christ and his disciples sung praises together, Mat. 26:30. So it is commanded, Eph. 5:18, 19, “Be ye filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.” And Col. 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” 1 Cor. 14:15, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” So also the saints in heaven are represented as singing God’s praises. And is that their happy and glorious employment; and yet shall it be so neglected by us, who hope for heaven? If there be any of the godly that do neglect this duty, I would desire them to consider how discordant such a neglect is with their profession, with their state, and with the mercies which God has bestowed. How much cause has God given you to sing his praise! You have received more to prompt you to praise God than all the natural men in the world. And can you content yourself to live in the world without singing the praises of your heavenly Father, and your glorious Redeemer?

Parents ought to be careful that their children are instructed in singing, that they may be capable of performing that part of divine worship. This we should do, as we would have our children trained up for heaven, for we all of us would have our children go to heaven.

IV. In the way of CONSOLATION to the godly. It may be matter of great comfort to you that you are to spend your eternity with the saints in heaven, where it is so much their work to praise God. The saints are sensible what cause they

have to praise God, and oftentimes are ready to say they long to praise him more and that they never can praise him enough. This may be a consolation to you, that you shall have a whole eternity in which to praise him. They earnestly desire to praise God better. This, therefore, may be your consolation, that in heaven your heart shall be enlarged, you shall be enabled to praise him in an immensely more perfect and exalted manner than you can do in this world. You shall not be troubled with such a dead, dull heart, with so much coldness, so many clogs and burdens from corruption, and from a earthly mind; with a wandering, unsteady heart; with so much darkness and so much hypocrisy. You shall be one of that vast assembly that praise God so fervently, that their voice is “as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings.”

You long to have others praise God, to have every one praise him. There there will be enough to help you, and join you in praising him, and those that are capable of doing it ten thousand times better than saints on earth. Thousands and thousands of angels and glorified saints will be around you, all united to you in the dearest love, all disposed to praise God, not only for themselves, but for his mercy to you.

**CHRISTIAN CAUTIONS;**

**OR,**

# **THE NECESSITY OF SELF- EXAMINATION**

**Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.\*PSALM 139:23, 24**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**THIS psalm is a meditation on the omniscience of God, or upon his perfect view and knowledge of every thing, which the psalmist represents by that perfect knowledge which God had of all his actions, his downsitting and his uprising; and of his thoughts, so that he knew his thoughts afar off; and of his words, "There is not a word in my tongue," says the psalmist, "but thou knowest it altogether." Then he represents it by the impossibility of fleeing from the divine presence, or of hiding from him; so that if he should go into heaven, or hide himself in hell, or fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, yet he would not be hid from God; or if he should endeavour to hide himself in darkness, yet that would not cover him; but the darkness and light are both alike to him. Then he represents it by the knowledge which God had of him while in his mother's womb, ver. 15, 16. "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret; thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written."**

**After this the psalmist observes what must be inferred as a necessary consequence of this omniscience of God, viz. that he will slay the wicked, since he seeth all their wickedness, and nothing of it is hid from him. And last of all, the psalmist improves this meditation upon God's all-seeing eye, in begging of God that he would search and try him, to**

see if there were any wicked way in him, and lead him in the way everlasting.

Three things may be noted in the words.

1. The act of mercy which the psalmist implores of God towards himself, viz. that God would search him. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts."

2. In what respect he desires to be searched, viz. "to see if there were any wicked way in him." We are not to understand by it, that the psalmist means that God should search him for his own information. What he had said before, of God's knowing all things, implies that he hath no need of that. The psalmist had said, in the second verse, that God understood his thought afar off; i.e. it was all plain before him, he saw it without difficulty, or without being forced to come nigh, and diligently to observe. That which is plain to be seen, may be seen at a distance.

Therefore, when the psalmist prays that God would search him, to see if there were any wicked way in him, he cannot mean, that he should search that he himself might see or be informed, but that the psalmist might see and be informed. He prays that God would search him by his discovering light; that he would lead him thoroughly to discern himself, and see whether there were any wicked way in him. Such figurative expressions are often used in Scripture. The word of God is said to be a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Not that the word itself discerns, but it searches and opens our hearts to view; so that it enables us to discern the temper and desires of our hearts. So God is often said to try men. He doth not try them for his own information, but for the discovery and manifestation of them to themselves or others.

**3. Observe to what end he thus desires God to search him, viz. "That he might be led in the way everlasting;" i.e. not only in a way which may have a specious show, and appear right to him for a while, and in which he may have peace and quietness for the present; but in the way which will hold, which will stand the test, which he may confidently abide by for ever, and always approve of as good and right, and in which he may always have peace and joy. It is said, that "the way of the ungodly shall perish," Psal. 1:6. In opposition to this, the way of the righteous is in the text said to last for ever.**

## **SECT. I**

**All men should be much concerned to know whether they do not live in some way of sin**

**DAVID was much concerned to know this concerning himself: he searched himself, he examined his own heart and ways; but he did not trust to that; he was still afraid lest there might be some wicked way in him, which had escaped his notice: therefore he cries to God to search him. And his earnestness appears in the frequent repetition of the same request in different words: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts." He was very earnest to know whether there were not some evil way or other in him, in which he went on, and did not take notice of.**

**1. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in a state of sin. All unregenerate men live in sin. We are born under the power and dominion of sin, are sold under sin; every unconverted sinner is a devoted servant to sin and Satan. We should look upon it as of the greatest importance to us, to know in what state we are, whether we ever had any change made in our hearts from sin to**

holiness, or whether we be not still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; whether ever sin were truly mortified in us; whether we do not live in the sin of unbelief, and in the rejection of the Saviour. This is what the apostle insists upon with the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 13:5. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Those who entertain the opinion and hope of themselves, that they are godly, should take great care to see that their foundation be right. Those that are in doubt should not give themselves rest till the matter be resolved.

Every unconverted person lives in a sinful way. He not only lives in a particular evil practice, but the whole course of his life is sinful. The imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually. He not only doth evil, but he doth no good, Psal. 14:3. "They are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one." Sin is an unconverted man's trade; it is the work and business of his life; for he is the servant of sin. And ordinarily hypocrites, or those who are wicked men, and yet think themselves godly, and make a profession accordingly, are especially odious and abominable to God.

2. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some particular way which is offensive and displeasing to God: this is what I principally intend. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in the gratification of some lust, either in practice or in our thoughts: whether we do not live in the omission of some duty, some thing which God expects we should do; whether we do not go into some practice or manner of behaviour, which is not warrantable. We should inquire whether we do not live in some practice which is against

**our light, and whether we do not allow ourselves in known sins.**

**We should be strict to inquire whether or no we have not hitherto allowed ourselves in some or other sinful way, through wrong principles and mistaken notions of our duty: whether we have not lived in the practice of some things offensive to God, through want of care and watchfulness, and observation of ourselves. We should be concerned to know whether we live not in some way which doth not become the profession we make; and whether our practice in some things be not unbecoming christians, contrary to christian rules, not suitable for the disciples and followers of the holy Jesus, the Lamb of God. We ought to be concerned to know this, because,**

**(1.) God requires of us, that we exercise the utmost watchfulness and diligence in his service. Reason teaches, that it is our duty to exercise the utmost care, that we may know the mind and will of God, and our duty in all the branches of it, and to use our utmost diligence in every thing to do it; because the service of God is the great business of our lives, it is that work which is the end of our beings; and God is worthy, that we should serve him to the utmost of our power in all things. This is what God often expressly requires of us; Deut. 4:9. "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things that thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life." And 5:15, 16. "Take ye therefore good heed to yourselves, lest ye corrupt yourselves." And Deut. 6:17. "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes which he hath commanded thee." And Prov. 4:23. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." So we are commanded by Christ to "watch and pray;" Matt. 26:41. and Luke 21:34, 36. "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any**

time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life." Eph. 5:15. "See that ye walk circumspectly." So that if we be found in any evil way whatsoever, it will not excuse us, that it was through inadvertence, or that we were not aware of it; as long as it is through want of that care and watchfulness in us, which we ought to have maintained.

(2.) If we live in any way of sin, we live in a way whereby God is dishonoured; but the honour of God ought to be supremely regarded by all. If every one would make it his great care in all things to obey God, to live justly and holily, to walk in every thing according to christian rules; and would maintain a strict, watchful, and scrupulous eye over himself, to see if there were no wicked way in him; would give diligence to amend whatsoever is amiss; would avoid every unholy, unchristian, and sinful way; and if the practice of all were universally as becometh Christians; how greatly would this be to the glory of God, and of Jesus Christ! How greatly would it be to the credit and honour of religion! How would it tend to excite a high esteem of religion in spectators, and to recommend a holy life! How would it stop the mouths of objectors and opposers! How beautiful and amiable would religion then appear, when exemplified in the lives of Christians, not maimed and mutilated, but whole and entire, as it were in its true shape, having all its parts and its proper beauty! Religion would then appear to be an amiable thing indeed.

If those who call themselves Christians, thus walked in all the paths of virtue and holiness, it would tend more to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in the world, the conviction of sinners, and the propagation of religion among unbelievers, than all the sermons in the world, so long as the lives of those who are called christians continue as they are now. For want of this concern and watchfulness



in the degree in which it ought to take place, many truly godly persons adorn not their profession as they ought to do, and, on the contrary, in some things dishonour it. For want of being so much concerned as they ought to be, to know whether they do not walk in some way that is unbecoming a Christian, and offensive to God; their behaviour in some things is very unlovely, and such as is an offence and stumbling-block to others, and gives occasion to the enemy to blaspheme.

(3.) We should be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin, as we would regard our own interest. If we live in any way of sin, it will be exceedingly to our hurt. Sin, as it is the most hateful evil, is that which is most prejudicial to our interest, and tends most to our hurt of any thing in the world. If we live in any way that is displeasing to God, it may be the ruin of our souls. Though men reform all other wicked practices, yet if they live in but one sinful way, which they do not forsake, it may prove their everlasting undoing.

If we live in any way of sin, we shall thereby provoke God to anger, and bring guilt upon our own souls. Neither will it excuse us, that we were not sensible how evil that way was in which we walked; that we did not consider it; that we were blind as to any evil in it. We contract guilt not only by living in those ways which we know, but in those which we might know to be sinful, if we were but sufficiently concerned to know what is sinful and what not, and to examine ourselves, and search our own hearts and ways. If we walk in some evil way, and know it not for want of watchfulness and consideration, that will not excuse us; for we ought to have watched and considered, and made the most diligent inquiry.

If we walk in some evil way, it will be a great prejudice to us in this world. We shall thereby be deprived of that comfort which we otherwise might enjoy, and shall expose ourselves to a great deal of soul trouble, and sorrow, and darkness, which otherwise we might have been free from. A wicked way is the original way of pain or grief. In it we shall expose ourselves to the judgments of God, even in this world; and we shall be great losers by it, in respect to our eternal interest; and that though we may not live in a way of sin wilfully, and with a deliberate resolution, but carelessly, and through the deceitfulness of our corruptions. However, we shall offend God, and prevent the flourishing of grace in our hearts, if not the very being of it.

Many are very careful that they do not proceed in mistakes, where their temporal interest is concerned. They will be strictly careful that they be not led on blindfold in the bargains which they make; in their traffic one with another, they are careful to have their eyes about them, and to see that they go safely in these cases; and why not, where the interest of their souls is concerned?

(4.) We should be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin, because we are exceedingly prone to walk in some such way.—The heart of man is naturally prone to sin; the weight of the soul is naturally that way, as the stone by its weight tendeth downwards. And there is very much of a remaining proneness to sin in the saints. Though sin be mortified in them, yet there is a body of sin and death remaining; there are all manner of lusts and corrupt inclinations. We are exceeding apt to get into some ill path or other. Man is so prone to sinful ways, that without maintaining a constant strict watch over himself, no other can be expected than that he will walk in some way of sin.

**Our hearts are so full of sin, that they are ready to betray us. That to which men are prone, they are apt to get into before they are aware. Sin is apt to steal in upon us unawares. Besides this, we live in a world where we continually meet with temptations; we walk in the midst of snares; and the devil, a subtle adversary, is continually watching over us, endeavouring, by all manner of wiles and devices, to lead us astray into by-paths, 2 Cor. 11:2, 3. "I am jealous over you. I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety; so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." 1 Pet. 5:8. "Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."—These things should make us the more jealous of ourselves.**

**(5.) We ought to be concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin; because there are many who live in such ways, and do not consider it, or are not sensible of it. It is a thing of great importance that we should know it, and yet the knowledge is not to be acquired without difficulty. Many live in ways which are offensive to God, who are not sensible of it. They are strangely blinded in this case. Psal. 19:12. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." By secret faults, the psalmist means those which are secret to himself, those sins which were in him, or which he was guilty of, and yet was not aware of.**

## **SECT. II**

**Why many live in sin, and yet not know it**

**THAT the knowing whether we do not live in some way of sin is attended with difficulty, is not because the rules of judging in such a case are not plain or plentiful. God hath**

abundantly taught us what we ought, and what we ought not, to do; and the rules by which we are to walk are often set before us in the preaching of the word. So that the difficulty of knowing whether there be any wicked way in us, is not for want of external light, or for want of God's having told us plainly and abundantly what are wicked ways. But that many persons live in ways which are displeasing to God, and yet are not sensible of it, may arise from the following things.

1. From the blinding deceitful nature of sin. The heart of man is full of sin and corruption, and that corruption is of an exceedingly darkening, blinding nature. Sin always carries a degree of darkness with it; and the more it prevails, the more it darkens and deludes the mind.—It is from hence that the knowing whether there be any wicked way in us is a difficult thing. The difficulty is not at all for want of light without us, not at all because the word of God is not plain, or the rules not clear; but it is because of the darkness within us. The light shines clear enough around us, but the fault is in our eyes; they are darkened and blinded by a pernicious distemper.

Sin is of a deceitful nature, because, so far as it prevails, so far it gains the inclination and will, and that sways and biasses the judgment. So far as any lust prevails, so far it biasses the mind to approve of it. So far as any sin sways the inclination or will, so far that sin seems pleasing and good to the man; and that which is pleasing, the mind is prejudiced to think is right.—Hence when any lust hath so gained upon a man, as to get him into a sinful way or practice; it having gained his will, also prejudices his understanding. And the more irregular a man walks, the more will his mind probably be darkened and blinded; because by so much the more doth sin prevail.

Hence many men who live in ways which are not agreeable to the rules of God's word, yet are not sensible of it; and it is a difficult thing to make them so; because the same lust that leads them into that evil way, blinds them in it.—Thus, if a man live a way of malice or envy, the more malice or envy prevails, the more will it blind his understanding to approve of it. The more a man hates his neighbour, the more will he be disposed to think that he has just cause to hate him, and that his neighbour is hateful, and deserves to be hated, and that it is not his duty to love him. So if a man live in any way of lasciviousness, the more his impure lust prevails, the more sweet and pleasant will it make the sin appear, and so the more will he be disposed and prejudiced to think there is no evil in it.

So the more a man lives in a way of covetousness, or the more inordinately he desires the profits of the world, the more will he think himself excusable in so doing, and the more will he think that he has a necessity of those things, and cannot do without them. And if they be necessary, then he is excusable for eagerly desiring them. The same might be shown of all the lusts which are in men's hearts. By how much the more they prevail, by so much the more do they blind the mind, and dispose the judgment to approve of them. All lusts are deceitful lusts. Eph. 4:22. "That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." And even godly men may for a time be blinded and deluded by a lust, so far as to live in a way which is displeasing to God.

The lusts of men's hearts—prejudicing them in favour of sinful practices, to which those lusts tend, and in which they delight—stir up carnal reason, and put men, with all the subtlety of which they are capable, to invent pleas and arguments to justify such practices. When men are very strongly inclined and tempted to any wicked practice, and

conscience troubles them about it, they will rack their brains to find out arguments to stop the mouth of conscience, and to make themselves believe that they may lawfully proceed in that practice.

When men have entered upon an ill practice, and proceeded in it, then their self-love prejudices them to approve of it. Men do not love to condemn themselves; they are prejudiced in their own favour, and in favour of whatever is found in themselves. Hence they will find out good names, by which to call their evil dispositions and practices; they will make them virtuous, or at least will make them innocent. Their covetousness they will call prudence and diligence in business. If they rejoice at another's calamity, they pretend it is because they hope it will do him good, and will humble him. If they indulge in excessive drinking, it is because their constitutions require it. If they talk against and backbite their neighbour, they call it zeal against sin; it is because they would bear a testimony against such wickedness. If they set up their wills to oppose others in public affairs, then they call their wilfulness conscience, or respect to the public good.—Thus they find good names for all their evil ways.

Men are very apt to bring their principles to their practices, and not their practices to their principles, as they ought to do. They, in their practice, comply not with their consciences; but all their strife is to bring their consciences to comply with their practice.

On the account of this deceitfulness of sin, and because we have so much sin dwelling in our hearts, it is a difficult thing to pass a true judgment on our own ways and practices. On this account we should make diligent search, and be much concerned to know whether there be not some wicked way in us. Heb. 3:12, 13. "Take heed,

**brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."**

**Men can more easily see faults in others than they can in themselves. When they see others out of the way, they will presently condemn them, when perhaps they do, or have done, the same, or the like, themselves, and in themselves justify it. Men can discern motes in others' eyes, better than they can beams in their own. Prov. 21:2. "Every way of man is right in his own eyes." The heart in this matter is exceedingly deceitful. Jer. 17:9. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" We ought not therefore to trust in our own hearts in this matter, but to keep a jealous eye on ourselves, to pry into our own hearts and ways, and to cry to God that he would search us. Prov. 28:26. "He that trusteth his own heart is a fool."**

**2. Satan also sets in with our deceitful lusts, and labours to blind us in this matter. He is continually endeavouring to lead us into sinful ways, and sets in with carnal reason to flatter us in such ways, and to blind the conscience. He is the prince of darkness; he labours to blind and deceive; it hath been his work ever since he began it with our first parents.**

**3. Sometimes men are not sensible, because they are stupified through custom. Custom in an evil practice stupifies the mind, so that it makes any way of sin, which at first was offensive to conscience, after a while, to seem harmless.**

**4. Sometimes persons live in ways of sin, and are not sensible of it, because they are blinded by common custom,**

and the examples of others. There are so many who go into the practice, and it is so common a custom, that it is esteemed little or no discredit to a man; it is little testified against. This causes some things to appear innocent, which are very displeasing to God, and abominable in his sight. Perhaps we see them practised by those of whom we have a high esteem, by our superiors, and those who are accounted wise men. This greatly prepossesses the mind in favour of them, and takes off the sense of their evil. Or if they be observed to be commonly practised by those who are accounted godly men, men of experience in religion, this tends greatly to harden the heart, and blind the mind with respect to any evil practice.

5. Persons are in great danger of living in ways of sin and not being sensible of it, for want of duly regarding and considering their duty in the full extent of it. There are some who hear of the necessity of reforming from all sins, and attending all duties, and will set themselves to perform some particular duties, at the same time neglecting others. Perhaps their thoughts will be wholly taken up about religious duties, such as prayer in secret, reading the Scriptures and other good books, going to public worship and giving diligent attention, keeping the sabbath, and serious meditation. They seem to regard these things, as though they comprised their duty in its full extent, and as if this were their whole work; and moral duties towards their neighbours, their duties in the relations in which they stand, their duties as husbands or wives, as brethren or sisters, or their duties as neighbours, seem not to be considered by them.

They consider not the necessity of those things: and when they hear of earnestly seeking salvation in a way of diligent attendance on all duties, they seem to leave those out of their thoughts, as if they were not meant; nor any other



duties, except reading, and praying, and keeping the sabbath, and the like. Or if they do regard some parts of their moral duty, it may be other branches of it are not considered. Thus if they be just in their dealings, yet perhaps they neglect deeds of charity. They know they must not defraud their neighbour; they must not lie; they must not commit uncleanness; but seem not to consider what an evil it is to talk against others lightly, or to take up a reproach against them, or to contend and quarrel with them, or to live contrary to the rules of the gospel in their family-relations, or not to instruct their children or servants.

Many men seem to be very conscientious in some things, in some branches of their duty on which they keep their eye, when other important branches are entirely neglected, and seem not to be noticed by them. They regard not their duty in the full extent of it.

### **SECT. III**

What method we ought to take, in order to find out whether we do not live in some way of sin

THIS, as hath been observed, is a difficult thing to be known; but it is not a matter of so much difficulty, but that if persons were sufficiently concerned about it, and strict and thorough in inquiring and searching, it might, for the most part, be discovered; men might know whether they live in any way of sin, or not. Persons who are deeply concerned to please and obey God, need not, under the light we enjoy, go on in the ways of sin through ignorance.

It is true, that our hearts are exceedingly deceitful; but God, in his holy word, hath given that light with respect to our duty, which is accommodated to the state of darkness

in which we are. So that by thorough care and inquiry, we may know our duty, and know whether or no we live in any sinful way. And every one who hath any true love to God and his duty, will be glad of assistance in this inquiry. It is with such persons a concern which lies with much weight upon their spirits, in all things to walk as God would have them, and so as to please and honour him. If they live in any way which is offensive to God, they will be glad to know it, and do by no means choose to have it concealed from them.

All those also, who in good earnest make the inquiry, What shall I do to be saved? will be glad to know whether they do not live in some sinful way of behaviour. For if they live in any such way, it is a great disadvantage to them with respect to that great concern. It behoves every one who is seeking salvation, to know and avoid every sinful way in which he lives. The means by which we must come to the knowledge of this, are two; viz. the knowledge of the rule, and the knowledge of ourselves.

1st, If we would know whether we do not live in some way of sin, we should take a great deal of pains to be thoroughly acquainted with the rule.—God hath given us a true and perfect rule, by which we ought to walk. And that we might be able, notwithstanding our darkness, and the disadvantages which attend us, to know our duty, he hath laid the rule before us abundantly. What a full and abundant revelation of the mind of God have we in the Scriptures! And how plain is it in what relates to practice! How often are rules repeated! In how many various forms are they revealed, that we might the more fully understand them!

But to what purpose will all this care of God to inform us be, if we neglect the revelation which God hath made of his

mind, and take no care to become acquainted with it! It is impossible that we should know whether we do not live in a way of sin, unless we know the rule by which we are to walk. The sinfulness of any way consists in its disagreement from the rule; and we cannot know whether it agree with the rule or not, unless we be acquainted with the rule. Rom. 3:20. "By the law is the knowledge of sin."

Therefore, lest we go in ways displeasing to God, we ought with the greatest diligence to study the rules which God hath given us. We ought to read and search the Holy Scriptures much, and do it with the design to know the whole of our duty, and in order that the word of God may be "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths." Psal. 119:105. Every one ought to strive to get knowledge in divine things, and to grow in such knowledge, to the end that he may know his duty, and know what God would have him to do.

These things being so, are not the greater part of men very much to blame in that they take no more pains or care to acquire the knowledge of divine things? in that they no more study the Holy Scriptures, and other books which might inform them? as if it were the work of ministers only, to take pains to acquire this knowledge. But why is it so much a minister's work to strive after knowledge, unless it be, that others may acquire knowledge by him?—Will not many be found inexcusable in the sinful ways in which they live through ignorance and mistake, because their ignorance is a wilful, allowed ignorance? They are ignorant of their duty, but it is their own fault they are so; they have advantages enough to know, and may know it if they will; out they take pains to acquire knowledge, and to be well skilled in their outward affairs, upon which their temporal interest depends; but will not take pains to know their duty.

**We ought to take great pains to be well informed, especially in those things which immediately concern us, or which relate to our particular cases.**

**2dly, The other mean is the knowledge of ourselves, as subject to the rule.—If we would know whether we do not live in some way of sin, we should take the utmost care to be well acquainted with ourselves, as well as with the rule, that we may be able to compare ourselves with the rule. When we have found what the rule is, then we should be strict in examining ourselves, whether or no we be conformed to the rule. This is the direct way in which our characters are to be discovered. It is one thing wherein man differs from brute creatures, that he is capable of self-reflection, or of reflecting upon his own actions, and what passes in his own mind, and considering the nature and quality of them. And doubtless it was partly for this end that God gave us this power, which is denied to other creatures, that we might know ourselves, and consider our own ways.**

**We should examine our hearts and ways, until we have satisfactorily discovered either their agreement or disagreement with the rules of Scripture. This is a matter that requires the utmost diligence, lest we overlook our own irregularities, lest some evil way in us should lie hid under disguise, and pass unobserved. One would think we are under greater advantages to be acquainted with ourselves, than with any thing else; for we are always present with ourselves, and have an immediate consciousness of our own actions: all that passeth in us, or is done by us, is immediately under our eye. Yet really in some respects the knowledge of nothing is so difficult to be obtained, as the knowledge of ourselves. We should therefore use great diligence in prying into the secrets of our hearts, and in examining all our ways and practices.**

**That you may the more successfully use those means to know whether you do not live in some way of sin; be advised,**

**1. Evermore to join self-reflection with reading and hearing the word of God. When you read or hear, reflect on yourselves as you go along, comparing yourselves and your own ways with what you read or hear. Reflect and consider what agreement or disagreement there is between the word and your ways. The Scriptures testify against all manner of sin, and contain directions for every duty; as the apostle saith, 2 Tim. 3:16. "And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Therefore when you there read the rules given us by Christ and his apostles, reflect and consider, each one of you with himself, Do I live according to this rule? Or do I live in any respect contrary to it?**

**When you read in the historical parts of Scripture an account of the sins of which others have been guilty, reflect on yourselves as you go along, and inquire whether you do not in some degree live in the same or like practices. When you there read accounts how God reprov'd the sins of others, and executed judgments upon them for their sins, examine whether you be not guilty of things of the same nature. When you read the examples of Christ, and of the saints recorded in Scripture, inquire whether you do not live in ways contrary to those examples. When you read there how God commended and rewarded any persons for their virtues and good deeds, inquire whether you perform those duties for which they were commended and rewarded, or whether you do not live in the contrary sins or vices. Let me further direct you, particularly to read the Scriptures to these ends, that you may compare and examine yourselves in the manner now mentioned.**

**So if you would know whether you do not live in some way of sin, whenever you hear any sin testified against, or any duty urged, in the preaching of the word, be careful to look back upon yourselves, to compare yourselves and your own ways with what you hear, and strictly examine yourselves, whether you live in this or the other sinful way which you hear testified against; and whether you do this duty which you hear urged. Make use of the word as a glass, wherein you may behold yourselves.**

**How few are there who do this as they ought to do! who, while the minister is testifying against sin, are busy with themselves in examining their own hearts and ways! The generality rather think of others, how this or that person lives in a manner contrary to what is preached; so that there may be hundreds of things delivered in the preaching of the word, which properly belong to them, and are well suited to their cases; yet it never so much as comes into their minds, that what is delivered any way concerns them. Their minds readily fix upon others, and they can charge them, but never think whether or no they themselves be the persons.**

**2. If you live in any ways which are generally condemned by the better, and more sober, sort of men, be especially careful to inquire concerning these, whether they be not ways of sin. Perhaps you have argued with yourselves, that such or such a practice is lawful; you cannot see any evil in it. However, if it be generally condemned by godly ministers, and the better and more pious sort of people, it certainly looks suspicious, whether or no there be not some evil in it; so that you may well be put upon inquiring with the utmost strictness, whether it be not sinful. The practice being so generally disapproved of by those who in such cases are most likely to be in the right, may reasonably put you upon more than ordinarily nice and**

**diligent inquiry concerning the lawfulness or unlawfulness of it.**

**3. Examine yourselves, whether all the ways in which you live, are likely to be pleasant to think of upon a deathbed. Persons often in health allow and plead for those things, which they would not dare to do, if they looked upon themselves as shortly about to go out of the world. They in a great measure still their consciences as to ways in which they walk, and keep them pretty easy, while death is thought of as at a distance: yet reflections on these same ways are very uncomfortable when they are going out of the world. Conscience is not so easily blinded and muffled then as at other times.**

**Consider therefore, and inquire diligently, whether or no you do not live in some practice or other, as to the lawfulness of which, when it shall come into your minds upon your death-bed, you will choose to have some further satisfaction, and some better argument than you now have, to prove that it is not sinful, in order to your being easy about it. Think over your particular ways, and try yourselves, with the awful expectation of soon going out of the world into eternity, and earnestly endeavour impartially to judge what ways you will on a death-bed approve of and rejoice in, and what you will disapprove of, and wish you had let alone.**

**4. Be advised to consider what others say of you, and improve it to this end, to know whether you do not live in some way of sin. Although men are blind to their own faults, yet they easily discover the faults of others, and are apt enough to speak of them. Sometimes persons live in ways which do not at all become them, yet are blind to it themselves, not seeing the deformity of their own ways, while it is most plain and evident to others. They**

themselves cannot see it, yet others cannot shut their eyes against it, cannot avoid seeing it.

For instance. Some persons are of a very proud behaviour, and are not sensible of it; but it appears notorious to others. Some are of a very worldly spirit, they are set after the world, so as to be noted for it, so as to have a name for it; yet they seem not to be sensible of it themselves. Some are of a very malicious and envious spirit; and others see it, and to them it appears very hateful; yet they themselves do not reflect upon it. Therefore since there is no trusting to our own hearts and our own eyes in such cases, we should make our improvement of what others say of us, observe what they charge us with, and what fault they find with us, and strictly examine whether there be not foundation for it.

If others charge us with being proud; or worldly, close, and niggardly; or spiteful and malicious; or with any other ill temper or practice; we should improve it in self-reflection, to inquire whether it be not so. And though the imputation may seem to us to be very groundless, and we think that they, in charging us so and so, are influenced by no good spirit; yet if we act prudently, we shall take so much notice of it as to make it an occasion of examining ourselves.

Thus we should improve what our friends say to us and of us, when they from friendship tell us of any thing which they observe amiss in us. It is most imprudent, as well as most unchristian, to take it amiss, and resent it, when we are thus told of our faults: we should rather rejoice in it, that we are shown our spots. Thus also we should improve what our enemies say of us. If they from an ill spirit reproach and revile us to our faces, we should consider it, so far as to reflect inward upon ourselves, and inquire whether it be not so, as they charge us. For though what is



said, be said in a reproachful, reviling manner; yet there may be too much truth in it. When men revile others even from an ill spirit towards them; yet they are likely to fix upon real faults; they are likely to fall upon us where we are weakest and most defective, and where we have given them most occasion. An enemy will soonest attack us where we can least defend ourselves: and a man that reviles us, though he do it from an unchristian spirit, and in an unchristian manner, yet will be most likely to speak of that, for which we are really most to blame, and are most blamed by others.

So when we hear of others talking against us behind our backs, though they do very ill in so doing, yet the right improvement of it will be, to reflect upon ourselves, and consider whether we indeed have not those faults which they lay to our charge. This will be a more Christian and a more wise improvement of it, than to be in a rage, to revile again, and to entertain an ill-will towards them for their evil-speaking. This is the most wise and prudent improvement of such things. Hereby we may get good out of evil; and this is the surest way to defeat the designs of our enemies in reviling and backbiting us. They do it from ill will, and to do us an injury; but in this way we may turn it to our own good.

9. Be advised, when you see others' faults, to examine whether there be not the same in yourselves. This is not done by many, as is evident from this, that they are so ready to speak of others' faults, and aggravate them, when they have the very same themselves. Thus, nothing is more common than for proud men to accuse others of pride, and to declaim against them upon that account. So it is common for dishonest men to complain of being wronged by others. When a person seeth ill dispositions and practices in others, he is not under the same disadvantage

**in seeing their odiousness and deformity, as when he looks upon any ill disposition or practice in himself. He can see how odious these and those things are in others; he can easily see what a hateful thing pride is in another; and so of malice, and other evil dispositions or practices. In others he can easily see their deformity; for he doth not look through such a deceitful glass, as when he sees the same things in himself.**

**Therefore, when you see others' faults; when you take notice, how such an one acts amiss, what an ill spirit he shows, and how unsuitable his behaviour is; when you hear others speak of it, and when you yourselves find fault with others in their dealings with you, or in things wherein you are any way concerned with them; then reflect, and consider, whether there be nothing of the same nature in yourselves. Consider that these things are just as deformed and hateful in you as they are in others. Pride, a haughty spirit and carriage, are as odious in you as they are in your neighbour. Your malicious and revengeful spirit towards your neighbour, is just as hateful as a malicious and revengeful spirit in him towards you. It is as unreasonable for you to wrong, and to be dishonest with your neighbour, as it is for him to wrong, and be dishonest with you. It is as injurious and unchristian for you to talk against others behind their backs, as it is for others to do the same with respect to you.**

**6. Consider the ways in which others are blinded as to sins in which they live, and strictly inquire whether you be not blinded in the same ways. You are sensible that others are blinded by their lusts; consider whether the prevalence of some carnal appetite or lust of the mind have not blinded you. You see how others are blinded by their temporal interest; inquire whether your temporal interests do not blind you also in some things, so as to make you allow**

**yourselves in things which are not right. You are as liable to be blinded through inclination and interest, and have the same deceitful and wicked hearts as other men, Prov. 27:12. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."**

#### **SECT. IV**

**Particular subjects of self-examination—The Lord's day—God's house**

**I DESIRE all those would strictly examine themselves in the following particulars, who are concerned not to live in any way of sin, as I hope there are a considerable number of such now present; and this certainly will be the case with all who are godly, and all who are duly concerned for their own salvation.**

**1. Examine yourselves with respect to the sabbath-day, whether you do not live in some way of breaking or profaning God's holy sabbath. Do you strictly in all things keep this day, as sacred to God, in governing your thoughts, words, and actions, as the word of God requires on this holy day? Inquire whether you do not only fail in particulars, but whether you do not live in some way whereby this day is profaned; and particularly inquire concerning three things.**

**(1.) Whether it be not a frequent thing with you to encroach upon the sabbath at its beginning,\* and after the sabbath is begun to be out at your work, or following that worldly business which is proper to be done only in our own time. If this be a thing in which you allow yourselves, you live in a way of sin; for it is a thing which can by no means be justified. You have no more warrant to be out with your team, or to be cutting wood, or doing any other worldly**

business, immediately after the sabbath is begun, than you have to do it in the middle of the day. The time is as holy near the beginning of the sabbath as it is in the middle; it is the whole that we are to rest, and to keep holy, and devote to God; we have no licence to take any part of it to ourselves.

When men often thus encroach upon the sabbath, it cannot be from any necessity which can justify them: it can only be for want of due care, and due regard to holy time. They can with due care get their work finished, so that they can leave it by a certain hour. This is evident, for when they are under a natural necessity of finishing their work by a certain time, then they do take that care as to have done before that time comes: as, for instance, when they are aware that at such a time it will be dark, and they will not be able to follow their work any longer, but will be under a natural necessity of leaving off; why, then, they will and do take care ordinarily to have finished their work before that time; and this although the darkness sometimes begins sooner, and sometimes later.

This shows, that with due care men can ordinarily have done their work by a limited time. If proper care will finish their work by a limited time when they are under a natural necessity of it, the same care would as well finish it by a certain time when we are only under a moral necessity. If men knew that as soon as ever the sabbath should begin, it would be perfectly dark, so that they would be under a natural necessity of leaving off their work abroad by that time, then we should see that they would generally have their work done before the time. This shows that it is only for want of care, and of regard to the holy command of God, that men so frequently have some of their work abroad to do after the sabbath is begun.

**Nehemiah took great care that no burden should be borne after the beginning of the sabbath, Nehem. 13:19. "And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath," i.e. began to be darkened by the shade of the mountains before sun-set, "I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath; and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should be no burden brought in on the sabbath-day."**

**(2.) Examine whether it be not your manner to talk on the sabbath of things unsuitable for holy time. If you do not move such talk yourselves, yet when you fall into company that set you the example, are you not wont to join in diverting talk, or in talk of worldly affairs, quite wide from any relation to the business of the day? There is as much reason that you should keep the sabbath holy with your tongues, as with your hands. If it be unsuitable for you to employ your hands about common and worldly things, why is it not as unsuitable for you to employ your tongues about them?**

**(3.) Inquire whether it be not your manner to loiter away the time of the sabbath, and to spend it in a great measure in idleness, in doing nothing. Do you not spend more time on sabbath-day, than on other days, on your beds, or otherwise idling away the time, not improving it as a precious opportunity of seeking God, and your own salvation?**

**2. Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin with respect to the institutions of God's house. Here I shall mention several instances.**

**(1.) Do you not wholly neglect some of those institutions, as particularly the sacrament of the Lord's supper? Perhaps**

**you pretend scruples of conscience, that you are not fit to come to that ordinance, and question whether you be commanded to come. But are your scruples the result of a serious and careful inquiry? Are they not rather a cloak for your own negligence, indolence, and thoughtlessness concerning your duty? Are you satisfied, have you thoroughly inquired and looked into this matter? If not, do you not live in sin, in that you do not more thoroughly inquire? Are you excusable in neglecting a positive institution, when you are scrupulous about your duty, and yet do not thoroughly inquire what it is?**

**But be it so, that you are unprepared; is not this your own sin, your own fault? and can sin excuse you from attending on a positive institution of Christ? When persons are like to have children to be baptized, they can be convinced that it is their duty to come. If it be only conscience that detained them, why doth it not detain them as well now as heretofore? or if they now be more thorough in their inquiries concerning their duty, ought they not to have been thorough in their inquiries before as well as now?**

**(2.) Do you not live in sin, in living in the neglect of singing God's praises? If singing praise to God be an ordinance of God's public worship, as doubtless it is, then it ought to be performed by the whole worshipping assembly. If it be a command that we should worship God in this way, then all ought to obey this command, not only by joining with others in singing, but in singing themselves. For if we suppose it answers the command of God for us only to join in our hearts with others, it will run us into this absurdity, that all may do so; and then there would be none to sing, none for others to join with.**

**If it be an appointment of God, that christian congregations should sing praises to him, then doubtless it is the duty of**

all; if there be no exception in the rule, then all ought to comply with it, unless they be incapable of it, or unless it would be a hinderance to the other work of God's house, as the case may be with ministers, who sometimes may be in great need of that respite and intermission after public prayers, to recover their breath and strength, so that they may be fit to speak the word. But if persons be now not capable, because they know not how to sing, that doth not excuse them, unless they have been incapable of learning. As it is the command of God, that all should sing, so all should make conscience of learning to sing, as it is a thing which cannot be decently performed at all without learning. Those, therefore, who neglect to learn to sing, live in sin, as they neglect what is necessary in order to their attending one of the ordinances of God's worship. Not only should persons make conscience of learning to sing themselves, but parents should conscientiously see to it, that their children are taught this among other things, as their education and instruction belongs to them.

(3.) Are you not guilty of allowing yourselves in sin, in neglecting to do your part towards the removal of scandals from among us? All persons that are in the church, and the children of the church, are under the watch of the church; and it is one of those duties to which we are bound by the covenant which we either actually or virtually make, in uniting ourselves to a particular church, that we will watch over our brethren, and do our part to uphold the ordinances of God in their purity. This is the end of the institution of particular churches, viz. the maintaining of the ordinances of divine worship there, in the manner which God hath appointed.

Examine whether you have not allowed yourselves in sin with respect to this matter, through fear of offending your neighbours. Have you not allowedly neglected the proper

steps for removing scandals, when you have seen them; the steps of reproofing them privately, where the case would allow of it, and of telling them to the church, where the case required it? Instead of watching over your brother, have you not rather hid yourselves, that ye might not be witnesses against him? and when you have seen scandal in him, have you not avoided the taking of proper steps according to the case?

(4.) Art not thou one whose manner it is, to come late to the public worship of God, and especially in winter, when the weather is cold? and dost thou not live in sin in so doing? Consider whether it be a way which can be justified; whether it be a practice which doth honour to God and religion; whether it have not the appearance of setting light by the public worship and ordinances of God's house. Doth it not show that thou dost not prize such opportunities, and that thou art willing to have as little of them as thou canst? Is it not a disorderly practice? and if all should do as thou dost, what confusion would it occasion?

(5.) Art thou not one whose manner it commonly is to sleep in the time of public service? and is not this to live in a way of sin? Consider the matter rationally; is it a thing to be justified, for thee to lay thyself down to sleep, while thou art present in the time of divine service, and pretendest to be one of the worshipping assembly, and to be hearing a message from God? Would it not be looked upon as a high affront, an odious behaviour, if thou shouldst do so in the presence of a king, while a message was delivering to thee, in his name, by one of his servants? Canst thou put a greater contempt on the message which the King of kings sendeth to thee, concerning things of the greatest importance, than from time to time to lay thyself down, and compose thyself to sleep, while the messenger is delivering his message to thee?



**(6.) Art thou not one who is not careful to keep his mind intent upon what is said and done in public worship? Dost thou not, in the midst of the most solemn acts of worship, suffer thy thoughts to rove after worldly objects, worldly cares and concerns, or perhaps the objects of thy wicked lusts and desires? and dost thou not herein live in a way of sin?**

## **SECT. V**

### **Self-examination concerning secret sins**

**I SHALL now propose to you to examine yourselves, Whether you do not live in some secret sin; whether you do not live in the neglect of some secret duty, or secretly live in some practice which is offensive to the pure and all-seeing eye of God. Here you should examine yourselves concerning all secret duties, as reading, meditation, secret prayer; whether you attend those at all, or if you do, whether you do not attend them in an unsteady and careless manner. You should also examine yourselves concerning all secret sins. Strictly inquire what your behaviour is, when you are hid from the eye of the world, when you are under no other restraints than those of conscience, when you are not afraid of the eye of man, and have nothing to fear but the all-seeing eye of God.—Here, among many other things which might be mentioned, I shall particularly mention two.**

**(1.) Inquire whether you do not live in the neglect of the duty of reading the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures were surely written to be read; and unless we be popish in our principles, we shall maintain, that they were not only given to be read by ministers, but by the people too. It doth not answer the design for which they were given, that we have once read them, and that we once in a great while**

**read something in them. They were given to be always with us, to be continually conversed with, as a rule of life. As the artificer must always have his rule with him in his work; and the blind man that walks must always have his guide by him; and he that walks in darkness must have his light with him; so the Scriptures were given to be a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.**

**That we may continually use the Scriptures as our rule of life, we should make them our daily companion, and keep them with us continually; Josh. 1:8. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night." See also Deut. 6:6–9. So Christ commands us to search the Scriptures, John 5:39. These are the mines wherein we are to dig for wisdom as for hidden treasures. Inquire, therefore, whether you do not live in the neglect of this duty, or neglect it so far, that you may be said to live in a way of sin.**

**(2.) Inquire whether you do not live in some way of secretly gratifying some sensual lust. There are many ways and degrees, wherein a carnal lust may be indulged; but every way is provoking to a holy God. Consider whether, although you restrain yourselves from more gross indulgences, you do not, in some way or other, and in some degree or other, secretly from time to time gratify your lusts, and allow yourselves to taste the sweets of unlawful delight.**

**Persons may greatly provoke God, by only allowedly gratifying their lusts in their thoughts and imaginations. They may also greatly provoke God by excess and intemperance in gratifying their animal appetites in those things which are in themselves lawful. Inquire, therefore, whether you do not live in some sinful way or other, in secretly gratifying a sinful appetite.**

## **SECT. VI**

**Self-examination concerning our temper of mind towards our neighbours—and our dealings with them**

**I WOULD propose to you to examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin,—1. In the spirit and temper of mind which you allow towards your neighbour.**

**(1.) Do you not allow and indulge a passionate, furious disposition? If your natural temper be hasty and passionate, do you truly strive against such a temper, and labour to govern your spirit? Do you lament it, and watch over yourselves to prevent it? or do you allow yourselves in a fiery temper? Such a disposition doth not become a Christian, or a man. It doth not become a man, because it unmans him; it turns a man from a rational creature, to be like a wild beast. When men are under the prevalency of a furious passion, they have not much of the exercise of reason. We are warned to avoid such men, as being dangerous creatures, Prov. 22:24, 25. "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."**

**(2.) Do not you live in hatred towards some or other of your neighbours? Do you not hate him for real or supposed injuries that you have received from him? Do you not hate him, because he is not friendly towards you, and because you judge that he hath an ill spirit against you, and hates you, and because he opposes you, and doth not show you that respect which you think belongs to you, or doth not show himself forward to promote your interest or honour? Do you not hate him, because you think he despises you, has mean thoughts of you, and takes occasion to show it? Do you not hate him, because he is of the opposite party to**

**that which is in your interest, and because he has considerable influence in that party.**

**Doubtless you will be loth to call it by so harsh a name as hatred; but inquire seriously and impartially, whether it be any thing better. Do you not feel ill towards him? Do you not feel a prevailing disposition within you to be pleased when you hear him talked against and run down, and to be glad when you hear of any dishonour put upon him, or of any disappointments which happen to him? Would you not be glad of an opportunity to be even with him for the injuries which he hath done you? And wherein doth hatred work but in such ways as these?**

**(3.) Inquire whether you do not live in envy towards some one at least of your neighbours. Is not his prosperity, his riches, or his advancement in honour, uncomfortable to you? Have you not, therefore, an ill will, or at least less good will to him, because you look upon him as standing in your way, you look upon yourself as depressed by his advancement? And would it not be pleasing to you now, if he should be deprived of his riches, or of his honours, not from pure respect to the public good, but because you reckon he stands in your way? Is it not merely from a selfish spirit that you are so uneasy at his prosperity?**

**2. I shall propose to your consideration, whether you do not live in some way of sin, and wrong in your dealings with your neighbours.**

**(1.) Inquire whether you do not from time to time injure and defraud those with whom you deal. Are your ways with your neighbour altogether just, such as will bear a trial by the strict rules of the word of God, or such as you can justify before God? Are you a faithful person? may your neighbours depend on your word? Are you strictly and**

**firmly true to your trust, or any thing with which you are entrusted, and which you undertake? Or do you not by your conduct plainly show, that you are not conscientious in such things?**

**Do you not live in a careless sinful neglect of paying your debts? Do you not, to the detriment of your neighbour, sinfully withhold that which is not your own, but his? Are you not wont to oppress your neighbour? When you see another in necessity, do you not thence take advantage to screw upon him? When you see a person ignorant, and perceive that you have an opportunity to make your gains of it, are you not wont to take such an opportunity? Will you not deceive in buying and selling, and labour to blind the eyes of him of whom you buy, or to whom you sell, with deceitful words, hiding the faults of what you sell, and denying the good qualities of what you buy, and not strictly keeping to the truth, when you see that falsehood will be an advantage to you in your bargain?**

**(2.) Do you not live in some wrong which you have formerly done your neighbour without repairing it? Are you not conscious that you have formerly, at some time or other, wronged your neighbour, and yet you live in it, have never repaired the injury which you have done him? If so, you live in a way of sin.**

## **SECT. VII**

**Self-examination respecting charity towards our neighbours, and conversation with them**

**I DESIRE you would examine yourselves, 1. Whether you do not live in the neglect of the duties of charity towards your neighbour. You may live in sin towards your neighbour, though you cannot charge yourselves with**

living in any injustice in your dealings. Here also I would mention two things.

(1.) Whether you are guilty of sinfully withholding from your neighbour who is in want. Giving to the poor, and giving liberally and bountifully, is a duty absolutely required of us. It is not a thing left to persons' choice to do as they please; nor is it merely a thing commendable in persons to be liberal to others in want; but it is a duty as strictly and absolutely required and commanded as any other duty whatsoever, a duty from which God will not acquit us; as you may see in Deut. 15:7, 8, &c. and the neglect of this duty is very provoking to God, Prov. 21:13. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also himself shall cry, and not be heard."

Inquire, therefore, whether you have not lived in a way of sin in this regard. Do you not see your neighbour suffer, and pinched with want, and you, although sensible of it, harden your hearts against him, and are careless about it? Do you not in such a case, neglect to inquire into his necessities, and to do something for his relief? Is it not your manner to hide your eyes in such cases, and to be so far from devising liberal things, and endeavouring to find out the proper objects and occasions of charity, that you rather contrive to avoid the knowledge of them? Are you not apt to make objections to such duties, and to excuse yourselves? And are you not sorry for such occasions, on which you are forced to give something, or expose your reputation?—Are not such things grievous to you? If these things be so, surely you live in sin, and in great sin, and have need to inquire, whether your spot be not such as is not the spot of God's children.

(2.) Do you not live in the neglect of reproving your neighbour, when you see him going on in a way of sin? This

is required of us by the command of God, as a duty of love and charity which we owe our neighbour: Lev. 19:17. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." When we see our neighbour going on in sin, we ought to go, and in a Christian way deal with him about it. Nor will it excuse us, that we fear it will have no good effect; we cannot certainly tell what effect it will have. This is past doubt, that if Christians generally performed this duty as they ought to do, it would prevent abundance of sin and wickedness, and would deliver many a soul from the ways of death.

If a man going on in the ways of sin, saw that it was generally disliked and discountenanced, and testified against by others, it would have a strong tendency to reform him. His regard for his own reputation would strongly persuade him to reform; for hereby he would see that the way in which he lives makes him odious in the eyes of others. When persons go on in sin, and no one saith any thing to them in testimony against it, they know not but that their ways are approved, and are not sensible that it is much to their dishonour to do as they do. The approbation of others tends to blind men's eyes, and harden their hearts in sin; whereas, if they saw that others utterly disapprove of their ways, it would tend to open their eyes and convince them.

If others neglect their duty in this respect, and our reproof alone will not be so likely to be effectual; yet that doth not excuse us: for if one singly may be excused, then every one may be excused, and so we shall make it no duty at all.

Persons often need the reproofs and admonitions of others, to make them sensible that the ways in which they

**live are sinful; for, as hath been already observed, men are often blinded as to their own sins.**

**2. Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin in your conversation with your neighbours. Men commit abundance of sin, not only in the business and dealings which they have with their neighbours, but in their talk and converse with them.**

**(1.) Inquire whether you do not keep company with persons of a lewd and immoral behaviour, with persons who do not make conscience of their ways, are not of sober lives, but on the contrary, are profane and extravagant, and unclean in their communication. This is what the word of God forbids, and testifies against: Prov. 14:7. "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." Prov. 13:20. "A companion of fools shall be destroyed." The psalmist professes himself clear of this sin, Psalm 26:4, 5. "I have not sat with vain persons; neither will I go with dissemblers: I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked."**

**Do you not live in this sin? Do you not keep company with such persons? and have you not found them a snare to your souls? If you have any serious thoughts about the great concerns of your souls, have you not found this a great hinderance to you? Have you not found that it hath been a great temptation to you? Have you not been from time to time led into sin thereby? Perhaps it may seem difficult wholly to forsake your old wicked companions. You are afraid they will deride you, and make game of you; therefore you have not courage enough to do it. But whether it be difficult or not, yet know this, that if you continue in such connexions, you live in a way of sin, and, as the Scripture saith, you shall be destroyed. You must**



**either cut off your right hands, and pluck out your right eyes, or else even go with them into the fire that never shall be quenched.**

**(2.) Consider whether, in your conversation with others, you do not accustom yourselves to evil speaking. How common is it for persons, when they meet together, to sit and spend their time in talking against others, judging this or that of them, spreading ill and uncertain reports which they have heard of them, running down one and another, and ridiculing their infirmities! How much is such sort of talk as this the entertainment of companies when they meet together! and what talk is there which seems to be more entertaining, to which persons will more listen, and in which they will seem to be more engaged, than such talk! You cannot but know how common this is.**

**Therefore examine whether you be not guilty of this.—And can you justify it? Do you not know it to be a way of sin, a way which is condemned by many rules in the word of God? Are you not guilty of eagerly taking up any ill report which you hear of your neighbour, seeming to be glad that you have some news to talk of, with which you think others will be entertained? Do you not often spread ill reports which you hear of others, before you know what ground there is for them? Do you not take a pleasure in being the reporter of such news? Are you not wont to pass a judgment concerning others, or their behaviour, without talking to them, and hearing what they have to say for themselves? Doth not that folly and shame belong to you which is spoken of in Prov. 18:13. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."**

**This is utterly an inquiry, a very unchristian practice, which commonly prevails, that men, when they hear or know of any ill of others, will not do a christian part, in**

going to talk with them about it, to reprove them for it, but will get behind their backs before they open their mouths, and there are very forward to speak, and to judge, to the hurt of their neighbour's good name. Consider whether you be not guilty of this. Consider also how apt you are to be displeased when you hear that others have been talking against you! how forward are you to apply the rules, and to think and tell how they ought first to have come and talked with you about it, and not to have gone and spread an ill report of you, before they knew what you had to say in your vindication! How ready are persons to resent it, when others meddle with their private affairs, and busy themselves, and judge, and find fault, and declaim against them! How ready are they to say, it is no business of theirs! Yet are you not guilty of the same?

(3.) Is it not your manner to seem to countenance and fall in with the talk of the company in which you are, in that which is evil? When the company is vain in its talk, and falls into lewd discourse, or vain jesting, is it not your manner, in such a case, to comply and fall in with the company, to seem pleased with its talk, if not to join with it, and help to carry on such discourse, out of compliance with your company, though indeed you disapprove of it in your hearts? So inquire, whether it be not your manner to fall in with your companions, when they are talking against others. Do you not help forward the discourse, or at least seem to fall in with their censures, the aspersions they cast on others, and the reflections they make upon their neighbours' characters?

There are some persons, who, in case of difference between persons or parties, are double-tongued, will seem to fall in with both parties. When they are with those on one side, they will seem to be on their side, and to fall in with them in their talk against their antagonists. At another time,

when they are with those of the other side, they will seem to comply with them, and will condemn the other party; which is a very vile and deceitful practice. Seeming to be friendly to both before their faces, they are enemies to both behind their backs; and that upon so mean a motive as the pleasing of the party with which they are in company. They injure both parties, and do what in them lies to establish the difference between them. Inquire whether or no this be your manner.

(4.) Is it not your manner, not to confine yourselves to strict truth in your conversation with your neighbours? Lying is accounted ignominious and reproachful among men; and they take it in high disdain to be called liars; yet how many are there that do not so govern their tongues, as strictly to confine them to the truth! There are various degrees of transgressing in this kind. Some, who may be cautious of transgressing in one degree, may allow themselves in another. Some, who commonly avoid speaking directly and wholly contrary to truth, in a plain matter of fact; yet perhaps are not strictly true in speaking of their own thoughts, desires, affections, and designs, and are not exact to the truth, in the relations which they give of things in conversation; scruple not to vary in circumstances, to add some things, to make their story the more entertaining; will magnify and enlarge things, to make their relation the more wonderful; and in things wherein their interest or credit is concerned, will make false representations of things: will be guilty of an unwarrantable equivocation, and a guileful way of speaking, wherein they are chargeable with a great abuse of language. In order to save their veracity, words and sentences must be wrested to a meaning quite beside their natural and established signification. Whatever interpretation such men put on their own words, they do not save themselves from the guilt of lying in the sight of

**God. Inquire whether you be not guilty of living in sin in this particular.**

## **SECT. VIII**

**Self-examination respecting the families to which we belong**

**EXAMINE yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin in the families to which you belong. There are many persons who appear well among their neighbours, and seem to be of an honest, civil behaviour in their dealings and conversation abroad; yet if you follow them to their own houses, and to the families to which they belong, there you will find them very perverse in their ways; there they live in ways which are very displeasing to the pure all-searching eyes of God. You have already been directed to examine your conversation abroad; you have been directed to search the house of God, and to see if you have brought no defilement into it; you have been directed to search your closets, to see if there be no pollution or provocation there; be advised now to search your houses, examine your behaviour in the families to which you belong, and see what your ways and manners are there.**

**The houses to which we belong are the places where the generality of us spend the greater part of our time. If we respect the world as a man's sphere of action, a man's own house is the greater part of the world to him; i.e. the greater part of his actions and behaviour in the world is limited within this sphere. We should therefore be very critical in examining our behaviour, not only abroad, but at home. A great proportion of the wickedness of which men are guilty, and that will be brought out at the day of judgment, will be the sin which they shall have committed in the families to which they belong.**

**Therefore inquire how you behave yourselves in the family relations in which you stand. As those relative duties which we owe towards the members of the same family belong to the second table of the law, so love is the general duty which comprises them all. Therefore,**

**(1.) Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way which is contrary to that love which is due to those who belong to the same family. Love, implying a hearty good will, and a behaviour agreeable to it, is a duty which we owe to all mankind. We owe it to our neighbours, to whom we are no otherwise related than as they are our neighbours; yea, we owe it to those who stand in no relation to us, except that they are of mankind, are reasonable creatures, the sons and daughters of Adam. It is a duty that we owe to our enemies; how much more then do we owe it to those who stand in so near a relation to us as a husband or wife, parents or children, brethren or sisters!**

**There are the same obligations on us to love such relatives as to love the rest of mankind. We are to love them as men; we are to love them as our neighbours; we are to love them as belonging to the same Christian church; and not only so, but here is an additional obligation, arising from that near relation in which they stand to us. This is over and above the other. The nearer the relation, the greater is the obligation to love. To live in hatred, or in a way that is contrary to love, towards any man, is very displeasing to God; but how much more towards one of the same family! Love is the uniting band of all societies, Col. 3:14. "And above all these things, put on charity which is the bond of perfectness."**

**The union in love in our own family should be so much the stronger, as that society is more peculiarly our own, and is more appropriated to ourselves, or is a society in which we**

are more especially interested. Christ saith, Matt. 7:22. "I say unto you, whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire." If this be true concerning those who are our brethren only as men, or professing Christians, how much more concerning those who are of the same family! If contention be so evil a thing in a town among neighbours, how much more hateful is it between members of the same family! If hatred, envy, or revenge, be so displeasing to God, towards those who are only our fellow-creatures, how much more provoking must it be between those that are our natural brothers and sisters, and are one bone and flesh! If only being angry with a neighbour without a cause be so evil, how much sin must needs be committed in those broils and quarrels between the nearest relations on earth!

Let every one inquire how it is with himself. Do you not in this respect allow yourselves in some way of sin? Are you not often jarring and contending with those who dwell under the same roof? Is not your spirit often ruffled with anger towards some of the same family? Do you not often go so far as to wish evil to them in your hearts, wish that some calamity would befall them? Are you not guilty of reproachful language towards them, if not of revengeful acts? Do you not neglect and refuse those offices of kindness and mutual helpfulness which become those who are of one family? Yea, are there not some who really go so far, as in some degree to entertain a settled hatred or malice against some of their nearest relations?—But here I would particularly apply myself,

[1.] To husbands and wives. Inquire whether you do not live in some way of sin in this relation. Do you make

conscience of performing all those duties which God in his word requires of persons in this relation? or do you allow yourselves in some ways which are directly opposite thereto? Do you not live in ways that are contrary to the obligations into which you entered in your marriage-covenant? The promises which you then made are not only binding as promises which are ordinarily made between man and man, but they have the nature of vows or promissory oaths; they are made in the presence of God, because they respect him as a witness to them; and therefore the marriage-covenant is called the covenant of God; Prov. 2:17.; "which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God." When you have vowed that you will behave towards those to whom you are thus united, as the word of God directs in such a relation, are you careless about it, no more thinking what you have promised and vowed, regardless how you perform those vows?

Particularly, are you not commonly guilty of bitterness of spirit towards one another, and of unkindness in your language and behaviour? If wrath, and contention, and unkind and reproachful language, be provoking to God, when only between neighbours; what is it then between those whom God hath joined together to be one flesh, and between whom he hath commanded so great and dear a friendship to be maintained? Eph. 5:28, 29. "So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." Eph. 5:25. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

It is no excuse at all for either party to indulge bitterness and contention in this relation, that the other party is to blame; for when was there ever one of fallen mankind to be

**found who had no faults? When God commanded such an entire friendship between man and wife, he knew that the greater part of mankind would have faults; yet he made no exception. And if you think your yoke-fellows have faults, you should consider whether you yourselves have not some too. There never will be any such thing as persons living in peace one with another, in this relation, if this be esteemed a sufficient and justifiable cause of the contrary. It becomes good friends to cover one another's faults: Love covers a multitude of faults: Prov. 10:1. "Hatred stirreth up strife; but love covereth all sins." But are not you rather quick to spy faults, and ready to make the most of them. Are not very little things often the occasion of contention between you? Will not a little thing often ruffle your spirits towards your companions? and when any misunderstanding is begun, are you not guilty of exasperating one another's spirits by unkind language, until you blow up a spark into a flame?**

**Do you endeavour to accommodate yourselves to each other's tempers? Do you study to suit each other? or do you set up your own wills, to have your own ways, in opposition to each other, in the management of your family concerns? Do you make it your study to render each other's lives comfortable? or is there not, on the contrary, very often subsisting between you a spirit of ill will, a disposition to vex and cross one another?**

**Husbands do sometimes greatly sin against God, in being of an unkind imperious behaviour towards their wives, treating them as if they were servants; and (to mention one instance of such treatment in particular) laying them under unjust and unreasonable restraints in the use and disposal of their common property; forbidding them so much as to dispose of any thing in charity, as of their own judgment and prudence. This is directly contrary to the**



word of God, where it is said of the virtuous wife, Prov. 31:20. that "she stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." If God hath made this her duty, then he hath given her this right and power, because the duty supposes the right. It cannot be the duty of her who hath no right to dispose of any thing, to stretch forth her hand to the poor, and to reach forth her hands to the needy.

On the other hand, are not the commands of God, the rules of his word, and the solemn vows of the marriage-covenant, with respect to the subordination which there ought to be in this relation, made light of by many? Eph. 5:22. "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord:" so Col. 3:18. What is commanded by God, and what hath been solemnly vowed and sworn in his presence, certainly ought not to be made a jest of; and the person who lightly violates these obligations, will doubtless be treated as one who slights the authority of God, and takes his name in vain.

[2.] I shall apply myself to parents and heads of families. Inquire whether you do not live in some way of sin with respect to your children, or others committed to your care: and particularly inquire,

1. Whether you do not live in sin, by living in the neglect of instructing them. Do you not wholly neglect the duty of instructing your children and servants? or if you do not wholly neglect it, yet do you not afford them so little instruction, and are you not so unsteady, and do you not take so little pains in it, that you live in a sinful neglect? Do you take pains in any measure proportionate to the importance of the matter? You cannot but own that it is a matter of vast importance, that your children be fitted for death, and saved from hell; and that all possible care be

**taken that it be done speedily; for you know not how soon your children may die. Are you as careful about the welfare of their souls as you are of their bodies? Do you labour as much that they may have eternal life, as you do to provide estates for them to live on in this world?**

**Let every parent inquire, whether he do not live in a way of sin in this respect: and let masters inquire, whether they do not live in a way of sin, in neglecting the poor souls of their servants; whether their only care be not to make their servants subservient to their worldly interest, without any concern what becomes of them to all eternity.**

**2. Do you not live in a sinful neglect of the government of your families? Do you not live in the sin of Eli? who indeed counselled and reproved his children, but did not exercise government over them. He reproved them very solemnly, as 1 Sam. 2:23, 24, 25. but he did not restrain them; by which he greatly provoked God, and brought an everlasting curse upon his house: 1 Sam. 3:12. "In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house. When I begin, I will also make an end. I will judge his house for ever; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."**

**If you say you cannot restrain your children, this is no excuse; for it is a sign that you have brought up your children without government, that your children regard not your authority. When parents lose their government over their children, their reproofs and counsel signify but little. How many parents are there who are exceedingly faulty on this account! How few are there who are thorough in maintaining order and government in their families! How is family-government in a great measure vanished! and how many are as likely to bring a curse upon their families, as Eli! This is one principal ground of the**

**corruptions which prevail in the land. This is the foundation of so much debauchery, and of such corrupt practices among young people: family-government is in a great measure extinct. By neglect in this particular, parents bring the guilt of their children's sins upon their own souls, and the blood of their children will be required at their hands.**

**Parents sometimes weaken one another's hands in this work; one parent disapproving what the other doth; one smiling upon a child, while the other frowns; one protecting, while the other corrects. When things in a family are thus, children are like to be undone. Therefore let every one examine whether he do not live in some way of sin with respect to this matter.**

**[3.] I shall now apply myself to children. Let them examine themselves, whether they do not live in some way of sin towards their parents. Are you not guilty of some undutifulness towards them, in which you allow yourselves? Are you not guilty of despising your parents for infirmities which you see in them? Undutiful children are ready to condemn their parents for their infirmities. Are not you sons of Ham, who saw and made derision of his father's nakedness, whereby he entailed a curse on himself and his posterity to this day; and not the sons of Shem and Japheth, who covered the nakedness of their father? Are you not guilty of dishonouring and despising your parents for natural infirmities, or those of old age? Prov. 23:22. "Despise not thy mother when she is old." Doth not that curse belong to you, in Deut. 27:16. "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother?"**

**Are you not wont to despise the counsels and reproofs of your parents? When they warn you against any sin, and reprove you for any misconduct, are you not wont to set**

light by it, and to be impatient under it? Do you honour your parents for it? on the contrary, do you not receive it with resentment, proudly rejecting it? Doth it not stir up corruption, and a stubborn and perverse spirit in you, and rather make you to have an ill-will to your parents, than to love and honour them? Are you not to be reckoned among the fools mentioned Prov. 15:5. "A fool despiseth his father's instruction?" and doth not that curse belong to you, Prov. 30:17. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it?"

Do you not allow a fretful disposition towards your parents, when they cross you in any thing? Are you not apt to find fault with your parents, and to be out of temper with them?

Consider, that if you live in such ways as these, you not only live in sin, but in that sin, than which there is scarcely any one oftener threatened with a curse in the word of God.

## **SECT. IX**

### **Awakening considerations for self-examination**

WE come now to mention some things, in order to convince those who, upon examination, find that they do live in some way of sin, of the importance of their knowing and amending their manner of life. You have had directions laid before you, how to find out whether you do live in any way of sin or not; and you have heard many particulars mentioned as proper subjects for your examination of yourselves. How then do you find things? Do you find yourselves clear of living in any way of sin? I mean not whether you find yourself clear of sin; that is not expected of any of you; for there is not a man upon earth

**that doeth good, and sinneth not, 1 Kings 8:46. But is there not some way of sin in which you live, which is your stated way or practice? There are doubtless some who are clear in this matter, some "who are undefiled in the way, and do no iniquity," Psal. 119:1, 2, 3.**

**Let your own consciences answer how you find with respect to yourselves, by those things which have been proposed to you. Do you not find that you are guilty? that you live in a way of sin, and have allowed yourselves in it?— If this be the case, then consider the following things.**

**If you have been long seeking salvation, and have not yet succeeded, it may be this hath been the cause. You have perhaps wondered what hath been the matter, that you have been so long a time under concern about your salvation, that you have taken so much pains, and all seems to be to no purpose. You have many a time cried earnestly to God, yet he doth not regard you. Others obtain comfort, but you are left in darkness. But is it any wonder at all, if you have lived in some way of sin all this while? If you have lived in any sinful way, this is a sufficient reason why all your prayers and all your pains have been blasted.**

**If all this while you have lived in some sinful way, so far you have failed of seeking salvation in the right way. The right way of seeking salvation is, to seek it in the diligent performance of all duties, and in the denial of all ungodliness. If there be any one member that is corrupt, and you cut it not off, there is danger that it will carry you to hell, (Matt. 5:29, 30.)**

**2. If grace have not been flourishing, but, on the contrary, in languishing circumstances in your souls, perhaps this is the cause. The way to grow in grace is to walk in the way of obedience to all the commands of God, to be very thorough**

**in the practice of religion. Grace will flourish in the hearts of those who live in this manner; but if you live in some way of sin, that will be like some secret disease at your vitals, which will keep you poor, weak, and languishing.**

**One way of sin lived in will wonderfully keep you down in your spiritual prosperity, and in the growth and strength of grace in your hearts. It will grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and will in a great measure banish him from you: this will prevent the good influence of the word and ordinances of God to the causing of grace to flourish in you. It will be a great obstacle to their good effect. It will be like an ulcer within a man, which, while it remains, will keep him weak and lean, though you feed him with ever so wholesome food, or feast him ever so daintily.**

**3. If you have been left to fall into great sin, perhaps this was the occasion of it. If you have been left greatly to wound your own souls, perhaps this was what made way for it, that you allowed yourselves in some way of sin. A man who doth not avoid every sin, and is not universally obedient, cannot be well guarded against great sins. The sin in which he lives will be always an inlet, an open door, by which Satan from time to time will find entrance. It is like a breach in your fortress, through which the enemy may get in, and find his way to you greatly to hurt and wound you.**

**If there be any way of sin which is retained as an outlet to corruption, it will be like a breach in a dam, which, if it be let alone, and be not stopped, will grow bigger and wider, and will endanger the whole. If any way of sin be lived in, it will be like Gideon's ephod, which was a snare to him and his house.**

**4. If you live very much in spiritual darkness, and without the comfortable presence of God, it may be this is the cause. If you complain that you have but little sweet communion with God, that you seem to be left and deserted of God, that God seems to hide his face from you, and but seldom gives you the sweet views of his glory and grace, that you seem to be left very much to grope in darkness, and to wander in a wilderness; perhaps you have wondered what is the matter; you have cried to God often, that you might have the light of his countenance, but he heareth you not; and you have sorrowful days and nights upon this account. But if you have found, by what hath been said, that you live in some way of sin, it is very probable that is the cause, that is the root of your mischief, that is the Achan, the troubler that offends God, and causes him to withdraw, and brings so many clouds of darkness upon your souls. You grieve the Holy Spirit by the way in which you live; and that is the reason that you have no more comfort from him.**

**Christ hath promised, that he will manifest himself to his disciples; but it is upon the condition, that they keep his commands: John 14:21. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." But if you habitually live in disobedience to any of the commandments of Christ, then it is no wonder that he doth not give you the comfortable manifestations of himself. The way to receive the special favours of God, and to enjoy comfortable communion with him, is to walk closely with him.**

**5. If you have been long doubting about your condition, perhaps this is the cause. If persons be converted, the most likely way to have the evidences of it clear, and to have the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirits, that we are the children of God, is to walk closely with God. This, as we**

have observed already, is the way to have grace in a flourishing state in the soul; it is the way to have the habits of grace strengthened, and the exercises of it lively. And the more lively the exercises of grace are, the more likely will they be to be seen. Besides, this is the way to have God manifesting himself to us, as our father and our friend, to have the manifestations and inward testimonies of his love and favour.

But if you live in some way of sin, it is no wonder if that greatly darkens your evidences, as it keeps down the exercises of grace, and hides the light of God's countenance. And it may be that you never will come to a comfortable resolution of that point, whether you be converted or not, until you shall have wholly forsaken the way of sin in which you live.

6. If you have met with the frowns of Providence, perhaps this has been the cause. When you have met with very sore rebukes and chastisements, that way of sin hath probably been your troubler. Sometimes God is exceedingly awful in his dealings with his own people in this world, for their sins. Moses and Aaron were not suffered to enter into Canaan, because they believed not God, and spake unadvisedly with their lips, at the waters of Meribah. And how terrible was God in his dealings with David! what affliction in his family did he send upon him! one of his sons ravishing his sister; another murdering his brother, and having expelled his father out of his kingdom, openly in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun, defiling his father's concubines on the top of the house, and at last coming to a miserable end? Immediately after this followed the rebellion of Sheba; and he had this uncomfortable circumstance attending the end of his life, that he saw another of his sons usurping the crown.



**How awfully did God deal with Eli, for living in the sin of not restraining his children from wickedness! He killed his two sons in one day; brought a violent death upon Eli himself; took the ark from him, and sent it into captivity; cursed his house for ever; and swore that the iniquity of his house should not be purged with sacrifice and offering for ever; that the priesthood should be taken from him, and given to another family; and that there should never be an old man in his family.**

**Is not some way of sin in which you live the occasion of the frowns and rebukes of Providence which you have met with? True, it is not the proper business of your neighbours to judge you with respect to events of Providence; but you yourselves ought to inquire, wherefore God is contending with you, Job 9:10.**

**7. If death be terrible to you, perhaps this is the foundation of it. When you think of dying, you find you shrink back at the thought. When you have any illness, or when there is any thing which seems any way to threaten life, you find you are affrighted by it; the thoughts of dying, and going into eternity, are awful to you; and that although you entertain a hope that you are converted. If you live in some way of sin, probably this is very much the foundation of it. This keeps your minds sensual and worldly, and hinders a lively sense of heaven and heavenly enjoyments. This keeps grace low, and prevents that relish of heavenly enjoyments which otherwise you would have. This prevents your having the comfortable sense of the divine favour and presence; and without that no wonder you cannot look death in the face without terror.**

**The way to have the prospect of death comfortable, and to have undisturbed peace and quiet when we encounter death, is, to walk closely with God, and to be undefiled in**

the way of obedience to the commands of God; and that it is otherwise sometimes with truly godly persons, is doubtless frequently owing to their living in ways displeasing to God.

8. If you find by these things which have been proposed to you, that you have lived in a way of sin, consider that if you henceforward live in the same way, you will live in known sin. Whether in time past it have been known sin or not, though you may have hitherto lived in it through ignorance or inadvertence; yet if now you be sensible of it, henceforward, if you continue in it still, it will not be a sin of ignorance, but you will be proved to be of that class of men who live in ways of known sin.

## ***The Christian Pilgrim***

***or***

## ***The True Christian's Life a Journey Toward Heaven***

***"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country." -- Hebrews 11:13, 14***

**Subject: This life ought so to be spent by us as to be only a journey towards heaven.**

The apostle is here setting forth the excellencies of the grace of faith, by the glorious effects and happy issue of it in the saints of the Old Testament. He had spoken in the

preceding part of the chapter particularly, of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. Having enumerated those instances, he takes notice that “these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers,” etc. — In these words the apostle seems to have a more particular respect to Abraham and Sarah, and their kindred, who came with them from Haran, and from Ur of the Chaldees, as appears by the 15th verse, where the apostle says, “and truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.”

Two things may be observed here:

1. What these saints confessed of themselves, *viz. that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* — Thus we have a particular account concerning Abraham, “I am a stranger and a sojourner with you.” (Gen. 23:4) And it seems to have been the general sense of the patriarchs, by what Jacob says to Pharaoh. “And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of years of my life been, and have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.” (Gen. 47:9) “I am a stranger and a sojourner with thee, as all my fathers were.” (Psa. 39:12)

2. The inference that the apostle draws from hence, *viz. that they sought another country as their home.* “For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country.” In confessing that they were strangers, they plainly declared that this is not their country; that this is not the place where they are at home. And in confessing themselves to be pilgrims, they declared plainly that this is

not their settled abode, but that they have respect to some other country, which they seek, and to which they are traveling.

## SECTION I

*That this life ought to be so spent by us, as to be only a journey or pilgrimage towards heaven.*

HERE I would observe,

1. That we ought not to rest in the world and its enjoyments, but should desire heaven. We should “seek first the kingdom of God.” (Mat. 6:33) We ought above all things to desire a heavenly happiness; to be with God and dwell with Jesus Christ. Though surrounded with outward enjoyments, and settled in families with desirable friends and relations; though we have companions whose society is delightful, and children in whom we see many promising qualifications; though we live by good neighbors, and are generally beloved where known; we ought not to take our rest in these things as our portion. We should be so far from resting in them, that we should desire to leave them all, in God’s due time. We ought to possess, enjoy and use them, with no other view but readily to quit them, whenever we are called to it, and to change them willingly and cheerfully for heaven.

A traveler is not wont to rest in what he meets with, however comfortable and pleasing, on the road. If he passes through pleasant places, flowery meadows, or shady groves, he does not take up his content in these things, but only takes a transient view of them as he goes along. He is not enticed by fine appearances to put off the thought of proceeding. No, but his journey’s end is in his mind. If he meets with comfortable accommodations at an inn, he

entertains no thoughts of settling there. He considers that these things are not his own, that he is but a stranger, and when he has refreshed himself, or tarried for a night, he is for going forward. And it is pleasant to him to think that so much of the way is gone.

So should we desire heaven more than the comforts and enjoyments of this life. The apostle mentions it as an encouraging, comfortable consideration to Christians, that they draw nearer their happiness. “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” — Our hearts ought to be loose to these things, as that of a man on a journey, that we may as cheerfully part with them whenever God calls. “But this I say, brethren, the time is short, it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away.” (1 Cor. 7:29-31) These things are only lent to us for a little while, to serve a present turn, but we should set our *hearts* on heaven, as our inheritance forever.

2. We ought to seek heaven, by traveling in the way that lead thither. This is a way of holiness. We should choose and desire to travel thither in this way and in no other, and part with all those carnal appetites which, as weights, will tend to hinder us. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us.” (Heb 12:1) However pleasant the gratification of any appetite may be, we must lay it aside if it be a hindrance, or a stumbling block, in the way to heaven.

We should travel on in the way of obedience to all God’s commands, even the difficult as well as the easy, denying

all our sinful inclinations and interests. The way to heaven is ascending. We must be content to travel up hill, though it be hard and tiresome, and contrary to the natural bias of our flesh. We should follow Christ: the path he traveled, was the right way to heaven. We should take up our cross and follow him, in meekness and lowliness of heart, obedience and charity, diligence to do good, and patience under afflictions. The way to heaven is a heavenly life, an imitation of those who are in heaven in their holy enjoyments, loving, adoring, serving, and praising God and the Lamb. Even if we *could* go to heaven with the gratification of our lusts, we should prefer a way of holiness and conformity to the spiritual self-denying rules of the gospel.

3. We should travel on in this way in a laborious manner. — Long journeys are attended with toil and fatigue, especially if through a wilderness. Persons in such a case expect no other than to suffer hardships and weariness. — So we should travel in this way of holiness, improving our time and strength, to surmount the difficulties and obstacles that are in the way. The land we have to travel through, is a wilderness. There are many mountains, rocks, and rough places that we must go over, and therefore there is a necessity that we should lay out our strength.

4. Our whole lives ought to be spent in traveling this road. — We ought to begin *early*. This should be the *first* concern, when persons become capable of acting. When they first set out in the *world*, they should set out on *this* journey. — And we ought to travel on with *assiduity*. It ought to be the work of every day. We should often think of our journey's end; and make it our daily work to travel on in the way that leads to it. — He who is on a journey is often thinking of the destined place, and it is his daily care and business to get along and to improve

his time to get towards his journey's end. Thus should heaven be continually in our thoughts, and the immediate entrance or passage to it, *viz.* death, should be present with us. — We ought to *persevere* in this way as long as we live.

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Heb. 12:1) Though the road be difficult and toilsome, we must hold out with patience, and be content to endure hardships. Though the journey be long, yet we must not stop short, but hold on till we arrive at the place we seek. Nor should we be discouraged with the length and difficulties of the way, as the children of Israel were, and be for turning back again. All our thought and design should be to press forward till we arrive.

5. We ought to be continually growing in holiness, and in that respect coming nearer and nearer to heaven. — We should be endeavoring to come nearer to heaven, in being more heavenly, becoming more and more like the inhabitants of heaven in respect of holiness and conformity to God, the knowledge of God and Christ, in clear views of the glory of God, the beauty of Christ, and the excellency of divine things, as we come nearer to the beatific vision. — We should labor to be continually growing in divine love — that this may be an increasing flame in our hearts, till they ascend wholly in this flame — in obedience and a heavenly conversation, that we may do the will of God on earth as the angels do in heaven, in comfort and spiritual joy, [and] in sensible communion with God and Jesus Christ. Our path should be as “the shining light, that shines more and more to the perfect day.” (Pro. 4:18) We ought to be hungering and thirsting after righteousness: after an increase in righteousness. “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” (1 Pet. 2:2) The perfection of heaven should be our mark. “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind,

and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13, 14)

6. All other concerns of life ought to be entirely subordinate to this. — When a man is on a journey, all the steps he takes are subordinated to the aim of getting to his journey’s end. And if he carries money or provisions with him, it is to supply him in his journey. So we ought wholly to subordinate all our other business, and all our temporal enjoyments, to this affair of traveling to heaven. When anything we have becomes a clog and hindrance to us, we should quit it immediately. The use of our worldly enjoyments and possessions, should be with such a view, and in such a manner, as to further us in our way heavenward. Thus we should eat, and drink, and clothe ourselves, and improve the conversation and enjoyment of friends. And whatever business we are setting about, whatever design we are engaging in, we should inquire with ourselves, whether this business or undertaking will forward us in our way to heaven? And if not, we should quit our design.

## SECTION II

### *Why the Christian’s life is a journey, or pilgrimage?*

1. THIS world is not our abiding place. Our continuance here is but very short. Man’s days on the earth, are as a shadow. It was never designed by God that this world should be our home. Neither did God give us these temporal accommodations for that end. If God has given us ample estates, and children, or other pleasant friends, it is with no such design, that we should be furnished here, as for a settled abode, but with a design that we should use them for the present, and then leave them in a very little



time. When we are called to any secular business, or charged with the care of a family, [and] if we improve our lives to any other purpose than as a journey toward heaven, all our labor will be lost. If we spend our lives in the pursuit of a temporal happiness, as riches or sensual pleasures, credit and esteem from men, delight in our children and the prospect of seeing them well brought up and well settled, etc. — all these things will be of little significancy to us. Death will blow up all our hopes, and will put an end to these enjoyments. “The places that have known us, will know us no more” and “the eye that has seen us, shall see us no more.” We must be taken away forever from all these things, and it is uncertain when: it may be soon after we are put into the possession of them. And then, where will be all our worldly employments and enjoyments, when we are laid in the silent grave! “So man lieth down, and riseth not again, till the heavens be no more.” (Job 14:12)

2. The future world was designed to be our settled and everlasting abode. There it was intended that we should be fixed, and there alone is a lasting habitation and a lasting inheritance. The present state is short and transitory, but our state in the other world is everlasting. And as we are there at first, so we must be without change. Our state in the future world, therefore, being eternal, is of so much greater importance than our state here, that all our concerns in this world should be wholly subordinated to it.

3. Heaven is that place alone where our highest end and highest good is to be obtained. God hath made us for himself. “Of him, and through him, and to him are all things.” Therefore, then do we attain to our highest end, when we are brought to God: but that is by being brought to heaven, for that is God’s throne, the place of his special presence. There is but a very imperfect union with God to

be had in this world, a very imperfect knowledge of him in the midst of much darkness: a very imperfect conformity to God, mingled with abundance of estrangement. Here we can serve and glorify God, but in a very imperfect manner: our service being mingled with sin, which dishonors God. — But when we get to heaven (if ever that be), we shall be brought to a perfect union with God and have more clear views of him. There we shall be fully conformed to God, without any remaining sin: for “we shall see him as he is.” There we shall serve God perfectly and glorify him in an exalted manner, even to the utmost of the powers and capacity of our nature. Then we shall perfectly give up ourselves to God: our hearts will be pure and holy offerings, presented in a flame of divine love.

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. — To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is *infinitely* better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean. — Therefore it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven, as it becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives, to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for, or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?

4. Our present state, and all that belongs to it, is designed by him that made all things, to be wholly in order to another world. — This world was made for a place of preparation for another. Man’s mortal life was given him,

that he might be prepared for his fixed state. And all that God has here given us, is given to this purpose. The sun shines, the rain falls upon us, and the earth yields her increase to us for this end. Civil, ecclesiastical, and family affairs, and all our personal concerns, are designed and ordered in subordination to a future world, by the maker and disposer of all things. To this therefore they ought to be subordinated by us.

### SECTION III

*Instruction afforded by the consideration, that life is a journey or pilgrimage, towards heaven.*

1. THIS doctrine may teach us moderation in our mourning for the loss of such dear friends, who while they lived, improved their lives to right purposes. If they lived a holy life, then their lives were a journey towards heaven. And why should we be immoderate in mourning, when they are got to their journey's end? Death, though it appears to us with a frightful aspect, is to them a great blessing. Their end is happy, and better than their beginning. "The day of their death, is better than the day of their birth." (Ecc. 7:1) While they lived, they desired heaven, and chose it above this world or any of its enjoyments. For this they earnestly longed, and why should we grieve that they have obtained it? — Now they have got to their Father's house. They find more comfort a thousand times now [that] they are gone home, than they did in their journey. In this world they underwent much labor and toil: it was a wilderness they passed through. There were many difficulties in the way: mountains and rough places. It was laborious and fatiguing to travel the road, and they had many wearisome days and nights: but now they have got to their everlasting rest. "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from

**henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.” (Rev. 14:13) They look back upon the difficulties, and sorrows, and dangers of life, rejoicing that they have surmounted them all.**

**We are ready to look upon death as their calamity, and to mourn that those who were so dear to us should be in the dark grave: that they are there transformed to corruption and worms, taken away from their dear children and enjoyments, etc. as though they were in awful circumstances. But this is owing to our infirmity. They are in a happy condition, inconceivably blessed. They do not mourn, but rejoice with exceeding joy: their mouths are filled with joyful songs, and they drink at rivers of pleasure. They find no mixture of grief that they have changed their earthly enjoyments, and the company of mortals, for heaven. Their life here, though in the best circumstances, was attended with much that was adverse and afflictive, but now there is an end to all adversity. “They shall hunger no more nor thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:16, 17)**

**It is true, we shall see them no more in this world, yet we ought to consider that we are traveling towards the same place; and why should we break our hearts that they have got there before us? We are following after them, and hope as soon as we get to our journey’s end, to be with them again, in better circumstances. A degree of mourning for near relations when departed is not inconsistent with Christianity, but very agreeable to it. For as long as we are flesh and blood, we have animal propensities and affections. But we have just reason that our mourning**

should be mingled with joy. “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others that have no hope:” (1 Thes. 4:13) i.e. that they should not sorrow as the heathen, who had no knowledge of a future happiness. This appears by the following verse; “for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.”

2. If our lives ought to be only a journey towards heaven, how ill do they improve their lives, that spend them in traveling towards hell? — Some men spend their whole lives, from their infancy to their dying day, in going down the broad way to destruction. They not only draw nearer to hell as to time, but they every day grow more ripe for destruction. They are more assimilated to the inhabitants of the internal world. While others press forward in the straight and narrow way to life and laboriously travel up the hill toward Zion, against the inclinations and tendency of the flesh, these run with a swift career down to eternal death. This is the employment of every day, with all wicked men, and the whole day is spent in it. As soon as ever they awake in the morning, they set out anew in the way to hell and spend every waking moment in it. They begin in early days. “The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.” (Psa. 58:3) They hold on it with perseverance. Many of them who live to be old, are never weary in it. Though they live to be an hundred years old, they will not cease traveling in the way to hell till they arrive there. And all the concerns of life are subordinated to this employment. A wicked man is a servant of sin, [and] his powers and faculties are employed in the service of sin and in fitness for hell. And all his possessions are so used by him as to be subservient to the same purpose. Men spend their time in treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath Thus do all unclean

persons, who live in lascivious practices in secret: all malicious persons, all profane persons that neglect the duties of religion. Thus do all unjust persons, and those who are fraudulent and oppressive in their dealings. Thus do all backbiters and revilers, [and] all covetous persons that set their hearts chiefly on the riches of this world. Thus do tavern-haunters, and frequenters of evil company, and many other kinds that might be mentioned. Thus the bulk of mankind are hastening onward in the broad way to destruction, which is, as it were, filled up with the multitude that are going in it with one accord. And they are every day going to hell out of this broad way by thousands. Multitudes are continually flowing down into the great lake of fire and brimstone, as some mighty river constantly disembogues its water into the ocean.

3. Hence when persons are converted they do but begin their work and set out in the way they have to go. — They never till then do anything at that work in which their whole lives ought to be spent. Persons before conversion never take a step that way. Then does a man first set out on his journey, when he is brought home to Christ, and so far is he from having done his work, that his care and labor in his Christian work and business, is then but begun, in which he must spend the remaining part of his life.

Those persons do ill, who when they are converted and have obtained a hope of their being in a good condition, do not strive as earnestly as they did before, while they were under awakenings. They ought, henceforward, as long as they live, to be as earnest and laborious, as watchful and careful as ever: yea, they should increase more and more. It is no just excuse that now they have obtained conversion. Should not we be as diligent as that we ourselves may be that we may serve and glorify God, happy? And if we have obtained grace, yet we ought to strive as much that we may

obtain the other degrees that are before, as we did to obtain that small degree that is behind. The apostle tells us that he forgot what was behind and reached forth towards what was before. (Phil. 3:13)

Yea, those who are converted have now a further reason to strive for grace. For they have seen something of its excellency. A man who has once tasted the blessings of Canaan, has more reason to press towards it than he had before. And they who are converted, should strive to “make their calling and election sure.” All those who are converted are not sure of it, and those who are sure, do not know that they shall be always so, and still, seeking and serving God with the utmost diligence, is the way to have assurance and to have it maintained.

#### SECTION IV

*An exhortation so to spend the present life, that it may only be a journey towards heaven*

Labor to obtain such a disposition of mind that you may choose heaven for your inheritance and home, and may earnestly long for it and be willing to change this world, and all its enjoyments, for heaven. Labor to have your heart taken up so much about heaven, and heavenly enjoyments, as that you may rejoice when God calls you to leave your best earthly friends and comforts for heaven, there to enjoy God and Christ.

Be persuaded to travel in the way that leads to heaven: viz. in holiness, self-denial, mortification, obedience to all the commands of God, following Christ's example [and] in a way of a heavenly life, or imitation of the saints and angels in heaven. Let it be your daily work, from morning till night, and hold out in it to the end. Let

nothing stop or discourage you, or turn you aside from this road. And let all other concerns be subordinated to this. Consider the reasons that have been mentioned why you should thus spend your life: that this world is not your abiding place, that the future world is to be your everlasting abode, and that the enjoyments and concerns of this world are given entirely in order to another. And consider further for motive.

1. How worthy is heaven that your life should be wholly spent as a journey towards it. — To what better purpose can you spend your life, whether you respect your duty or your interest? What better end can you propose to your journey, than to obtain heaven? You are placed in this world with a choice given you, that you may travel which way you please, and one way leads to heaven. Now, can you direct your course better than this way? All men have some aim or other in living. Some mainly seek worldly things. They spend their days in such pursuits. But is not heaven, where is fullness of joy forever, much more worthy to be sought by you? How can you better employ your strength, use your means, and spend your days, than in traveling the road that leads to the everlasting enjoyment of God: to his glorious presence, to the new Jerusalem, to the heavenly mount Zion, where all your desires will be filled and no danger of ever losing your happiness? — No man is at home in this world, whether he choose heaven or not: here he is but a transient person. Where can you choose your home better than in heaven?

2. This is the way to have death comfortable to us. — To spend our lives so as to be only a journeying towards heaven, is the way to be free from bondage and to have the prospect and forethought of death comfortable. Does the traveler think of his journey's end with fear and terror? Is terrible to him to think that he has almost got to his



journey's end? Were the children of Israel sorry after forty years' travel in the wilderness, when they had almost got to Canaan? This is the way to be able to part with the world without grief. Does it grieve the traveler when he has got home, to quit his staff and load of provisions that he had to sustain him by the way?

3. No more of your life will be pleasant to think of when you come to die, than has been spent after this manner. — If you have spent none of your life this way, your whole life will be terrible to you to think of, unless you die under some great delusion. You will see then, that all of your life that has been spent otherwise, is lost. You will then see the vanity of all other aims that you may have proposed to yourself. The thought of what you here possessed and enjoyed will not be pleasant to you, unless you can think also that you have subordinated them to this purpose.

4. Consider that those who are willing thus to spend their lives as a journey towards heaven may have heaven. — Heaven, however high and glorious, is attainable to such poor worthless creatures as we are. We may attain that glorious region which is the habitation of angels: yea, the dwelling-place of the Son of God, and where is the glorious presence of the great Jehovah. And we may have it freely, without money and without price. If we are but willing to travel the road that leads to it and bend our course that way as long as we live, we may and shall have heaven for our eternal resting place.

5. Let it be considered that if our lives be not a journey towards heaven, they will be a journey to hell. All mankind, after they have been here a short while, go to either of the two great receptacles of all that depart out of this world: the one in *heaven*; whither the bulk of mankind throng.

**And one or the other of these must be the issue of our course in this world.**

**I shall conclude by giving a few *directions*:**

**1. Labor to get a sense of the vanity of this world, on account of the little satisfaction that is to be enjoyed here, its short continuance, and unserviceableness when we most stand in need of help, viz. on a death-bed. — All men, that live any considerable time in the world, might see enough to convince them of its vanity, if they would but consider. — Be persuaded therefore to exercise consideration when you see and hear, from time to time, of the death of others. Labor to turn your thoughts this way. See the vanity of the world in such a glass.**

**2. Labor to be much acquainted with heaven. — If you are not acquainted with it, you will not be likely to spend your life as a journey thither. You will not be sensible of its worth, nor will you long for it. Unless you are much conversant in your mind with a better good, it will be exceeding difficult to you to have your hearts loose from these things, to use them only in subordination to something else, and be ready to part with them for the sake of that better good. — Labor therefore to obtain a realizing sense of a heavenly world, to get a firm belief of its reality, and to be very much conversant with it in your thoughts.**

**3. Seek heaven only by Jesus Christ. — Christ tells us that he is the way, and the truth, and the life. (John 14:6) He tells us that he is the door of the sheep. “I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved; and go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9) If we therefore would improve our lives as a journey towards heaven, we must seek it by him and not by our own righteousness, as expecting to obtain it only for his sake: looking to him**

**[and] having our dependence on him, who has procured it for us by his merit. And expect [that] strength to walk in holiness, the way that leads to heaven, only from him.**

**4. Let Christians help one another in going this journey. — There are many ways whereby Christians might greatly forward one another in their way to heaven, as by religious conference, etc. Therefore let them be exhorted to go this journey as it were in company: conversing together, and assisting one another. Company is very desirable in a journey, but in none so much as this. — Let them go united and not fall out by the way, which would be to hinder one another, but use all means they can to help each other up the hill. — This would ensure a more successful traveling and a more joyful meeting at their Father's house in glory.**

**CHRISTIAN CHARITY:**

**OR, THE**

## **DUTY OF CHARITY TO THE POOR, EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED**

**If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. DEUT. 15:7–11**

### **SECT. I**

#### **The words explained**

**THE duty here enjoined, is giving to the poor: "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:—Thou shalt surely give him." Here by thy poor brother is to be understood the same as in other places is meant by neighbour. It is explained in Levit. 25:35. to mean not only those of their own nation, but even strangers and**

**sojourners: "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner." The Pharisees indeed interpreted it to signify only one of their own nation; but Christ condemns this interpretation, Luke 10:29, &c. and teaches, in contradiction to their opinion, that the rules of charity, in the law of Moses, are to be extended to the Samaritans, who were not of their nation, and between whom and the Jews there was the most bitter enmity, and who were a people very troublesome to the Jews.**

**God gives us direction how we are to give in such a case, viz. bountifully, and willingly. We should give bountifully, and sufficiently for the supply of the poor's need: ver. 7, 8. "Thou shalt not shut up thine hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth." And again, in ver. 11. "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." Again, we should give willingly and without grudging: ver. 7. "Thou shalt not harden thine heart from thy poor brother;" and ver. 10. "And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest him."**

**We may also observe how peremptorily this duty is here enjoined, and how much it is insisted on. It is repeated over and over again, and enjoined in the strongest terms; ver. 7. "Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother;" ver. 8. "But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him;" ver. 10. "Thou shalt surely give him;" ver. 11. "I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy."**

**Moreover, God strictly warns against objections, ver. 9. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart,**

saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee." The matter concerning the seventh year, or year of release, was thus: God had given Israel a law, that every seventh year should be a year of release; that if any man had lent any thing to any of his poor neighbours, if the latter had not been able to repay it before that year, the former should release it, and should not exact it of his neighbour, but give it to him. Therefore God warns the children of Israel against making of this an objection to helping their poor neighbours, that the year of release was near at hand; and it was not likely that they would be able to refund it again before that time, and then they should lose it wholly, because then they would be obliged to release it. God foresaw that the wickedness of their hearts would be very ready to make such an objection; but very strictly warns them against it, that they should not be the more backward to supply the wants of the needy for that, but should be willing to give him: "Thou shalt be willing to lend, expecting nothing again."

Men are exceedingly apt to make objections against such duties, which God speaks of here as a manifestation of the wickedness of their hearts: "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart," &c. The warning is very strict. God doth not only say, Beware that thou do not actually refuse to give him, but, Beware that thou have not one objecting thought against it, arising from a backwardness to liberality. God warns against the beginnings of uncharitableness in the heart, and against whatever tends to a forbearance to give: "And thou give him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee." God warns them, from the guilt which they would be liable to bring upon themselves hereby.

We may observe here several enforcements of this duty. There is a reason of this duty implied in God's calling him that is needy, our brother: "Thou shalt not shut thine hand from thy poor brother;" and ver. 9. "Beware that thine eye be not evil against thy poor brother;" and ver. 11. "Thou shalt open thine hand wide to thy brother." We are to look upon ourselves as related to all mankind, but especially to those who are of the visible people of God. We are to look upon them as brethren, and to treat them accordingly. We shall be base indeed, if we be not willing to help a brother in want.—Another enforcement of this duty is the promise of God, that for this thing he will bless us in all our works, and in all that we put our hands unto; a promise that we shall not lose, but gain by it, (ver. 10.)—Another is, that we shall never want proper objects of our charity and bounty: ver. 11. "For the poor shall never cease out of thy land." This God saith to the Jewish church; and the like Christ saith to the Christian church, Matt. 26:11. "The poor ye have always with you." This is to cut off an excuse that uncharitable persons would be ready to make for not giving, that they could find nobody to give to, that they saw none who needed. God cuts off such an excuse, by telling us, that he would so order it in his providence, that his people every where, and in all ages, shall have occasion for the exercise of that virtue.

From this account the doctrine is obvious, that it is the absolute and indispensable duty of the people of God, to give bountifully and willingly for supplying the wants of the needy.—But more particularly,

1. It is the duty of the people of God, to give bountifully for the aforesaid purpose. It is commanded once and again in the text, "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy poor brother." Merely to give something is not sufficient; it answers not the rule, nor comes up to the holy command of

God; but we must open our hand wide. What we give, considering our neighbour's wants, and our ability, should be such as may be called a liberal gift. What is meant in the text by opening the hand wide, with respect to those that are able, is explained in ver. 8. "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his want, in that which he needeth." By lending here, as is evident by the two following verses, and as we have just now shown, is not only meant lending to receive again; the word lend in Scripture is sometimes used for giving; as in Luke 6:35. "Do good and lend, hoping for nothing again."

We are commanded, therefore, to give our poor neighbour what is sufficient for his need. There ought to be none suffered to live in pinching want, among a visible people of God, who are able: unless in case of idleness, or prodigality, or some such case which the word of God excepts.—It is said that the children of Israel should lend to the poor, and in the year of release should release what they had lent, save when there should be no poor among them. It is rendered in the margin, to the end there be no poor among you; i.e. you should so supply the wants of the needy, that there may be none among you in pinching want. This translation seems the more likely to be the true one, because God says, ver. 11. that there shall be no such time when there shall be no poor, who shall be proper objects of charity.—When persons give very sparingly, it is no manifestation of charity, but of a contrary spirit: 2 Cor. 9:5. "Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness." The apostle here calls a very sparing contribution, matter of covetousness.



**2. It is the duty of the visible people of God, to give for the supply of the needy, freely, and without grudging. It doth not at all answer the rule in the sight of God, if it be done with an inward grudging, or if the heart be grieved, and it inwardly hurt the man to give what he gives: "Thou shalt surely give," says God, "and thine heart shall not be grieved." God looks at the heart, and the hand is not accepted without it: 2 Cor. 9:7. "Every man according as he hath purposed in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."**

**3. This is a duty to which God's people are under very strict obligations. It is not merely a commendable thing for a man to be kind and bountiful to the poor, but our bounden duty, as much a duty as it is to pray, or to attend public worship, or any thing else whatever; and the neglect of it brings great guilt upon any person.**

## **SECT. II**

**Of the obligation of Christians to perform the duty of charity to the poor**

**THIS duty is absolutely commanded, and much insisted on, in the word of God. Where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more peremptory urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor? We have the same law in a positive manner laid down in Levit. 25:35, &c. "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him; yea, though he be a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with thee." And at the conclusion of ver. 38. God enforces it with saving, I am the Lord thy God.**

**It is mentioned in Scripture, not only as a duty, but a great duty. Indeed it is generally acknowledged to be a duty, to be**

kind to the needy; but by many it seems not to be looked upon as a duty of great importance. However, it is mentioned in Scripture as one of the greater and more essential duties of religion: Micah 6:8. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Here to love mercy is mentioned as one of the three great things that are the sum of all religion. So it is mentioned by the apostle James, as one of the two things wherein pure and undefiled religion consists: James 1:27. "Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

So Christ tells us, it is one of the weightier matters of the law: Matt. 22:23. "Ye have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." The Scriptures again and again teach us, that it is a more weighty and essential thing than the attendance on the outward ordinances of worship: Hos. 6:6. "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice;" Matt. 9:13. and 12:7. I know of scarce any duty which is so much insisted on, so pressed and urged upon us, both in the Old Testament and New, as this duty of charity to the poor.

The reason of the thing strongly obliges to it. It is not only very positively and frequently insisted on by God, but it is most reasonable in itself; and so, on this account, there is reason why God should much insist upon it.

1. It is most reasonable, considering the general state and nature of mankind. This is such as renders it most reasonable that we should love our neighbour as ourselves; for men are made in the image of our God, and on this account are worthy of our love. Besides, we are all nearly allied one to another by nature. We have all the same

**nature, like faculties, like dispositions, like desires of good, like needs, like aversion to misery, and are made of one blood; and we are made to subsist by society and union one with another. God hath made us with such a nature, that we cannot subsist without the help of one another. Mankind in this respect are as the members of the natural body, one cannot subsist alone, without an union with and the help of the rest.**

**Now, this state of mankind shows how reasonable and suitable it is, that men should love their neighbours; and that we should not look every one at his own things, but every man also at the things of others, Phil. 2:4. A selfish spirit is very unsuitable to the nature and state of mankind. He who is all for himself, and none for his neighbours, deserves to be cut off from the benefit of human society, and to be turned out among wild beasts, to subsist by himself as well as he can. A private niggardly spirit is more suitable for wolves, and other beasts of prey, than for human beings.**

**To love our neighbour as ourselves, is the sum of the moral law respecting our fellow-creatures; and to help them, and to contribute to their relief, is the most natural expression of this love. It is vain to pretend to a spirit of love to our neighbours, when it is grievous to us to part with any thing for their help, when under calamity. They who love only in word, and in tongue, and not in deed, have no love in truth. Any profession without it is a vain pretence. To refuse to give to the needy, is unreasonable, because we therein do to others contrary to what we would have others to do to us in like circumstances. We are very sensible of our own calamities; and when we suffer, are ready enough to think, that our state requires the compassion and help of others; and are ready enough to think it hard, if others will not deny themselves in order to help us when in straits.**

**2. It is especially reasonable, considering our circumstances, under such a dispensation of grace as that of the gospel. Consider how much God hath done for us, how greatly he hath loved us, what he hath given us, when we were so unworthy, and when he could have no addition to his happiness by us. Consider that silver, and gold, and earthly crowns, were in his esteem but mean things to give us, and he hath therefore given us his own Son. Christ loved and pitied us, when we were poor, and he laid out himself to help, and even did shed his own blood for us without grudging. He did not think much to deny himself, and to be at great cost for us vile wretches, in order to make us rich, and to clothe us with kingly robes, when we were naked; to feast us at his own table with dainties infinitely costly, when we were starving; to advance us from the dunghill, and set us among princes, and make us to inherit the throne of his glory, and so to give us the enjoyment of the greatest wealth and plenty to all eternity; agreeably to 2 Cor. 8:9. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Considering all these things, what a poor business will it be, that those who hope to share these benefits, yet cannot give something for the relief of a poor neighbour without grudging! that it should grieve them to part with a small matter, to help a fellow-servant in calamity, when Christ did not grudge to shed his own blood for them!**

**How unsuitable is it for us, who live only by kindness, to be unkind! What would have become of us, if Christ had been so saving of his blood, and loth to bestow it, as many men are of their money or goods? or if he had been as ready to excuse himself from dying for us, as men commonly are to excuse themselves from charity to their neighbour? If Christ would have made objections of such things, as men**

**commonly object to performing deeds of charity to their neighbour, he would have found enough of them.**

**Besides, Christ, by his redemption, has brought us into a more near relation one to another, hath made us children of God, children in the same family. We are all brethren, having God for our common Father; which is much more than to be brethren in any other family. He hath made us all one body; therefore we ought to be united, and subserve one another's good, and bear one another's burdens, as is the case with the members of the same natural body. If one of the members suffer, all the other members bear the burden with it, 1 Cor. 12:26. If one member be diseased or wounded, the other members of the body will minister to it, and help it. So surely it should be in the body of Christ: Gal. 6:2. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."**

**Apply these things to yourselves; and inquire, whether you do not lie under guilt on account of the neglect of this duty, in withholding that charity which God requires of you towards the needy? You have often been put upon examining yourselves, whether you do not live in some way displeasing to God. Perhaps at such times it never came into your minds, whether you do not lie under guilt on this account.—But this neglect certainly brings guilt upon the soul in the sight of God, as is evident by the text: "Beware that thine eye be not evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee," ver. 9. This is often mentioned as one of the sins of Judah and Jerusalem, for which God was about to bring such terrible judgments upon them; and it was one of the sins of Sodom, for which that city was destroyed, that she did not give to supply the poor and needy, Ezek. 16:49. "This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness**

**in her, and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy."**

**And have we not reason to fear, that much guilt lies upon this land on this very account? We have a high conceit of ourselves for religion: but do not many other countries shame us? Do not the papists shame us in this respect? So far as I can understand the tenor of the christian religion, and the rules of the word of God, the same are in no measure in this respect answered by the general practice of most people in this land. There are many who make a high profession of religion; but do not many of them need to be informed by the apostle James, what true religion is?**

**Let every one examine himself, whether he do not lie under guilt in this matter. Have you not forborne to give, when you have seen your brother in want? Have you not shut up the bowels of your compassion towards him, and forborne to deny yourselves a little for his relief? Or when you have given, have you not done it grudgingly? And has it not inwardly hurt and grieved you? You have looked upon what you have given, as lost: so that what you have given, has been, as the apostle expresses it, a matter of covetousness, rather than of bounty. Have not occasions of giving been unwelcome to you? Have you not been uneasy under them? Have you not felt a considerable backwardness to give? Have you not, from a grudging, backward spirit, been apt to raise objections against giving, and to excuse yourselves? Such things as these bring guilt upon the soul, and often bring down the curse of God upon the persons in whom these things are found, as we may show more fully hereafter.**

### **SECT. III**

**An exhortation to the duty of charity to the poor**

**WE are professors of Christianity, we pretend to be the followers of Jesus, and to make the gospel our rule. We have the Bible in our houses. Let us not behave ourselves in this particular, as if we had never seen the Bible, as if we were ignorant of Christianity, and knew not what kind of religion it is. What will it signify to pretend to be Christians, and at the same time to live in the neglect of those rules of Christianity which are mainly insisted on in it? But there are several things which I would here propose to your consideration.**

**I. Consider that what you have is not your own; i.e. you have only a subordinate right. Your goods are only lent to you of God, to be improved by you in such ways as he directs. You yourselves are not your own; 1 Cor. 6:20. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; your body and your spirit are God's." And if you yourselves are not your own, so then neither are your possessions your own. Many of you have by covenant given up yourselves and all you have to God. You have disowned and renounced any right in yourselves or in any thing that you have, and have given to God all the absolute right; and if you be true Christians, you have done it from the heart.**

**Your money and your goods are not your own; they are only committed to you as stewards, to be used for him who committed them to you; 1 Pet. 4:9, 10. "Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." A steward has no business with his master's goods, to use them any otherwise than for the benefit of his master and his family, or according to his master's direction. He hath no business to use them, as if he were the proprietor of them; he hath nothing to do with them, only as he is to use them for his**

**master. He is to give every one of his master's family their portion of meat in due season.**

**But if instead of that, he hoards up his master's goods for himself, and withholds them from those of the household, so that some of the family are pinched for want of food and clothing; he is therein guilty of robbing his master and embezzling his substance. And would any householder endure such a steward? If he discovered him in such a practice, would he not take his goods out of his hands, and commit them to the care of some other steward, who should give every one of his family his portion of meat in due season? Remember that all of us must give account of our stewardship, and how we have disposed of those goods which our Master has put into our hands. And if when our Master comes to reckon with us, it be found that we have denied some of his family their proper provision, while we have hoarded up for ourselves, as if we had been the proprietors of our Master's goods, what account shall we give of this?**

**II. God tells us, that he shall look upon what is done in charity to our neighbours in want, as done unto him; and what is denied unto them, as denied unto him. Prov. 19:17. "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord." God hath been pleased to make our needy neighbours his receivers. He in his infinite mercy hath so interested himself in their case, that he looks upon what is given in charity to them, as given to himself; and when we deny them what their circumstances require of us, he looks upon it that we therein rob him of his right.**

**Christ teaches us, that we are to look upon our fellow-Christians in this case as himself, and that our giving or withholding from them, shall be taken, as if we so behaved ourselves towards him; see Matt. 25:40. There Christ says**



to the righteous on his right hand, who had supplied the wants of the needy, "In that ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." In like manner he says to the wicked who had not shown mercy to the poor, ver. 45. "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."—Now what stronger enforcement of this duty can be conceived, or is possible, than this, that Jesus Christ looks upon our kind and bountiful, or unkind and uncharitable, treatment of our needy neighbours, as such a treatment of himself?

If Christ himself were upon earth, and dwelt among us in a frail body, as he once did, and were in calamitous and needy circumstances, should we not be willing to supply him? Should we be apt to excuse ourselves from helping him? Should we not be willing to supply him so, that he might live free from distressing poverty? And if we did otherwise, should we not bring great guilt upon ourselves? And might not our conduct justly be very highly resented by God? Christ was once here in a frail body, stood in need of the charity, and was maintained by it; Luke 8:2, 3. "And certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalen, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." So he still, in many of his members, needs the charity of others.

III. Consider that there is an absolute necessity of our complying with the difficult duties of religion. To give to the poor in the manner and measure that the gospel prescribes, is a difficult duty, i.e. it is very contrary to corrupt nature, to that covetousness and selfishness of which there is so much in the wicked heart of man. Man is naturally governed only by a principle of self-love; and it is a difficult thing to corrupt nature, for men to deny

themselves of their present interest, trusting in God to make it up to them hereafter.—But how often hath Christ told us the necessity of doing difficult duties of religion, if we will be his disciples; that we must sell all, take up our cross daily, deny ourselves, renounce our worldly profits and interests, &c. And if this duty seem hard and difficult to you, let not that be an objection with you against doing it; for you have taken up quite a wrong notion of things, if you expect to go to heaven without performing difficult duties; if you expect any other than to find the way to life a narrow way.

**IV. The Scripture teaches us, that this very particular duty is necessary. Particularly,**

**1. The Scripture teaches, that God will deal with us as we deal with our fellow-creatures in this particular, and that with what measure we mete to others in this respect, God will measure to us again. This the Scripture asserts both ways; it asserts that if we be of a merciful spirit, God will be merciful to us: Matt. 5:7. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Ps. 18:25. "With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful." On the other hand it tells us, that if we be not merciful, God will not be merciful to us; and that all our pretences to faith and a work of conversion will not avail us, to obtain mercy, unless we be merciful to them that are in want. James 2:13–16. "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy.—What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed, and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"**

**2. This very thing is often mentioned in Scripture, as an essential part of the character of a godly man; Ps. 37:21. "The righteous showeth mercy, and giveth;" and again, ver. 26. "He is ever merciful, and lendeth." Psal. 112:5. "A good man showeth favour, and lendeth:" and ver. 9. "He hath dispersed, and given to the poor." So Prov. 14:31. "He that honoureth God, hath mercy on the poor." Again, Prov. 21:26. and Isa. 57:1. A righteous man and a merciful man are used as synonymous terms: "The righteous perisheth, and merciful men are taken away," &c.**

**It is mentioned in the New Testament as a thing so essential, that the contrary cannot consist with a sincere love to God. 1 John 3:17–19. "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." So the apostle Paul, when he writes to the Corinthians, and proposes their contributing for the supply of the poor saints, tells them what he doth it for, viz. a trial of their sincerity: see 2 Cor. 8:8. "I speak to prove the sincerity of your love."**

**3. Christ teaches, that judgment will be past at the great day according to men's works in this respect. This is taught us by Christ in the most particular account of the proceedings of that day, that we have in the whole Bible; see Matt. 25:34, &c. It is evident that Christ thus represented the proceedings and determinations of this great day, as turning upon this one point, on purpose, and on design to lead us into this notion, and to fix it in us, that a charitable spirit and practice towards our brethren is necessary to salvation.**

**V. Consider what abundant encouragement the word of God gives, that you shall be no losers by your charity and bounty to them who are in want. As there is scarce any duty prescribed in the word of God, which is so much insisted on as this; so there is scarce any to which there are so many promises of reward made. This virtue especially hath the promises of this life and that which is to come. If we believe the Scriptures, when a man charitably gives to his neighbour in want, the giver has the greatest advantage by it, even greater than the receiver: Acts 20:35. "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." He that gives bountifully is a happier man than he that receives bountifully; Prov. 14:21. "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he."**

**Many persons are ready to look upon what is bestowed for charitable uses as lost. But we ought not to look upon it as lost, because it benefits those whom we ought to love as ourselves. And not only so, but it is not lost to us, if we give any credit to the Scriptures. See the advice that Solomon gives in Eccl. 11:1. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." By casting our bread upon the waters, Solomon means giving it to the poor, as appears by the next words, "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight." Waters are sometimes put for people and multitudes.**

**What strange advice would this seem to many, to cast their bread upon the waters, which would seem to them like throwing it away! What more direct method to lose our bread, than to go and throw it into the sea? But the wise man tells us, No, it is not lost; you shall find it again after many days. It is not sunk, but you commit it to Providence; you commit it to the winds and waves: however it will come**

about to you, and you shall find it again after many days. Though it should be many days first, yet you shall find it at last, at a time when you most need it. He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord: and God is not one of those who will not pay again what is lent to him. If you lend any thing to God, you commit it into faithful hands. Prov. 19:17. "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again." God will not only pay you again, but he will pay you with great increase; Luke 6:38. "Give, and it shall be given you," that is, in "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over."

Men do not account that lost, that is let out to use: but what is bestowed in charity is lent to the Lord, and he repays with great increase. Isa. 32:8. "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." Here I would particularly observe,

1. That if you give with a spirit of true charity, you shall be rewarded in what is infinitely more valuable than what you give; even eternal riches in heaven. Matt. 10:42. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple; verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Giving to our needy brethren, is in Scripture called laying up treasure in heaven, in bags that wax not old; Luke 12:33. "Sell what ye have and give alms, provide for yourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, nor moth corrupteth. Men, when they have laid up their money in their chests, do not suppose that they have thrown it away; but, on the contrary, that it is laid up safe. Much less is treasure thrown away, when it is laid up in heaven. What is laid up

**there is much safer than what is laid up in chests or cabinets.**

**You cannot lay up treasure on earth, but that it is liable to be stolen, or otherwise to fail. But there no thief approacheth nor moth corrupteth. It is committed to God's care, and he will keep it safely for you; and when you die, you shall receive it with infinite increase. Instead of a part of your earthly substance thus bestowed, you shall receive heavenly riches, on which you may live in the greatest fulness, honour, and happiness, to all eternity; and shall never be in want of any thing. After feeding with some of your bread those who cannot recompense you, you shall be rewarded at the resurrection, and eat bread in the kingdom of God. Luke 14:13–16. "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind: and thou shall be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. And when one of them that sat at meat with him, heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."**

**2. If you give to the needy though but in the exercise of moral virtue, you will be in the way greatly to gain by it in your temporal interest. They who give in the exercise of a gracious charity, are in the way to be gainers both here and hereafter; and those that give in the exercise of a moral bounty and liberality, have many temporal promises made to them. We learn by the word of God, that they are in the way to be prospered in their outward affairs. Ordinarily such do not lose by it, but such a blessing attends their concerns, that they are paid doubly for it: Prov. 11:24, 25. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth,**

**shall be watered also himself." And Prov. 28:27. "He that giveth to the poor, shall not lack."**

**When men give to the needy, they do as it were sow seed for a crop. When men sow their seed, they seem to throw it away; yet they do not look upon it as thrown away; because, though they expect not the same again, yet they expect much more as the fruit of it: and if it be not certain that they shall have a crop, yet they are willing to run the venture of it; for that is the ordinary way wherein men obtain increase. So it is when persons give to the poor; though the promises of gaining thereby, in our outward circumstances, perhaps are not absolute; yet it is as much the ordinary consequence of it, as increase is of sowing seed. Giving to the poor, is in this respect compared to sowing seed, in Eccl. 11:6. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." By withholding the hand, the wise man means, not giving to the poor. (See ver. 1, 2.) It intimates, that giving to the poor is as likely a way to obtain prosperity and increase, as sowing seed in a field.**

**The husbandman doth not look upon his seed as lost, but is glad that he has opportunity to sow it. It grieves him not that he has land to be sown, but he rejoices in it. For the like reason we should not be grieved that we find needy people to bestow our charity upon; for this is as much an opportunity to obtain increase as the other.**

**Some may think this is strange doctrine; and it is to be feared, that not many will so far believe it as to give to the poor with as much cheerfulness as they sow their ground. However, it is the very doctrine of the word of God, 2 Cor. 9:6, 7, 8. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully, shall**

reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound towards you; that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

It is easy with God to make up to men what they give in charity. Many but little consider how their prosperity or ill success in their outward affairs depends upon Providence. There are a thousand turns of Providence, to which their affairs are liable, whereby God may either add to their outward substance, or diminish from it, a great deal more than they are ordinarily called to give to their neighbours. How easy is it with God to diminish what they possess by sickness in their families, by drought, or frost, or mildew, or vermin; by unfortunate accidents, by entanglements in their affairs, or disappointments in their business! And how easy is it with God to increase their substance, by suitable seasons, or by health and strength; by giving them fair opportunities for promoting their interest in their dealings with men; by conducting them in his providence, so that they attain their designs; and by innumerable other ways which might be mentioned! How often is it, that only one act of providence in a man's affairs either adds to his estate, or diminishes from it, more than he would need to give to the poor in a whole year.

God hath told us, that this is the way to have his blessing attending our affairs. Thus, in the text, ver. 10. "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him; because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto;" and Prov. 22:9. "He that hath a bountiful eye, shall be blessed." It is a remarkable evidence how little many men realize the things of religion, whatever they pretend; how little they realize that the Scripture is



the word of God, or if it be, that he speaks true; that notwithstanding all the promises made in the Scripture to bounty to the poor, yet they are so backward to this duty, and are so afraid to trust God with a little of their estates. Observation may confirm the same thing which the word of God teaches on this head. God, in his providence, generally smiles upon and prospers those men who are of a liberal, charitable, bountiful spirit.

6. God hath threatened to follow with his curse those who are uncharitable to the poor; as Prov. 28:27. "He that giveth to the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes, shall have many a curse." It is said, he that hideth his eyes, because this is the way of uncharitable men; they hide their eyes from seeing the wants of their neighbour. A charitable person, whose heart disposes him to bounty and liberality, will be quick-sighted to discern the needs of others. They will not be at any difficulty to find out who is in want; they will see objects enough of their charity, let them go whither they will.

But, on the contrary, he that is of a niggardly spirit, so that it goes against the grain to give any thing, he will be always at a loss for objects of his charity. Such men excuse themselves with this, that they find not any one to give to. They hide their eyes, and wilt not see their neighbour's wants. If a particular object is presented, they will not very readily see his circumstances; they are a long while in being convinced that he is an object of charity. They hide their eyes; and it is not an easy thing to make them sensible of the necessities and distresses of their neighbour, or at least to convince them, that his necessities are such that they ought to give him any great matter.

Other men, who are of a bountiful spirit, can very easily see the objects of charity; but the uncharitable are very unapt

**both to see the proper objects of charity, and to see their obligations to this duty. The reason is, that they are of that sort spoken of here by the wise man, they hide their eyes. Men will readily see, where they are willing to see; but where they hate to see, they will hide their eyes.**

**God says, such as hides his eyes in this case shall have many a curse. Such an one is in the way to be cursed in soul and body, in both his spiritual and temporal affairs. We have shown already, how those that are charitable to the poor are in the way of being blessed. There are so many promises of the divine blessing, that we may look upon it as much the way to be blessed in our outward concerns, as sowing seed in a field is the way to have increase. And to be close and uncharitable, is as much the way to be followed with a curse, as to be charitable is the way to be followed with a blessing. To withhold more than is meet, tends as much to poverty, as scattering tends to increase, Prov. 11:24. Therefore, if you withhold more than is meet, you will cross your own disposition, and will frustrate your own end. What you seek by withholding from your neighbour, is your own temporal interest and outward estate; but if you believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, you must believe that you cannot take a more direct course to lose, to be crossed and cursed in your temporal interest, than this of withholding from your indigent neighbour.**

**7. Consider, that you know not what calamitous and necessitous circumstances you yourselves or your children may be in. Perhaps you are ready to bless yourselves in your hearts, as though there were no danger of your being brought into calamitous and distressing circumstances. There is at present no prospect of it; and you hope you shall be able to provide well for your children. But you little consider what a shifting, changing, uncertain world you**

live in, and how often it hath so happened, that men have been reduced from the greatest prosperity to the greatest adversity, and how often the children of the rich have been reduced to pinching want.

Agreeable to this is the advice that the wise man gives us, Eccles. 11:1, 2. "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon earth." Thou knowest not what calamitous circumstances thou mayest be in thyself, in this changeable uncertain world. You know not what circumstances you or your children may be brought into by captivity, or other unthought-of providences. Providence governs all things. Perhaps you may trust to your own wisdom to continue your prosperity; but you cannot alter what God determines and orders in providence, as in the words immediately following the fore-mentioned text in Ecclesiastes, "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north; in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be;" i.e. you cannot alter the determinations of Providence. You may trust to your own wisdom for future prosperity; but if God have ordained adversity, it shall come: as the clouds when full of rain, empty themselves upon the earth; so what is in the womb of Providence shall surely come to pass. And as Providence casts the tree, whether towards the south, or towards the north, whether for prosperity or adversity, there it shall be, for all that you can do to alter it; agreeably to what the wise man observes in chap. 7:13. "Consider the work of God; for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked?"

This consideration, that you know not what calamity and necessity you may be in yourselves or your children, tends very powerfully to enforce this duty several ways.

**1. This may put you upon considering how your hearts would be effected, if it should so be. If it should happen, that you or some of your children should be brought into such circumstances, as those of your neighbours, how grievous would it be to you! Now perhaps you say of this and the other poor neighbour, that they can do well enough; if they be pinched a little, they can live. Thus you can make light of their difficulties. But if Providence should so order it, that you or your children should be brought into the same circumstances, would you make light of them then? Would you not use another sort of language about it? Would you not think that your case was such as needed the kindness of your neighbours? Would you not think that they ought to be ready to help you? And would you not take it hardly, if you saw a contrary spirit in them, and saw that they made light of your difficulties?**

**If one of your children should be brought to poverty by captivity,\* or otherwise, how would your hearts be affected in such a case? If you should hear that some persons had taken pity on your child, and had been very bountiful to it, would you not think that they did well? Would you be at all apt to accuse them of folly or profuseness, that they should give so much to it?**

**2. If ever there should be such a time, your kindness to others now will be but a laying up against such a time. If you yourselves should be brought into calamity and necessity, then would you find what you have given in charity to others, lying ready in store for you. Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days, says the wise man. But when shall we find it? He tells us in the next verse; "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Then is the time when you shall find it, when the day of evil cometh. You shall again find your bread which**

**you have cast upon the waters, when you shall want it most, and stand in greatest necessity of it. God will keep it for you against such a time. When other bread shall fail, then God will bring to you the bread which you formerly cast upon the waters; so that you shall not famish. He that giveth to the poor shall not lack.**

**Giving to the needy is like laying up against winter, or against a time of calamity. It is the best way of laying up for yourselves and for your children. Children in a time of need very often find their fathers' bread, that bread which their fathers had cast upon the waters. Psal. 37:25. "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Why? what is the reason of it? It follows in the next verse, "He is ever merciful and lendeth, and his seed is blessed."**

**Whether the time will ever come or not, that we or our children shall be in distressing want of bread; yet doubtless evil will be on the earth. We shall have our times of calamity, wherein we shall stand in great need of God's pity and help, if not of that of our fellow-creatures. And God hath promised that at such a time, he that hath been of a charitable spirit and practice, shall find help, Psal. 41:1-4. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." Such as have been merciful and liberal to others in their distress, God will not forget it, but will so order it, that they shall have help when they are in distress. Yea, their children shall reap the fruit of it in the day of trouble.**

**3. God hath threatened uncharitable persons, that if ever they come to be in calamity and distress they shall be left helpless; Prov. 21:3. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself and not be heard."**

#### **SECT. IV**

**Objections which are sometimes made to the exercise of charity, answered**

**I PROCEED now to answer some OBJECTIONS, which are sometimes made against this duty.**

**OBJECT. I. I am in a natural condition, and if I should give to the poor, I should not do it with a right spirit, and so should get nothing by it.—To this I answer,**

**1. We have shown already that a temporal blessing is promised to a moral bounty and liberality. This is the way to be prospered; this is the way to increase. We find in Scripture many promises of temporal blessings to moral virtues; as to diligence in our business, to justice in our dealings, to faithfulness, to temperance. So there are many blessings promised to bounty and liberality.**

**2. You may as well make the same objection against any other duty of religion. You may as well object against keeping the sabbath, against prayer, or public worship, or against doing any thing at all in religion; for while in a natural condition, you do not any of these duties with a right spirit. If you say, you do these duties because God hath commanded or required them of you, and you shall sin greatly if you neglect them; you shall increase your guilt; and so expose yourselves to the greater damnation and punishment. The same may be said of the neglect of this duty; the neglect of it is as provoking to God.**

If you say that you read, and pray, and attend public worship, because that is the appointed way for you to seek salvation; so is bounty to the poor, as much as those.—The appointed way for us to seek the favour of God and eternal life, is the way of the performance of all known duties, of which giving to the poor is one as much known, and as necessary, as reading the Scriptures, praying, or any other. Showing mercy to the poor does as much belong to the appointed way of seeking salvation, as any other duty whatever. Therefore this is the way in which Daniel directed Nebuchadnezzar to seek mercy, in Dan. 4:27. "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor."

**OBJECT. II.** If I be liberal and bountiful, I shall only make a righteousness of it, and so it will do me more hurt than good. To this I say,

1. The same answer may be made to this, as to the former objection, viz. That you may as well make the same objection against doing any religious or moral duty at all. If this be a sufficient objection against deeds of charity, then it is a sufficient objection to prayer; for nothing is more common than for persons to make a righteousness of their prayers. So it is a good objection against your keeping the sabbath, or attending any public worship, or ever reading in the Bible; for of all these things you are in danger of making a righteousness.—Yea, if the objection be good against deeds of charity, then it is as good against acts of justice; and you may neglect to speak the truth, may neglect to pay your debts, may neglect acts of common humanity; for of all those things you are in danger of making a righteousness. So that if your objection be good, you may throw up all religion, and live like heathens or atheists, and may be thieves, robbers, fornicators, adulterers,

**murderers, and commit all the sins that you can think of, lest if you should do otherwise, you should make a righteousness of your conduct.**

**2. Your objection carries it thus, that it is not best for you to do as God commands and counsels you to do. We find many commands in Scripture to be charitable to the poor; the Bible is full of them; and you are not excepted from those commands. God makes no exception of any particular kinds of persons that are especially in danger of making a righteousness of what they do; and God often directs and counsels persons to this duty. Now will you presume to say that God has not directed you to the best way? He has advised you to do thus; but you think it not best for you, but that it would do you more hurt than good, if you should do it. You think there is other counsel better than God's, and that it is the best way for you to go contrary to God's commands.**

**OBJECT. III. I have in times past given to the poor, but never found myself the better for it. I have heard ministers preach, that giving to the poor was the way to prosper: but I perceive not that I am more prosperous than I was before. —Yea, I have met with many misfortunes, crosses, and disappointments in my affairs since. And it may be that some will say, That very year, or soon after the very time, I had been giving to the poor, hoping to be blessed for it, I met with great losses, and things went hardly with me; and therefore I do not find what I hear preached about giving to the poor, as being the way to be blessed and prosperous, agreeable to my experience.**

**To this objection I shall answer several things:**

**1. Perhaps you looked out for the fulfilment of the promise too soon, before you had fulfilled the condition; as**



particularly, perhaps you have been so sparing and grudging in your kindness to the poor, that what you have done has been rather a discovery of a covetous, niggardly spirit, than of any bounty or liberality. The promises are not made to every man who gives any thing at all to the poor, let it be ever so little, and after what manner soever given. You mistook the promises, if you understood them so. A man may give something to the poor, and yet be entitled to no promise, either temporal or spiritual. The promises are made to mercy and liberality. But a man may give something, and yet be so niggardly and grudging in it, that what he gives may be, as the apostle calls it, a matter of covetousness. What he does may be more a manifestation of his covetousness and closeness, than any thing else. But there are no promises made to men's expressing their covetousness.

Perhaps what you gave was not freely given, but as it were of necessity. It was grudgingly; your hearts were grieved when you gave. And if you gave once or twice what was considerable, yet that doth not answer the rule. It may be, for all that, that in the general course of your lives you have been far from being kind and liberal to your neighbours. Perhaps you thought that because you once or twice gave a few shillings to the poor, that then you stood entitled to the promises of being blessed in all your concerns, and of increasing and being established by liberal things; though in the general you have lived in a faulty neglect of the duty of charity. You raise objections from experience, before you have made trial. To give once, or twice, or thrice, is not to make trial, though you give considerably. You cannot make any trial, unless you become a liberal person, or unless you become such that you may be truly said to be of a liberal and bountiful practice. Let one who is truly such, and has been such in the general course of his life, tell what he hath found by experience.

**2. If you have been liberal to the poor, and have met with calamities since, yet how can you tell how much greater calamities and losses you might have met with, if you had been otherwise? You say you have met with crosses, and disappointments, and frowns. If you expected to meet with no trouble in the world, because you gave to the poor, you mistook the matter. Though there be many and great promises made to the liberal, yet God hath nowhere promised, that they shall not find this world a world of trouble. It will be so to all. Man is born to sorrow, and must expect no other than to meet with sorrow here. But how can you tell how much greater sorrow you would have met with, if you had been close and unmerciful to the poor? how can you tell how much greater losses you would have met with? how much more vexation and trouble would have followed you? Have none ever met with greater frowns in their outward affairs, than you have?**

**3. How can you tell what blessings God hath yet in reserve for you, if you do but continue in well-doing? Although God hath promised great blessings to liberality to the poor, yet he hath not limited himself as to the time of the bestowment. If you have not yet seen any evident fruit of your kindness to the poor, yet the time may come when you shall see it remarkably, and that at a time when you most stand in need of it. You cast your bread upon the waters, and looked for it, and expected to find it again presently. And sometimes it is so; but this is not promised: it is promised, "Thou shalt find it again after many days." God knows how to choose a time for you, better than you yourselves. You should therefore wait his time. If you go on in well-doing, God may bring it to you when you stand most in need.**

**It may be that there is some winter a-coming, some day of trouble; and God keeps your bread for you against that**

time; and then God will give you good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. We must trust in God's word for the bestowment of the promised reward, whether we can see in what manner it is done or no. Pertinent to the present purpose are those words of the wise man in Eccles. 11:4. "He that observeth the winds shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." In this context the wise man is speaking of charity to the poor, and comparing it to sowing seed; and advises us to trust Providence for success in that, as we do in sowing seed. He that regardeth the winds and clouds, to prognosticate thence prosperity to seed, and will not trust Providence with it, is not like to sow, nor to have bread-corn. So he that will not trust Providence for the reward of his charity to the poor, is like to go without the blessing. After the words now quoted, follows his advice, ver. 6. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."—Therefore, (Gal. 6:9.) "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." You think you have not reaped yet. Whether you have or not, go on still in giving and doing good; and if you do so, you shall reap in due time. God only knows the due time, the best time, for you to reap.

**OBJECT. IV.** Some may object against charity to such or such particular persons, that they are not obliged to give them any thing; for though they be needy, yet they are not in extremity. It is true they meet with difficulty, yet not so but that they can live, though they suffer some hardships.—  
But,

It doth not answer the rules of christian charity, to relieve those only who are reduced to extremity, as might be

**abundantly shown. I shall at this time mention but two things as evidences of it.**

**1. We are commanded to love and treat one another as brethren: 1 Pet. 3:8. "Have compassion one of another; love as brethren; be pitiful." Now, is it the part of brethren to refuse to help one another, and to do any thing for each other's comfort, and for the relief of each other's difficulties, only when they are in extremity? Doth it not become brothers and sisters to have a more friendly disposition one towards another, than this comes to? and to be ready to compassionate one another under difficulties, though they be not extreme?**

**The rule of the gospel is, that when we see our brother under any difficulty or burden, we should be ready to bear the burden with him: Gal. 6:2. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." So we are commanded, "by love to serve one another," Gal. 5:13. The christian spirit will make us apt to sympathize with our neighbour, when we see him under any difficulty: Rom. 12:15. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." When our neighbour is in difficulty, he is afflicted; and we ought to have such a spirit of love to him, as to be afflicted with him in his affliction. And if we ought to be afflicted with him, then it will follow, that we ought to be ready to relieve him; because, if we are afflicted with him, in relieving him we relieve ourselves. His relief is so far our own relief, as his affliction is our affliction. Christianity teaches us to be afflicted in our neighbour's affliction; and nature teaches us to relieve ourselves when afflicted.**

**We should behave ourselves one towards another as brethren that are fellow-travellers; for we are pilgrims and strangers here on earth, and are on a journey. Now, if**

brethren be on a journey together, and one meet with difficulty in the way, doth it not become the rest to help him, not only in the extremity of broken bones, or the like, but as to provision for the journey if his own fall short? It becomes his fellow-travellers to afford him a supply out of their stores, and not to be over nice, exact, and fearful lest they give him too much; for it is but provision for a journey; and all are supplied when they get to their journey's end.

2. That we should relieve our neighbour only when in extremity, is not agreeable to the rule of loving our neighbour as ourselves. That rule implies that our love towards our neighbour should work in the same manner, and express itself in the same ways, as our love towards ourselves. We are very sensible of our own difficulties; we should also be readily sensible of theirs. From love to ourselves, when we are under difficulties, and suffer hardships, we are concerned for our relief, are wont to seek relief, and lay ourselves out for it.—And as we would love our neighbour as ourselves, we ought in like manner to be concerned when our neighbour is under difficulty, and to seek his relief. We are wont to be much concerned about our own difficulties, though we be not reduced to extremity, and are willing in those cases to lay ourselves out for our own relief. So, as we would love our neighbour as ourselves, we should in like manner lay out ourselves to obtain relief for him, though his difficulties be not extreme.

OBJECT. V. Some may object against charity to a particular object, because he is an ill sort of person; he deserves not that people should be kind to him; he is of a very ill temper, of an ungrateful spirit, and particularly, because he hath not deserved well of them, but has treated them ill, has been injurious to them, and even now entertains an ill spirit against them.

**But we are obliged to relieve persons in want, notwithstanding these things, both by the general and particular rules of God's word.**

**1. We are obliged to do so by the general rules of Scripture. I shall mention two.**

**(1.) That of loving our neighbour as ourselves. A man may be our neighbour, though he be an ill sort of man, and even our enemy, as Christ himself teaches us by his discourse with the lawyer, Luke 10:25, &c. A certain lawyer came to Christ, and asked him, what he should do to inherit eternal life? Christ asked him, how it was written in the law? He answers, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Christ tells him, that if he shall do thus, he shall live. But then the lawyer asks him, who is his neighbour? because it was a received doctrine among the Pharisees, that no man was their neighbour, but their friends, and those of the same people and religion.—Christ answers him by a parable, or story of a certain man, who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed from him, leaving him half dead. Soon after there came a priest that way, who saw the poor man that had been thus cruelly treated by the thieves; but passed by without affording him any relief. The same was done by a Levite.—But a certain Samaritan coming that way, as soon as he saw the half-dead man, had compassion on him, took him up, bound up his wounds, set him on his own beast, carried him to the inn, and took care of him, paying the innkeeper money for his past and future expense; and promising him still more, if he should find it necessary to be at more expense on behalf of the man.**

Then Christ asks the lawyer, which of these three, the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan, was neighbour to the man that fell among the thieves. Christ proposed this in such a manner, that the lawyer could not help owning, that the Samaritan did well in relieving the Jew, that he did the duty of a neighbour to him. Now, there was an inveterate enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. They hated one another more than any other nation in the world; and the Samaritans were a people exceedingly troublesome to the Jews; yet we see that Christ teaches, that the Jews ought to do the part of neighbours to the Samaritans; i.e. to love them as themselves; for it was that of which Christ was speaking.

And the consequence was plain. If the Samaritan was neighbour to the distressed Jew, then the Jews, by a parity of reason, were neighbours to the Samaritans. If the Samaritan did well, in relieving a Jew that was his enemy; then the Jews would do well in relieving the Samaritans, their enemies.—What I particularly observe is, that Christ here plainly teaches, that our enemies, those that abuse and injure us, are our neighbours, and therefore come under the rule of loving our neighbour as ourselves.

(2.) Another general rule that obliges us to the same thing, is that wherein we are commanded to love one another, as Christ hath loved us. We have it John 13:34. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Christ calls it a new commandment, with respect to that old commandment of loving our neighbour as ourselves. This command of loving our neighbour as Christ hath loved us, opens our duty to us in a new manner, and in a further degree than that did. We must not only love our neighbour as ourselves, but as Christ hath loved us. We have the same

**again, John 15:12. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."**

**Now, the meaning of this is, not that we should love one another to the same degree that Christ loved us; though there ought to be a proportion, considering our nature and capacity; but that we should exercise our love one to another in like manner. As, for instance, Christ hath loved us so as to be willing to deny himself, and to suffer greatly, in order to help us; so should we be willing to deny ourselves, in order to help one another. Christ loved us, and showed us great kindness though we were far below him; so should we show kindness to those of our fellow-men who are far below us. Christ denied himself to help us, though we are not able to recompense him; so should we be willing to lay out ourselves to help our neighbour, freely expecting nothing again. Christ loved us, was kind to us, and was willing to relieve us, though we were very evil and hateful, of an evil disposition, not deserving any good, but deserving only to be hated, and treated with indignation; so we should be willing to be kind to those who are of an ill disposition, and are very undeserving. Christ loved us, and laid himself out to relieve us, though we were his enemies, and had treated him ill; so we, as we would love one another as Christ hath loved us, should relieve those who are our enemies, hate us, have an ill spirit toward us, and have treated us ill.**

**2. We are obliged to this duty by many particular rules. We are particularly required to be kind to the unthankful and to the evil; and therein to follow the example of our heavenly Father, who causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. We are obliged, not only to be kind to them that are so to us, but to them that hate, and that despitefully use us. I**



**need not mention the particular places which speak to this effect.**

**Not but that when persons are virtuous and pious, and of a grateful disposition, and are friendly disposed towards us, they are more the objects of our charity for it, and our obligation to kindness to them is the greater. Yet if things be otherwise, that doth not render them not fit objects of our charity, nor set us free from obligation to kindness towards them.**

**OBJECT. VI. Some may object from their own circumstances, that they have nothing to spare; they have not more than enough for themselves.—I answer,**

**1. It must doubtless be allowed that in some cases persons, by reason of their own circumstances, are not obliged to give to others.—For instance, if there be a contribution for the poor, they are not obliged to join in the contribution, who are in as much need as those are for whom the contribution is made. It savours of ridiculous vanity in them to contribute with others for such as are not more needy than they. It savours of a proud desire to conceal their own circumstances, and an affectation of having them accounted above what they in truth are.**

**2. There are scarcely any who may not make this objection, as they interpret it. There is no person who may not say, he has not more than enough for himself, as he may mean by enough. He may intend, that he has not more than he desires, or more than he can dispose of to his own advantage; or not so much, but that, if he had any thing less, he should took upon himself in worse circumstances than he is in now. He will own, that he could live if he had less; but then he will say he could not live so well. Rich men may say, they have not more than enough for themselves,**

as they may mean by it. They need it all, they may say, to support their honour and dignity, as is proper for the place and degree in which they stand. Those who are poor, to be sure, will say, they have not too much for themselves; those who are of the middle sort will say, they have not too much for themselves; and the rich will say, they have not too much for themselves. Thus there will be none found to give to the poor.

3. In many cases, we may, by the rules of the gospel, be obliged to give to others, when we cannot do it without suffering ourselves; as if our neighbour's difficulties and necessities be much greater than our own, and we see that he is not like to be otherwise relieved, we should be willing to suffer with him, and to take part of his burden on ourselves; else how is that rule of bearing one another's burdens fulfilled? If we be never obliged to relieve others' burdens, but when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbour's burdens, when we bear no burden at all? Though we may not have a superfluity, yet we may be obliged to afford relief to others who are in much greater necessity; as appears by that rule, Luke 3:11. "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise."—Yea, they who are very poor may be obliged to give for the relief of others in much greater distress than they. If there be no other way of relief, those who have the lightest burden are obliged still to take some part of their neighbour's burden, to make it the more supportable. A brother may be obliged to help a brother in extremity, though they are both very much in want. The apostle commends the Macedonian Christians, that they were liberal to their brethren, though they themselves were in deep poverty: 2 Cor. 8:1, 2. "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: how in a great trial of affliction, the abundance

of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality."

4. Those who have not too much for themselves are willing to spare seed to sow, that they may have fruit hereafter. Perhaps they need that which they scatter in the field, and seem to throw away. They may need it for bread for their families; yet they will spare seed to sow, that they may provide for the future, and may have increase. But we have already shown, that giving to the poor is in Scripture compared to sowing seed, and is as much the way to increase as the sowing of seed is. It doth not tend to poverty, but the contrary; it is not the way to diminish our substance, but to increase it. All the difficulty in this matter is in trusting God with what we give, in trusting his promises. If men could but trust the faithfulness of God to his own promises, they would give freely.

OBJECT. VII. Some may object concerning a particular person, that they do not certainly know whether he be an object of charity or not. They are not perfectly acquainted with his circumstances; neither do they know what sort of man he is. They know not whether he be in want as he pretends. Or if they know this, they know not how he came to be in want; whether it were not by his own idleness, or prodigality. Thus they argue that they cannot be obliged, till they certainly know these things.—I reply,

1. This is Nabal's objection, for which he is greatly condemned in Scripture; see 1 Sam. 25. David in his exiled state came and begged relief of Nabal. Nabal objected, ver. 10, 11. "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?" His

objection was, that David was a stranger to him; he did not know who he was, nor what his circumstances were. He did not know but that he was a runaway: and he was not obliged to support and harbour a runaway. He objected, that he knew not that he was a proper object of charity; that he knew not but that he was very much the contrary.

But Abigail no way countenanced his behaviour herein, but greatly condemned it. She calls him a man of Belial, and says that he was as his name was; Nabal was his name, and folly was with him. And her behaviour was very contrary to his; and she is greatly commended for it. The Holy Ghost tells us in that chapter, ver. 3. that "she was a woman of a good understanding." At the same time God exceedingly frowned on Nabal's behaviour on this occasion, as we are informed that about ten days after God smote Nabal that he died; ver. 38.

This story is doubtless told us partly for this end, to discountenance too great a scrupulosity as to the object on whom we bestow our charity, and the making of this merely an objection against charity to others, that we do not certainly know their circumstances. It is true, when we have opportunity to become certainly acquainted with their circumstances, it is well to embrace it: and to be influenced in a measure by probability in such cases, is not to be condemned. Yet it is better to give to several that are not objects of charity, than to send away empty one that is.

2. We are commanded to be kind to strangers whom we know not, nor their circumstances. This is commanded in many places; but I shall mention only one; Heb. 13:2. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." By strangers here the apostle means one whom we know not, and whose circumstances we know not; as is evident by these words,

**"for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Those who entertained angels unawares, did not know the persons whom they entertained, nor their circumstances: else how could it be unawares?**

**OBJECT. VIII. Some may say they are not obliged to give to the poor, till they ask. If any man is in necessity, let him come and make known his straits to me, and then it will be time enough for me to give him. Or if he need a public contribution, let him come and ask. I do not know that the congregation or church is obliged to relieve till they ask relief.—I answer,**

**1. It surely is the most charitable, to relieve the needy in that way wherein we shall do them the greatest kindness. Now it is certain that we shall do them a greater kindness by inquiring into their circumstances, and relieving them, without putting them upon begging. There is none of us but who, if it were their case, would look upon it more kind in our neighbours, to inquire into our circumstances, and help us of their own accord. To put our neighbours upon begging in order to relief, is painful. It is more charitable, more brotherly, more becoming Christians and the disciples of Jesus, to do it without. I think this is self-evident, and needs no proof.**

**2. This is not agreeable to the character of the liberal man given in Scripture; viz. that devises liberal things. Isa. 32:8. It is not to devise liberal things, if we neglect all liberality till the poor come a begging to us. But to inquire who stand in need of our charity, and to contrive to relieve them in the way that shall do them the greatest kindness; that is to devise liberal things.**

**3. We should not commend a man for doing so to his own brother. If a man had an own brother or sister in great**

straits, and he were well able to supply them, under the pretence, that if he or she want any thing, let them come and ask and I will give them; we should hardly think such an one behaved like a brother. Christians are commanded to love as brethren, to look upon one another as brethren in Christ, and to treat one another as such.

4. We should commend others for taking a method contrary to that which is proposed by the objector. If we should hear or read of a people who were so charitable, who took such care of the poor, and were so concerned that none among them should suffer, who were proper objects of charity; that they were wont diligently to inquire into the circumstances of their neighbours, to find out who were needy, and liberally supplied them of their own accord; I say, if we should hear or read of such a people, would it not appear well to us? Should not we have the better thought of that people, on that account?

OBJECT. IX. He has brought himself to want by his own fault.—In reply, it must be considered what you mean by his fault.

1. If you mean a want of a natural faculty to manage affairs to advantage, that is to be considered as his calamity. Such a faculty is a gift that God bestows on some, and not on others; and it is not owing to themselves. You ought to be thankful that God hath given you such a gift, which he hath denied to the person in question. And it will be a very suitable way for you to show your thankfulness, to help those to whom that gift is denied, and let them share the benefit of it with you. This is as reasonable as that he to whom Providence has imparted sight, should be willing to help him to whom sight is denied, and that he should have the benefit of the sight of others, who has none of his own: or, as that he to whom God hath given wisdom, should be

willing that the ignorant should have the benefit of his knowledge.

2. If they have been reduced to want by some oversight, and are to be blamed that they did not consider for themselves better; yet that doth not free us from all obligation to charity towards them. If we should for ever refuse to help men because of that, it would be for us to make their inconsiderateness and imprudent act, an unpardonable crime, quite contrary to the rules of the gospel, which insist so much upon forgiveness.—We should not be disposed so highly to resent such an oversight in any for whom we have a dear affection, as our children, or our friends. We should not refuse to help them in that necessity and distress, which they brought upon themselves by their own inconsiderateness. But we ought to have a dear affection and concern for the welfare of all our fellow-Christians, whom we should love as brethren, and as Christ hath loved us.

3. If they are come to want by a vicious idleness and prodigality; yet we are not thereby excused from all obligation to relieve them, unless they continue in those vices. If they continue not in those vices, the rules of the gospel direct us to forgive them; and if their fault be forgiven, then it will not remain to be a bar in the way of our charitably relieving them. If we do otherwise, we shall act in a manner very contrary to the rule of loving one another as Christ hath loved us. Now Christ hath loved us, pitied us, and greatly laid out himself to relieve us from that want and misery which we brought on ourselves by our own folly and wickedness. We foolishly and perversely threw away those riches with which we were provided, upon which we might have lived and been happy to all eternity.

**4. If they continue in the same courses still, yet that doth not excuse us from charity to their families that are innocent. If we cannot relieve those of their families without their having something of it, yet that ought not to be a bar in the way of our charity; and that because it is supposed that those of their families are proper objects of charity; and those that are so, we are bound to relieve: the command is positive and absolute. If we look upon that which the heads of the families have of what we give, to be entirely lost; yet we had better lose something of our estate, than suffer those who are really proper objects of charity to remain without relief.**

**OBJECT. X. Some may object and say, Others do not their duty. If others did their duty, the poor would be sufficiently supplied. If others did as much as we in proportion to their ability and obligation, the poor would have enough to help them out of their straits. Or some may say, it belongs to others more than it does to us. They have relations that ought to help them; or there are others to whom it more properly belongs than to us.**

**ANS. We ought to relieve those who are in want though brought to it through others' fault. If our neighbour be poor, though others be to blame that it is so, yet that excuses us not from helping him. If it belong to others more than to us, yet if those others will neglect their duty, and our neighbour therefore remains in want, we may be obliged to relieve him. If a man be brought into straits through the injustice of others, suppose by thieves or robbers, as the poor Jew whom the Samaritan relieved; yet we may be obliged to relieve him, though it be not through our fault that he is in want, but through that of other men. And whether that fault be a commission or a neglect alters not the case.**



As to the poor Jew that fell among thieves between Jerusalem and Jericho, it more properly belonged to those thieves who brought him into that distress, to relieve him, than to any other person. Yet seeing they would not do it, others were not excused; and the Samaritan did no more than his duty, relieving him as he did, though it properly belonged to others.—Thus if a man have children or other relations, to whom it most properly belongs to relieve him; yet if they will not do it, the obligation to relieve him falls upon others. So for the same reason we should do the more for the relief of the poor, because others neglect to do their proportion, or what belongs to them; and that because by the neglect of others to do their proportion they need the more, their necessity is the greater.

**OBJECT. XI.** The law makes provision for the poor, and obliges the respective towns in which they live to provide for them; therefore some argue, that there is no occasion for particular persons to exercise any charity this way. They say, the case is not the same with us now, as it was in the primitive church; for then Christians were under a heathen government; and however the charity of Christians in those times be much to be commended, yet now, by reason of our different circumstances, there is no occasion for private charity; because, in the state in which Christians now are, provision is made for the poor otherwise.—This objection is built upon these two suppositions, both which I suppose are false.

1. That the towns are obliged by law to relieve every one who otherwise would be an object of charity. This I suppose to be false, unless it be supposed that none are proper objects of charity, but those that have no estate left to live upon, which is very unreasonable, and what I have already shown to be false, in answer to the fourth objection, in

showing that it doth not answer the rules of christian charity, to relieve only those who are reduced to extremity.

Nor do I suppose it was ever the design of the law, requiring the various towns to support their own poor, to cut off all occasion for christian charity: nor is it fit there should be such a law. It is fit that the law should make provision for those that have no estates of their own; it is not fit that persons who are reduced to that extremity should be left to so precarious a source of supply as a voluntary charity. They are in extreme necessity of relief, and therefore it is fit that there should be something sure for them to depend on. But a voluntary charity in this corrupt world is an uncertain thing. Therefore the wisdom of the legislature did not think fit to leave those who are so reduced, upon such a precarious foundation for subsistence. But I suppose not that it was ever the design of the law to make such provision for all that are in want, as to leave no room for christian charity.

2. This objection is built upon another supposition, which is equally false, viz. That there are in fact none who are proper objects of charity, but those that are relieved by the town. Let the design of the law be what it will, yet if there are in fact persons who are so in want, as to stand in need of our charity, then that law doth not free us from obligation to relieve them by our charity. For as we have just now shown, in answer to the last objection, if it more properly belong to others to relieve them than us; yet if they do it not, we are not free. So that if it be true, that it belongs to the town to relieve all who are proper objects of charity; yet if the town in fact do it not, we are not excused.

If one of our neighbours suffers through the fault of a particular person, of a thief or robber, or of a town, it alters not the case: but if he suffer and be without relief, it

is an act of christian charity in us to relieve him. Now it is too obvious to be denied, that there are in fact persons so in want, that it would be a charitable act in us to help them, notwithstanding all that is done by the town. A man must hide his mental eyes, to think otherwise.

**PROCRASTINATION,**  
**OR,**  
**THE SIN AND FOLLY OF DEPENDING**  
**ON FUTURE TIME\***

**Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. PROV. 27:1**

**THE design of the wise man in this book of Proverbs, is to give us the precepts of true wisdom, or to teach us how to conduct ourselves wisely in the course of our lives. Wisdom very much consists in making a wise improvement of time, and of the opportunities we enjoy. This is often in Scripture spoken of as a great part of true wisdom; as Deut. 32:29. "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" And Psal. 90:12. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." So the wisdom of the wise virgins is represented as consisting much in this, that they improved the proper season to buy oil.**

Therefore the wise man in these books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, agreeably to his design, insists on this part of wisdom. He tells us the advantage of seeking Christ early; Prov. 8:17. And advises us "to do what our hand findeth to do, with our might;" Eccles. 9:10. He advises young people to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, while the evil days come not, in which they shall say they have no pleasure; Eccles. 12:1. So here he advises us to a wise improvement of the present season.—In the words are two things to be particularly observed.

1. The precept, not to boast of to-morrow; i.e. not to speak or act as though it were our own. It is absurd for men to boast of that which is not theirs. The wise man would not have us behave ourselves as though any time were ours but the present. He that boasts of to-morrow, acts as though he had to-morrow in his possession, or had something whereby he might depend on it, and call it his own.

2. The reason given for this precept; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. It is a good reason why we should not behave ourselves as though the morrow were our own, that indeed it is not; we are not sure of it; we have no hold of future time; we know not whether we shall see the morrow: or if we do know that we shall see it, we know not what we shall see on it.—Hence, we ought to behave ourselves every day, as though we had no dependence on any other.

## SECT. I

### Needful precautions

TO prevent a misunderstanding of the doctrine, I observe that it is not meant, that we should in every respect behave as though we knew that we should not live another day. Not

depending on another day, is a different thing, from concluding, that we shall not live another day. We may have reason for the one, and not for the other. We have good reason not to depend on another day, but we have no reason to conclude, that we shall not live another day.

In some respects we ought to carry ourselves, as though we know we should not live another day, and should improve every day as if it were the last. Particularly, we should live every day as conscientiously and as holily as if we knew it were the last. We should be as careful every day to avoid all sin, as if we knew that that night our souls should be required of us. We should be as careful to do every duty which God requires of us, and take as much care that we have a good account to give to our Judge, of our improvement of that day, as if we concluded that we must be called to give an account before another day.

But in many other respects, we are not obliged to behave ourselves as though we concluded that we should not live to another day. If we had reason to conclude that we should not live another day, some things would not be our duty which now are our duty. As for instance, in such a case it would not be the duty of any person to make provision for his temporal subsistence during another day: to neglect which, as things now are, would be very imprudent and foolish, as the consequences would show, if every man were to act in this manner. If so, it would never be man's duty to plough or sow the field, or to lay up for winter; but these things are man's duty; as Prov. 6:6. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." And chap. 10:5, &c. "He that gathereth in the summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest, is a son that causeth shame." And many other places might be mentioned.

**So, on the other hand, if we were certain that we should not live another day, some things would be our duty today, which now are not so. As for instance, it would be proper for us to spend our time in giving our dying counsels, and in setting our houses in order. If it were revealed to us, that we should die before to-morrow morning, we ought to look upon it as a call of God to us, to spend the short remainder of our lives in those things which immediately concern our departure, more than otherwise it would be our duty to do. —Therefore, the words which forbid us to boast of to-morrow, cannot be extended so far as to signify, that we ought in all respects to live, as if we knew we should not see another day. Yet they undoubtedly mean, that we ought not to behave ourselves in any respect, as though we depended on another day.**

## **SECT. II**

### **The precept explained**

**Boast not thyself of to-morrow. In this precept two things seem to be forbidden.**

**1. Boasting ourselves of what shall be on the morrow, or behaving ourselves as though we depended on particular things to come to pass in this world, in some future time. As when men behave themselves, as though they depended on being rich, or promoted to honour hereafter: or as though they were sure of accomplishing any particular design another day. So did the rich man in the gospel, when he did not only promise himself, that he should live many years, but promised himself also, that he should be rich many years. Hence he said to his soul, that he had much goods laid up for many years.**

**And if men act as though they depended upon it, that they should another day accomplish such and such things for their souls, then may they be said to boast themselves of to-morrow, and not to behave themselves as though they depended on no other day. As when they behave themselves, as though they depended upon it, that they should at another day have such and such advantages for the good of their souls; that they should at another day have the strivings of God's Spirit; that they should at another day find themselves disposed to be thorough in seeking their salvation; that they should at another day have a more convenient season; and that God at another day would stand ready to hear their prayers, and show them mercy.**

**Or if they act as though they depended upon it that they should have considerable opportunity on a death-bed to seek mercy; or whatever they promise themselves should come to pass respecting them in this world, if they act as depending on it, they boast themselves of to-morrow.**

**2. Another thing implied, is our boasting of future time itself, or acting as though we depended on it, that we should have our lives continued to us another day. Not only is the command of God delivered in the text transgressed by those who behave themselves as depending upon it, that they shall see and obtain such and such things to-morrow; but by those who act as depending upon it, that they shall remain in being in this world to-morrow.**

**Both these ways of boasting of to-morrow are reproved by the apostle James, chap. 4:13. "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." by promising themselves that they shall do such and such things, and that they shall get gain, they boast themselves of what shall**

come to pass in such a time. The apostle in the next verse teaches them, that they ought not to do this, no nor so much as depend upon seeing another day, or on having their lives continued, ver. 14. "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." And in ver. 15. he teaches us that both are uncertain and dependent on the will of God, viz. Whether we shall live another day, and if we do, whether such and such things shall come to pass? "For that you ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." Therefore he adds in ver. 16. "But now you rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."

### **SECT. III**

**When men act as though they depend on another day**

1. **THEY** will do so, if they set their hearts on the enjoyments of this life. I mean not, if they have any manner of affection to them. We may have some affection to the enjoyments of this world; otherwise they would cease to be enjoyments. If we might have no degree of rejoicing in them, we could not be thankful for them. Persons may in a degree take delight in earthly friends, and other earthly enjoyments. It is agreeable to the wise man's advice that we should do so, Eccles. 5:18. "It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all this labour that he taketh under the sun."—But by setting our hearts on these things, by placing our happiness on them, and letting out the current of our affections after them—by turning and fixing our inclinations so much upon them, that we cannot well enjoy ourselves without them, so that very much of the strength of the faculties of our minds is employed and taken up about these things—we show that we have our dependence on another day.



The man who doth thus, acts as though he depended on another day, yea many other days, in the world; for it is most evident, that if the enjoyments of this world be of such a nature that they are not to be depended on for one day more, they are not worth the setting of our hearts upon them, or the placing of our happiness in them. We may rejoice in the enjoyments of the world, but not in such a manner as to place the rest of our souls in them. As the apostle saith, we should rejoice in them as though we rejoiced not, 1 Cor. 7:30. So that if this joy should fail, our stock may hold good; and in this case we must behave ourselves only as if we had lost a small stream of joy, but still had the fountain in full possession. We should conduct ourselves as those who have not the foundation of their joy shaken, though some appurtenances have failed. Our happiness as to the body of it, if I may so speak, should yet stand as on an immovable foundation.

They who are very much pleased and elated with the enjoyments of the world, certainly behave themselves as though they had much dependence on their continuance for more than one or two days more—They who addict themselves to vain mirth, and lead a jovial life, show that they set their hearts on the enjoyments of the world, and act as those who depend on more days than the present. For if they were sensible that they could not depend on any future time, but that death would put an eternal end to all their carnal mirth before to-morrow, they would have no heart to spend the present day in such a manner as they now do. It would immediately produce in them a disposition far from levity and vanity.

And when persons are very much sunk with the loss of any temporal enjoyments, or with any temporal disappointments, it shows that they set their hearts upon them, and behave as though they boasted of to-morrow,

and depended on their long continuance in life. If they had no such dependence, they would not be frustrated, or would not be overwhelmed by their frustration. If they be very much sunk, and the comfort of their lives be destroyed by it, it shows that those temporal enjoyments were too much the foundation on which their comfort stood. That which makes a building totter, and threatens its destruction, is not the taking away of some of the exterior parts of the superstructure, but the removal of some considerable part of the foundation on which the house stands.

2. If men are proud of their worldly circumstances, it shows that they have a dependence on to-morrow; for no man would think it worth his while to vaunt himself in that which is to be depended on only for a day. Though a man have a great estate to-day, he will not be puffed up with it, unless he depend upon having it to-morrow. A man who hath no dependence, but that he may to-morrow be in the grave, where the small and great are upon a level, Job 3:19. will not be much lifted up with his advancement to a post of honour.

That person will not be proud of his rich and fine clothes, who is sensible that he may be stripped by death to-morrow, and sent out of the world, as he came naked into it. He will not to-day be very proud of his personal beauty, who hath no dependence on escaping to-morrow that stroke of death which will mar all his beauty, and make that face which he now thinks so comely, appear ghastly and horrid; when instead of a ruddy and florid countenance, there will be the blood settled, cold and congealed, the flesh stiff and clayey, the teeth set, the eyes fixed and sunk into the head. Nor will he to-day very much affect to beautify and adorn with gaudy and flaunting apparel, that body concerning which he is sensible that it

may be wrapped in a winding sheet to-morrow, to be carried to the grave, there to rot, and be covered and filled with worms.

3. When men envy others their worldly enjoyments, their wealth, their worldly ease, or their titles and high places—their sensual pleasures, or any of their worldly circumstances—it shows, that they set their hearts on the things of the world; and that they are not sensible that these things are not to be depended upon for another day. If they were, they would not think them worth their envy. They would appear so worthless in their eyes, that they would not care who had them, nor who went without them.—So when they contend about worldly possessions and enjoyments, (as almost all the contentions that are in the world are about these things,) it shows that they have dependence on to-morrow; otherwise they would not think the enjoyments of the world worth contending about. they would be very much of the temper recommended by Jesus Christ, Matt. 5:40. "He that will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."

4. Men behave themselves as if they depended on another day, when they rest at ease to-day, in a condition out of which they must be delivered before they die. When a man's mind is at rest, there is something that he rests in: it must have some foundation, either real or imaginary. But if the man be in a condition from which he is sensible he must some time or other be delivered, or be undone, it is impossible that he should rest in the thoughts of remaining in his condition always, and never being delivered from it: for no man is willing to be ruined; no man can rest in that which he conceives to be connected with his own misery and undoing.—Therefore, if he rest in such a condition for the present, it must be on a supposition, that he shall be delivered from it. If he rest in it to-day, it must be because

**he depends on being delivered another day, and therefore depends on seeing another day.**

**We in this land generally profess, that as we are by sinful nature, we are exposed to eternal death, and that therefore there is a necessity that we get out of a natural condition some time before we die. And those among us who are sensible that they have never passed through any such change as in Scripture is called a being born again, though they be not sufficiently convinced that there is any such place as hell, yet have a kind of belief of it; at least they do not conclude that there is no such place, and therefore cannot but be sensible that it would be dreadful to die unconverted. Therefore, if they be in a considerable degree of ease and quietness in their condition, it must be because they have a dependence on being delivered out of such a condition some time before they die.**

**Inasmuch as they are easy, remaining in such a condition to-day, without any prospect of present deliverance, it shows plainly that they depend on another day. If they did not, they could have no quietness in their spirits; because, if there be no grounds of dependence on any further opportunity, then what they are exposed to, by missing the opportunity which they have to-day, is infinitely dreadful.—Persons who are secure in their sins, under the light of the gospel, unless they be deceived with a false hope, are generally so because they boast themselves of to-morrow. They depend on future opportunity; they flatter themselves with hopes of living long in the world; they depend on what shall come to pass hereafter; they depend on the fulfilment of their good intentions as to what they will do at a more convenient season.**

**5. Men behave themselves as those who depend on another day, when they neglect any thing to-day which must be**

done before they die. If there be any thing, which is absolutely necessary to be done some time before death, and the necessity of it be sufficiently declared and shown to the person for whom it is thus necessary, if he neglect setting about it immediately, sincerely, and with all his might, certainly it carries this face with it, that the man depends upon its being done hereafter, and consequently that he shall have opportunity to do it.—Because, as to those things which are absolutely necessary to be done, there is need, not only of a possibility of a future opportunity; but of something which is to be depended on, some good ground to conclude that we shall have future opportunity; therefore, whoever lives under the gospel, and does not this day thoroughly reform his life, by casting away every abomination, and denying every lust—and doth not apply himself to the practice of the whole of his duty towards God and man, and begin to make religion his main business—he acts as one who depends on another day; because he is abundantly taught that these things must be done before he dies.

Those who have been seeking salvation for a great while, in a dull, insincere, and slighty manner, and find no good effect of it, have abundant reason to conclude, that some time before they die, they must not only seek, but strive to enter in at the strait gate, and must be violent for the kingdom of heaven; and therefore, if they do not begin thus to-day, they act as those who depend on another day.—So those who have hitherto lived in the neglect of some particular known duty, whether it be secret prayer, or paying some old debt, which they have long owed to their neighbour—or the duty of confessing some fault to a brother who hath aught against them, or of making restitution for some injury—they act as those who depend on another day.

**6. Men behave themselves as though they depended on another day, if they do that to-day which some time or other must be undone. There are many things done by men which must be undone by them. They must go back again from the way which they have gone, or they are ruined to all eternity. Therefore, in doing these things, they act as those who depend on future opportunity to undo them: as when a man cheats or defrauds his neighbour in any thing, he acts as one that boasts of to-morrow: for he must undo what he doth before he dies; he must some time or other make restitution, or divine justice, which oversees all things, and governs the whole world, and will see to it that right be done, will not let go its hold of him.**

**So when men hearken to temptation, and yield to the solicitations of their lusts to commit any sin, they act as those who depend on another day. They do what must be undone. What they then do must be undone by hearty and thorough repentance, or they are ruined and lost for ever. So if persons have been seeking salvation for a time, and afterwards are guilty of backsliding, and turn back after their hands have been put to the plough, they act as those who depend on another day. For what they now do, they must undo some time or other; they must go back again from their backsliding, and have all their work to do over again. And these things must be undone in this world, while men live; for there will be no undoing of them afterwards; they may be suffered for, but never can be undone.**

#### **SECT. IV**

**Why we ought not to boast of to-morrow**

**I COME now to show, why we ought not thus to boast ourselves of to-morrow; but on the contrary, to behave**

ourselves every day as though we had no dependence on another. And there is this plain and sufficient REASON for it, viz. That we have no grounds of dependence on another day. We have neither any foundation to depend upon seeing any particular things come to pass another day, which we may hope or wish for, nor upon enjoying another day in this world. We have nothing for a foundation of dependence that we shall not be in eternity before to-morrow, as both reason and experience show.—We have no promise of God that we shall ever see another day. We are in God's hands; our lives are in his hands; he hath set our bounds; the number of our months and days are with him; nor hath he told them to us. We see that the life of man at longest is very short, and nothing is more uncertain; and it is a thing universal among mankind, that they know not the day of their death. We see that great natural abilities, and sharpness of wit, and clearness of discernment, do not help to any discovery in this matter. Wise men are as uncertain of the term of their lives as others.

There are so many ways and means whereby the lives of men come to an end, that no circumstances in which a man can be are any security to him from death. That it is but a very little while till to-morrow, is no good ground of dependence that we shall live till then. We see that deaths as sudden as our dying before to-morrow morning, are common in the world. We very often see or hear of sudden deaths. How many suddenly, in a few minutes, pass from a state of health to a state of death, in the daytime, by several kinds of disease, which give no warning of their approach, and by many unforeseen accidents! How many go to sleep in health, and are found dead in their beds in the morning! So that our present health is no good ground of dependence that we shall live to see another day.—That persons are now in youth is no good ground of dependence upon another day; for sudden unexpected deaths are

common even among those who are in the bloom of youth. Nor is it any ground of dependence in this case, that a man is of a more than ordinary healthy and strong constitution. It is found by experience, that such are liable to sudden death as well as others: Job 21:23. "One dieth in his full strength. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow."

That persons have already lived to see a great many days, and that after they had been often in times past told, that they were uncertain of any future time; or that persons have a strong desire to live longer; or that they are now very unprepared for death, both on temporal and spiritual accounts; is no ground of dependence on the future. Death tarries for no man, but comes when and to whom he is sent, and strikes the deadly blow, whether the man be prepared or not. That men have been very useful in their day, and that it is of great importance to their families and neighbours that they should live longer, is no ground of dependence. The most useful men are often cut down by death, in the midst of their usefulness. The same may be said, though we cannot see which way death should come at us before to-morrow. To how many accidents, to how many diseases, are we liable, which may prove fatal before to-morrow, which yet it is impossible for us to foresee! So, if we be very careful of our lives, and our health, not to expose ourselves to any dangers, still this is no ground of dependence as to any future time. Death comes in many ways which were not thought of. Men foresee not the means of their death, any more than the fish securely swimming in the water foresee the net, or the bird that securely feeds upon the bait sees the snare. It is as the wise man observes, in Eccles. 9:12. "For man also knoweth not his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of



**men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."**

## **SECT. V**

### **Serious inquiries**

**I SHALL improve this doctrine, by putting you upon examining yourselves, whether you do not boast yourselves of to-morrow, or whether you do not live in such a manner as you would not, were it not that you depend on future time and future opportunity in the world. Would not your behaviour be very different from what it now is, if you every day lived and acted without any dependence on seeing one day more?—You cannot but acknowledge it to be most reasonable, that you should live and act thus. You cannot but own, that you have no good ground of dependence on another day; and therefore that you cannot act wisely any otherwise than in acting as one who hath no dependence on any such thing. Therefore inquire whether you act wisely and reasonably in this respect.**

**1. Do you not set your hearts much more on this world, than you would, if you had no dependence on the morrow? Is not the language of the rich man in the gospel, the secret language of your hearts? "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years," &c. Is not this the language of your hearts, with respect to what you have gotten already; which makes you place your happiness so much in it? And with respect to what of the world you are seeking and pursuing, is it not with a dependence on enjoying it for a great while, when you shall have obtained it? Are not your lands and other possessions which you have gotten, or are about to get, in your own imagination, yours for a great while?—Would your mind be so filled with thoughts and cares about these things, so much to the exclusion of another**

world; would you lay yourselves under so great disadvantages for your soul's good, by involving yourselves in worldly cares; if you had no dependence on having any thing to do with these things for more than the present day? If you did not depend on considerably more time in the world, would your inquiry be so much, What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed? and so little, How shall we make our calling and election sure? how shall we be assured that we are upon a good foundation for another world, and that we are in such a state, that death cannot hurt us? How shall we be sure that we are ready to appear before the judgment-seat of a heart-searching God?—Would there be so much of your time spent in laying up treasure on earth—and so little in laying up treasure in heaven, that you might have store against the day of death—were it not that you put death at a distance? Would you be so much raised at your temporal prosperity, and so much sunk when you meet with crosses and disappointments in your worldly affairs, if you did not think that continuance in the world is to be depended on for more days than the present?—Let those who very much affect to adorn their bodies in gaudy apparel, inquire whether they would think it worth their while to spend so much time to make themselves fine, and to set themselves forth as gayer than others, if they really had no dependence that their bodies would be preserved one day longer from being clasped in the cold arms of death?

2. Inquire, whether you would not much less meddle with the concerns of others, and be much more employed with your own hearts, if each day you had no dependence on living another day. If you were sensible that you had had no other day to depend upon than this, you would be sensible that you had great affairs of your own to attend to. You would find a great deal of business at home between God and your own soul; and considering that you cannot

depend on another day, it would seem to you that you have but a short time in which to do it, and that therefore you have need to be much engaged. You would say as Christ did, I must work while the day lasts, for the night cometh, wherein no man can work. You would find so much to be done, and so much difficulty in doing it, that you would have little leisure, and little heart, to intermeddle with the business of others. Your business would be confined to a much narrower compass. You would have so much to do at home in your closets, and with your own hearts, that you would find no occasion to go abroad for intermeddling business to fill up your time.

But the truth is, men conceive of a great deal of time which they have to be filled up, and hence they want business: they depend on to-morrow, and the day following, and next month, and next year, yea many years to come. When they are young they depend on living to be middle-aged, and when middle-aged they depend on old age, and always put far away the day of death. Let them be young or old, there always seems to them to be a great vacancy between them and death; hence they wander to and fro for business to fill up that vacancy.—Whereas if they were sensible of the uncertainty of life, they would, in the first place, make sure of their own business; the business of their own precious, immortal souls would be done, before they would attend much to the business of other people. They would have no desire or disposition to concern themselves with every private quarrel which breaks out in the neighbourhood. They would not think it much concerned them to inquire into the matter, and to pass their censure on the affair. They would find something else to do, than to set by the hour together, discussing and censuring the conduct of such and such persons, gathering up or rehearsing the stories which are carried about to the disadvantage of this and that person.

We seldom, if ever, see men who are upon sick-beds, and look upon themselves very dangerously sick, disposed to spend their time in this manner; and the reason is, that they look upon it doubtful whether they shall live long. They do not, so much as others, depend on much time to spare; hence their minds are taken up more about their own souls' concerns, than about the concerns of others. So it would be with persons in health, if their health did not make them depend on a great deal of time in the world.

3. If you each day depend on no other but the present, would you not engage and interest yourselves much less in party designs and schemes, than you are now wont to do? Among a people divided into two parties, as this town hath been for a long time, there is commonly much done by the partizans in forming schemes of opposition to one another. There is always a strife, who shall get their wills and carry their point. This often engages them, if not in open quarrels, in secret intrigues. That there is so much done in these things, is a certain evidence that they boast themselves of to-morrow, and put death at a distance.

Men would certainly find themselves very much indisposed to such things, if they were so sensible of the uncertainty of life, as to depend on no other day than the present. It is therefore very proper, that you should examine yourselves in this particular, at this time. If you really depended on no other day than the present, would your hearts be so much engaged in strife between two parties, as they often are? Would your spirits be so often raised and ruffled? Would you go about with so much prejudice against such and such men: harbouring so much of the old leaven, which so often breaks out in heats of spirit; and, as an old sore which was skinned over, but not cured, sets to raging with a touch which would not have hurt sound flesh?—Commonly in the management of a strife between two parties, there is a

great deal of envy. When any who belong to one of the parties seem to prosper, the other party will envy them; it is a grievous thing to them. So there is also much contempt; when one of the parties gets the ascendant a little over the other, they are ready to make the utmost improvement of it, and to insult the other party.—And there is commonly in such cases a great deal of mutual secret reproach. When those of one party get together, then is the time to inveigh against those of the other party, and to set forth their injustice and their fraudulent practices. Then is the time for them to pass their censure on their words and actions. Then is the time to expose their own surmises and suspicions of what the other party intends, what it aims at in such and such things, what the purposes of individuals are, and what they suppose their secret actions are.—Then is the time for all that are friends in the cause, and engaged in the same designs, to entertain one another by ridiculing the words and actions of the other party, and to make themselves sport of their folly and disappointments; and much is done at calling one another Raca and fools, or other names equivalent, if not much more than equivalent. Then is the time to lay their heads together, to plot and contrive how they shall manage such an affair so as to disappoint the other party, and obtain their own wills.

Brethren, these things ought not so to be among a christian people; especially among a people that has made the profession which we have made. Nor would they be so if it were not for your dependence on much future time in the world. If you were so sensible of your continual liableness to death, that every day was the last you depended upon, these things certainly would not be so. For let us but consider what are the effects of death with respect to such things. It puts an end to party-quarrels. Many men hold these quarrels as long as they live. They begin young, and

hold on through many great and sore afflictions and chastisements of Providence. The old sore remains, when the supporters of nature bow, and the eyes grow dim, and the hands tremble with age. But death, when that comes, puts an end to all their quarrelling in this world. Death silences the most clamorous, and censorious, and backbiting tongue. When men are dead, they cease to lay schemes against those of another party; death dashes all their schemes, so far as they have any concern in them. Psal. 146:4. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

When men are dead, they cease to bite and devour others; as it is said to have been of old a proverb among the Egyptians, Dead men do not bite. There are many who will bite and devour as long as they live, but death tames them. Men could not be quiet or safe by them while alive, but none will be afraid of them when dead. The bodies of those that made such a noise and tumult when alive, when dead, lie as quietly among the graves of their neighbours as any others. Their enemies, of whom they strove to get their wills while alive, get their wills of them when they are dead. Nothing can please their enemies better than to have them out of their way. It suits them, that those who were so troublesome to them, are locked up safe in the close grave, where they will no more stand in their way.—There are no more effects of their pride, their craftiness, their hatred and envy. Eccles. 9:6. "Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished."

The time will soon come, when you who have for many years been at times warmly contending one with another, will be very peaceable as to this world. Your dead bodies will probably lie quietly together in the same burying place. If you do not leave off contending before death, how natural will it be for others to have such thoughts as these,

when they see your corpses; What! is this the man who used to be so busy in carrying on the designs of his party? Oh, now he has done; now he hath no more any part in any of these things; now it doth not at all concern him, who get their wills, or what party is uppermost. We shall hear his voice no more in our town meetings. He will not sit any more to reproach and laugh at others. He is gone to appear before his Judge, and to receive according to his conduct in life.—The consideration of such things as these would certainly have a mighty effect among us, if we did not put far away the day of death. If all acted every day as not depending on any other day, we should be a peaceable, quiet people.

4. Inquire, whether or no you do not allow yourselves in some things, and endeavour to flatter yourselves that there is no evil in them, which you would by no means dare to do if you had not a dependence on living till tomorrow. It is very common among men, when they are strongly enticed to some sinful practice, by their worldly interest, or by their carnal appetites, to pretend that they do not think there is any evil in it; when indeed they know better. Their pretence is only to serve a present turn. And if they expected to have their souls required of them that night, they would by no means dare to persist in the practice.—Therefore examine the liberties you take by this test. What would you think of them, if you now should have the following news sent you by some messenger from heaven; John, or Thomas, (or whatever your name be,) this night shall thy soul be required of thee. How would such tidings strike you! How would they alter the face of things! Doubtless your thoughts would be very quick; you would soon begin to reflect on yourselves, and to examine your past and present conduct. And in what colours would the liberties you now take, appear to you in the case now supposed? Would you then conclude, that there is no evil in

them? Would you not be less bold to go forward and meet death, for having continued in such practices? Would you dare to commit such acts again before you die, which now you pretend are lawful? Would not the few hours which you would have to live, be at all the more uncomfortable to you for having done such things? Would you not presently wish that you had let them alone? Yea, would they not appear frightful and terrifying to you? If it be thus, it is a sign that the reason why you now allow yourselves in them, and plead for their lawfulness, is that you put death at a distance, and depend on many other days in the world.

5. Inquire, whether you do not some things on the presumption, that you shall hereafter repent of them. Is not this the very thing which causes you to dare to do some things? Is it not the very ground on which you venture to gratify your lusts? Let young people examine all their secret carriage; what they do alone in the dark and in secret corners. God knoweth, and your own hearts know, though men do not. Put the question impartially to your own consciences; is not this the very thing that gives you courage, that God is very merciful, and that he often of his sovereign mercy gives repentance of great sins, and even wilful sins, and in consequence of repentance forgives? And so you hope that one day or other he will do so to you. You intend some time hereafter earnestly to seek; and you hope you shall be awakened. And if you be very earnest, as you intend to be, you hope you shall be converted, and then you shall be forgiven, and it will be as well as if you had never committed such sins.

If this be the case, consider how you boast of to-morrow, and foolishly depend on future opportunity to repent, as well as foolishly presume on the mercy of God to give you repentance, at the same time that you take a course to provoke God, for ever to give you up to a sealed hardness



and blindness, and to a most fearful damnation; not considering that God will glorify his revenging justice as well as his mercy; nor remembering the sad example of Esau, "who for a morsel of meat sold his birthright; and afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Heb. 12:16, 17.

6. Inquire, whether you improve this day, as one who doth not depend upon ever having opportunity to keep another sabbath, or to hear or read another discourse. It appears from what hath been already said, that you have no grounds to depend on any more such opportunities. Now the day is present, and so you are in the better capacity to determine how it is with you. It is but for you to reflect upon yourselves, to look inward, and see how it is with you at this present time. And how is it? Are you as strict and as diligent in keeping this sabbath, watching your thoughts, keeping your hearts, striving in duties both public and private, and improving ordinances, as might be expected of one who hath no dependence on ever enjoying such an opportunity any more; one who doth not depend on ever setting foot again within the walls of God's house?—Do you attend to this address with that care, and desire, and endeavour to improve it for your good, as you would, if you did not depend upon it, that your bodies would not be in the grave, and your souls fixed in eternity, in their unalterable state, before the next sabbath?

7. Are you careful to see to it that the grounds of your hope are good? A man who hath some hope of being in a state of acceptance with God, but is not sure, if he had no dependence on any other day's opportunity of making it sure, would be very strict in examining himself and searching the grounds of his hope, and would not rest in an uncertainty. He would be very thorough in informing

himself what might be depended on as good evidence of an interest in Christ, and what not; and would be exceedingly strict in searching his own heart, to see whether there was any thing in him that comes up to the requisites laid down in the Scriptures.—If what appears hopeful in him were dim and obscure, he would set himself very earnestly to obtain that which would be more clear and manifest, and would cry earnestly to God for it, and would apply himself to a diligent use of means in order to it. And good reason why; for he depends on no other opportunity to make his calling and election sure, than what he hath to-day. Inquire therefore whether you be thus thorough in examining your hope. And are you thus careful effectually to see to it, that you are on a sure foundation? If not, then you behave yourselves as those that depend on to-morrow.

## **SECT. VI**

### **How to spend every day**

GOD hath concealed from us the day of our death, without doubt, partly for this end, that we might be excited to be always ready, and might live as those that are always waiting for the coming of their Lord, agreeably to the counsel which Christ gives us, Matt. 24:42, 43, 44. 25:13. and Mark 13:32, &c.—That watchman is not faithful who, being set to defend a house from thieves, or a city from an enemy at hand, will at any hour venture to sleep, trusting that the thief or the enemy will not come. Therefore it is expected of the watchman, that he behave himself every hour of the night, as one who doth not depend upon it that the enemy will tarry until the next hour. Now therefore let me, in Christ's name, renew the call and counsel of Jesus Christ to you, to watch as those that know not what hour your Lord will come. Let me call upon you who are hitherto in an unrenewed condition. Depend not upon it, that you

**will not be in hell before tomorrow morning. You have no reason for any such dependence; God hath not promised to keep you from it, or to withhold his wrath so long.**

**How can you reasonably be easy or quiet for one day, or one night, in such a condition, when you know not but your Lord will come this night? And if you should then be found, as you now are, unregenerate, how unprepared would you be for his coming, and how fearful would be the consequence! Be exhorted therefore, for your own sakes, immediately to awake from the sleep of sin, out of sleep, and sleep no more, as not depending on any other day.—Let me exhort you to have no dependence on any future time; to keep every sabbath, and to hear every sermon, as if it were the last. And when you go into your closet, and address yourself to your Father who seeth in secret, do it in no dependence on any future opportunity to perform the same duty. When you that are young go into company for amusement and diversion, consider that it may be the last opportunity of the like nature that ever you may have. In all your dealings with your neighbours, act as if you were never to make another bargain. Behave in your families every day, as though you depended on no other.—Here I shall offer you two motives.**

**1. Consider, if you will hearken to this counsel, how much it will tend to your safety and peace in life and death. It is the way really and truly to be ready for death; yea, to be fit to live or fit to die; to be ready for affliction and adversity, and for whatever God in his providence shall bring upon you. It is the way to be in, not only an habitual, but actual preparedness for all changes, and particularly for your last change.—It is the way to possess your souls in a serene and undisturbed peace, and to enable you to go on with an immovable fortitude of soul, to meet the most frightful changes, to encounter the most formidable enemies, and to**

be ready with unshaken confidence to triumph over death whenever you meet him; to have your hearts fixed, trusting in God, as one that stands on a firm foundation, and hath for his habitation the munition of rocks, that is not afraid of evil tidings, but laughs at the fear of the enemy. It will be the way for you to possess that quietness and assurance spoken of, Isa. 32:17. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."—The servant who always stands watching, will not be at all surprised at the news that his Lord is coming. This will be the way for you to live above the fear of death. Yea, if heaven and earth should shake, you may stand firm and unshaken, being settled on a rock, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. O how happy are such persons, who have such safety and peace! What a blessed peace is that which arises from such a constant preparation for death! How happy therefore is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing!

2. What dismal calamities and miseries mankind are subject to for want of this, for want of behaving themselves every day, as not depending on any future day! The way of the world is, one day foolishly to depend on another, yea on many others. And what is the consequence? Why, the consequence with respect to the greater part of the world is, that they live all their days without any true peace or rest of soul. They are all their lifetime subject to bondage through fear of death. And when death sensibly approaches they are put into a terrible fright. They have a dismal view of their past lives; the ill improvement of their time, and the sins they have been guilty of, stand staring them in the face, and are more frightful to them than so many devils. And when they look forward into that eternity whither they are going, how dismal is the prospect! O how do their hearts shrink at the thought of it! They go before the

judgment-seat of God, as those that are dragged thither, while they would gladly, if they could, hide themselves in the caves and dens of the earth.

And what is worse yet than all the disquietude and terror of conscience in this world; the consequence of a contrary behaviour, with respect to the bulk of mankind, is their eternal perdition. They flatter themselves that they shall see another day, and then another, and trust to that, until finally most of them are swallowed up in hell, to lament their folly to all eternity, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.—Consider how it was with all the foolish virgins who trusted to the delay of the bridegroom's coming: when he came they were surprised, and found unprepared, having no oil in their lamps; and while they went to buy, those who were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut against them, and they came afterwards crying in vain, Lord, Lord, open to us.

## ***God the Best Portion of the Christian***

***"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." -- Psalm 73:25***

**Subject: 'Tis the spirit of a truly godly man to prefer God before all other things either in heaven or earth.**

In this psalm, the psalmist (Asaph) relates the great difficulty which existed in his own mind, from the consideration of the wicked. He observes, verses 2 and 3, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." In the 4th and following verses, he informs us, what in the wicked was his temptation. In the first place, he observed, that they

were *prosperous*, and all things went well with them. He then observed their *behavior* in their prosperity, and the use which they made of it; and that God, notwithstanding such abuse, *continued* their prosperity. Then he tells us by what means he was helped out of this difficulty, *viz.* by going into the *sanctuary*, verses 16, 17. And [he] proceeds to inform us what considerations they were which helped him, *viz.* — (1.) The consideration of the *miserable end* of wicked men. However they prosper for the present, yet they come to a woeful end at last, verses 18-20. — (2.) The consideration of the *blessed end* of the saints. Although the saints, while they live, may be afflicted, yet they come to a happy end at last, verses 21-24. — (3.) The consideration, that the godly have much *better portion* than the wicked, even though they have no other portion but God; as in the text and following verse. Though the wicked are in prosperity, [they] are not in trouble as other men. Yet the godly, though in affliction, are in a state infinitely better, because they have God for their portion. They need desire nothing else. He that hath God, hath all. Thus the psalmist professes the sense and apprehension which he had of things: *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

In the verse immediately preceding, the psalmist takes notice how the saints are happy in God, both when they are in this world, and also when they are taken to another. They are blessed in God in this world, in that he *guides them by his counsel*. And when he takes them out of it, they are still happy, in that then he *receives them to glory*. This probably led him, in the text, to declare that he desired *no other portion*, either in this world or in that to come, either in heaven or upon earth. — Whence we learn, *That it is the spirit of a truly godly man, to prefer God before all other things, either in heaven or on earth.*

## **I. A godly man prefers God before anything else *in heaven*.**

***First*, he prefers God before anything else that *actually* is in heaven. Every godly man hath his heart in heaven; his affections are mainly set on what is to be had there. Heaven is his chosen country and inheritance. He hath respect to heaven, as a traveler, who is in a distant land, hath to his own country. The traveler can content himself to be in a strange land for a while, but his own native land is preferred by him to all others: Heb. 11:13, etc. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.” — The respect which a godly person hath to heaven may be compared to the respect which a child, when he is abroad, hath to his father’s house. He can be contented abroad for a little while; but the place to which he desires to return, and in which to dwell, is his own home. Heaven is the true saint’s Father’s house: John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” John 20:17, “I ascend to my Father and your Father.”**

**Now, the main reason why the godly man hath his heart thus to heaven is because God is there; that is the palace of the Most High. It is the place where God is gloriously present, where his love is gloriously manifested, where the godly may be with him, see him as he is, and love, serve, praise, and enjoy him perfectly. If God and Christ were not in heaven, he would not be so earnest in seeking it, nor would he take so much pains in a laborious travel through this wilderness, nor would the consideration that he is**

going to heaven when he dies, be such a comfort to him under toils and afflictions. The martyrs would not undergo cruel sufferings, from their persecutors, with a cheerful prospect of going to heaven, did they not expect to be with Christ, and to enjoy God there. They would not with that cheerfulness forsake all their earthly possessions, and all their earthly friends, as many thousands of them have done, and wander about in poverty and banishment, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, in hopes of exchanging their earthly for a heavenly inheritance, were it not that they hope to be with their glorious Redeemer and heavenly Father. — The believer's heart is in heaven, because his treasure is there.

*Second*, a godly man prefers God before anything else that *might be* in heaven. Not only is there nothing *actually* in heaven, which is in his esteem equal with God; but neither is there any of which he can conceive as *possible to be there*, which by him is esteemed and desired equally with God. Some suppose quite different enjoyments to be in heaven, from those which the Scriptures teach us. The Mahometans, for instance, suppose that in heaven are to be enjoyed all manner of sensual delights and pleasures. Many things which Mahomet has feigned are to the lusts and carnal appetites of men the most agreeable that he could devise, and with them he flattered his followers. — But the true saint could not contrive one more agreeable to his inclination and desires, than such as is revealed in the Word of God; a heaven of enjoying the glorious God, and the Lord Jesus Christ. There he shall have all sin taken away, and shall be perfectly conformed to God, and shall spend an eternity in exalted exercises of love to him, and in the enjoyment of his love. If God were not to be enjoyed in heaven, but only vast wealth, immense treasures of silver, and gold, great honor of such kind as men obtain in this world, and a fullness of



the greatest sensual delights and pleasures; all these things would not make up for the want of God and Christ, and the enjoyment of them there. If it were empty of God, it would indeed be an empty melancholy place. — The godly have been made sensible, as to all creature-enjoyments, that they cannot satisfy the soul; and therefore nothing will content them but God. Offer a saint what you will, [but] if you deny him God, he will esteem himself miserable. God is the center of his desires; and as long as you keep his soul from its proper center, it will not be at rest.

**II.** It is the temper of a godly man to prefer God before all other things *on the earth*.

*First*, the saint prefers that enjoyment of God, for which he *hopes* hereafter, to anything in this world. He looketh not so much at the things which are seen and temporal, as at those which are unseen and eternal, 2 Cor. 4:18. It is but a little of God that the saint enjoys in this world. He hath but a little acquaintance with God, and enjoys but a little of the manifestations of the divine glory and love. But God hath promised to give him Himself hereafter in a full enjoyment. And these promises are more precious to the saint, than the most precious earthly jewels. The gospel contains greater treasures, in his esteem, than the cabinets of princes, or the mines of the Indies.

*Second*, the saints prefer what of God may be *obtained* in this life before all things in the world. There is a great difference in the present spiritual attainments of the saints. Some attain to much greater acquaintance and communion with God, and conformity to him, than others. But the highest attainments are very small in comparison with what is future. The saints are capable of making progress in spiritual attainments, and they earnestly desire such further attainments. Not contented with those

degrees to which they have already attained, they hunger and thirst after righteousness, and, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. It is their desire, to know more of God, to have more of his image, and to be enabled more to imitate God and Christ in their walk and conversation. Psa. 27:4, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.” Psa. 42:1, 2, “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” Psa. 63:1, 2, “O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.” See also Psa. 84:1, 2, 3 and Psa. 130:6, “My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

Though every saint has not this longing desire after God to the same degree that the psalmist had, yet they are all of the same spirit. They earnestly desire to have more of his presence in their hearts. That this is the temper of the godly in general, and not of some particular saints only, appears from Isa. 26:8, 9, where not any particular saint, but the church in general speaks thus: “Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.” See also Song 3:1, 2, 6, 8.

The saints are not always in the lively exercise of grace, but such a spirit they have, and sometimes they have the

sensible exercise of it. They desire God and divine attainments, more than all earthly things; and seek to be rich in grace, more than they do to get earthly riches. They desire the honor which is of God, more than that which is of men, John 5:44, and communion with him, more than any earthly pleasures. They are of the same spirit which the apostle expresses, Phil. 3:8, “Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.”

*Third*, the saint prefers *what he hath already of God* before anything in this world. That which was infused into his heart at his conversion, it more precious to him than anything which the world can afford. The views which are sometimes given him of the beauty and excellency of God, are more precious to him than all the treasures of the wicked. The relation of a child in which he stands to God, the union which there is between his soul and Jesus Christ, he values more than the greatest earthly dignity. That image of God which is enstamped on his soul, he values more than any earthly ornaments. It is, in his esteem, better to be adorned with the graces of God’s Holy Spirit, than to be made to shine in jewels of gold, and the most costly pearls, or to be admired for the greatest external beauty. He values the robe of Christ’s righteousness, which he hath on his soul, more than the robes of princes. The spiritual pleasures and delights which he sometimes has in God, he prefers far before all the pleasures of sin. Psa. 84:10, “A day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

A saint thus prefers God before all other things in this world — 1. As he prefers God before anything else that he *possesses* in the world. Whatever temporal enjoyments

he has, he prefers God to them all. Psa. 16:5, 6, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” If he be rich, he chiefly sets his heart on his heavenly riches. He prefers God before any earthly friend, and the divine favor before any respect shown him by his fellow-creatures. Although inadvertently, these have room in his heart, and too much room; yet he reserves the throne for God; Luke 14:26, “If man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

2. He prefers God before any earthly enjoyment of which he *hath a prospect*. The children of men commonly set their hearts more on some earthly happiness for which they *hope*, and after which they are seeking, than on what they *have* in present possession. But a godly man prefers God to anything which he has in prospect in this world. He may, indeed, through the prevalence of corruption, be for a season carried away with some enjoyment. However, he will again come to himself. This is not the temper of the man; he is of another spirit.

3. It is the spirit of a godly man to prefer God to any earthly enjoyments of which he *can conceive*. He not only prefers him to anything which he now possesses, but he sees nothing possessed by any of his fellow-creatures, so estimable. Could he have as much worldly prosperity as he would, could he have earthly things just to his mind, and agreeable to his inclination; he values the portion which he has in God, incomparably more. He prefers Christ to earthly kingdoms.

## APPLICATION

***First***, hence we may learn, that whatever changes a godly man passes through, he is happy; because God, who is unchangeable, is his chosen portion. Though he meet with temporal losses, and be deprived of many, yea, of all his temporal enjoyments; yet God, whom he prefers before all, still remains, and cannot be lost. While he stays in this changeable, troublesome world, he is happy; because his chosen portion, on which he builds as his main foundation for happiness, is above the world, and above all changes. And when he goes into another world, still he is happy, because that portion yet remains. Whatever he be deprived of, he cannot be deprived of his chief portion; his inheritance remains sure to him. — Could worldly-minded men find out a way to secure to themselves those earthly enjoyments on which they mainly set their hearts, so that they could not be lost nor impaired while they live, how great would they account the privilege, though other things which they esteem in a less degree, were liable to the same uncertainty as they now are! Whereas now, those earthly enjoyments, on which men chiefly set their hearts, are often most fading. But how great is the happiness of those who have chosen the Fountain of all good, who prefer him before all things in heaven or on earth, and who can never be deprived of him to all eternity!

***Second***, let all by these things examine and try themselves, whether they be saints or not. As this which hath been exhibited is the spirit of the saints, so it is peculiar to them. None can use the language of the text, and say, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee*, but the saints. A man's choice is that which determines his state. He that chooses God for his portion, and prefers him to all other things, is a godly man, for *he* chooses and worships him as God. To respect him as God, is to respect him above all other things. And if any man respect Him as *his* God, *his God he is*. There is an

union and covenant relation between that man and the true God. — Every man is as his God is. If you would know what a man is, whether he be a godly man or not, you must inquire what his God is. If the true God be he to whom he hath a supreme respect, whom he regards above all; he is doubtless a servant of the true God. But if the man have something else to which he pays a greater respect than to Jehovah, he is not a godly man.

Inquire, therefore, how it is with you, — whether you prefer God before all other things. It may sometimes be a difficulty for persons to determine this to their satisfaction. The ungodly may be deluded with false affections; the godly in dull frames may be at a loss about it. Therefore you may try yourselves, as to this matter, several ways; if you cannot speak fully to one thing, yet you may perhaps to others.

1. What is it which *chiefly* makes you desire to go to heaven when you die? Indeed some have no great desire to go to heaven. They do not care to go to hell; but if they could be safe from that, they would not much concern themselves about heaven. If it be not so with you, but you find that you have a desire after heaven, then inquire what it is for. Is the main reason, that you may be with God, have communion with him, and be conformed to him? that you may see God, and enjoy him there? Is this the consideration which keeps your hearts, and your desires, and your expectations towards heaven?

2. If you could avoid death, and might have your free choice, would you choose to live *always* in this world, without God, rather than in his time to leave the world, in order to be with him? If you might live here in earthly prosperity to all eternity, but destitute of the presence of God and communion with him — having no spiritual intercourse between him and your souls, God and you

being strangers to each other for ever — would you choose this rather than to leave the world, in order to dwell in heaven, as the children of God, there to enjoy the glorious privileges of children, in holy and perfect love to God, and enjoyment of him to all eternity?

3. Do you prefer Christ to all others as the *way* to heaven? He who truly chooses God, prefers him in each person of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: the Father, as his Father; the Son as his Savior; the Holy Ghost, as his Sanctifier. Inquire, therefore, not only whether you choose the enjoyment of God in heaven as your highest portion and happiness, but also whether you choose Jesus Christ before all others, as your way to heaven. And that in a sense of the excellency of Christ, and of the way of salvation by him, as being that which is to the glory of Christ, and of sovereign grace. Is the way of free grace, by the blood and righteousness of the blessed and glorious Redeemer, the most excellent way to life in your esteem? Doth it add a value to the heavenly inheritance, that it is conferred in this way? Is this far better to you than to be saved by your own righteousness, by any of your own performances, or by any other mediator?

4. If you might go to heaven in what course you please, would you prefer to all others the way of a *strict walk* with God? They who prefer God as hath been represented, choose him, not only in the end, but in the way. They had rather be with God than with any other, not only when they come to the end of their journey, but also while they are in their pilgrimage. They choose the way of walking with God, though it be a way of labor, and care, and self-denial, rather than a way of sin, though it be a way of sloth, and of gratifying their lusts.

**5. Were you to spend your eternity in this world, would you choose rather to live in mean and low circumstances with the gracious presence of God, than to live for ever in earthly prosperity without him? Would you rather spend it in holy living, and serving and walking with God, and in the enjoyment of the privileges of his children? God often manifesting himself to you as your Father, discovering to you his glory, and manifesting his love, lifting the light of his countenance upon you! Would you rather choose these things, though in poverty, than to abound in worldly things, and to live in ease and prosperity, at the same time being an alien from the common wealth of Israel? Could you be content to stand in no child-like relation to God, enjoying no gracious intercourse with him, having no right to be acknowledged by him as his children? Or would such a life as this, though in ever so great earthly prosperity, be esteemed by you a miserable life?**

**If, after all, there remain with you doubts, and a difficulty to determine concerning yourselves whether you do truly and sincerely prefer God to all other things, I would mention two things which are the surest ways to be determined in this matter, and which seem to be the best grounds of satisfaction in it.**

**(1) The feeling of some particular, strong, and lively *exercise* of such a spirit. A person may have such a spirit as is spoken of in the doctrine, and may have the exercise of it in a low degree, and yet remain in doubt whether he have it or not, and be unable to come to a satisfying determination. But God is pleased sometimes to give such discoveries of his glory, and of the excellency of Christ, as do so draw forth the heart, that they know beyond all doubt, that they feel such a spirit as Paul spoke of, when he said, “he counted all things but loss for the excellency of Christ Jesus his Lord;” and they can boldly**



say, as in the text, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.” At such times the people of God do not need any help of ministers to satisfy them whether they have the true love of God. They plainly see and feel it; and the Spirit of God then witnesseth with their spirits, that they are the children of God. — Therefore, if you would be satisfied upon this point, earnestly seek such attainments; seek that you may have such clear and lively exercises of this spirit. To this end, you must labor to grow in grace. Though you have had such experiences in times past, and they satisfied you then, yet you may again doubt. You should therefore seek that you may have them more frequently; and the way to that is, earnestly to press forward, that you may have more acquaintance with God, and have the principles of grace strengthened. This is the way to have the exercises of grace stronger, more lively, and more frequent, and so to be satisfied that you have a spirit of supreme love to God.

(2) The other way is to inquire whether you prefer God to all other things in *practice*, i.e. when you have occasion to manifest by your practice which you prefer — when you must either cleave to one or the other, and must either forsake other things, or forsake God — whether then it be your manner practically to prefer God to all other things whatever, even to those earthly things to which your hearts are most wedded. Are your lives those of adherence to God, and of serving him in this manner?

He who sincerely prefers God to all other things in his heart, will do it in his practice. For when God and all other things come to stand in competition, that is the proper trial what a man chooses; and the manner of acting in such cases must certainly determine what the choice is in all free agents, or those who act on choice. Therefore there is no sign of sincerity so much insisted on in the Bible as this,

that we deny ourselves, sell all, forsake the world, take up the cross, and follow Christ whithersoever he goeth. — Therefore, so run, not as uncertainly; so fight, not as those that beat the air; but keep under your bodies, and bring them into subjection. Act not as though you counted yourselves to have apprehended; but this one thing do, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” 2 Pet. 1:5, etc. “And besides this, giving diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

# **Safety, Fullness and Sweet Refreshment in Christ**

**And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind,  
and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a  
dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.  
ISAIAH 32:2**

**IN these words we may observe,**

**1. The person who is here prophesied of and commended, viz. the Lord Jesus Christ, the King spoken of in the preceding verse, who shall reign in righteousness. This King is abundantly prophesied of in the Old Testament, and especially in this prophecy of Isaiah. Glorious predictions were from time to time uttered by the prophets concerning that great King who was to come: there is no subject which is spoken of in so magnificent and exalted a style by the prophets of the Old Testament, as the Messiah. They saw his day and rejoiced, and searched diligently, together with the angels, into those things. 1 Peter 1:11, 12. "Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."**

**We are told here that "a man shall be a hiding-place from the wind," &c. There is an emphasis in the words, that "a man" should be this. If these things had been said of God, it would not be strange under the Old Testament; for God is**

frequently called a hiding-place for his people, a refuge in time of trouble, a strong rock, and a high tower. But what is so remarkable is, that they are said of "a man." But this is a prophecy of the Son of God incarnate.

**2. The things here foretold of him, and the commendations given him.**

"He shall be a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest:" that is, he shall be the safety and defence of his people, to which they shall flee for protection in the time of their danger and trouble. To him they shall flee, as one who is abroad, and sees a terrible storm arising, makes haste to some shelter to secure himself; so that however furious is the tempest, yet he is safe within, and the wind and rain, though they beat never so impetuously upon the roof and walls, are no annoyance unto him.

He shall be as "rivers of water in a dry place." This is an allusion to the deserts of Arabia, which was an exceedingly hot and dry country. One may travel there many days, and see no sign of a river, brook, or spring, nothing but a dry and parched wilderness; so that travellers are ready to be consumed with thirst, as the children of Israel were when they were in this wilderness, when they were faint because there was no water. Now when a man finds Jesus Christ, he is like one that has been travelling in those deserts till he is almost consumed with thirst, and who at last finds a river of cool and clear water. And Christ was typified by the river of water that issued out of the rock for the children of Israel in this desert: he is compared to a river, because there is such a plenty and fulness in him.

He is the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Allusion is still made to the desert of Arabia. It is not said, as the

shadow of a tree, because in some places of that country, there is nothing but dry sand and rocks for a vast space together, not a tree to be seen; and the sun beats exceedingly hot upon the sands, and all the shade to be found there, where travellers can rest and shelter themselves from the scorching sun, is under some great rock. They who come to Christ find such rest and refreshment as the weary traveller in that hot and desolate country finds under the shadow of a great rock.

We propose to speak to three propositions that are explicatory of the several parts of the text.

I. There is in Christ Jesus abundant foundation of peace and safety for those who are in fear and danger. "A man shall be a hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest."

II. There is in Christ provision for the satisfaction, and full contentment, of the needy and thirsty soul. He shall be "as rivers of water in a dry place."

III. There are quiet rest and sweet refreshment in Christ Jesus for him who is weary. He shall be "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

I. There is in Christ Jesus abundant foundation of peace and safety for those who are in fear and danger.

The fears and dangers to which men are subject, are of two kinds; temporal and eternal. Men are frequently in distress from fear of temporal evils. We live in an evil world, where we are liable to an abundance of sorrows and calamities. A great part of our lives is spent in sorrowing for present or past evils, and in fearing those which are future. What poor, distressed creatures are we, when God is pleased to send his judgments among us! If he visits a place with

mortal and prevailing sickness, what terror seizes our hearts! If any person is taken sick, and trembles for his life, or if our near friends are at the point of death, or in many other dangers, how fearful is our condition! Now there is sufficient foundation for peace and safety to those exercised with such fears, and brought into such dangers. But Christ is a refuge in all trouble; there is a foundation for rational support and peace in him, whatever threatens us. He, whose heart is fixed, trusting in Christ, need not be afraid of any evil tidings. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so Christ is round about them that fear him."

But it is the other kind of fear and danger to which we have a principal respect; the fear and danger of God's wrath. The fears of a terrified conscience, the fearful expectation of the dire fruits of sin, and the resentment of an angry God, these are infinitely the most dreadful. If men are in danger of those things, and are not asleep, they will be more terrified than with the fears of any outward evil. Men are in a most deplorable condition, as they are by nature exposed to God's wrath; and if they are sensible how dismal their case is, will be in dreadful fears and dismal expectations.

God is pleased to make some sensible of their true condition. He lets them see the storm that threatens them, how black the clouds are, and how impregnated with thunder, that it is a burning tempest, that they are in danger of being speedily overtaken by it, that they have nothing to shelter themselves from it, and that they are in danger of being taken away by the fierceness of his anger.

It is a fearful condition when one is smitten with a sense of the dreadfulness of God's wrath, when he has his heart impressed with the conviction that the great God is not reconciled to him, that he holds him guilty of these and

those sins, and that he is angry enough with him to condemn him for ever. It is dreadful to lie down and rise up, it is dreadful to eat and drink, and to walk about, in God's anger from day to day. One, in such a case, is ready to be afraid of every thing; he is afraid of meeting God's wrath wherever he goes. He has no peace in his mind, but there is a dreadful sound in his ears; his mind is afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted, and courage is ready to fail, and the spirit ready to sink with fear; for how can a poor worm bear the wrath of the great God, and what would not he give for peace of conscience, what would not he give if he could find safety! When such fears exist to a great degree, or are continued a long time, they greatly enfeeble the heart, and bring it to a trembling posture and disposition.

Now for such as these there is abundant foundation for peace and safety in Jesus Christ, and this will appear from the following things:

1. Christ has undertaken to save all such from what they fear, if they come to him. It is his professional business; the work in which he engaged before the foundation of the world. It is what he always had in his thoughts and intentions; he undertook from everlasting to be the refuge of those that are afraid of God's wrath. His wisdom is such, that he would never undertake a work for which he is not sufficient. If there were some in so dreadful a case that he was not able to defend them, or so guilty that it was not fit that he should save them, then he never would have undertaken for them. Those who are in trouble and distressing fear, if they come to Jesus Christ, have this to ease them of their fears, that Christ has promised them that he will protect them; that they come upon his invitation; that Christ has plighted his faith for their security if they will close with him; and that he is engaged

by covenant to God the Father that he will save those afflicted and distressed souls that come to him.

Christ, by his own free act, has made himself the surety of such, he has voluntarily put himself in their stead; and if justice has any thing against them, he has undertaken to answer for them. By his own act, he has engaged to be responsible for them; so that if they have exposed themselves to God's wrath, and to the stroke of justice, it is not their concern, but his, how to answer or satisfy for what they have done. Let there be never so much wrath that they have deserved, they are as safe as if they never had deserved any; because he has undertaken to stand for them, let it be more or less. If they are in Christ Jesus, the storm does of course light on him, and not on them; as when we are under a good shelter, the storm, that would otherwise come upon our heads, lights upon the shelter.

2. He is chosen and appointed of the Father to this work. There needs be no fear nor jealousy, whether the Father will approve of this undertaking of Christ Jesus, whether he will accept of him as a surety, or whether he will be willing that his wrath should be poured upon his own dear Son, instead of us miserable sinners. For there was an agreement with him concerning it before the world was; it was a thing much upon God's heart, that his Son Jesus Christ should undertake this work, and it was the Father that sent him into the world. It is as much the act of God the Father as it is of the Son. Therefore, when Christ was near the time of his death, he tells the Father that he had finished the work which he gave him to do. Christ is often called God's elect, or his chosen, because he was chosen by the Father for this work; and God's anointed, for the words Messiah and Christ signify anointed, because he is by God appointed and fitted for this work.



**3. If we are in Christ Jesus, justice and the law have its course with respect to our sins, without our hurt. The foundation of the sinner's fear and distress is the justice and the law of God; they are against him, and they are unalterable, they must have their course. Every jot and tittle of the law must be fulfilled, heaven and earth shall be destroyed, rather than justice should not take place; there is no possibility of sin's escaping justice.**

**But yet if the distressed trembling soul who is afraid of justice, would fly to Christ, he would be a safe hiding-place. Justice and the threatening of the law will have their course as fully, while he is safe and untouched, as if he were to be eternally destroyed. Christ bears the stroke of justice, and the curse of the law falls fully upon him; Christ bears all that vengeance that belongs to the sin that has been committed by him, and there is no need of its being borne twice over. His temporal sufferings, by reason of the infinite dignity of his person, are fully equivalent to the eternal sufferings of a mere creature. And then his sufferings answer for him who flees to him as well as if they were his own, for indeed they are his own by virtue of the union between Christ and him. Christ has made himself one with them; he is the head, and they are the members. Therefore, if Christ suffers for the believer, there is no need of his suffering; and what needs he to be afraid? His safety is not only consistent with absolute justice, but it is consistent with the tenor of the law. The law leaves fair room for such a thing as the answering of a surety. If the end of punishment in maintaining the authority of the law and the majesty of the government is fully secured by the sufferings of Christ as his surety, then the law of God, according to the true and fair interpretation of it, has its course as much in the sufferings of Christ, as it would have in his own sufferings. The threatening, "thou shalt surely die," is properly fulfilled in the death of Christ, as it is fairly**

to be understood. Therefore if those who are afraid will go to Jesus Christ, they need to fear nothing from the threatening of the law. The threatening of the law has nothing to do with them.

4. Those who come to Christ, need not be afraid of God's wrath for their sins; for God's honour will not suffer by their escaping punishment and being made happy. The wounded soul is sensible that he has affronted the majesty of God, and looks upon God as a vindicator of his honour; as a jealous God that will not be mocked, an infinitely great God that will not bear to be affronted, that will not suffer his authority and majesty to be trampled on, that will not bear that his kindness should be abused. A view of God in this light terrifies awakened souls. They think how exceedingly they have sinned, how they have sinned against light, against frequent and long-continued calls and warnings; and how they have slighted mercy, and been guilty of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, taking encouragement from God's mercy to go on in sin against him; and they fear that God is so affronted at the contempt and slight which they have cast upon him, that he, being careful of his honour, will never forgive them, but will punish them. But if they go to Christ, the honour of God's majesty and authority will not be in the least hurt by their being freed and made happy. For what Christ has done has repaired God's honour to the full. It is a greater honour to God's authority and majesty, that, rather than it should be wronged, so glorious a person would suffer what the law required. It is surely a wonderful display of the honour of God's majesty, to see an infinite and eternal person dying for its being wronged. And then Christ by his obedience, by that obedience which he undertook for our sakes, has honoured God abundantly more than the sins of any of us have dishonoured him, how many soever, and how great soever. How great an honour is it to God's law

that so great a person is willing to submit to it, and to obey it! God hates our sins, but not more than he delights in Christ's obedience which he performed on account. This is a sweet savour to him, a savour of rest. God is abundantly compensated, he desires no more; Christ's righteousness is of infinite worthiness and merit.

5. Christ is a person so dear to the Father, that those who are in Christ need not be at all jealous of being accepted upon his account. If Christ is accepted they must of consequence be accepted, for they are in Christ, as members, as parts, as the same. They are the body of Christ, his flesh and his bones. They that are in Christ Jesus, are one spirit; and therefore, if God loves Christ Jesus, he must of necessity accept of those that are in him, and that are of him. But Christ is a person exceedingly dear to the Father, the Father's love to the Son is really infinite. God necessarily loves the Son; God could as soon cease to be, as cease to love the Son. He is God's elect, in whom his soul delighteth; he is his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased; he loved him before, the foundation of the world, and had infinite delight in him from all eternity.

A terrified conscience, therefore, may have rest here, and abundant satisfaction that he is safe in Christ, and that there is not the least danger but that he shall be accepted, and that God will be at peace with him in Christ.

6. God has given an open testimony that Christ has done and suffered enough, and that he is satisfied with it, by his raising him from the dead. Christ, when he was in his passion, was in the hands of justice, he was God's prisoner for believers, and it pleased God to bruise him, and put him to grief, and to bring him into a low state; and when he raised him from the dead, he set him at liberty, whereby he declared that it was enough. If God was not satisfied, why

did he set Christ at liberty so soon? he was in the hands of justice, why did not God pour out more wrath upon him, and hold him in the chains of darkness longer? God raised him up and opened the prison doors to him, because he desired no more. And now surely there is free admittance for all sinners into God's favour through this risen Saviour, there is enough done, and God is satisfied; as he has declared and sealed to it by the resurrection of Christ, who is alive, and lives for evermore, and is making intercession for poor, distressed souls that come unto him.

7. Christ has the dispensation of safety and deliverance in his own hands, so that we need not fear but that, if we are united to him, we may be safe. God has given him all power in heaven and in earth, to give eternal life to whomsoever comes to him. He is made head over all things to the church, and the work of salvation is left with himself, he may save whom he pleases, and defend those that are in him by his own power. What greater ground of confidence could God have given us than that the Mediator, who died for us, and intercedes for us, should have committed to him the dispensation of the very thing which he died to purchase and for which he intercedes?

8. Christ's love, and compassion, and gracious disposition, are such that we may be sure he is inclined to receive all who come to him. If he should not do it, he would fail of his own undertaking, and also of his promise to the Father, and to us; and his wisdom and faithfulness will not allow of that. But he is so full of love and kindness that he is disposed to nothing but to receive and defend us, if we come to him. Christ is exceedingly ready to pity us, his arms are open to receive us, he delights to receive distressed souls that come to him, and to protect them; he would gather them as a hen gathereth her chickens under

her wings; it is a work that he exceedingly rejoices in, because he delights in acts of love, and pity, and mercy.

I shall take occasion from what now has been said, to invite those who are afraid of God's wrath, to come to Christ Jesus. You are indeed in a dreadful condition. It is dismal to have God's wrath impending over our heads, and not to know how soon it will fall upon us. And you are in some measure sensible that it is a dreadful condition, you are full of fear and trouble, and you know not where to flee for help; your mind is, as it were, tossed with a tempest. But how lamentable is it, that you should spend your life in such a condition, when Christ would shelter you, as a hen shelters her chickens under her wings, if you were but willing; and that you should live such a fearful, distressed life, when there is so much provision made for your safety in Christ Jesus!

How happy would you be if your hearts were but persuaded to close with Jesus Christ! Then you would be out of all danger: whatever storms and tempests were without, you might rest securely within; you might hear the rushing of the wind, and the thunder roar abroad, while you are safe in this hiding-place. O be persuaded to hide yourself in Christ Jesus! What greater assurance of safety can you desire? He has undertaken to defend and save you, if you will come to him: he looks upon it as his work; he engaged in it before the world was, and he has given his faithful promise which he will not break; and if you will but make your flight there, his life shall be for yours; he will answer for you, you shall have nothing to do but rest quietly in him; you may stand still and see what the Lord will do for you. If there be any thing to suffer, the suffering is Christ's, you will have nothing to suffer; if there be any thing to be done, the doing of it is Christ's, you will have nothing to do but to stand still and behold it.

**You will certainly be accepted of the Father if your soul lays hold of Jesus Christ. Christ is chosen and anointed of the Father, and sent forth for this very end, to save those that are in danger and fear; and he is greatly beloved of God, even infinitely, and he will accept of those that are in him. Justice and the law will not be against you, if you are in Christ; that threatening, "in the day that thou eatest thou shalt die," in the proper sense of it, will not touch you. The majesty and honour of God are not against you. You need not be afraid but that you shall be justified, if you come to him; there is an act of justification already past and declared for all who come to Christ by the resurrection of Christ, and as soon as ever you come, you are by that declared free. If you come to Christ it will be a sure sign that Christ loved you from all eternity, and that he died for you; and you may be sure if he died for you, he will not lose the end of his death, for the dispensation of life is committed unto him.**

**You need not, therefore, continue in so dangerous a condition; there is help for you. You need not stand out in the storm so long, as there is so good a shelter near you, whose doors are open to receive you. O make haste, therefore, unto that man who is a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest!**

**Let this truth also cause believers more to prize the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider that it is he, and he only, who defends you from wrath, and that he is a safe defence; your defence is a high tower; your city of refuge is impregnable. There is no rock like your rock. There is none like Christ, "the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky; the eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are everlasting arms." He in whom you trust is a buckler to all that trust in him. O prize that Saviour, who keeps your soul in safety, while thousands of**

others are carried away by the fury of God's anger, and are tossed with raging and burning tempests in hell! O, how much better is your case than theirs! and to whom is it owing but to the Lord Jesus Christ? Remember what was once your case, and what it is now, and prize Jesus Christ.

And let those Christians who are in doubts and fears concerning their condition, renewedly fly to Jesus Christ, who is a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest. Most Christians are at times afraid whether they shall not miscarry at last. Such doubtings are always through some want of the exercise of faith, and the best remedy for them is a renewed resort of the soul to this hiding-place; the same act which at first gave comfort and peace, will give peace again. They that clearly see the sufficiency of Christ, and the safety of committing themselves to him to save them from what they fear, will rest in it that Christ will defend them; be directed therefore at such times to do as the psalmist. Psal. 56:3, 4. "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word; in God I have put my trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

II. There is provision in Christ for the satisfaction and full contentment of the needy and thirsty soul. This is the sense of those words in the text, "as rivers of water in a dry place," in a dry and parched wilderness, where there is a great want of water, and where travellers are ready to be destroyed with thirst, such as was that wilderness in which the children of Israel wandered. This comparison is used elsewhere in the Scriptures. Psalm 63:1. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Ps. 143:6. "I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land." Those who travel in such a land, who wander in such a wilderness, are

**in extreme need of water; they are ready to perish for the want of it; and thus they have a great thirst and longing for it.**

**It is said that Christ is a river of water, because there is such a fulness in him, so plentiful a provision for the satisfaction of the needy and longing soul. When one is extremely thirsty, though it is not a small draught of water will satisfy him, yet when he comes to a river, he finds a fulness, there he may drink full draughts. Christ is like a river, in that he has a sufficiency not only for one thirsty soul, but by supplying him the fountain is not lessened; there is not the less afforded to those who come afterwards. A thirsty man does not sensibly lessen a river by quenching his thirst.**

**Christ is like a river in another respect. A river is continually flowing, there are fresh supplies of water coming from the fountain-head continually, so that a man may live by it, and be supplied with water all his life. So Christ is an ever-flowing fountain; he is continually supplying his people, and the fountain is not spent. They who live upon Christ, may have fresh supplies from him to all eternity; they may have an increase of blessedness that is new, and new still, and which never will come to an end.**

**In illustrating this second proposition, I shall inquire,**

**1. What it is that the soul of every man naturally and necessarily craves.**

**First. The soul of every man necessarily craves happiness. This is an universal appetite of human nature, that is alike in the good and the bad; it is as universal as the very essence of the soul, because it necessarily and immediately flows from that essence. It is not only natural to all**



mankind, but to the angels; it is universal among all reasonable, intelligent beings, in heaven, earth, or hell, because it flows necessarily from an intelligent nature. There is no rational being, nor can there be any, without a love and desire of happiness. It is impossible that there should be any creature made that should love misery, or not love happiness, since it implies a manifest contradiction; for the very notion of misery is to be in a state that nature abhors, and the notion of happiness, is to be in such a state as is most agreeable to nature.

Therefore, this craving of happiness must be insuperable, and what never can be changed; it never can be overcome, or in any way abated. Young and old love happiness alike, and good and bad, wise and unwise; though there is a great variety as to men's ideas of happiness. Some think it is to be found in one thing, and some in another; yet, as to the desire of happiness in general, there is no variety. There are particular appetites that may be restrained, and kept under, and conquered, but this general appetite for happiness never can be.

Secondly. The soul of every man craves a happiness that is equal to the capacity of his nature. The soul of man is like a vessel; the capacity of the soul is as the largeness or contents of the vessel. And therefore, if man has much pleasure and happiness, yet if the vessel is not full, the craving will not cease. Every creature is restless till it enjoys what is equal to the capacity of its nature. Thus we may observe in the brutes; when they have that which is suitable to their nature, and proportional to their capacity, they are contented. Man is of such a nature, that he is capable of an exceedingly great degree of happiness; he is made of a vastly higher nature than the brutes, and therefore he must have vastly higher happiness to satisfy. The pleasures of the outward senses which content the

beasts, will not content man. He has other faculties of a higher nature that stand in need of something to fill them; if the sense be satiated, yet if the faculties of the soul are not filled, man will be in a craving restless state.

It is more especially by reason of the faculty of understanding that the soul is capable of so great a happiness, and desires so much. The understanding is an exceedingly extensive faculty; it extends itself beyond the limits of earth, beyond the limits of the creation. As we are capable of understanding immensely more than we do understand, who can tell how far the understanding of men is capable of stretching itself? and as the understanding enlarges, the desire will enlarge with it. It must therefore be an incomprehensible object that must satisfy the soul; it will never be contented with that, and that only, to which it can see an end, it will never be satisfied with that happiness to which it can find a bottom.

A man may seem to take contentment for a little while in a finite object, but after he has had a little experience, he finds that he wants something besides. This is very apparent from the experience of this restless craving world. Every one is inquiring, Who will show us any good?

2. Men in their fallen state, are in very great want of this happiness. They were once in the enjoyment of it, but mankind are sunk to a very low estate; we are naturally poor, destitute creatures. We came naked into the world, and our souls as well as our bodies are in a wretched, miserable condition; we are so far from having food to eat suitable to our nature, that we are greedy after the husks which the swine do eat.

The poverty of man in a natural condition, appears in his discontented, craving spirit; it shows that the soul is very

empty, when, like the horse-leech, it cries, "Give, give, and saith not, It is enough." We are naturally like the prodigal, for we once were rich, but we departed from our father's house, and have squandered away our wealth, and are become poor, hungry, famishing wretches.

Men in a natural condition may find something to gratify their senses, but there is nothing to feed the soul; that more noble and more essential part perishes for lack of food. They may fare sumptuously every day, they may pamper their bodies, but the soul cannot be fed from a sumptuous table; they may drink wine in bowls, yet the spiritual part is not refreshed. The superior faculties want to be supplied as well as the inferior. True poverty and true misery consist in the want of those things of which our spiritual part stands in need.

3. Those sinners who are thoroughly awakened, are sensible of their great want. Multitudes of men are not sensible of their miserable, needy condition. There are many who are thus poor, and think themselves rich, and increased in goods. Indeed there are no natural men that have true contentment: they are all restless, and crying, "Who will show us any good?" but multitudes are not sensible how exceedingly necessitous is their condition. But the thoroughly awakened soul sees that he is very far from true happiness, that those things which he possesses will never make him happy; that for all his outward possessions he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. He becomes sensible of the short continuance and uncertainty of those things, and their insufficiency to satisfy a troubled conscience. He wants something else to give him peace and ease. If you would tell him that he might have a kingdom, it would not quiet him; he desires to have his sins pardoned, and to be at peace with his Judge. He is poor, and he becomes as a beggar;

becomes and cries for help. He does not thirst, because he as yet sees where true happiness is to be found, but because he sees that he has it not, and cannot find it. He is without comfort, and does not know where to find it, but he longs for it. O, what would he not give, if he could find some satisfying peace and comfort!

Such are those hungry, thirsty souls that Christ so often invites to come to him. Isa. 55:1, 2. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and he that is athirst, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

4. There is in Christ Jesus provision for the full satisfaction and contentment of such as these.

First. The excellency of Christ is such, that the discovery of it is exceedingly contenting and satisfying to the soul. The inquiry of the soul is after that which is most excellent. The carnal soul imagines that earthly things are excellent; one thinks riches most excellent, another has the highest esteem of honour, and to another carnal pleasure appears the most excellent; but the soul cannot find contentment in any of these things, because it soon finds an end to their excellency.

Worldly men imagine, that there is true excellency and true happiness in those things which they are pursuing. They think that if they could but obtain them, they should be happy; and when they obtain them, and cannot find

**happiness, they look for happiness in something else, and are still upon the pursuit.**

**But Christ Jesus has true excellency, and so great excellency, that when they come to see it they look no further, but the mind rests there. It sees a transcendent glory and an ineffable sweetness in him; it sees that till now it has been pursuing shadows, but that now it has found the substance; that before it had been seeking happiness in the stream, but that now it has found the ocean. The excellency of Christ is an object adequate to the natural cravings of the soul, and is sufficient to fill the capacity. It is an infinite excellency, such an one as the mind desires, in which it can find no bounds; and the more the mind is used to it, the more excellent it appears. Every new discovery makes this beauty appear more ravishing, and the mind sees no end; here is room enough for the mind to go deeper and deeper, and never come to the bottom. The soul is exceedingly ravished when it first looks on this beauty, and it is never weary of it. The mind never has any satiety, but Christ's excellency is always fresh and new, and tends as much to delight, after it has been seen a thousand or ten thousand years, as when it was seen the first moment. The excellency of Christ is an object suited to the superior faculties of man, it is suited to entertain the faculty of reason and understanding, and there is nothing so worthy about which the understanding can be employed as this excellency; no other object is so great, noble, and exalted.**

**This excellency of Jesus Christ is the suitable food of the rational soul. The soul that comes to Christ, feeds upon this, and lives upon it; it is that bread which came down from heaven, of which he that eats shall not die; it is angels' food, it is that wine and milk that is given without money, and without price. This is that fatness in which the believing soul delights itself; here the longing soul may be**

satisfied, and the hungry soul may be filled with goodness. The delight and contentment that is to be found here, passeth understanding, and is unspeakable and full of glory. It is impossible for those who have tasted of this fountain, and know the sweetness of it, ever to forsake it. The soul has found the river of water of life, and it desires no other drink; it has found the tree of life, and it desires no other fruit.

Secondly. The manifestation of the love of Christ gives the soul abundant contentment. This love of Christ is exceedingly sweet and satisfying, it is better than life, because it is the love of a person of such dignity and excellency. The sweetness of his love depends very much upon the greatness of his excellency; so much the more lovely the person, so much the more desirable is his love. How sweet must the love of that person be, who is the eternal Son of God, who is of equal dignity with the Father! How great a happiness must it be to be the object of the love of him who is the Creator of the world, and by whom all things consist, and who is exalted at God's right hand, and made head over principalities and powers in heavenly places, who has all things put under his feet, and is King of kings and Lord of lords, and is the brightness of the Father's glory! Surely to be beloved by him, is enough to satisfy the soul of a worm of the dust.

This love of Christ is also exceedingly sweet and satisfying from the greatness of it; it is a dying love; such love as never was before seen, and such as no other can parallel. There have been instances of very great love between one earthly friend and another; there was a surpassing love between David and Jonathan. But there never was any such love as Christ has towards believers. The satisfying nature of this love arises also from the sweet fruits of it. Those precious benefits that Christ bestows upon his people, and

those precious promises which he has given them, are the fruit of this love; joy and hope are the constant streams that flow from this fountain, from the love of Christ.

**Thirdly.** There is provision for the satisfaction and contentment of the thirsty longing soul in Christ, as he is the way to the Father; not only from the fulness of excellency and grace which he has in his own person, but as by him we may come to God, may be reconciled to him, and may be made happy in his favour and love.

The poverty and want of the soul in its natural state consist in its being separated from God, for God is the riches and the happiness of the creature. But we naturally are alienated from God; and God is alienated from us, our Maker is not at peace with us. But in Christ there is a way for a free communication between God and us; for us to come to God, and for God to communicate himself to us by his Spirit. John 14:6. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Ephes. 2:13, 18, 19. "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made high by the blood of Christ. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

Christ by being thus the way to the Father, is the way to true happiness and contentment. John 10:9. "I am the door: by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

Hence I would take occasion to invite needy, thirsty souls to come to Jesus. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." You that have not yet come

to Christ, are in a poor, necessitous condition; you are in a parched wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And if you are thoroughly awakened, you are sensible that you are in distress and ready to faint for want of something to satisfy your souls. Come to him who is "as rivers of water in a dry place." There are plenty and fulness in him; he is like a river that is always flowing, you may live by it for ever, and never be in want. Come to him who has such excellency as is sufficient to give full contentment to your soul, who is a person of transcendent glory, and ineffable beauty, where you may entertain the view of your soul for ever without weariness, and without being cloyed. Accept of the offered love of him who is the only-begotten Son of God, and his elect, in whom his soul delighteth. Through Christ, come to God the Father, from whom you have departed by sin. He is the way, the truth, and the life; he is the door, by which if any man enters he shall be saved.

III. There are quiet rest and sweet refreshment in Christ Jesus, for those that are weary. He is "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

The comparison that is used in the text is very beautiful and very significative. The dry, barren, and scorched wilderness of Arabia is a very lively representation of the misery that men have brought upon themselves by sin. It is destitute of any inhabitants but lions and tigers and fiery serpents; it is barren and parched, and without any river or spring; it is a land of drought, wherein there is seldom any rain, a land exceedingly hot and uncomfortable. The scorching sunbeams that are ready to consume the spirits of travellers, are a fit representation of terror of conscience, and the inward sense of God's displeasure.

And there being no other shade in which travellers may rest, but only here and there that of a great rock, it is a fit



representation of Jesus Christ, who came to redeem us from our misery. Christ is often compared to a rock, because he is a sure foundation to builders, and because he is a sure bulwark and defence. They who dwell upon the top of a rock, dwell in a most defensible place; we read of those whose habitation is the munitions of rocks. He may also be compared to a rock, as he is everlasting and unchangeable. A great rock remains stedfast, unmoved, and unbroken by winds and storms from age to age; and therefore God chose a rock to be an emblem of Christ in the wilderness, when he caused water to issue forth for the children of Israel; and the shadow of a great rock is a most fit representation of the refreshment given to weary souls by Jesus Christ.

1. There is quiet rest and full refreshment in Christ for sinners that are weary and heavy laden with sin. Sin is the most evil and odious thing, as well as the most mischievous and fatal; it is the most mortal poison; it, above all things, hazards life, and endangers the soul, exposes to the loss of all happiness, and to the suffering of all misery, and brings the wrath of God. All men have this dreadful evil hanging about them, and cleaving fast to the soul, and ruling over it, and keeping it in possession, and under absolute command: it hangs like a viper to the heart, or rather holds it as a lion does his prey.

But yet there are multitudes, who are not sensible of their misery. They are in such a sleep that they are not very unquiet in this condition, it is not very burthensome to them, they are so sottish that they do not know what is their state, and what is like to become of them. But there are others who have their sense so far restored to them that they feel the pain, and see the approaching destruction, and sin lies like a heavy load upon their hearts; it is a load that lies upon them day and night, they

cannot lay it down to rest themselves, but it continually oppresses them. It is bound fast unto them, and is ready to sink them down; it is a continual labour of heart, to support itself under this burden. Thus we read of them "that labour, and are heavy laden."

Or rather, it is like the scorching heat in a dry wilderness, where the sun beats and burns all the day long; where they have nothing to defend them; where they can find no shade to refresh themselves. If they lay themselves down to rest, it is like lying down in the hot sands, where there is nothing to keep off the heat.

Here it may be proper to inquire who are weary and heavy laden with sin; and in what sense a sinner may be weary and burdened with sin. Sinners are not wearied with sin from any dislike to it, or dislike of it. There is no sinner that is burdened with sin in the sense in which a godly man carries his indwelling sin, as his daily and greatest burden, because he loathes it, and longs to get rid of it; he would fain be at a great distance from it, and have nothing more to do with it; he is ready to cry out as Paul did, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The unregenerate man has nothing of this nature, for sin is yet his delight, he dearly loves it. If he be under convictions, his love to sin in general is not mortified, he loves it as well as ever, he hides it still as a sweet morsel under his tongue.

But there is a difference between being weary and burdened with sin, and being weary of sin. Awakened sinners are weary with sin, but not properly weary of it.

Therefore, they are only weary of the guilt of sin, the guilt that cleaves to their consciences is that great burden. God has put the sense of feeling into their consciences, that

were before as seared flesh, and it is guilt that pains them. The filthiness of sin and its evil nature, as it is an offence to a holy, gracious, and glorious God, is not a burden to them. But it is the connexion between sin and punishment, between sin and God's wrath, that makes it a burden. Their consciences are heavy laden with guilt, which is an obligation to punishment; they see the threatening and curse of the law joined to their sins, and see that the justice of God and his vengeance are against them. They are burdened with their sins, not because there is any odiousness in them, but because there is hell in them. This is the sting of sin, whereby it stings the conscience, and distresses and wearies the soul.

The guilt of such and such great sins is upon the soul, and the man sees no way to get rid of it, but he has wearisome days and wearisome nights; it makes him ready sometimes to say as the psalmist did, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."

But when sinners come to Christ, he takes away that which was their burden, or their sin and guilt, that which was so heavy upon their hearts, that so distressed their minds.

First. He takes away the guilt of sin, from which the soul before saw no way how it was possible to be freed, and which, if it was not removed, led to eternal destruction. When the sinner comes to Christ, it is all at once taken away, and the soul is left free, it is lightened of its burden, it is delivered from its bondage, and is like a bird escaped from the snare of the fowler. The soul sees in Christ a way to peace with God, and a way by which the law may be answered, and justice satisfied, and yet he may escape; a wonderful way indeed, but yet a certain and a glorious one.

**And what rest does it give to the weary soul to see itself thus delivered, that the foundation of its anxieties and fears is wholly removed, and that God's wrath ceases, that it is brought into a state of peace with God, and that there is no more occasion to fear hell, but that it is for ever safe!**

**How refreshing is it to the soul to be at once thus delivered of that which was so much its trouble and terror, and to be eased of that which was so much its burden! This is like coming to a cool shade after one has been travelling in a dry and hot wilderness, and almost fainting under the scorching heat.**

**And then Christ also takes away sin itself, and mortifies that root of bitterness which is the cause of all the inward tumults and disquietudes that are in the mind, that make it like the troubled sea that cannot rest, and leaves it all calm. When guilt is taken away and sin is mortified, then the foundation of fear, and trouble, and pain is removed, and the soul is left in peace and serenity.**

**Secondly. Christ puts strength and a principle of new life into the weary soul that comes to him. The sinner, before he comes to Christ, is as a sick man that is weakened and brought low, and whose nature is consumed by some strong distemper: he is full of pain, and so weak that he cannot walk nor stand. Therefore, Christ is compared to a physician. "But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole, need not a physician, but they that are sick." When he comes and speaks the word, he puts a principle of life into him that was before as dead: he gives a principle of spiritual life and the beginning of eternal life; he invigorates the mind with a communication of his own life and strength, and renews the nature and creates it again, and makes the man to be a new creature.**

**So that the fainting, sinking spirits are now revived, and this principle of spiritual life is a continual spring of refreshment, like a well of living water. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Christ gives his Spirit, that calms the mind, and is like a refreshing breeze of wind. He gives that strength whereby he lifts up the hands that hang down, and strengthens the feeble knees.**

**Thirdly. Christ gives to those who come to him such comfort and pleasure as are enough to make them forget all their former labour and travail. A little of true peace, a little of the joys of the manifested love of Christ, and a little of the true and holy hope of eternal life, are enough to compensate for all that toil and weariness, and to erase the remembrance of it from the mind. That peace which results from true faith passes understanding, and that joy is joy unspeakable. There is something peculiarly sweet and refreshing in this joy, that is not in other joys; and what can more effectually support the mind, or give a more rational ground of rejoicing, than a prospect of eternal glory in the enjoyment of God from God's own promise in Christ? If we come to Christ, we may not only be refreshed by resting in his shadow, but by eating his fruit: these things are the fruits of this tree. "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."**

**Before proceeding to the next particular of this proposition, I would apply myself to those that are weary; to move them to repose themselves under Christ's shadow.**

**The great trouble of such a state, one would think, should be a motive to you to accept of an offer of relief, and**

**remedy. You are weary, and doubtless would be glad to be at rest; but here you are to consider,**

**1st. That there is no remedy but in Jesus Christ; there is nothing else will give you true quietness. If you could fly into heaven, you would not find it there; if you should take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, in some solitary place in the wilderness, you could not fly from your burden. So that if you do not come to Christ, you must either continue still weary and burdened, or, which is worse, you must return to your old dead sleep, to a state of stupidity; and not only so, but you must be everlastingly wearied with God's wrath.**

**2d. Consider that Christ is a remedy at hand. You need not wish for the wings of a dove that you may fly afar off, and be at rest, but Christ is high at hand, if you were but sensible of it. Rom. 10:6, 7, 8. "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is high thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach." There is no need of doing any great work to come at this rest; the way is plain to it; it is but going to it, it is but sitting down under Christ's shadow. Christ requires no money to purchase rest of him, he calls to us to come freely, and for nothing. If we are poor and have no money, we may come. Christ sent out his servants to invite the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. Christ does not want to be hired to accept of you, and to give you rest. It is his work as Mediator to give rest to the weary, it is the work that he was anointed for, and in which he delights. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath**

**sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."**

**3d. Christ is not only a remedy for your weariness and trouble, but he will give you an abundance of the contrary, joy and delight. They who come to Christ, do not only come to a resting-place after they have been wandering in a wilderness, but they come to a banqueting-house where they may rest, and where they may feast. They may cease from their former troubles and toils, and they may enter upon a course of delights and spiritual joys.**

**Christ not only delivers from fears of hell and of wrath, but he gives hopes of heaven, and the enjoyment of God's love. He delivers from inward tumults and inward pain, from that guilt of conscience which is as a worm gnawing within, and he gives delight and inward glory. He brings us out of a wilderness of pits, and drought, and fiery flying spirits; and he brings us into a pleasant land, a land flowing with milk and honey. He delivers us out of prison, and lifts us off from the dunghill, and he sets us among princes, and causes us to inherit the throne of glory. Wherefore, if any one is weary, if any is in prison, if any one is in captivity, if any one is in the wilderness, let him come to the blessed Jesus, who is as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Delay not, arise and come away.**

**2. There are quiet rest and sweet refreshment in Christ for God's people that are weary.**

**The saints themselves, while they remain in this imperfect state, and have so much remains of sin in their hearts, are liable still to many troubles and sorrows, and much weariness, and have often need to resort anew unto Jesus**

**Christ for rest. I shall mention three cases wherein Christ is a sufficient remedy.**

**First. There is rest and sweet refreshment in Christ for those that are wearied with persecutions. It has been the lot of God's church in this world for the most part to be persecuted. It has had now and then some lucid intervals of peace and outward prosperity, but generally it has been otherwise. This has accorded with the first prophecy concerning Christ; "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." Those two seeds have been at enmity ever since the time of Abel. Satan has borne great malice against the church of God, and so have those that are his seed. And oftentimes God's people have been persecuted to an extreme degree, have been put to the most exquisite torments that wit or art could devise, and thousands of them have been tormented to death.**

**But even in such a case there are rest and refreshment to be found in Christ Jesus. When their cruel enemies have given them no rest in this world; when, as oftentimes has been the case, they could not flee, nor in any way avoid the rage of their adversaries, but many of them have been tormented gradually from day to day, that their torments might be lengthened; still rest has been found even then in Christ. It has been often found by experience; the martyrs have often showed plainly that the peace and calm of their minds were undisturbed in the midst of the greatest bodily torment, and have sometimes rejoiced and sung praises upon the rack and in the fire. If Christ is pleased to send forth his Spirit to manifest his love, and speaks friendly to the soul, it will support it even in the greatest outward torment that man can inflict. Christ is the joy of the soul, and if the soul be but rejoiced and filled with divine light,**



**such joy no man can take away; whatever outward misery there be, the spirit will sustain it.**

**Secondly. There is in Christ rest for God's people, when exercised with afflictions. If a person labour under great bodily weakness, or under some disease that causes frequent and strong pains, such things will tire out so feeble a creature as man. It may to such an one be a comfort and an effectual support to think, that he has a Mediator, who knows by experience what pain is; who by his pain has purchased eternal ease and pleasure for him; and who will make his brief sufferings to work out a far more exceeding delight, to be bestowed when he shall rest from his labours and sorrows.**

**If a person be brought into great straits as to outward subsistence, and poverty brings abundance of difficulties and extremities; yet it may be a supporting, refreshing consideration to such an one to think, that he has a compassionate Saviour, who when upon earth, was so poor that he had not where to lay his head, and who became poor to make him rich, and purchased for him durable riches, and will make his poverty work out an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.**

**If God in his providence calls his people to mourn over lost relations, and if he repeats his stroke and takes away one after another of those that were dear to him; it is a supporting, refreshing consideration to think, that Christ has declared that he will be in stead of all relations unto those who trust in him. They are as his mother, and sister, and brother; he has taken them into a very near relation to himself: and in every other afflictive providence, it is a great comfort to a believing soul to think that he has an intercessor with God, that by him he can have access with confidence to the throne of grace, and that in Christ we**

have so many great and precious promises, that all things shall work together for good, and shall issue in eternal blessedness. God's people, whenever they are scorched by afflictions as by hot sun-beams, may resort to him, who is as a shadow of a great rock, and be effectually sheltered, and sweetly refreshed.

Thirdly. There is in Christ quiet rest and sweet refreshment for God's people, when wearied with the buffetings of Satan. The devil, that malicious enemy of God and man, does whatever lies in his power to darken and hinder, and tempt God's people, and render their lives uncomfortable. Often he raises needless and groundless scruples, and casts in doubts, and fills the mind with such fear as is tormenting, and tends to hinder them exceedingly in the christian course; and he often raises mists and clouds of darkness, and stirs up corruption, and thereby fills the mind with concern and anguish, and sometimes wearies out the soul. So that they may say as the psalmist; "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion."

In such a case if the soul flies to Jesus Christ, they may find rest in him, for he came into the world to destroy Satan, and to rescue souls out of his hands. And he has all things put under his feet, whether they be things in heaven, or things on earth, or things in hell, and therefore he can restrain Satan when he pleases. And that he is doubtless ready enough to pity us under such temptations, we may be assured, for he has been tempted and buffeted by Satan as well as we. He is able to succour those that are tempted, and he has promised that he will subdue Satan under his people's feet. Let God's people therefore, when they are exercised with any of those kinds of weariness, make their resort unto Jesus Christ for refuge and rest.

## REFLECTIONS

1. We may here see great reason to admire the goodness and grace of God to us in our low estate, that he has so provided for our help and relief. We are by our own sin against God plunged into all sort of evil, and God has provided a remedy for us against every sort of evil, he has left us helpless in no calamity. We by our sin have exposed ourselves to wrath, to a vindictive justice; but God has done very great things that we might be saved from that wrath; he has been at infinite cost that the law might be answered without our suffering. We by our sins have exposed ourselves to terror of conscience, in expectation of the dreadful storm of God's wrath; but God has provided for us a hiding-place from the storm, he bids us enter into his chambers, and hide ourselves from indignation. We by sin have made ourselves poor, needy creatures; but God has provided for us gold tried in the fire. We by sin have made ourselves naked; and when he passed by, he took notice of our want, and has provided us white raiment that we may be clothed. We have made ourselves blind, and God in mercy to us has provided eye-salve, that we may see. We have deprived ourselves of all spiritual food; we are like the prodigal son that perished with hunger, and would gladly have filled his belly with husks. God has taken notice of this our condition, and has provided for us a feast of fat things, and has sent forth his servants to invite the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. We by sin have brought ourselves into a dry and thirsty wilderness; but God was merciful, and took notice of our condition, and has provided for us rivers of water, water out of the rock. We by sin have brought upon ourselves a miserable slavery and bondage; God has made provision for our liberty. We have exposed ourselves to weariness; God has provided a resting-place for us. We by sin have exposed ourselves to many outward troubles and afflictions; God has pitied us,

and in Christ has provided true comfort for us. We have exposed ourselves to our grand enemy, even Satan, to be tempted and buffeted by him; God has pitied, and has provided for us a Saviour and Captain of salvation, who has overcome Satan, and is able to deliver us. Thus God has in Christ provided sufficiently for our help in all kinds of evils.

How ought we to bless God for this abundant provision he has made for us, poor and sinful as we were, who were so undeserving and so ungrateful. He made no such provision for the fallen angels, who are left without remedy in all the woes and miseries into which they are plunged.

2. We should admire the love of Christ to men, that he has thus given himself to be the remedy for all their evil, and a fountain of all good. Christ has given himself to us, to be all things to us that we need. We want clothing, and Christ does not only give us clothing, but he gives himself to be our clothing, that we might put him on. Gal. 3:27. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Rom. 13:14. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

We want food, and Christ has given himself to be our food; he has given his own flesh to be our meat, and his blood to be our drink, to nourish our soul. Thus Christ tells us that he is the bread which came down from heaven, and the bread of life. "I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." In order to our

**eating of his flesh, it was necessary that he should be slain, as the sacrifices must be slain before they could be eaten; and such was Christ's love to us, that he consented to be slain, he went as a sheep to the slaughter, that he might give us his flesh to be food for our poor, famishing souls.**

**We are in need of a habitation; we by sin have, as it were, turned ourselves out of house and home; Christ has given himself to be the habitation of his people. Ps. 90:1. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." It is promised to God's people that they should dwell in the temple of God for ever, and should go no more out; and we are told that Christ is the temple of the new Jerusalem.**

**Christ gives himself to his people to be all things to them that they need, and all things that make for their happiness. Col. 3:11. "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but Christ is all, and in all." And that he might be so, he has refused nothing that is needful to prepare him to be so. When it was needful that he should be incarnate, he refused it not, but became man, and appeared in the form of a servant. When it was needful that he should be slain, he refused it not, but gave himself for us, and gave himself to us upon the cross.**

**Here is love for us to admire, for us to praise, and for us to rejoice in, with joy that is full of glory for ever.**

**CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE:**

# **OR, THE IMPORTANCE AND ADVANTAGE OF A THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE TRUTH**

**For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.  
HEBREWS 5:12**

**THESE words are a complaint, which the apostle makes against the christian Hebrews, for their want of such proficiency in the knowledge of the doctrines and mysteries of religion, as might have been expected of them. The apostle complains, that they had not made that progress in their acquaintance with the things taught in the oracles of God, which they ought to have made. And he means to reprove them, not merely for their deficiency in spiritual and experimental knowledge of divine things, but for their deficiency in a doctrinal acquaintance with the principles of religion, and the truths of christian divinity; as is evident by the manner in which the apostle introduces this reproof. The occasion of his introducing it is this: In the next verse but one preceding, he mentions Christ as being "Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek." In the Old Testament, the oracles of God, Melchizedek was held forth as an eminent type of Christ; and the account we there have of him contains many gospel mysteries. These mysteries the apostle was willing to point out to the christian Hebrews; but he apprehended, that through their weakness in knowledge, they would not understand him; and therefore breaks off for the present**

from saying any thing about Melchizedek, thus, (ver. 11.) "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered; seeing ye are all dull of hearing;" i.e. there are many things concerning Melchizedek which contain wonderful gospel-mysteries, and which I would take notice of to you, were it not that I am afraid, that through your dulness, and backwardness in understanding these things, you would only be puzzled and confounded by my discourse, and so receive no benefit; and that it would be too hard for you, as meat that is too strong.

Then come in the words of the text: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." As much as to say, Indeed it might have been expected of you, that you should have known enough of the Holy Scriptures, to be able to understand and digest such mysteries: but it is not so with you. The apostle speaks of their proficiency in such knowledge as is conveyed by human teaching: as appears by that expression, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers;" which includes not only a practical and experimental, but also a doctrinal, knowledge of the truths and mysteries of religion.

Again, the apostle speaks of such knowledge, whereby Christians are enabled to understand those things in divinity which are more abstruse and difficult to be understood, and which require great skill in things of this nature. This is more fully expressed in the two next verses: "For every one that useth milk, is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." It is such knowledge, that proficiency in it shall carry persons beyond the first principles of religion. As here; "Ye

have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God." Therefore the apostle, in the beginning of the next chapter, advises them "to leave the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and to go on unto perfection."

We may observe that the fault of this defect appears, in that they had not made proficiency according to their time.—For the time, they ought to have been teachers. As they were Christians, their business was to learn and gain christian knowledge. They were scholars in the school of Christ; and if they had improved their time in learning, as they ought to have done, they might, by the time when the apostle wrote, have been fit to be teachers in this school. To whatever business any one is devoted, it may be expected that his perfection in it shall be answerable to the time he has had to learn and perfect himself.—Christians should not always remain babes, but should grow in christian knowledge; and leaving the food of babes, they should learn to digest strong meat.

**DOCTRINE.** Every Christian should make a business of endeavouring to grow in knowledge in divinity.—This is indeed esteemed the business of divines and ministers: it is commonly thought to be their work, by the study of the Scriptures, and other instructive books, to gain knowledge; and most seem to think that it may be left to them, as what belongeth not to others. But if the apostle had entertained this notion, he would never have blamed the christian Hebrews for not having acquired knowledge enough to be teachers. Or if he had thought, that this concerned Christians in general only as a thing by the by, and that their time should not in a considerable measure be taken up with this business; he never would have so much blamed them, that their proficiency in knowledge had not been answerable to the time which they had had to learn.



**In handling this subject, I shall show—what is intended by divinity—what kind of knowledge in divinity is intended—why knowledge in divinity is necessary.**

**And why all Christians should make a business of endeavouring to grow in this knowledge.**

## **SECT. I**

**What is intended by divinity, as the object of christian knowledge**

**VARIOUS definitions have been given of this subject by those who have treated on it. I shall not now stand to inquire which, according to the rules of art, is the most accurate definition; but shall so define or describe it, as I think has the greatest tendency to convey a proper notion of it.—It is that science or doctrine which comprehends all those truths and rules which concern the great business of religion.**

**There are various kinds of arts and sciences taught and learned in the schools, which are conversant about various objects; about the works of nature in general, as philosophy; or the visible heavens, as astronomy; or the sea, as navigation; or the earth, as geography; or the body of man, as physic and anatomy; or the soul of man, with regard to its natural powers and qualities, as logic and pneumatology; or about human government, as politics and jurisprudence. But one science, or kind of knowledge and doctrine, is above all the rest; as it treats concerning God and the great business of religion. Divinity is not learned, as other sciences, merely by the improvement of man's natural reason, but is taught by God himself in a book full of instruction, winch he hath given us for that end. This is the rule which God hath given to the world to**

be their guide in searching after this kind of knowledge, and is a summary of all things of this nature needful for us to know. Upon this account divinity is rather called a doctrine, than an art or science.

Indeed there is what is called natural religion. There are many truths concerning God, and our duty to him, which are evident by the light of nature. But christian divinity, properly so called, is not evident by the light of nature; it depends on revelation. Such are our circumstances now in our fallen state, that nothing which it is needful for us to know concerning God, is manifest by the light of nature, in the manner in which it is necessary for us to know it. For the knowledge of no truth in divinity is of significance to us, any otherwise than as it some way or other belongs to the gospel-scheme, or as it relates to a Mediator. But the light of nature teaches us no truth in this matter. Therefore it cannot be said, that we come to the knowledge of any part of christian truth by the light of nature. It is only the word of God, contained in the Old and New Testament, which teaches us christian divinity.

This comprehends all that is taught in the Scriptures, and so all that we need know, or is to be known, concerning God and Jesus Christ, concerning our duty to God, and our happiness in God. Divinity is commonly defined, the doctrine of living to God; and by some who seem to be more accurate, the doctrine of living to God by Christ. It comprehends all christian doctrines as they are in Jesus, and all christian rules directing us in living to God by Christ. There is no one doctrine, no promise, no rule, but what some way or other relates to the christian and divine life, or our living to God by Christ. They all relate to this, in two respects, viz. as they tend to promote our living to God here in this world, in a life of faith and holiness, and also as

they tend to bring us to a life of perfect holiness and happiness, in the full enjoyment of God hereafter.

## **SECT. II**

**What kind of knowledge in divinity, is intended in the doctrine**

**THERE are two kinds of knowledge of divine truth, viz. speculative and practical, or in other terms, natural and spiritual. The former remains only in the head. No other faculty but the understanding is concerned in it. It consists in having a natural or rational knowledge of the things of religion, or such a knowledge as is to be obtained by the natural exercise of our own faculties, without any special illumination of the Spirit of God. The latter rests not entirely in the head, or in the speculative ideas of things; but the heart is concerned in it: it principally consists in the sense of the heart. The mere intellect, without the will or the inclination, is not the seat of it. And it may not only be called seeing, but feeling or tasting. Thus there is a difference between having a right speculative notion of the doctrines contained in the word of God, and having a due sense of them in the heart. In the former consists the speculative or natural knowledge, in the latter consists the spiritual or practical knowledge of them.**

**Neither of these is intended in the doctrine exclusively of the other: but it is intended that we should seek the former in order to the latter. The latter, or the spiritual and practical, is of the greatest importance; for a speculative without a spiritual knowledge, is to no purpose, but to make our condemnation the greater. Yet a speculative knowledge is also of infinite importance in this respect, that without it we can have no spiritual or practical knowledge.**

I have already shown, that the apostle speaks not only of a spiritual knowledge, but of such as can be acquired, and communicated from one to another. Yet it is not to be thought, that he means this exclusively of the other. But he would have the christian Hebrews seek the one, in order to the other. Therefore the former is first and most directly intended; it is intended that Christians should, by reading and other proper means, seek a good rational knowledge of the things of divinity: while the latter is more indirectly intended, since it is to be sought by the other. But I proceed to

### SECT. III

The usefulness and necessity of the knowledge of divine truths

THERE is no other way by which any means of grace whatsoever can be of any benefit, but by knowledge. All teaching is in vain, without learning. Therefore the preaching of the gospel would be wholly to no purpose, if it conveyed no knowledge to the mind. There is an order of men which Christ has appointed on purpose to be teachers in his church. But they teach in vain, if no knowledge in these things is gained by their teaching. It is impossible that their teaching and preaching should be a mean of grace, or of any good in the hearts of their hearers, any otherwise than by knowledge imparted to the understanding. Otherwise it would be of as much benefit to the auditory, if the minister should preach in some unknown tongue. All the difference is, that preaching in a known tongue conveys something to the understanding, which preaching in an unknown tongue doth not. On this account, such preaching must be unprofitable. In such things men receive nothing, when they understand nothing; and are not at all edified, unless some knowledge

be conveyed; agreeable to the apostle's arguing, 1 Cor. 14:2–6.

No speech can be a mean of grace, but by conveying knowledge. Otherwise the speech is as much lost as if there had been no man there, and if he that spoke, had spoken only into the air; as it follows in the passage just quoted, ver. 6–10. God deals with man as with a rational creature; and when faith is in exercise, it is not about something he knows not what. Therefore hearing is absolutely necessary to faith; because hearing is necessary to understanding, Rom. 10:14. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" In like manner, there can be no love without knowledge. It is not according to the nature of the human soul, to love an object which is entirely unknown. The heart cannot be set upon an object of which there is no idea in the understanding. The reasons which induce the soul to love, must first be understood, before they can have a reasonable influence on the heart.

God hath given us the Bible, which is a book of instructions. But this book can be of no manner of profit to us, any otherwise than as it conveys some knowledge to the mind: it can profit us no more than if it were written in the Chinese or Tartarian language, of which we know not one word. So the sacraments of the gospel can have a proper effect no other way, than by conveying some knowledge. They represent certain things by visible signs. And what is the end of signs, but to convey some knowledge of the things signified? Such is the nature of man, that no object can come at the heart but through the door of the understanding: and there can be no spiritual knowledge of that of which there is not first a rational knowledge. It is impossible that any one should see the truth or excellency of any doctrine of the gospel, who knows not what that doctrine is. A man cannot see the wonderful excellency and

love of Christ in doing such and such things for sinners, unless his understanding be first informed how those things were done. He cannot have a taste of the sweetness and excellency of divine truth, unless he first have a notion that there is such a thing.

Without knowledge in divinity, none would differ from the most ignorant and barbarous heathens. The heathens remain in gross darkness, because they are not instructed, and have not obtained the knowledge of divine truths.

If men have no knowledge of these things, the faculty of reason in him will be wholly in vain. The faculty of reason and understanding was given for actual understanding and knowledge. If a man have no actual knowledge, the faculty or capacity of knowing is of no use to him. And if he have actual knowledge, yet if he be destitute of the knowledge of those things which are the last end of his being, and for the sake of the knowledge of which he had more understanding given him than the beasts; then still his faculty of reason is in vain; he might as well have been a beast as a man. But divine subjects are the things, to know which we had the faculty of reason given us. They are the things which appertain to the end of our being, and to the great business for which we are made. Therefore a man cannot have his faculty of understanding to any good purpose, further than he hath knowledge of divine truth.

So that this kind of knowledge is absolutely necessary.— Other kinds of knowledge may be very useful. Some other sciences, such as astronomy, natural philosophy, and geography, may be very excellent in their kind. But the knowledge of this divine science is infinitely more useful and important than that of all other sciences whatever.

#### SECT. IV

**Why all Christians should make a business of endeavouring to grow in the knowledge of divinity**

**CHRISTIANS** ought not to content themselves with such degrees of knowledge of divinity as they have already obtained. It should not satisfy them, as they know as much as is absolutely necessary to salvation, but should seek to make progress.

**This endeavour to make progress in such knowledge ought not to be attended to as a thing by the bye, but all Christians should make a business of it. They should look upon it as a part of their daily business, and no small part of it neither. It should be attended to as a considerable part of the work of their high calling.—For,**

**1. Our business should doubtless much consist in employing those faculties, by which we are distinguished from the beasts, about those things which are the main end of those faculties. The reason why we have faculties superior to those of the brutes given us, is, that we are indeed designed for a superior employment. That which the Creator intended should be our main employment, is something above what he intended the beast for, and therefore hath given us superior powers. Therefore, without doubt, it should be a considerable part of our business to improve those superior faculties. But the faculty by which we are chiefly distinguished from the brutes, is the faculty of understanding. It follows then, that we should make it our chief business to improve this faculty, and should by no means prosecute it as a business by the bye. For us to make the improvement of this faculty a business by the bye, is in effect for us to make the faculty of understanding itself a by-faculty, if I may so speak, a faculty of less importance than others: whereas indeed it is the highest faculty we have.**

**But we cannot make a business of the improvement of our intellectual faculty, any otherwise than by making a business of improving ourselves in actual knowledge. So that those who make not this very much their business; but instead of improving their understanding to acquire knowledge, are chiefly devoted to their inferior power—to please their senses, and gratify their animal appetites—not only behave themselves in a manner not becoming Christians, but also act as if they had forgotten that they are men, and that God hath set them above the brutes, by giving them understanding.**

**God hath given to man some things in common with the brutes, as his outward senses, his bodily appetites, a capacity of bodily pleasure and pain, and other animal faculties: and some things he hath given him superior to the brutes, the chief of which is a faculty of understanding and reason. Now God never gave man these faculties to be subject to those which he hath in common with the brutes. This would be great confusion, and equivalent to making man to be a servant to the beasts. On the contrary, he has given those inferior powers to be employed in subserviency to man's understanding; and therefore it must be a great part of man's principal business to improve his understanding by acquiring knowledge. If so, then it will follow, that it should be a main part of his business to improve his understanding in acquiring divine knowledge, or the knowledge of the things of divinity: for the knowledge of these things is the principal end of this faculty. God gave man the faculty of understanding, chiefly, that he might understand divine things.**

**The wiser heathens were sensible that the main business of man was the improvement and exercise of his understanding. But they knew not the object about which the understanding should chiefly be employed. That**



science which many of them thought should chiefly employ the understanding, was philosophy; and accordingly they made it their chief business to study it. But we who enjoy the light of the gospel are more happy; we are not left, as to this particular, in the dark. God hath told us about what things we should chiefly employ our understandings, having given us a book full of divine instructions, holding forth many glorious objects about which all rational creatures should chiefly employ their understandings. These instructions are accommodated to persons of all capacities and conditions, and proper to be studied, not only by men of learning, but by persons of every character, learned and unlearned, young and old, men and women. Therefore the acquisition of knowledge in these things should be a main business of all those who have the advantage of enjoying the Holy Scriptures.

2. The truths of divinity are superlative excellency, and are worthy that all should make a business of endeavouring to grow in the knowledge of them. They are as much above those things which are treated of in other sciences, as heaven is above the earth. God himself, the eternal Three in one, is the chief object of this science; and next Jesus Christ, as God-man and Mediator, and the glorious work of redemption, the most glorious work that ever was wrought: then the great things of the heavenly world, the glorious and eternal inheritance purchased by Christ, and promised in the gospel; the work of the Holy Spirit of God on the hearts of men; our duty to God, and the way in which we ourselves may become like angels, and like God himself in our measure. All these are objects of this science.

Such things as these have been the main subject of the study of the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, and the most excellent men that ever existed; and they are also

the subject of study to the angels in heaven; 1 Pet. 1:10–12. —They are so excellent and worthy to be known, that the knowledge of them will richly pay for all the pains and labour of an earnest seeking of it. If there were a great treasure of gold and pearls accidentally found, and opened with such circumstances that all might have as much as they could gather; would not every one think it worth his while to make a business of gathering while it should last? But that treasure of divine knowledge, which is contained in the Scriptures, and is provided for every one to gather to himself as much of it as he can, is far more rich than any one of gold and pearls. How busy are all sorts of men, all over the world, in getting riches! But this knowledge is a far better kind of riches, than that after which they so diligently and laboriously pursue.

3. Divine truths not only concern ministers, but are of infinite importance to all Christians. It is not with the doctrines of divinity as it is with the doctrines of philosophy and other sciences. These last are generally speculative points, which are of little concern in human life; and it very little alters the case as to our temporal or spiritual interests, whether we know them or not. Philosophers differ about them, some being of one opinion, and others of another. And while they are engaged in warm disputes about them, others may well leave them to dispute among themselves, without troubling their heads much about them; it being of little concern to them, whether the one or the other be in the right.—But it is not thus in matters of divinity. The doctrines of this nearly concern every one. They are about those things which relate to every man's eternal salvation and happiness. The common people cannot say, Let us leave these matters to ministers and divines; let them dispute them out among themselves as they can; they concern not us: for they are of infinite importance to every man. Those doctrines which relate to

the essence, attributes, and subsistencies of God, concern all; as it is of infinite importance to common people, as well as to ministers, to know what kind of being God is. For he is a Being who hath made us all, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being;" who is the Lord of all; the Being to whom we are all accountable; is the last end of our being, and the only fountain of our happiness.

The doctrines also which relate to Jesus Christ and his mediation, his incarnation, his life and death, his resurrection and ascension, his sitting at the right hand of the Father, his satisfaction and intercession, infinitely concern common people as well as divines. They stand in as much need of this Saviour, and of an interest in his person and offices, and the things which he hath done and suffered, as ministers and divines.—The same may be said of the doctrines which relate to the manner of a sinner's justification, or the way in which he becomes interested in the mediation of Christ. They equally concern all; for all stand in equal necessity of justification before God. That eternal condemnation, to which we are all naturally exposed, is equally dreadful. So with respect to those doctrines which relate to the work of the Spirit of God on the heart, in the application of redemption in our effectual calling and sanctification, all are equally concerned in them. There is no doctrine of divinity whatever, which doth not some way or other concern the eternal interest of every Christian.

4. We may argue in favour of the same position, from the great things which God hath done in order to give us instruction in these things. As to other sciences, he hath left us to ourselves, to the light of our own reason. But divine things being of infinitely greater importance to us, he hath not left us to an uncertain guide; but hath himself given us a revelation of the truth in these matters, and hath

done very great things to convey and confirm it to us; raising up many prophets in different ages, immediately inspiring them with this Holy Spirit, and confirming their doctrine with innumerable miracles or wonderful works out of the established course of nature. Yea, he raised up a succession of prophets, which was upheld for several ages.

It was very much for this end that God separated the people of Israel, in so wonderful a manner, from all other people, and kept them separate; that to them he might commit the oracles of God, and that from them they might be communicated to the world. He hath also often sent angels to bring divine instructions to men; and hath often himself appeared in miraculous symbols or representations of his presence: and now in these last days hath sent his own Son into the world, to be his great prophet, to teach us divine: truth. Heb. 1:1, &c. God hath given us a book of divine instructions, which contains the sum of divinity. Now, these things hath God done, not only for the instruction of ministers and men of learning; but for the instruction of all men, of all sorts, learned and unlearned, men, women, and children. And certainly if God doth such great things to teach us, we ought to do something to learn.

God giving instructions to men in these things, is not a business by the by; but what he hath undertaken and prosecuted in a course of great and wonderful dispensations, as an affair in which his heart hath been greatly engaged; which is sometimes in Scripture signified by the expression of God's rising early to teach us, and to send us prophets and teachers. Jer. 7:25. "Since that day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt, unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early, and sending them." And ver. 13. "I spake unto you, rising up early, and speaking." This is a figurative speech, signifying, that God hath done

this as a business of great importance, in which he took great care, and had his heart much engaged; because persons are wont to rise early to prosecute such business as they are earnestly engaged in.—If God hath been so engaged in teaching, certainly we should not be negligent in learning; but should make growing in knowledge a great part of the business of our lives.

5. It may be argued from the abundance of the instructions which God hath given us, from the largeness of that book which God hath given to teach us divinity, and from the great variety that is therein contained. Much was taught by Moses of old, which we have transmitted down to us; after that, other books were from time to time added; much is taught us by David and Solomon; and many and excellent are the instructions communicated by the prophets: yet God did not think all this enough, but after this sent Christ and his apostles, by whom there is added a great and excellent treasure to that holy book, which is to be our rule in the study of this important subject.

This book was written for the use of all; all are directed to search the Scriptures, John 5:39. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they that testify of me;" and Isa. 34:16. "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read." They that read and understand are pronounced blessed, Rev. 1:3. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that understand the words of this prophecy." If this be true of that particular book of the Revelation, much more is it true of the Bible in general. Nor is it to be believed that God would have given instructions in such abundance, if he had intended that receiving instruction should be only a bye concern with us.

It is to be considered, that all those abundant instructions which are contained in the Scriptures were written that

they might be understood: otherwise they are not instructions. That which is not given that the learner may understand it, is not given for the learner's instruction; unless we endeavour to grow in the knowledge of divinity, a very great part of those instructions will to us be in vain; for we can receive benefit by no more of the Scriptures than we understand. We have reason to bless God that he hath given us such various and plentiful instruction in his word; but we shall be hypocritical in so doing, if we after all content ourselves with but little of this instruction.

When God hath opened a very large treasure before us, for the supply of our wants, and we thank him that he hath given us so much; if at the same time we be willing to remain destitute of the greatest part of it, because we are too lazy to gather it, this will not show the sincerity of our thankfulness. We are now under much greater advantages to acquire knowledge in divinity, than the people of God were of old, because since that time the canon of Scripture is much increased. But if we be negligent of our advantages, we may be never the better for them, and may remain with as little knowledge as they.

6. However diligent we apply ourselves, there is room enough to increase our knowledge in divine truth. None have this excuse to make for not diligently applying themselves to gain knowledge in divinity, that they already know all; nor can they make this excuse, that they have no need diligently to apply themselves, in order to know all that is to be known. None can excuse themselves for want of business in which to employ themselves. There is room enough to employ ourselves for ever in this divine science, with the utmost application. Those who have applied themselves most closely, have studied the longest, and have made the greatest attainments in this knowledge, know but little of what is to be known. The subject is inexhaustible.

**That divine Being, who is the main subject of this science, is infinite, and there is no end to the glory of his perfections. His works at the same time are wonderful, and cannot be found out to perfection; especially the work of redemption, about which the science of divinity is chiefly conversant, is full of unsearchable wonders.**

**The word of God, which is given for our instruction in divinity, contains enough in it to employ us to the end of our lives, and then we shall leave enough uninvestigated to employ the heads of the ablest divines to the end of the world. The psalmist found an end to the things that are human; but he could never find an end to what is contained in the word of God: Psal. 119:96. "I have seen an end to all perfection; but thy command is exceeding broad." There is enough in this divine science to employ the understandings of saints and angels to all eternity.**

**7. It doubtless concerns every one to endeavour to excel in the knowledge of things which pertain to his profession, or principal calling. If it concerns men to excel in any thing, or in any wisdom or knowledge at all, it certainly concerns them to excel in the affairs of their main profession and work. But the calling and work of every Christian is to live to God. This is said to be his high calling, Phil. 3:14. This is the business, and, if I may so speak, the trade of a Christian, his main work, and indeed should be his only work. No business should be done by a Christian, but as it is some way or other a part of this. Therefore certainly the Christian should endeavour to be well acquainted with those things which belong to this work, that he may fulfil it, and be thoroughly furnished to it.**

**It becomes one who is called to be a soldier, to excel in the art of war. It becomes a mariner, to excel in the art of navigation. It becomes a physician, to excel in the**

knowledge of those things which pertain to the art of physic. So it becomes all such as profess to be Christians, and to devote themselves to the practice of Christianity, to endeavour to excel in the knowledge of divinity.

8. It may be argued hence, that God hath appointed an order of men for this end, to assist persons in gaining knowledge in these things. He hath appointed them to be teachers, 1 Cor. 12:28. and God hath set some in the church; first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers: Eph. 4:11, 12. "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." If God hath set them to be teachers, making that their business, then he hath made it their business to impart knowledge. But what kind of knowledge? not the knowledge of philosophy, or of human laws, or of mechanical arts, but of divinity.

If God have made it the business of some to be teachers, it will follow, that he hath made it the business of others to be learners; for teachers and learners are correlates, one of which was never intended to be without the other. God hath never made it the duty of some to take pains to teach those who are not obliged to take pains to learn. He hath not commanded ministers to spend themselves, in order to impart knowledge to those who are not obliged to apply themselves to receive it.

The name by which Christians are commonly called in the New Testament is disciples, the signification of which word is scholars or learners. All Christians are put into the school of Christ, where their business is to learn, or receive knowledge from Christ, their common master and teacher, and from those inferior teachers appointed by him to instruct in his name.



**9. God hath in the Scriptures plainly revealed it to be his will, that all Christians should diligently endeavour to excel in the knowledge of divine things. It is the revealed will of God, that Christians should not only have some knowledge of things of this nature, but that they should be enriched with all knowledge: 1 Cor. 1:4, 5. "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God that is given you by Jesus Christ, that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge." So the apostle earnestly prayed, that the christian Philippians might abound more and more, not only in love, but in christian knowledge; Phil. 1:9. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment." So the apostle Peter advises to "give all diligence to add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge," 2 Pet. 1:5. and the apostle Paul, in the next chapter to that wherein is the text, counsels the Christian Hebrews, leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, to go on to perfection. He would by no means have them always to rest only in those fundamental doctrines of repentance, and faith, and the resurrection from the dead, and the eternal judgment, in which they were instructed when baptized, at their first initiation in Christianity. (See Heb. 6. &c.)**

## **SECT. V**

**An exhortation that all may diligently endeavour to gain christian knowledge**

**CONSIDER yourselves as scholars or disciples, put into the school of Christ; and therefore be diligent to make proficiency in christian knowledge. Content not yourselves with this, that you have been taught your catechism in your childhood, and that you know as much of the principles of religion as is necessary to salvation; else you will be guilty of what the apostle warns against, viz. going no further**

than laying the foundation of repentance from dead works, &c.

**You are all called to be Christians, and this is your profession. Endeavour, therefore, to acquire knowledge in things which pertain to your profession. Let not your teachers have cause to complain, that while they spend and are spent, to impart knowledge to you, you take little pains to learn. It is a great encouragement to an instructor, to have such to teach as make a business of learning, bending their minds to it. This makes teaching a pleasure, when otherwise it will be a very heavy and burdensome task.**

**You all have by you a large treasure of divine knowledge, in that you have the Bible in your hands; therefore be not contented in possessing but little of this treasure. God hath spoken much to you in the Scriptures; labour to understand as much of what he saith as you can. God hath made you all reasonable creatures; therefore let not the noble faculty of reason or understanding lie neglected. Content not yourselves with having so much knowledge as is thrown in your way, and receive in some sense unavoidably by the frequent inculcation of divine truth in the preaching of the word, of which you are obliged to be hearers, or accidentally gain in conversation; but let it be very much your business to search for it, and that with the same diligence and labour with which men are wont to dig in mines of silver and gold.**

**Especially I would advise those who are young to employ themselves in this way. Men are never too old to learn; but the time of youth is especially the time for learning; it is peculiarly proper for gaining and storing up knowledge.—Further, to stir up all, both old and young, to this duty, let me entreat you to consider,**

**1. If you apply yourselves diligently to this work, you will not want employment, when you are at leisure from your common secular business. In this way, you may find something in which you may profitably employ yourselves. You will find something else to do, besides going about from house to house, spending one hour after another in unprofitable conversation, or, at best, to no other purpose but to amuse yourselves, to fill up and wear away your time. And it is to be feared that very much of the time spent in evening visits, is spent to a much worse purpose than that which I have now mentioned. Solomon tells us, Prov. 10:19. "That in the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin." And is not this verified in those who find little else to do but to go to one another's houses, and spend the time in such talk as comes next, or such as any one's present disposition happens to suggest?**

**Some diversion is doubtless lawful; but for Christians to spend so much of their time, so many long evenings, in no other conversation than that which tends to divert and amuse, if nothing worse, is a sinful way of spending time, and tends to poverty of soul at least, if not to outward poverty: Prov. 14:23. "In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." Besides, when persons for so much of their time have nothing else to do, but to sit, and talk, and chat, there is great danger of falling into foolish and sinful conversation, venting their corrupt dispositions, in talking against others, expressing their jealousies and evil surmises concerning their neighbours; not considering what Christ hath said. Matt. 12:36. "Of every idle word that men shall speak, shall they give account in the day of judgment."**

**If you would comply with what you have heard from this doctrine, you would find something else to employ your time besides contention, or talking about those public**

affaire which tend to contention. Young people might find something else to do, besides spending their time in vain company; something that would be much more profitable to themselves, as it would really turn to some good account; something, in doing which they would both be more out of the way of temptation, and be more in the way of duty, and of a divine blessing. And even aged people would have something to employ themselves in, after they are become incapable of bodily labour. Their time, as is now often the case, would not lie heavy upon their hands, as they would with both profit and pleasure be engaged in searching the Scriptures, and in comparing and meditating upon the various truths which they should find there.

2. This would be a noble way of spending your time.—The Holy Spirit gives the Bereans this epithet, because they diligently employed themselves in this business: Acts 17:11. "These were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Similar to this is very much the employment of heaven. The inhabitants of that world spend much of their time in searching into the great things of divinity, and endeavouring to acquire knowledge in them, as we are told of the angels, 1 Pet. 1:12. "Which things the angels desire to look into." This will be very agreeable to what you hope will be your business to all eternity, as you doubtless hope to join in the same employment with the angels of light. Solomon says, Prov. 25:2. "It is the honour of kings to search out a matter;" and certainly, above all others, to search out divine matters. Now, if this be the honour even of kings, is it not equally if not much more your honour?

3. This is a pleasant way of improving time. Knowledge is pleasant and delightful to intelligent creatures, and above all, the knowledge of divine things; for in them are the

most excellent truths, and the most beautiful and amiable objects held forth to view. However tedious the labour necessarily attending this business may be, yet the knowledge once obtained will richly requite the pains taken to obtain it. "When wisdom entereth the heart, knowledge is pleasant to the soul." Prov. 2:10.

4. This knowledge is exceedingly useful in christian practice. Such as have much knowledge in divinity have great means and advantages for spiritual and saving knowledge; for no means of grace have a saving effect, otherwise than by the knowledge they impart. The more you have of a rational knowledge of divine things, the more opportunity will there be, when the Spirit shall be breathed into your heart, to see the excellency of these things, and to taste the sweetness of them. The heathens, who have no rational knowledge of the things of the gospel, have no opportunity to see the excellency of them; and therefore the more rational knowledge of these things you have, the more opportunity and advantage you have to see the divine excellency and glory of them.

Again, The more knowledge you have of divine things, the better will you know your duty; your knowledge will be of great use to direct you as to your duty in particular cases. You will also be the better furnished against the temptations of the devil. For the devil often takes advantage of persons' ignorance to ply them with temptations which otherwise would have no hold of them. By having much knowledge, you will be under greater advantages to conduct yourselves with prudence and discretion in your christian course, and so to live much more to the honour of God and religion. Many who mean well, and are full of a good spirit, yet for want of prudence, conduct themselves so as to wound religion. Many have a zeal of God, which doth more hurt than good, because it is

not according to knowledge, Rom. 10:2. The reason why many good men behave no better in many instances, is not so much that they want grace, as that they want knowledge. Beside, an increase of knowledge would be a great help to profitable conversation. It would supply you with matter for conversation when you come together, or when you visit your neighbours: and so you would have less temptation to spend the time in such conversation as tends to your own and others' hurt.

5. Consider the advantages you are under to grow in the knowledge of divinity. We are under far greater advantages to gain much of this knowledge now, than God's people under the Old Testament, both because the canon of Scripture is so much enlarged since that time, and also because evangelical truths are now so much more plainly revealed. So that common men are now in some respects under advantages to know more, than the greatest prophets were then. Thus that saying of Christ is in a sense applicable to us, Luke 10:23, 24. "Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see. For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." We are in some respects under far greater advantages for gaining knowledge, now in these latter ages of the church, than Christians were formerly; especially by reason of the art of printing, of which God hath given us the benefit, whereby Bibles and other books of divinity are exceedingly multiplied, and persons may now be furnished with helps for the obtaining of christian knowledge, at a much easier and cheaper rate than they formerly could.

6. We know not what opposition we may meet with in the religious principles which we hold. We know that there are many adversaries to the gospel and its truths. If therefore

**we embrace those truths, we must expect to be attacked by the said adversaries; and unless we be well informed concerning divine things, how shall we be able to defend ourselves? Beside, the apostle Peter enjoins it upon us, always to be ready to give an answer to every man who asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us. But this we cannot expect to do without considerable knowledge in divine things.**

## **SECT. VI**

### **Directions for the acquisition of christian knowledge**

**1. BE assiduous in reading the Holy Scriptures. This is the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived. Therefore let not this treasure lie by you neglected. Every man of common understanding who can read, may, if he please, become well acquainted with the Scriptures. And what an excellent attainment would this be!**

**2. Content not yourselves with only a cursory reading, without regarding the sense. This is an ill way of reading, to which, however, many accustom themselves all their days. When you read, observe what you read. Observe how things come in. Take notice of the drift of the discourse, and compare one scripture with another. For the Scripture, by the harmony of its different parts, casts great light upon itself.—We are expressly directed by Christ, to search the Scriptures, which evidently intends something more than a mere cursory reading. And use means to find out the meaning of the Scripture. When you have it explained in the preaching of the word, take notice of it; and if at any time a scripture that you did not understand be cleared up to your satisfaction, mark it, lay it up, and if possible remember it.**

**3. Procure, and diligently use, other books which may help you to grow in this knowledge. There are many excellent books extant, which might greatly forward you in this knowledge, and afford you a very profitable and pleasant entertainment in your leisure hours. There is doubtless a great defect in many, that through a lothness to be at a little expense, they furnish themselves with no more helps of this nature. They have a few books indeed, which now and then on sabbath-days they read; but they have had them so long, and read them so often, that they are weary of them, and it is now become a dull story, a mere task to read them.**

**4. Improve conversation with others to this end. How much might persons promote each other's knowledge in divine things, if they would improve conversation as they might; if men that are ignorant were not ashamed to show their ignorance, and were willing to learn of others; if those that have knowledge would communicate it, without pride and ostentation; and if all were more disposed to enter on such conversation as would be for their mutual edification and instruction.**

**5. Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the benefit of your souls, and in order to practice.—If applause be your end, you will not be so likely to be led to the knowledge of the truth, but may justly, as often is the case of those who are proud of their knowledge, be led into error to your own perdition. This being your end, if you should obtain much rational knowledge, it would not be likely to be of any benefit to you, but would puff you up with pride: 1 Cor. 8:1. "Knowledge puffeth up."**

**6. Seek to God, that he would direct you, and bless you, in this pursuit after knowledge. This is the apostle's direction, Jam. 1:5. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God,**



who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not." God is the fountain of all divine knowledge: Prov. 2:6. "The Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." Labour to be sensible of your own blindness and ignorance, and your need of the help of God, lest you be led into error, instead of true knowledge: 1 Cor. 3:18. "If any man would be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

7. Practise according to what knowledge you have. This will be the way to know more. The psalmist warmly recommends this way of seeking knowledge in divine truth, from his own experience: Psal. 119:100. "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." Christ also recommends the same: John 7:17. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

## **The Manner in Which the Salvation of the Soul is to be Sought**

"Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he."- Genesis 6:22

CONCERNING these words, I would observe three things:

1. What it was that God commanded Noah, to which these words refer. It was the building of an ark according to the particular direction of God, against the time when the flood of waters should come; and the laying up of food for himself, his family, and the other animals, which were to be preserved in the ark. We have the particular commands which God gave him respecting this affair, from the 14th verse, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood," &c

**2. We may observe the special design of the work which God had enjoined upon Noah: it was to save himself and his family, when the rest of the world should be drowned. See ver. 17, 18. We may observe Noah's obedience. He obeyed God: thus did Noah. And his obedience was thorough and universal: according to all that God commanded him, so did he. He not only began, but he went through his work, which God had commanded him to undertake for his salvation from the flood. To this obedience the apostle refers in Heb. 11:7, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.**

#### **DOCTRINE.**

**We should be willing to engage in and go through great undertakings, in order to our own salvation.**

**The building of the ark, which was enjoined upon Noah, that he and his family might be saved, was a great undertaking: the ark was a building of vast size; the length of it being three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A cubit, till of late, was by learned men reckoned to be equal to a foot and a half of our measure. But lately some learned men of our nation have travelled into Egypt, and other ancient countries, and have measured some ancient buildings there, which are of several thousand years standing, and of which ancient histories give us the dimensions in cubits; particularly the pyramids of Egypt, which are standing entire at this day. By measuring these, and by comparing the measure in feet with the ancient accounts of their measure in cubits, a cubit is found to be almost two and twenty inches. Therefore learned men more lately reckon a cubit much larger than they did formerly. So that the ark, reckoned so much larger every way, will appear to be**

**almost of double the bulk which was formerly ascribed to it According to this computation of the cubit, it was more than five hundred and fifty feet long, about ninety feet broad, and about fifty feet in height.**

**To build such a structure, with all those apartments and divisions in it which were necessary, and in such a manner as to be fit to float upon the water for so long a time, was then a great undertaking. It took Noah, with all the workmen he employed, a hundred and twenty years, or thereabouts, to build it For so long it was, that the Spirit of God strove, and the long-suffering God waited on the old world, as you may see in Gen. 4:3: "My Spirit shall I not always strive with man; yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." All this while the ark was a preparing, as appears by 1 Pet. 3:20: "When once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." It was a long time that Noah constantly employed himself in this business. Men would esteem that undertaking very great, which should keep them constantly employed even for one half of that time. Noah must have had a great and constant care upon his mind for these one hundred and twenty years, in superintending this work, and in seeing that all was done exactly according to the directions which God had given him.**

**Not only was Noah himself continually employed, but it required a great number of workmen to be constantly employed, during all that time, in procuring, and collecting, and fitting the materials, and in putting them together in due form. How great a thing was it for Noah to undertake such a work! For beside the continual care and labor, it was a work of vast expense. It is not probable that any of that wicked generation would put to a finger to help forward such a work, which doubtless they believed was merely the fruit of Noah's folly, without full wages. Noah**

must needs have been very rich, to be able to bear the expense of such a work, and to pay so many workmen for so long a time. It would have been a very great expense for a prince; and doubtless Noah was very rich, as Abraham and Job were afterwards. But it is probable that Noah spent all his worldly substance in this work, thus manifesting his faith in the word of God, by selling all he had, as believing there would surely come a flood, which would destroy all; so that if he should keep what he had, it would be of no service to him. Herein he has set us an example, showing us how we ought to sell all for our salvation.

Noah's undertaking was of great difficulty, as it exposed him to the continual reproaches of all his neighbors, for that whole one hundred and twenty years. None of them believed what he told them of a flood which was about to drown the world. For a man to undertake such a vast piece of work, under notion that it should be the means of saving him when the world should be destroyed, it made him the continual laughing-stock of the world. When he was about to hire workmen, doubtless all laughed at him, and we may suppose, that though the workmen consented to work for wages, yet they laughed at the folly of him who employed them. When the ark was begun, we may suppose that every one that passed by and saw such a huge bulk stand there, laughed at, it, calling it Noah's folly.

In these days, men are with difficulty brought to do or submit to that which makes them the objects of the reproach of all their neighbors. Indeed if while some reproach them, others stand by them and honor them, this will support them. But it is very difficult for a man to go on in a way wherein he makes himself the laughing stock of the whole world, and wherein he can find none who do not despise him. Where is the man that can stand the shock of

such a trial for twenty years?

But in such an undertaking as this, Noah at the divine direction, engaged and went through it, that himself and his family might be saved from the common destruction which was shortly about to come on the world. He began, and also made an end: "According to all that God commanded him, so did he." Length of time did not weary him: he did not grow weary of his vast expense. He stood the shock of the derision of all his neighbors; and of all the world year after year: he did not grow weary of being their laughing-stock, so as to give over his enterprise; but persevered in it till the ark was finished. After this, he was at the trouble and charge of procuring stores for the maintenance of his family, and of all the various kinds of creatures, for so long a time. Such an undertaking he engaged in and went through in order to a temporal salvation. How great an undertaking then should men be willing to engage in and go through in order to their eternal salvation! A salvation from an eternal deluge; from being overwhelmed with the billows of God's wrath of which Noah's flood was but a shadow.

I shall particularly handle this doctrine under the three following propositions.

I. There is a work or business which must be undertaken and accomplished by men, if they would be saved.

II. This business is a great undertaking.

III. Men should be willing to enter upon and go through this undertaking though it be great, seeing it is for their own salvation.

Proposition. There is a work or business which men must enter upon and accomplish, in order to their salvation.- Men have no reason to expect to be saved in idleness, or to go to heaven in a way of doing nothing. No; in order to it, there is a great work, which must be not only begun, but

**finished-I shall speak upon this proposition, in answer to two inquiries.**

**I. What is this work or business which must be undertaken and accomplished in order to the salvation of men?**

**Answer. It is the work of seeking salvation in a way of constant observance of all the duty to which God directs its in his word. If we would be saved, we must seek salvation. For although men do not obtain heaven of themselves; they do not go thither accidentally, or without any intention or endeavors of their own. God, in his word, hath directed men to seek their salvation as they would hope to obtain it. There is a race that is set before them, which they must run, and in that race come off victors, in order to their winning the prize.**

**The Scriptures have told us what particular duties must be performed by us in order to our salvation. It is not sufficient that men seek their salvation on in the observance of some of those duties; but they must be observed universally. The work we have to do is not an obedience only to some, but to all the commands of God; a compliance with every institution of worship; a diligent use of all the appointed means of grace; a doing of all duty towards God and towards man.-It is not sufficient that men have some respect to all the commands of God, and that they may be said to seek their salvation in some sort of observance of all the commands; but they must be devoted to it.**

**They must not make this a business by the by, or a thing in which they are negligent and careless, or which they do with a slack hand; but it must be their great business, being attended to as their great concern. They must not only seek, but strive; they must do what their hand findeth to do with their might, as men thoroughly engaged in their**

**minds, and influenced and set forward by great desire and strong resolution. They must act as those that see so much of the importance of religion above all other things, that every thing else must be as an occasional affair, and nothing must stand in competition with its duties. This must be the one thing they do; Phil. 3:13, "This one thing I do."-It must be the business to which they make all other affairs give place, and to which they are ready to make other things a sacrifice. They must be ready to part with pleasures and honor, estate and life, and to sell all, that they may successfully accomplish this business.**

**It is required of every man, that he not only do something in this business, but that he should devote himself to it; which implies that he should give up himself to it, all his affairs, and all his temporal enjoyments. This is the import of taking up the cross, of taking Christ's yoke upon us, and of denying ourselves to follow Christ. The rich young man, who came kneeling to Christ to know what he should do to be saved, Mark 10:17, in some sense sought salvation but did not obtain it. In some sense he kept all the commands from his youth up; but was not cordially devoted to this business. He had not made a sacrifice to it of all his enjoyments, as appeared when Christ came to try him; he would not part with his estate for him.**

**It is not only necessary that men should seem to be very much engaged, and appear as if they were devoted to their duty for a little while; but there must be a constant devotedness, in a persevering way, as Noah was to the business of the building the ark, going on with that great, difficult, and expensive affair, till it was finished, and till the flood came. Men must not only be diligent in the use of the means of grace, and be anxiously engaged to escape eternal ruin, till they obtain hope and comfort; but afterwards they must persevere in the duties of religion, till**

**the flood come, the flood of death. Not only must the faculties, strength, and possessions of men be devoted to this work, but also their time and their lives; they must give up their whole lives to it, even to the very day when God causes the storms and floods to come. This is the work or business which men have to do in order to their salvation.**

**Inquiry 2. Why is it needful that men should undertake to go through such a work in order to their salvation?**

**Answer 1. Not to merit salvation, or to recommend them to the saving mercy of God. Men are not saved on the account of any work of theirs, and yet they are not saved without works. If we merely consider what it is for which, or on the account of which, men are saved, no work at all in men is necessary to their salvation. In this respect they are saved wholly without any work of theirs: Tit. iii. 5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." We must indeed be saved on the account of works; but not our own. It is on account of the works which Christ hath done for us. Works are the fixed price of eternal life; it is fixed by an eternal, unalterable rule of righteousness. But since the fall there is no hope of our doing these works, without salvation offered freely without money and without price. But,**

**2. Though it be not needful that we do any thing to merit salvation, which Christ hath fully merited for all who believe in him; yet God, for wise and holy ends, hath appointed, that we should come to final salvation in no other way, but that of good works done by us. God did not save Noah on account of the labor and expense he was at in building the ark. Noah's salvation from the flood was an instance of the free and distinguishing mercy of God. Nor did God stand in need of Noah's care, or cost, or labor, to**



**build an ark. The same power which created the world, and which brought the flood of waters upon the earth, could have made the ark in an instant, without any care or cost to Noah, or any of the labor of those workmen who were employed for so long a time. Yet God was pleased to appoint, that Noah should be saved in this way. So God hath appointed that man should not be saved without his undertaking and doing this work of which I have been speaking; and therefore we are commanded "to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," Philip. 2:12.**

**There are many wise ends to be answered by the establishment of such a work as prerequisite to salvation. The glory of God requires it. For although God stand in no need of any thing that men do to recommend them to his saving mercy, yet it would reflect much on the glory of God's wisdom and holiness, to bestow salvation on men in such a way as tends to encourage them in sloth and wickedness; or in any other way than that which tends to promote diligence and holiness. Man was made capable of action, with many powers of both body and mind fitting him for it. He was made for business and not idleness and the main business for which he was made, was that of religion. Therefore it becomes the wisdom of God to bestow salvation and happiness on man in such a way as tends most to promote his end in this respect, and, to stir him up to a diligent use of his faculties and talents.**

**It becomes the wisdom of God so to order it, that things of great value and importance should not be obtained without great labor and diligence. Much human learning and great moral accomplishments are not to be obtained without care and labor. It is wisely so ordered, in order to maintain in man a due sense of the value of those things which are excellent. If great things were in common easily obtained, it would have a tendency to cause men to slight and**

**undervalue them. Men commonly despise those things which are cheap, and which are obtained without difficulty.**

**Although the work of obedience performed by men, be not necessary in order to merit salvation; yet it is necessary in order to their being prepared for it. Men cannot be prepared for salvation without seeking it in such a way as hath been described. This is necessary in order that they have a proper sense of their own necessities, and unworthiness; and in order that they be prepared and disposed to prize salvation when bestowed, and be properly thankful to God for it. The requisition of so great a work in order to our salvation is no way inconsistent with the freedom of the offer of salvation; as after all it is both offered and bestowed without any respect to our work, as the price or meritorious cause of our salvation, as I have already explained. Besides, salvation bestowed in this way is better for us, more for our advantage and happiness both in this and the future world, than if it were given without this requisition.**

**II. Proposition. This work or business, which must be done in order to the salvation of men, is a great undertaking. It often appears so to men upon whom it is urged. Utterly to break off from all their sins, and to give up themselves forever to the business of religion, without making a reserve of any one lust, submitting to and complying with every command of God, in all cases, and persevering therein, appears to many so great a thing, that they are in vain urged to undertake it. In so doing it seems to them, that they should give up themselves to a perpetual bondage. The greater part of men therefore choose to put it off, and keep it at as great a distance as they can. They cannot bear to think of entering immediately on such a hard service, and rather than do it, they will run the risk of**

**eternal damnation, by putting it off to an uncertain future opportunity.**

**Although the business of religion is far from really being as it appears to such men, or the devil will be sure, if he can, to represent it in false colors to sinners, and make it appear as black and as terrible as he can; yet it is indeed a great business, a great undertaking, and it is fit that all who are urged to it should count the cost beforehand, and be sensible of the difficulty attending it. For though the devil discourages many from this undertaking, by representing it to be more difficult than it really is; yet with others he takes a contrary course and flatters them it is a very easy thing, a trivial business, which may be done at any time when they please, and so emboldens them to defer it from that consideration. But let none conceive any other notion of that business of religion, which is absolutely necessary to their salvation, than that it is a great undertaking. It is so on the following accounts.**

**1. It is a business of great labor and care. There are many commands to be obeyed, many duties to be done, duties to God, duties to our neighbor, and duties, to ourselves. There is much opposition in the way of these duties from without. There is a subtle and powerful adversary laying all manner of blocks in the way. There are innumerable temptations of Satan to be resisted and repelled. There is great opposition from the world, innumerable snares laid, on every side, many rocks and mountains to be passed over, many streams to be passed through, and many flatteries and enticements from a vain world to be resisted. There is a great opposition from within; a dull and sluggish heart, which is exceedingly averse from that activity in religion which is necessary; a carnal heart, which is averse from religion and spiritual exercises, and continually drawing the contrary way; and a proud and a deceitful heart, in**

**which corruption will be exerting itself in all manner of ways. So that nothing can be done to any effect without a most strict and careful watch, great labor and strife.**

**2. It is a constant in business.-In that business which requires great labor, men love now and then to have a space of relaxation, that they may rest from their extraordinary labor. But this is a business which must be followed every day. Luke ix. 23, " If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." We must never give ourselves any relaxation from this business; it must be continually prosecuted day after day. If sometimes we make a great stir and bustle concerning religion, but then lay all aside to take our ease, and do so from time to time, it will be of no good effect; we had even as good do nothing at all. The business of religion so followed is never like to come to any good issue, nor is the work ever like to be accomplished to any good purpose.**

**3. It is a great undertaking, as it is an undertaking of great expense.-We must, therein sell all: we must follow this business at the expense of all our unlawful pleasures and delights, at the expense of our carnal ease, often at the expense of our substance, of our credit among men, the good will of our neighbors, at the expense of all our earthly friends, and even at the expense of life itself. Herein it is like Noah's undertaking to build the ark, which, as hath been shown was a costly undertaking: it was expensive to his reputation among men, exposing him to be the continual laughing-stock of all his neighbors and of the whole world: and it was expensive to his estate, and probably cost him all that he had.**

**4. Sometimes the fear, trouble, and exercise of mind, which are undergone respecting this business, and the salvation of the soul, are great and long continued, before any**

comfort is obtained. Sometimes persons in this situation labor long in the dark, and sometimes, as it were, in the very fire, they having great distress of conscience, great fears, and many perplexing temptations, before they obtain light and comfort to make their care and labor more easy to them. They sometimes earnestly, and for a long time, seek comfort, but find it not, because they seek it not in a right manner, nor in the right objects. God therefore hides his face. They cry, but God doth not answer their prayers. They strive, but all seems in vain. They seem to themselves not at all to get forward, or nearer to a deliverance from sin: but to go backward, rather than forward. They see no glimmerings of light: things rather appear darker and darker. Insomuch that they are often ready to be discouraged, and to sink under the weight of their present distress, and under the prospect of future misery. In this situation, and under these views, some are almost driven to despair. Many, after they have obtained some saving comfort, are again involved in darkness and trouble. It is with them as it was with the Christian Hebrews, Heb. 10:32, "After ye were illuminated ye endured a great fight of afflictions. Some through a melancholy habit and distemper of body, together with Satan's temptations, spend a great part of their lives in distress and darkness, even after they have had some saving comfort.

5. It is a business which, by reason of the many difficulties, snares, and dangers that attend it, requires much instruction, consideration, and counsel. There is no business wherein men stand in need of counsel more than in this. It is a difficult undertaking, a hard matter to proceed aright in it. There are ten thousand wrong ways, which men may take; there are many labyrinths wherein many poor souls are entangled and never find the way out ; there are many rocks on which thousands of souls have suffered shipwreck, for want of, having steered aright.

**Men of themselves know not how to proceed in this business, any more than the children of Israel in the wilderness knew where to go without the guidance, of the pillar of cloud and fire. There is great need that they search the Scriptures, and give diligent heed to the instructions and directions contained in them, as to a light shining in a dark place and that they ask counsel of those skilled in these matters. And there is no business in which men have so much need of seeking to God by prayer, for his counsel, and that he would lead them in the right way, and show them the strait gate. " For strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it;" yea, there are none that find it without direction from heaven. The building of the ark was a work of great difficulty on this account, that Noah's wisdom was not sufficient to direct him how to make such a building as should be a sufficient security against such a flood, and which should be a convenient dwelling-place for himself, his family, and all the various kinds of beasts and birds, and creeping things. Nor could he ever have known how to construct this building, had not God directed him.**

**6. This business never ends till life ends. They that undertake this laborious, careful, expensive, self-denying business, must not expect to rest from their labors, till death shall have put an end to them. The long continuance of the work which Noah undertook was what especially made it a great undertaking. This also was what made the travel of the children of Israel through the wilderness appear so great to them, that it was continued for so long a time. Their spirits failed, they were discouraged, and had not a heart to go through with so great an undertaking. But such is this business that it runs parallel with life, whether it be longer or shorter. Although we should live to a great age, our race and warfare will not be finished till death shall come. We must not expect that an end will be put to**

**our labor, and care, and strife, by any hope of a good estate which we may obtain. Past attainments and past success will not excuse us from what remains for the future, nor will they make future constant labor and care unnecessary to our salvation.**

**III. Men should be willing to engage in and go through this business, however great and difficult it may seem to them, seeing it is for their own salvation. Because,**

**1. A deluge of wrath will surely come. The inhabitants of the old world would not believe that there would come such a flood of waters upon the earth as that of which Noah told them, though he told them often; neither would they take any care to avoid the destruction. Yet such a deluge did come; nothing of all those things of which Noah had forewarned them, failed.**

**So there will surely come a more dreadful deluge of divine wrath on this wicked world. We are often forewarned of it in the Scriptures, and the world, as then, doth not believe any such thing. Yet the threatening will as certainly be accomplished, as the threatening denounced against the old world. A day of wrath is coming; it will come at its appointed season; it will not tarry, it shall not be delayed one moment beyond its appointed time.**

**2. All such as do not seasonably undertake and go through the great work mentioned will surely be swallowed up in this deluge. When the floods of wrath shall come, they will universally overwhelm the wicked world: all such as shall not have taken care to prepare an ark, will surely be swallowed up in it; they will find no other way of escape. In vain shall salvation be expected from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; for the flood shall be above the tops of all the mountains. Or if they shall hide themselves**

in the caves and dens of the mountains, there the waters of the flood will find them out, and there shall they miserably perish. As those of the old world who were not in the ark perished, Gen. 7:21, 23, so all who shall not have secured to themselves a place in the spiritual ark of the gospel, shall perish much more miserably than the old world. Doubtless the inhabitants of the old world had many contrivances to save themselves. Some, we may suppose, ascended to the tops of their houses, being driven out of one story to another, till at last they perished. Others climbed to the tops of high towers; who yet were washed thence by the boisterous waves of the rising flood. Some climbed to the tops of trees; others to the tops of mountains, and especially of the highest mountains. But all was in vain; the flood sooner or later swallowed them all up; only Noah and his family, who had taken care to prepare an ark, remained alive. So it will doubtless be at the end of the world, when Christ shall come to judge the world in righteousness. Some, when they shall look up and see him coming in the clouds of heaven, shall hide themselves in closets, and secret places in their houses. Others flying to the caves and dens of the earth, shall attempt to hide themselves there. Others shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and cover them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.-So it will be after the sentence is pronounced, and wicked men see that terrible fire coming, which is to burn this world forever, and which will be a deluge of fire, and will burn the earth even to the bottoms of the mountains, and to its very centre. Deut. 32:22, "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn to the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains." I say, when the wicked shall, after the sentence, see this great fire beginning to kindle, and to take hold of this earth; there will be many contrivances devised by them to escape, some flying to caves and holes in the



earth, some hiding themselves in one place, and some in another. But let them hide themselves where they will, or let them do what they will, it will be utterly in vain. Every cave shall burn as an oven, the rocks and mountains shall melt with fervent heat, and if they could creep down to the very centre of the earth, still the heat would follow them, and rage with as much vehemence there, as on the very surface.

So when wicked men, who neglect their great work in their lifetime, who are not willing to go through the difficulty and labor of this work, draw near to death, they sometimes do many things to escape death, and put forth many endeavors to lengthen out their lives at least a little longer. For this end, they send for physicians, and perhaps many are consulted, and their prescriptions are punctually observed. They also use many endeavors to save their souls from hell. They cry to God; they confess their past sins; they promise future reformation; and, Oh what would they not give for some small addition to their lives, or some hope of future happiness! But all proves in vain: God hath numbered their days and finished them; and as they have sinned away the day of grace, they must even bear the consequence, and forever lie down in sorrow.

3. The destruction, when it shall come, will be infinitely terrible. The destruction of the old world by the flood was terrible; but that eternal destruction which is coming on the wicked is infinitely more so. That flood of waters was but an image of this awful flood of divine vengeance. When the waters poured down, more like spouts or cataracts, or the fall of a great river, than like rain; what an awful appearance was there of the wrath of God! This however but an image of that terrible outpouring of the wrath of God which shall be forever, yea forever and ever, on wicked men. And when the fountains of the great deep were

broken up, and the waters burst forth out of the ground though they had issued out of the womb (Job38:8), this was an image of the mighty breakings forth of God's wrath, which shall be, when the flood gates of wrath shall be drawn up. How may we suppose that the wicked of the old world repented that they had not hearkened to the warnings which Noah had given them, when they saw these dreadful things, and saw that they must perish! How much more will you repent your refusing to hearken to the gracious warnings of the gospel, when you shall see the fire of God's wrath against you, pouring down from heaven, and bursting on all sides out of bowels of the earth!

4. Though the work which is necessary in order to man's salvation be a great work, yet it is not impossible. What was required of Noah, doubtless appeared a very great and difficult undertaking. Yet he undertook it with resolution, and he was carried through it. So if we undertake this work with the same good will and resolution, we shall undoubtedly be successful. However difficult it be, yet multitudes have gone through it, and have obtained salvation by the means. It is not a work beyond the faculties of our nature, nor beyond the opportunities which God giveth us. If men will but take warning, and hearken to counsel, if they will but be sincere and in good earnest, be seasonable in their work, take their opportunities, use their advantages be steadfast, and not wavering; they shall not fail.

#### **APPLICATION.**

The use I would make of this doctrine, is to exhort all to undertake and go through this great work, which they have to do in order to their salvation, and this let the work seem ever so great and difficult. If your nature be averse to it, and there seems to be very frightful things in the way, so

that your heart is ready to fail at the prospect; yet seriously consider what has been said, and act a wise part. Seeing it is for yourselves, for your own salvation; seeing it is for so great a salvation, for your deliverance from eternal destruction; and seeing it is of such absolute necessity in order to your salvation, that the deluge of divine wrath will come, and there will be no escaping it without preparing an ark; is it not best for you to undertake the work, engage in it with your might, and go through it, though this cannot be done without great labor, care, and difficulty, and expense? I would by no means flatter you concerning this work, or go about to make you believe, that you shall find an easy light business of it: no, I would not have you expect any such thing. I would have you sit down and count the cost; and if you cannot find it in your hearts to engage in a great, hard, laborious, and expensive undertaking, and to persevere in it to the end of life, pretend not to be religious. Indulge yourselves in your ease; follow your pleasures; eat, drink, and be merry; even conclude to go to hell in that way, and never make any more pretenses of seeking your salvation. Here consider several things in particular.

1. How often you have been warned of the approaching flood of God's wrath. How frequently you have been told of hell, heard the threatenings of the word of God set before you, and been warned to flee from the wrath to come. It is with you as it was with the inhabitants of the old world. Noah warned them abundantly of the approaching flood, and counseled them to take care for their safety, 1 Pet. 3:19, 20. Noah warned them in words; and he preached to them. He warned them also in his actions. His building the ark, which took him so long a time, and in which he employed so many hands, was a standing warning to them. All the blows of the hammer and axe, during the progress of that building, were so many calls and warnings to the old world, to take care for their preservation from the approaching destruction. Every knock of the workmen was a knock of

**Jesus Christ at the door of their hearts: but they would not hearken. All these warnings, though repeated every day, and continued for so long a time, availed nothing.**

**Now, is it not much so with you, as it was with them? How often have you been warned! How have you heard the warning knocks of the gospel, Sabbath after Sabbath, for these many years! Yet how have some of you no more regarded them than the inhabitants of the old world regarded the noise of the workmen's tools in Noah's ark!**

**Objection. But here possibly it may be objected by some, that though it be true they have often been told of hell, yet they never saw any thing of it, and therefore they cannot realize it that there is any such place. They have often heard of hell, and are told that wicked men, when they die, go to a most dreadful place of torment; that hereafter there will be a day of judgment, and that the world will be consumed by fire. But how do they know that it is really so? How do they know what becomes of those wicked men that die? None of them come back to tell them. They have nothing to depend on but the word which they hear. And how do they know that all is not a cunningly-devised fable?**

**Answer. The sinners of the old world had the very same objection against what Noah told them of a flood about to drown the world. Yet the bare word of God proved to be sufficient evidence that such a thing was coming. What was the reason that none of the many millions then upon earth believed what Noah said, but this, that it was a strange thing, that no such thing had ever before been known? And what a strange story must that of Noah have appeared to them, wherein he told them of a deluge of waters above the tops of the mountains! Therefore it. is said, Heb. 11:7, that "Noah was warned of God of things not seen as yet." It is probable, none could conceive how it could be that the**

whole world should be drowned in a flood of waters; and all were ready to ask, where there was water enough for it; and by what means it should be brought upon the earth. Noah did not tell them how it should be brought to pass; he only told them that God had said that it should be: and that proved to be enough. The event showed their folly in not depending on the mere word of God, who was able, who knew how to bring it to pass, and who could not lie.

In like manner the word of God will prove true, in threatening a flood of eternal wrath to overwhelm all the wicked. You will believe it when the event shall prove it, when it shall be too late to profit by the belief. The word of God will never fail; nothing is so sure as that: heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of God shall not pass away. It is firmer than mountains of brass. At the end, the vision will speak and not lie. The decree shall bring forth, and all wicked men shall know that God is the Lord, that he is a God of truth, and that they are fools who will not depend on his word. The wicked of the old world counted Noah a fool for depending so much on the word of God, as to put himself to all the fatigue and expense of building the ark; but the event showed that they themselves were the fools, and that he was wise.

2. Consider that the Spirit of God will not always strive with you; nor will his long suffering always wait upon you. So God said concerning the inhabitants of the old world, Gen. 4:3 "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." All this while God was striving with them. It was a day of grace with them, and God's long-suffering all this while waited upon them: 1 Peter 3:20, "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." All this while they had an opportunity to escape, if they

would but hearken and believe God. Even after the ark was finished, which seems to have been but little before the flood came, still there was an opportunity; the door of the ark stood open for some time. There was some time during which Noah was employed in laying up stores in the ark. Even then it was not too late; the door of the ark yet stood open.-About a week before the flood came, Noah was commanded to begin to gather in the beasts and birds. During this last week still the door of the ark stood open. But on the very day that the flood began to come, while the rain was yet withheld, Noah and his wife, his three sons, and their wives, went into the ark; and we are told, Gen. 7:16, that "God shut him in. Then the day of God's patience was past; the door of the ark was shut; God himself, who shuts and no man opens, shut the door. Then all hope of their escaping the flood was past; it was too late to repent that they had not hearkened to Noah's warnings, and had not entered into the ark while the door stood open.

After Noah and his family had entered into the ark, and God had shut them in, after the windows of heaven were opened, and they saw how the waters were poured down out of heaven, we may suppose that many of those who were near came running to the door of the ark, knocking, and crying most piteously for entrance. But it was too late; God himself had shut the door, and Noah had no license, and probably no power, to open it. We may suppose, they stood knocking and calling, Open to us, open to us; O let us in; we beg that we may be let in. And probably some of them pleaded old acquaintance with Noah; that they had always been his neighbors, and had even helped him to build the ark. But all was in vain. There they stood till the waters of the flood came, and without mercy swept them away from the door of the ark.

**So it will be with you, if you continue to refuse to hearken to the warnings which are given you. Now God is striving with you; now he is warning you of the approaching flood, and calling upon you Sabbath after Sabbath. Now the door of the ark stands open. But God's Spirit will not always strive with you; his long-suffering will not always wait upon you. There is an appointed day of God's patience, which is as certainly limited as it was to the old world. God hath set your bounds, which you cannot pass. Though now warnings are continued in plenty, yet there will be last knocks and last calls, the last that ever you shall hear. When the appointed time shall be elapsed, God will shut the door, and you shall never see it open again; for God shutteth, and no man openeth.-If you improve not your opportunity before that time, you will cry in vain, "Lord, Lord, open to us," Matt. 25:11, and Luke 23:25, &c. While you shall stand at the door with your piteous cries, the flood of God's wrath will come upon you, overwhelm you, and you shall not escape. The tempest shall carry you away without mercy, and you shall be forever swallowed up and lost.**

**3. Consider how mighty the billows of divine wrath will be when they shall come. The waters of Noah's flood were very great. The deluge was vast; it was very deep; the billows reached fifteen cubits above the highest mountains; and it was an ocean which had no shore; signifying the greatness of that wrath which is coming on wicked men in another world, which will be like a mighty flood of waters overwhelming them, and rising vastly high over their heads, with billows reaching to the very heavens. Those billows will be higher and heavier than mountains on their poor souls. The wrath of God will be an ocean without shores, as Noah's flood was: it will be misery that will have no end. The misery of the damned in hell can be better represented by nothing, than by a deluge of misery, a**

mighty deluge of wrath, which will be ten thousand times worse than a deluge of waters; for it will be a deluge of liquid fire, as in the Scriptures it is called a lake of fire and brimstone.-At the end of the world all the wicked shall be swallowed up in a vast deluge of fire, which shall be as great and as mighty as Noah's deluge of water. See 2 Pet. 3:5, 6, 7. After that the wicked will have mighty billows of fire and brimstone eternally rolling over their poor souls, and their miserable tormented bodies. Those billows may be called vast liquid mountains of fire and brimstone. And when one billow shall have gone over their heads, another shall follow, without intermission, giving them no rest day nor night to all eternity.

4. This flood of wrath will probably come upon you suddenly, when you all think little of it, and it shall seem far from you. So the flood came upon the old world. See Matt. 24:36, &c. Probably many of them were surprised in the night by the waters bursting suddenly in at their doors, or under the foundations of their houses, coming in upon them in their beds. For when the fountains of the great deep were broken up, the waters, as observed before, burst forth in mighty torrents. To such a sudden surprise of the wicked of the old world in the night, probably that alludes in Job 27:20, "Terrors take hold on him as waters; a tempest stealeth him away in the night." So destruction is wont to come on wicked men, who hear many warnings of approaching destruction, and yet will not be influenced by them. For "he that is often reprov'd, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1. And "when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape," 1 Thess. 5:3.



**5. If you will not hearken to the many warnings which are given you of approaching destruction, you will be guilty of more than brutish madness. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." They know upon whom they are dependent, and whom they must obey, and act accordingly. But you, so long as you neglect your own salvation, act as if you knew not God, your Creator and Proprietor, nor your dependence upon him. The very beasts, when they see signs of an approaching storm, will betake themselves to their dens for shelter. Yet you, when abundantly warned of the approaching storm of divine vengeance, will not fly to the hiding-place from the storm, and the covert from the tempest. The sparrow, the swallow, and other birds, when they are forewarned of approaching winter, will betake themselves to a safer climate. Yet you who have been often forewarned of the piercing blasts of divine wrath, will not, in order to escape them, enter into the New Jerusalem, of most mild and salubrious air, though the gate stands wide open to receive you. The very ants will be diligent in summer to lay up for winter: yet you will do nothing to lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come. Balaam's ass would not run upon a drawn sword, though his master, for the sake of gain, would expose himself to the sword of God's wrath; and so God made the dumb ass, both in words and actions, to rebuke the madness of the prophet, 1 Pet. ii. 16. In like manner, you, although you have been oft warned that the sword of God's wrath is drawn against you, and will certainly be thrust through you, if you proceed in your present course, still proceed, regardless of the consequence.**

**So God made the very beasts and birds of the old world to rebuke the madness of the men of that day: for they, even all sorts of them, fled to the ark while the door was yet open: which the men of that day refused to do; God hereby,**

**thus signifying, that their folly was greater than that of the very brute creatures.-Such folly and madness are you guilty of; who refuse to hearken to the warnings that are given you of the approaching flood of the wrath of God.**

**You have been once more warned to-day, while the door of the ark yet stands open. You have, as it were, once again heard the knocks of the hammer and axe in the building of the ark, to put you in mind that a flood is approaching. Take heed therefore that you do not still stop your ears, treat these warnings with a regardless heart, and still neglect the great work which you have to do lest the flood of wrath suddenly come upon you, sweep you away, and there be no remedy.**

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