

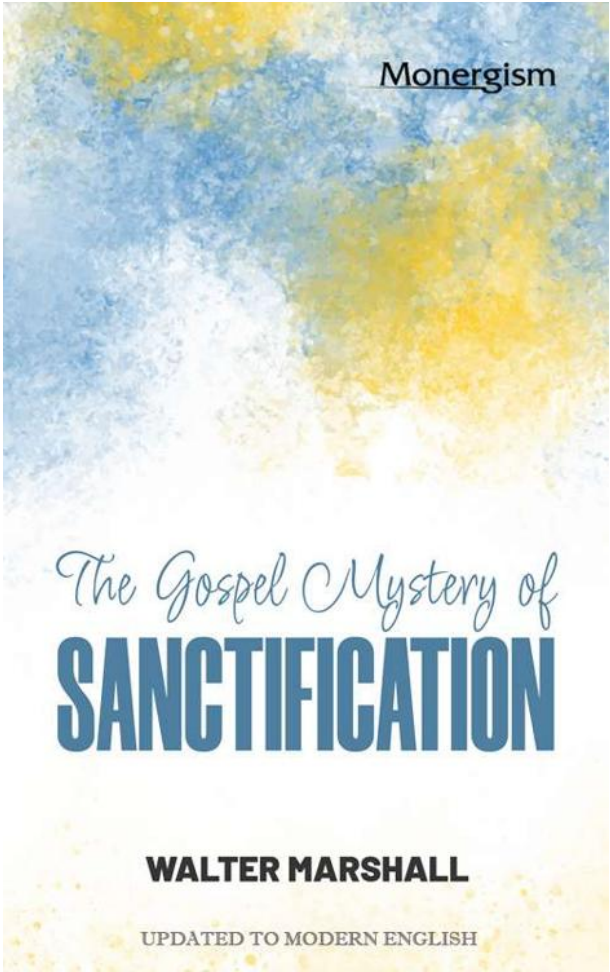


Monergism

The Gospel Mystery of
SANCTIFICATION

WALTER MARSHALL

UPDATED TO MODERN ENGLISH



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Walter Marshall

Monergism Books

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Chapter One

That we may acceptably perform the duties of holiness and righteousness required in the law

In order to perform the duties of holiness and righteousness as required by the law, our first task is to learn the powerful and effective means by which we can achieve such a great goal.

This instruction can serve as a preface, preparing the reader's understanding and attention for what follows.

Firstly, it informs you about the ultimate goal for which all those means are intended, which will be the main subject discussed here. The aim of all this is to teach you how to attain the practice and way of life that we refer to as holiness, righteousness, or godliness, obedience, and true religion. These are the qualities that God expects from us according to the law, especially the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments, and more concisely in the two great commandments of loving God and our neighbor (Matthew 22:37, 39). They are further explained in detail throughout the Holy Scriptures. My task is to demonstrate how to fulfill the duties of this law once you know them. Therefore, do not expect me to delay my intention of helping you understand them by providing an extensive explanation, as that

has already been done in various catechisms and commentaries. However, to ensure that you do not miss the target due to a lack of understanding, I will briefly highlight that the holiness I aim to guide you towards is spiritual (Romans 7:14). It encompasses not only external acts of piety and charity, but also the pure thoughts, imaginations, and emotions of the soul. Its essence lies primarily in love, from which all other good works must flow, otherwise they will not be pleasing to God. Holiness also involves restraining oneself from giving in to sinful desires, as well as desiring and delighting in doing the will of God, and willingly obeying Him without complaining, being annoyed, or begrudging any duty, as if it were a burdensome yoke to bear.

Take note that the law, which is your target, is extremely broad (Psalm 119:96), yet not easier to hit, because you must aim to hit it in every duty, with an equally broad performance. Otherwise, you will not hit it at all (James 2:10). The Lord is not truly loved with the love that is owed to Him as the Lord of all, unless He is loved with all our heart, spirit, and strength. We are meant to love everything about Him: His justice, holiness, supreme authority, all-seeing eye, as well as His decrees, commands, judgments, and all His actions. We are to love Him not only more than other things, but solely, as the only source of goodness, the fountain of all goodness. We should reject all earthly and worldly pleasures, even our own lives, as if we despise them, when they compete with our enjoyment of Him or our obligation towards Him. We must love Him to the extent that we surrender ourselves completely to His constant service in all matters, and to His control over us as our absolute Lord, whether it is for success or adversity, life or death. And for His sake, we are to love our neighbor - every single person, whether they are our friends or enemies - and treat them in all

matters concerning their dignity, life, purity, material wealth, reputation, and satisfaction, just as we would want them to treat us in a similar situation (Matthew 7:12). This spiritual and all-encompassing obedience is the ultimate goal that I am guiding you towards. And so that you do not dismiss my endeavor as impossible, understand that the most I promise is no more than an acceptable performance of these duties of the law, which our gracious and merciful God will undoubtedly take delight in and be pleased with, considering our imperfect state in this world. Such performance will ultimately lead to perfection in holiness and complete happiness in the world to come.

Before I proceed further, take a moment to contemplate the great importance and excellence of these duties of the law, so that you may strive to perform them with such high esteem that it brings a pleasing radiance to the forthcoming revelation of the means. The primary duties of love towards God above all else, and love towards one another for His sake, from which all other duties stem, are so exceptional that I cannot envision a more noble task even for the holy angels in their glorious realm. These are the primary works for which we were originally fashioned in the image of God, imprinted upon humanity during the initial creation, and for which this beautiful image is renewed within us through our new creation and sanctification in Jesus Christ, and will be perfected in our glorification. These works are not merely subject to the sovereignty of God's will, to be commanded or forbidden, left indifferent, altered, or abolished at His pleasure, as other works pertaining to the judicial or ceremonial law, or the means of salvation prescribed by the gospel. Instead, they possess inherent holiness, righteousness, and goodness (Romans 7:12), and are suitable for us to perform due to our natural relationship with our Creator and fellow

creatures. Thus, they have an inseparable reliance on the holiness of God's will, and are indispensably established by it. These works alone are sufficient to make the doers holy in every aspect of their conduct, through the fruits they bear, even if no other duties had ever been commanded. They establish the performance of all other duties as soon as they are commanded, and without them, we cannot fathom any notion of holiness in heart and life. They are also the honored means through which the Mosaic ordinances were fulfilled, and now serve evangelical purposes, until their end—this unwavering charity—is perfectly attained (1 Corinthians 13). These duties are obligations imposed on us by nature, by virtue of the reason and understanding that God bestowed upon humanity at the time of creation, enabling us to discern what is just and appropriate for us to do. Even pagans remain bound to these duties by the light of nature alone, without any written law or supernatural revelation (Romans 2:14, 15). Therefore, they are referred to as natural religion, and the law that commands them is known as the natural law or moral law. All individuals, believers and non-believers alike, should conform their behavior to it, and if they were to fully adhere, they would not fall short of eternal happiness (Matthew 5:19; Luke 10:27, 28), under the penalty of God's wrath for its violation. This is the true morality that God approves, consisting of aligning all our actions with the moral law. And if those who currently emphasize morality understand it in no other way than this, I confidently affirm that the most morally upright individual is the greatest saint. Morality is the primary component of true religion and the criterion by which all other aspects are evaluated. Without it, faith is lifeless, and all other religious practices are a hollow display and mere hypocrisy. For the faithful and truthful Witness has testified regarding the two great moral commandments

of love for God and love for our neighbor, declaring that there is no greater commandment than these, and that "all the law and the prophets hang on these" (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:31).

The second aspect covered in this introductory guidance is the necessity of learning the powerful and effective means by which this great and admirable goal can be achieved. It must be the foremost task to be undertaken before expecting any success in endeavors to attain it.

This is an important notice, as many are prone to overlook the lesson regarding the means (which will be thoroughly discussed in this entire treatise) as redundant and futile. Once they grasp the nature and excellence of the duties prescribed by the law, they believe that nothing is lacking except for diligent performance. They recklessly rush into immediate practice, hastening more than making progress. They readily promise, "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do" (Exodus 19:8), without taking the time to assess the cost. They view holiness merely as a means to an end, namely eternal salvation, rather than an end in itself that requires substantial means for its attainment. The inquiry of most individuals when they begin to sense the importance of religion is, "What good deed should I do to obtain eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16), rather than, "How can I be enabled to do anything that is good?" Furthermore, many who are regarded as powerful preachers expend all their zeal in earnestly urging immediate adherence to the law, without providing any insight into the effective means of accomplishment, as if righteous acts were akin to menial tasks that require no skill or artistry, but only diligence and activity.

To prevent you from stumbling at the threshold of a religious life due to this common oversight, I will strive to make you aware that it is insufficient for you to merely comprehend the substance and rationale of your duty. You

must also learn the powerful and effective means of performance before you can genuinely engage in immediate practice. For this purpose, I will present the following considerations to you.

1. By nature, we are all devoid of the strength and ability to perform the holiness and righteousness that the law demands. We are spiritually dead, immersed in transgressions and sins, and by the sin of our first father, Adam, we are children of wrath, as the Scripture testifies (Romans 5:12, 15, 18, 19; Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 8:7, 8). This doctrine of original sin, which is generally professed by Protestants, serves as a strong foundation for the assertion that is to be proven now, as well as for various other assertions in this entire discourse. If we believe this truth, it is not reasonable to encourage ourselves to pursue a life of holiness until we become acquainted with powerful and effective means that enable us to do so. While humanity remained upright in the image of God, as they were created initially (Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 1:27), they could sincerely obey God's will as soon as they knew it. However, once they fell, they were quickly filled with fear due to their vulnerability. Yet, they were unable to remedy the situation until God revealed the means of restoration to them (Genesis 3:10, 15). Instruct a strong and healthy servant to "Go," and they go; "Come," and they come; "Do this," and they do it. However, a bedridden servant must first learn how they can be enabled. Undoubtedly, the fallen angels recognized the necessity of holiness and trembled at the guilt of their sin, but they had no knowledge of any means to effectively attain holiness and thus continue in their wickedness. It was futile

for Samson to say, "I will go out as I have done before and shake myself," after he had forfeited his strength through sin (Judges 16:20). People display a strange forgetfulness or hypocrisy when they profess belief in original sin in their prayers, catechisms, and confessions of faith, yet urge themselves and others to practice the law without considering any empowering or invigorating means—as if there were no lack of ability, but only of activity.

2. Those who doubt or deny the doctrine of original sin may all come to know, if their consciences are not blinded, that the perfect justice of God stands against them. They are under God's curse and the sentence of death for their actual sins, if God were to judge them (Romans 1:32; 2:2; 3:9; Galatians 3:10). Is it possible for a person who knows that this is their condition and has not learned any means of escape to immediately practice the law, to love God and everything about Him—His justice, holiness, power, and mercy—and willingly submit themselves to God's will, even if God were to suddenly bring about their death? Is there no skill or strategy required in this situation to encourage the discouraged soul to engage in universal obedience?
3. Although heathens may possess some knowledge of the requirements of the law through the common light of natural reason and understanding (Romans 2:14), the effective means of fulfilling those requirements cannot be discovered through that light alone. Therefore, they must be entirely learned through the teachings of supernatural revelation. For what is our natural understanding but a few sparks and faint glimpses of what Adam possessed before the

Fall? Even then, at its brightest, it was not sufficient to guide Adam on how to regain the ability to walk in holiness if he were to lose it through sin, nor could it assure him beforehand that God would provide any means of restoration. God had only set death as the consequence of transgression before his eyes (Genesis 2:17), and so Adam hid himself from God when the shame of his nakedness was revealed, not expecting any favor from Him. We are like lost sheep, unaware of the way to return until we hear the voice of the Shepherd. Can these dry bones live to God in holiness? O Lord, You know, and we can only know it if we learn it from You.

4. Sanctification, by which our hearts and lives are transformed in accordance with the law, is a grace of God that is imparted to us through means, just like justification. It involves the process of teaching and learning something that we cannot perceive without the Word (Acts 26:17, 18). There are various things pertaining to life and godliness that are bestowed through knowledge (2 Peter 1:2, 3). A form of doctrine is employed by God to set people free from sin and make them servants of righteousness (Romans 6:17, 18). Additionally, there are different pieces of the whole armor of God that need to be known and put on so that we can stand against sin and Satan in times of evil (Ephesians 6:13). Shall we disregard and neglect the path of sanctification when the learning of justification has been deemed worthy of numerous elaborate treatises?
5. God, through His inspiration in the Holy Scriptures, has provided abundant instruction in righteousness "so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,

17), particularly since "the dawn from on high has broken upon us" with the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came "to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78, 79). If God condescends to such a great extent to teach us this way through the Scriptures and through Christ, it must be of utmost importance for us to humbly sit at His feet and learn it.

6. The path to attaining godliness is far from being understood without learning from the Holy Scriptures. Even when it is clearly revealed to us, we cannot grasp it as easily as the duties of the law, which were partly known through natural light and therefore more readily accepted. It is the path through which the spiritually dead are brought to life in God. Undoubtedly, it surpasses all human wisdom and speculations. It is the path of salvation in which God will "destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent," by unveiling things through His Spirit that "the natural person does not accept, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 1:19, 21; 2:14). "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16). Learning it requires double effort, as we must unlearn many deeply rooted notions and become fools in order to become truly wise. We must earnestly pray to the Lord to teach us and diligently search the Scriptures to acquire this knowledge. "Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!" "Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end" (Psalm 119:5, 33). "Teach me to do your will" (Psalm 143:10). "May the Lord direct

your hearts to the love of God" (2 Thessalonians 3:5). Surely, these saints did not merely lack instruction and guidance regarding the duties of the law to be performed, but they also sought direction and means by which they could accomplish them.

7. The certain knowledge of these powerful and effective means is of utmost importance and necessity for our firm establishment in true faith and to avoid errors that contradict them. We cannot reasonably doubt that the moral duties of love towards God and our neighbour are absolutely essential to genuine religion, as it cannot exist without them. From this principle, we can firmly conclude that anything contradictory to the practice of these holy duties should not be accepted as a point of faith delivered by the most holy God. Conversely, whatever is truly necessary, powerful, and effective in leading us to practice these duties should be believed as coming from God, as it bears the imprint of His holiness and righteousness. This serves as a reliable test and touchstone which those who are sincerely devoted will use to examine their own spirits and doctrines, determining whether they are from God or not. They cannot reasonably endorse any doctrine as religious if it does not align with godliness (1 Timothy 6:3). Christ Himself proves the divine origin of His teachings through this touchstone, as He seeks the glory of God in all things (John 7:17, 18). He teaches us to recognize false prophets by their fruits (Matthew 7:15, 16), paying particular attention to the outcomes their doctrines produce. Thus, it becomes evident that without knowing the effective means of holiness and distinguishing them from ineffective ones, we lack a

necessary touchstone of divine truth and may easily fall prey to false doctrines or live in a state of uncertainty regarding the truth of any religion, resembling the seekers. If you make the mistake of considering ineffective means to be effective, or perceiving effective means as weak or having an opposite effect, your error in this will serve as a false touchstone to assess other doctrines, causing you to readily embrace errors and reject the truth. This has been a perilous source of numerous religious errors in recent times. Obtain a true touchstone by learning this lesson, and you will be able to evaluate the various doctrines of Protestants, Catholics, Arminians, Socinians, Antinomians, Quakers, and discern the truth, confidently adhering to it amidst the disputes and controversies of our era. In this way, you can determine whether the established Protestant religion among us harbours any elements of Antinomianism, whether it suffers from any unacceptable deficiencies in practical principles, and whether it warrants alteration and upheaval with new doctrines and methods, as some learned individuals have concluded using their touchstones.

8. It is also of significant importance and necessity for our commitment to holy practice, as we cannot engage in the pursuit of holiness with hope of success unless we have faith in divine assistance. Such assistance cannot be expected if we do not utilize the means that God has appointed for His work. "God meets those who remember Him in His ways" (Isaiah 64:5), and He "breaks out against those who do not seek Him according to the proper order" (1 Chronicles 15:13). He has chosen and ordained specific means of

sanctification and salvation that are for His own glory, and only those means are blessed to us. He does not crown anyone who competes unlawfully (2 Timothy 2:5).

Experience abundantly shows, both among heathens and Christians, how detrimental ignorance or misunderstanding of these effective means is to the practice of holiness. (i) Heathens, in general, fell short of acceptable performance in the duties of the law they knew because of their ignorance in this matter. (ii) Many Christians are satisfied with mere external actions because they never learned how to engage in spiritual worship. (iii) Numerous individuals reject the path of holiness, perceiving it as strict and unpleasant, simply because they did not know how to make necessary sacrifices without experiencing unbearable pain. If they knew the ways of wisdom, they would discover that they are pleasant and lead to peace (Proverbs 3:17). This leads to the continual postponement of repentance, as it appears unfamiliar. (iv) Many others approach the pursuit of holiness with fervent zeal and great speed, yet they fail to follow the right path. Disappointed and overcome by their own desires, they eventually give up the work and return to their former sinful ways. This has prompted numerous treatises on how far a reprobate can progress in religious pursuits, which discourages many weak saints who believe these reprobates have gone further than themselves. However, most of these reprobates never knew the right path or walked in it correctly, for "few find it" (Matthew 7:14). (v) Some zealous individuals, lacking in knowledge, harshly afflict their bodies through excessive fasting and other severe practices in an attempt to suppress their desires. When they realize that their desires remain unconquered, they fall into despair and, driven by a troubled conscience,

wickedly contemplate taking their own lives, thus causing a scandal to religion.

Perhaps, by God's grace, my exposition of the powerful means of holiness may save someone from self-destruction. Such a result would justify my efforts, although I also hope that God will use it to inspire many to joyfully and gratefully embrace His commandments with enthusiasm and dedication.

Chapter Two

Several endowments and qualifications are necessary to enable us for the immediate practice of the law

Several qualities and abilities are necessary to enable us to immediately practice the law. In particular, we must have a desire and inclination in our hearts towards it. Therefore, we must firmly believe in our reconciliation with God and in our future experience of everlasting heavenly blessings. We must also possess sufficient strength to both desire and perform all duties in an acceptable manner until we attain that ultimate happiness.

The means that are closest to achieving the desired end must first be revealed so that we can learn how to obtain them through the directions provided. Thus, I have mentioned various qualities and abilities that are necessary to establish that holy disposition and state of the soul which enables us to immediately practice the law, not just initially but continuously. Therefore, take note that these qualities must remain within us during our earthly lives, or else our capacity for a holy life will be lost. They must precede practice, not in terms of time, but as a cause comes before its effect.

I do not claim to have listed all the necessary qualities specifically, but I dare say that anyone who attains these can, through the same means, acquire any other qualities that should be included. This is a matter worthy of serious consideration, as few understand that specific endowments are required to equip us for a holy practice, more so than for other voluntary actions. The first Adam received excellent endowments for a holy practice when he was created in the image of God, and the second Adam received even more excellent endowments to enable Him for a more challenging task of obedience. Considering that obedience has become more difficult due to opposition and temptations since Adam's fall, we, who are to imitate Christ, must possess exceptional endowments, at least equal to or better than what Adam had initially, as our task is more arduous than his.

What king, preparing for war against another king, does not first sit down and consider whether he can confront the enemy who outnumbers him? And yet, should we dare to enter into battle against the forces of darkness, worldly terrors and enticements, and our own powerful inherent corruptions, without considering whether we possess sufficient spiritual resources to stand firm in the face of adversity? Nevertheless, many are satisfied with an ability to desire and perform their duties that they believe should be universally given to all people. However, this does not equip them any better for the spiritual battle than the majority of the world, who remain defeated under the sway of the wicked one. Therefore, their standing is not secure at all.

It is challenging to determine what this universal ability is that so many passionately argue for, what it consists of, and how it is conveyed to us and maintained through means.

Bodily agility relies on spirits, nerves, ligaments, and bones for its functioning, but this spiritual universal ability appears to be an elusive quality that cannot be adequately explained in terms of its conveyance or constitution. In order to prevent self-deception and failure in our pursuit of holiness by relying on such a weak and mysterious quality, I have outlined four endowments that are necessary to constitute a true ability for the practice of holiness. These endowments are essential for its sustenance and maintenance. Later, I will demonstrate how these endowments are bestowed upon us and whether the inclination or propensity mentioned here is perfect or imperfect. These endowments are of such a mysterious nature that some who acknowledge the necessity of endowments for preparing us for holiness are inclined to believe that less than these will suffice, and that some of these endowments actually lead us towards licentiousness rather than holiness since they are presented before any actual performance of the moral law. They may even think that some things contrary to these endowments would put us in a better state for holiness. Against all such notions, I will strive to provide a clear demonstration of these endowments that may win the assent of sound reasoning, explaining them in the same order as I have presented them in the direction.

1. I affirm that an inclination and propensity of the heart towards the duties of the law is necessary to shape and enable us for their immediate practice. By this, I do not mean a blind inclination like that of inanimate creatures and animals towards their natural actions, but rather a fitting inclination for intelligent beings, guided by reason, that inclines them to approve and choose their duty and be averse to the practice of sin. Thus, I have indicated that the three

other endowments mentioned in the direction serve as supports to this primary endowment, which are sufficient to make it a rational inclination. This contradicts those who, out of zeal for obedience but lacking knowledge, fervently argue for free will as a necessary and adequate endowment to enable us to perform our duty once we are convinced of it and our obligation to it. They exalt this endowment as the greatest benefit bestowed upon all mankind through universal redemption, despite considering this free will without any actual inclination towards good. Moreover, they cannot deny that in most people who possess it, free will is burdened with a strong inclination towards evil. Such a free will cannot free us from the bondage of sin and Satan or prepare us for the practice of the law, and therefore it is not worth the effort of those who fervently defend it. The will is not truly free in the manner necessary for holiness until it is endowed with an inclination and propensity towards it, as can be seen from the following arguments. The duties of the law are of such a nature that they cannot be performed when there is a complete aversion or mere indifference of the heart towards them, and no inclination or propensity towards their practice. This is because the greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord with our whole heart, might, and soul, to love everything that is in Him, to love His will and His ways, and to view them as good. Love must influence the performance of all duties: we must take delight in doing the will of God; it should be sweeter to us than honey or honeycomb. This love, liking, delight, longing, thirst, and sweet relishing must endure until the end. The initial involuntary movements of lust must be guided by love for God and our neighbour, and sin must be fought

against and abhorred. If it were considered true obedience (as some suggest) to love our duty only as a market man loves the muddy roads to the market, or as a sick person loves an unpleasant medicinal potion, or as a captive slave loves hard work out of fear of a greater evil, then perhaps it could be performed with aversion or lack of inclination. However, we must love it as the market man loves profit, as the sick person loves health, as delicious food and drink, as the captive loves freedom. Undoubtedly, there can be no power in the will for this kind of service without a genuine inclination towards the will of God, a heart that aligns with His own heart, a turning away of our hearts from sin, and a kind of strong dislike for sin. We know the saying, "Like loves like." There must be a compatibility between the person or thing loved and the disposition of the lover. Love for God must come from a clean heart, a heart that has been cleansed from evil inclinations and tendencies. Reason tells us that the initial movements of lust, which are beyond our choice and deliberation, cannot be avoided without a steadfast inclination of the heart towards holiness.

2. The image of God, in which God, according to His infinite wisdom, deemed it fitting to create the first Adam in righteousness, true holiness, and uprightness, consists of an actual inclination and propensity of the heart towards the practice of holiness. It does not merely entail the power of will to choose between good and evil, for in itself, this power is neither holy nor unholy; it is merely a foundation upon which the image of either God or Satan can be drawn. Nor does it involve an indifference towards the choice of sin

or duty, for that is a wicked disposition in an intelligent creature who knows their duty, and it only leaves us wavering between God and Baal. Initially, God placed Adam's soul in a wholly upright inclination, although Adam could act contrary to it if he chose, just as we may be persuaded to do things contrary to our natural inclinations. It is easy to fall short of our duty, despite the great preparation and equipment required for its performance. Similarly, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, was born as a holy being, with a sanctified disposition of His soul and a propensity towards goodness. Can we reasonably expect to rise to the life of holiness from which the first Adam fell, or to imitate Christ, considering that duty has become more difficult due to the Fall, if we are not renewed to some extent according to the same image of God and endowed with such a propensity and inclination?

3. Original corruption, by which we are estranged from God and godliness from birth and become willing slaves to the commission of actual sins until the Son of God sets us free, consists of a natural inclination and propensity of the heart towards sin and an aversion to holiness. Without this inclination towards sin, what can we make of the "law of sin in our members" that wages war against the law of our mind and holds us captive to the service of sin? What is that poison within us that warrants us being called serpents, vipers? What is that spirit of promiscuity in men that hinders them from turning their deeds towards God? How does the tree become corrupt and, as a result, bear corrupt fruit? How can man be described as abominable and filthy, drinking iniquity like water? How could the

mind of the flesh be in constant enmity with the law of God? I am aware that there is also a blindness of understanding and other aspects associated with original corruption that contribute to this evil inclination of the will. However, this inclination itself is the great evil, the indwelling sin that gives rise to all actual sins. It must be either removed or restrained by restoring the contrary inclination that constitutes the image of God; otherwise, we will be averse and unreceptive to every good work, and any freedom the will possesses will only be employed in the service of sin.

4. God restores His people to holiness by granting them "a new heart and a new spirit" and removing the heart of stone from their flesh, replacing it with a heart of flesh. He circumcises their hearts, enabling them to love Him with their entire being. Additionally, He calls us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may discern and follow His acceptable will. David also prays for this same purpose, asking God to create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit within him. If anyone believes that this new, clean, circumcised heart, this heart of flesh, this new right spirit, lacks an actual inclination and propensity towards goodness, and is merely endowed with a power to choose between good and evil, referred to as free will without any present inclination to good, or an indifference towards both opposites, then it may not be worthwhile to try and convince such a judgement. However, let it be considered whether David would deem a heart clean and right when he prays, "Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness."

The second necessary endowment to enable us to immediately practice holiness, in conjunction with the two others that follow, is to be firmly convinced of our reconciliation with God. We must acknowledge that the breach of friendship caused by sin between God and us is repaired through a firm reconciliation, restoring His love and favour towards us. In this, I include the great benefit of justification as the means by which we are reconciled to God. This is described in Scripture either as the forgiveness of our sins or the imputation of righteousness to us, as both aspects are encompassed within the same justifying act. It is similar to how one act of illumination involves the expulsion of darkness and the introduction of light, or how one act of repentance entails the mortification of sin and the vivification to righteousness. Every transition from one state to its contrary is essentially one and the same, even though it may be expressed using different terms depending on the two opposing elements involved, with one being abolished and the other introduced. This is a profound mystery that contradicts the understanding not only of ordinary people but also of some learned theologians. They believe that we must be reconciled to God and justified through the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness before we can sincerely obey the law and be enabled to practice it. They argue that this doctrine undermines holy practice and serves as a significant support for Antinomianism. According to them, the only way to establish genuine obedience is to make it a condition to be fulfilled prior to our actual justification and reconciliation with God. As a result, some recent theologians have attempted to reshape the doctrine of justification held by earlier Protestants in order to make it less prone to Antinomianism and more effective in securing holy practice. However, their efforts are futile and harmful, as they tend towards either Antinomian irreverence or, at best,

superficial hypocrisy. Neither true nor feigned practice can be secure unless the conviction of our justification and reconciliation with God is first obtained apart from works of the law, enabling us to engage in such practice. I will now prove this through several arguments and also demonstrate in the following directions that the persuasion of God's love, as granted to His people, leads only to holiness, although a mistaken belief in it serves as an occasion for licentiousness in many individuals.

1. When the first Adam was created for the practice of holiness, he enjoyed God's great favour and had no sin attributed to him. He was regarded as righteous in God's eyes, given his upright nature in accordance with God's image. It is reasonable to believe that these qualifications were advantageous for his pursuit of holiness, as God's wisdom deemed them good for that purpose. However, when Adam lost these qualities, he fell into a state of spiritual death. Similarly, the second Adam, in our human nature, was beloved by the Father and considered righteous before God, with no sin imputed to Him except for the sins He bore on behalf of others. Can we reasonably expect to imitate Christ by undertaking obedience more challenging than that of the first Adam before the Fall, unless we receive similar advantages through reconciliation, the forgiveness of sins, and the imputation of God's righteousness to us, as we have none of our own?
2. Those who are fully aware of their natural state of spiritual deadness under the power of sin and Satan are convinced that, if left to their own devices, they can only continue to sin. They recognize that they can only perform good works if it pleases God, out of His great love

and mercy, to work in them. Therefore, in order to be encouraged and genuinely inclined towards holiness, they must have hope that God will work salvation within them. Now, I leave it to thoughtful individuals to judge whether such hope can be well-founded without a firm conviction of reconciliation with God and His saving love towards us, which does not depend on any prior goodness of our works, but is a sufficient cause to bring about their effective manifestation in us. Moreover, we understand (if we truly know ourselves) that our spiritual death originated from the guilt of Adam's initial sin and the punishment pronounced upon it. This state of death persists in us due to the guilt of our own sins and the curse of the law. We can never receive spiritual life to be liberated from this dominion unless this guilt and curse are removed from us, which occurs through actual justification.

3. The nature of the duties prescribed by the law necessitates an understanding of our reconciliation with God and His genuine love and favour towards us in performing them. The greatest duty is to love God with our entire being, and this love is not a mere contemplative affection such as philosophers may have towards the objects of their study, with no further personal involvement beyond satisfying their intellectual curiosity. Rather, it is a practical love that leads us to willingly submit ourselves and the entire world to God's absolute authority and governance, accepting His sovereign will in relation to our present and eternal condition. It involves viewing Him as the sole source of fulfillment and happiness for all who are blessed. This love encompasses delighting in everything

about God as our Lord, including His justice along with all His other attributes, without desiring Him to be different than He is. It is a love that desires His will to be done in our lives and the lives of others, whether it involves prosperity or adversity, life or death. Through this love, we can genuinely praise Him in all circumstances and find joy in our obedience to Him, even when we endure great hardships, including the prospect of death.

Consider these matters carefully, and you will easily understand that our spirits are not in the right state to perform these duties when we perceive ourselves to be under God's curse and wrath, or when we harbor suspicions that God will ultimately prove to be our enemy. Slavish fear may force some hypocritical actions from us, akin to Pharaoh reluctantly allowing the Israelites to go. However, the duty of love cannot be coerced or compelled by fear; it must be won and sweetly attracted through an understanding of God's love and goodness towards us, as that beloved disciple testifies. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us."

Note here that we cannot love God before we perceive His love for us. Reflect on your own experience, if you have true love for God, and consider whether it was not instilled in you by a sense of God's love for you first. The goodness and excellence of God alone cannot make Him an object of love for us unless we perceive Him as a good that agrees with us. I have no doubt that the devils know the excellence of God's nature just as well as our greatest metaphysical thinkers, but this only fills them with tormenting horror and trembling, which is contrary to love. The greater God's

excellence and perfection, the greater evil He becomes to us if He hates and curses us. Therefore, the innate instinct of self-preservation, deeply rooted in our nature, prevents us from loving that which we perceive as our own destruction. If a person is an enemy to us, we can love them for the sake of our loving reconciled God, because His love can make that person's hatred work for our good. But if God Himself is our enemy, for whose sake can we love Him? Who is there that can deliver us from the evil of His enmity and turn it to our advantage until He is pleased to reconcile Himself to us?

Our conscience must necessarily be cleansed from dead works in order for us to serve the living God. This cleansing is accomplished through the actual forgiveness of sin, obtained by the blood of Christ and revealed to our consciences, as demonstrated by Christ's death for this purpose. In Scripture, that conscience which judges us to be guilty of sin and under God's wrath is considered an evil conscience, even though it performs its duty accurately, because it is caused by the evil of sin and will itself lead us to commit more sin until it can declare us justified from all sin and accepted in God's favour. Love, which is the goal of the law, must originate from a good conscience, just as much as from any other purity of heart. David's mouth could not praise God until he was delivered from the guilt of bloodshed. This guilty conscience, through which we perceive God as our enemy and His justice as condemning us eternally due to our sins, strongly maintains and increases the dominion of sin and Satan within us. It has pernicious effects on the soul, fueling hatred towards God and a desire for there to be no God, no heaven, and no hell so as to escape punishment. It causes such aversion towards God that people cannot bear to think, speak, or hear about Him and His law; instead, they seek to distract themselves with worldly pleasures and activities, trying to keep God out of their minds.

Consequently, they become alienated from true religion, merely suppressing it and silencing its voice. This guilty conscience produces zeal for outward religious performances, as well as false religion, idolatry, and the most inhumane superstitions in the world.

I have often pondered how any sin could effectively destroy the entire image of God in the first Adam, and I conclude that it was by first instilling an evil guilty conscience in him, through which he believed that the righteous God was against him and had cursed him for that one sin. This was enough to lead to a shameful exposure through disorderly desires, a complete turning of his love away from God to the creation, and a desire to hide from the presence of God. This resulted in the total destruction of the image of God's holiness. We can infer that the continual malice, bitterness, rage, and blasphemy of the devil and many wicked individuals against God and godliness stem from the same cause. Some may consider Job uncharitable for suspecting not only that his sons had sinned but that they had been so abominably wicked as to curse God in their hearts. However, Job understood well that if the guilt of any ordinary sin weighs on the conscience, it will secretly lead the soul to wish that God did not exist or that He was not such a just judge. This secret cursing of God cannot be avoided until our consciences are cleansed from the guilt of sin through the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, as symbolised by Job's burnt offerings for his sons.

God has clearly revealed in His Word that His method of bringing people from sin to a life of holiness is to first make them aware of His love for them and the forgiveness of their sins. When He gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, He began by revealing Himself as their God who had delivered them from Egypt, assuring them of His salvation

(Exod. 20:2). Throughout the Old Testament, God instituted circumcision as the entryway into religion, which served not only as a sign but also as a seal of the righteousness obtained through faith, justifying people while they were still considered ungodly. This seal was administered to infants on the eighth day, before they were capable of fulfilling any conditions of sincere obedience, in order to prepare them for a life of holiness.

Moreover, in the Old Testament, God ordained various washings, the shedding of animal blood, and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer to purify and sanctify the people for worship in His tabernacle and temple. These rituals symbolised the cleansing of their consciences from dead works through the blood of Christ, enabling them to serve the living God. This sanctification, in a broader sense, encompassed all that prepared them for God's service, particularly the forgiveness of sin. Though in a stricter sense, focusing solely on their conformity to the law, sanctification would necessarily follow justification, as is commonly taught by Protestant theologians. God also emphasized the importance of first dealing with guilt before engaging in acceptable worship by commanding them to offer sin offerings before burnt offerings. And to ensure that the guilt of their sins did not defile their worship, God instituted an annual Day of Atonement, during which the scapegoat would bear the people's iniquities into a desolate land, providing a comprehensive atonement for all their sins (Lev. 5:8; 16:3, 11, 22, 34).

Under the New Testament, God employs the same method of first loving us and cleansing us from our sins through the blood of Christ. He does this to appoint us as priests, enabling us to offer sacrifices of praise and good works to God the Father. He initiates us into His service through the washing away of our sins in baptism. He nourishes and strengthens us for

His service by granting us the forgiveness of sins in the blood of Christ during the Lord's Supper. He urges us to obey Him because He has already loved us and pardoned our sins. "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1-2). "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. Do not love the world nor the things in the world" (1 John 2:12, 15). I could provide numerous similar passages. From all this, it is evident that God considers it of great importance and graciously provides abundant means, both in the Old and New Testaments, for His people to be first cleansed from guilt and reconciled to Himself in order to be fit for the practice of holiness. Therefore, let us discard all contrary methods proposed by the new divinity!

The third necessary endowment to enable us to practice holiness, without which a conviction of our reconciliation with God would have little efficacy in fostering a rational inclination towards it, is the persuasion of our future enjoyment of everlasting heavenly happiness. This persuasion precedes our holy practice, serving as a motivating and enticing factor. Various adversaries challenge this assertion. Some argue that a belief in our future happiness, prior to demonstrating sincere obedience, leads to licentiousness. They suggest that the way to perform good works is to make them a necessary condition for attaining this persuasion. Others condemn all works pursued out of anticipation of future heavenly joy as legalistic, mercenary, arising from self-love rather than pure love for God. They depict genuine godliness as a person holding fire in one hand to burn up heaven and water in the other to extinguish hell, implying that true devotion to God must not stem from hope for reward or fear of punishment, but solely from love. To

establish the truth asserted against these conflicting errors, I will present the following considerations.

1. The nature of the duties prescribed by the law is such that they cannot be sincerely and universally practised without this endowment. I have already sufficiently demonstrated the necessity of being convinced of our firm reconciliation with God through justification in order to prepare us for this practice, as it includes a belief in our future happiness. Without this conviction, all our efforts are of little value. However, let me now consider a scenario where a Sadducee, who believes in no happiness after death, is asked: "Can such a person love God with their whole heart, might, and soul?" Would it not be reasonable for them to diminish and moderate their love for God, fearing the pain of parting with Him in death? It is generally considered reasonable to detach ourselves from things we must eventually let go. Can such a person find contentment in the enjoyment of God as their happiness? Would they not view the enjoyment of God and all religious duties as vanity, just like everything else, since they will derive no benefit from them after a short time? How can such a person willingly sacrifice their life for the sake of God when, by dying, they must part with God and other things as well? How can they choose afflictions over sin when they will be more miserable in this life and find no happiness in the afterlife? I concede that if afflictions befall such an individual unavoidably, they may reasonably determine that patience is better than impatience. However, they will be displeased that they are compelled to practice such a virtue and prone to

complain and resent their Creator, wishing they had never existed instead of enduring such hardships and finding solace only in fleeting and transient pleasures. I believe I have made my point about the inadequacy of such a person for holiness. In their attempt to reject heaven and hell in order to serve God out of love, they leave themselves no better equipped than the Sadducee. One denies them, the other dismisses their relevance in this matter.

2. The confident hope of heavenly glory has been routinely employed by God, since the fall of Adam, as an incentive for the practice of holiness, as abundantly shown in Scripture. Christ, the great exemplar of holiness, "endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before Him" (Heb. 12:2). While I cannot assert that the first Adam possessed such a certain hope to preserve his innocence, he did have the immediate possession of an earthly paradise and a blissful state within it, which he knew would endure if he continued in holiness or be transformed into an even greater happiness. The apostles did not lose heart in the face of affliction because they knew it would result in "an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:16-17). The Hebrew believers "joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one" in heaven (Heb. 10:34). The apostle Paul considered all his sufferings worthless without the hope of a glorious resurrection, stating that Christians would be the most pitiable if this were not the case, and that the philosophy of the Epicureans, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," would be preferable. He also urged the

Corinthians to abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labor in Him would not be in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

As worldly hopes motivate people in their various occupations, God grants His people the hope of His glory to keep them devoted to His service (Heb. 6:11, 12; 1 John 3:3). It is a certain hope that will never disappoint them (Rom. 5:5). Those who believe it is beneath the excellence of their love to work with the hope of heavenly reward actually elevate their love above that of the apostles, the early saints, and even Christ Himself.

1. This conviction of our future enjoyment of eternal happiness does not lead to licentiousness, provided we understand that perfect holiness is an essential aspect of that happiness. Though we have a right to that happiness through free justification and adoption, we must pursue it in a path of holiness (1 John 3:1-3). Furthermore, being motivated by this conviction is neither legalistic nor driven by self-interest, considering that the conviction itself is not obtained through works of the law, but by the free grace received through faith (Gal. 5:5). Even if it involves self-love, it is certainly not the carnal self-love condemned by Scripture as the source of sinfulness (2 Tim. 3:2), but a righteous self-love that inclines us to value God above the flesh and the world, as God instructs when He urges us to save ourselves (Acts 2:40; 1 Tim. 4:16). Far from being contrary to the pure love of God, this conviction enables us to love God more purely and wholeheartedly. The more we perceive God's eternal goodness and beneficence towards us, undoubtedly the more we will find Him lovable, and our affections will burn even brighter for Him. God does not desire to be loved as a barren wilderness or a

land of darkness to us, nor does He expect to be served for nothing (Jer. 2:31). He would consider it dishonourable for us to claim Him as our God if He had not prepared a city for us (Heb. 11:16). He draws us to love Him with the cords of humanity, using the same cords that human love is drawn by, namely His own love towards us, as He presents His blessings before us (Hos. 11:4). Therefore, the way for us to remain in the love of God is to await His mercy leading to eternal life (Jude 21).

The final endowment, for the same purpose as the previous ones, is that we are convinced of having sufficient strength to both desire and carry out our duties in an acceptable manner until we attain heavenly happiness. This stands in contrast to the error of those who believe it is enough to have the ability to practice holiness if we desire, or to have the will to do so if we choose. They vehemently argue that this sufficient strength is a great benefit bestowed upon all humanity through universal redemption. It also opposes the misconception of those who think that living a godly or wicked life is equally easy, except for some initial difficulties in changing sinful habits and enduring persecution, which they consider to be rare occurrences since many kingdoms have embraced Christianity. They also believe that God only requires individuals to do their best, that is, what they are capable of, and it is nonsensical to say they cannot do what they are capable of. According to their viewpoint, there is no need to concern ourselves much about sufficient strength for a holy practice. To affirm this assertion and refute these errors, consider the following arguments.

1. By nature, we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins, incapable of desiring or doing anything that is spiritually good,

despite the redemption through Christ, until we are actually revived by Him (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:7-9). Those who are sufficiently enlightened and humbled recognize themselves to be in this state by nature. They not only lack the ability to carry out good actions, but primarily lack the inclination and pleasure to do so. They understand that if God does not work in them to both desire and act, they will neither will nor do anything pleasing to Him (Phil. 2:13). They also acknowledge that if God leaves them to their own corruption after initiating the good work, they will undoubtedly become vile apostates, and their ultimate state will be worse than their beginning. From this, we can conclude that anyone who boldly attempts to follow the law without being firmly convinced of having sufficient power to wholeheartedly will and perform the entire work of obedience acceptably has never truly been humbled and come to know the corruption of their own heart. Furthermore, they do not truly believe in the doctrine of original sin, regardless of any formal profession they may make.

2. Those who believe that sincere obedience to the law is incredibly easy demonstrate their lack of understanding of both the law and themselves. Is it an easy task to wrestle, not just against human adversaries, but against principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places? (Eph. 6:12) Is it simple to resist lust and covetousness as commanded in the tenth commandment? The apostle Paul found it so challenging to obey this commandment that his sinful desires were actually heightened by it (Rom. 7:7, 8). Our task is not merely to change sinful habits, but to mortify corrupt

natural affections that give rise to these habits. It involves not only refraining from fulfilling sinful desires but being filled with holy love and aspirations. Yet even restraining and countering the execution of corrupt desires in many cases is comparable to "cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye" (Matt. 5:29, 30). If obedience is so effortless, how is it that the pagans generally engaged in actions that their own consciences condemned as deserving of death? (Rom. 1:32) And why do many of us strive to enter through the narrow gate but fail to do so (Luke 13:24), breaking numerous vows and commitments to obedience and falling back into the practice of our lusts while being weighed down by the fear of eternal damnation?

Regarding those who believe that persecution for the sake of religion is rare in recent times, they should be suspected of being of the world, for the world loves its own. Otherwise, they would recognize that a mere national profession of religion does not guarantee the safety of those who are truly godly from various forms of persecution. And even if men do not persecute us for our faith, it is still immensely challenging to endure great injustices inflicted by others, as well as losses, poverty, physical ailments, prolonged illnesses, and untimely deaths through God's ordinary providence, all while maintaining a genuine love for God and for those who harm us, and exhibiting a patient acceptance of His will, as required by God's law. I acknowledge that the work of God is easy and pleasant for those whom God adequately equips for it. However, those who claim that it is easy for individuals in their ordinary condition reveal their lack of wisdom in contradicting the collective experiences of both pagans and Christians.

While many duties may not require significant physical or mental exertion and could be done with ease if we were willing, it is far easier to move a mountain than to move and incline the heart to genuinely desire and embrace the performance of these duties. I need not concern myself with those who believe that everyone has sufficient strength for a holy practice simply because they can make an effort, that is, do what they can. For God requires the actual fulfillment of His commands. What if, despite our efforts, we cannot fulfill the commands to any significant degree? Shall the law then be disregarded without any performance? And should such efforts be considered sufficient holiness? Moreover, what if we cannot even make the right kind of effort? If a person's ability were the measure of acceptable duty, the commands of the law would hold very little significance.

1. Throughout history, the wisdom of God has always provided people with a firm belief in sufficient strength to enable them to both desire and carry out their duties. The first Adam was endowed with such strength, and there is no reason to think that he was unaware of it or needed to fear being abandoned to his own corruptions, as he had no corruptions within him until he generated them through sinning against that strength. Once he lost that strength, he could not regain the practice of holiness until he became acquainted with a superior strength by which the head of Satan would be crushed (Gen. 3:15). Our Lord Christ, undoubtedly, knew the infinite power of His divinity to enable Him for all that He had to do and suffer in our human nature. He knew that the Lord God would aid Him so that He would not be put to shame (Isa. 50:7). The Scripture demonstrates the abundant assurance of strength that God granted to Moses,

Joshua, and Gideon when He called them to significant tasks, as well as to the Israelites when He called them to conquer the land of Canaan. Christ wanted the sons of Zebedee to consider whether they were able to drink from His cup and be baptized with the baptism that He was to undergo (Matt. 20:22). Paul encourages believers to a life of holiness by assuring them that sin will not prevail over them or have dominion over them, for they are not under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:13, 14). He urges them to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, so that they may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:10, 11). John exhorts believers not to love the world or the things of the world because they are strong and have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:14, 15).

Those who were called by God in the past to perform miracles were first made aware of the gift of power to work them, and no wise person would attempt to perform miracles without knowledge of the gift. Similarly, when people who were dead in sin are called to live a holy life, which is a great miracle within them, God reveals the gift of power to them in order to encourage them in a reasonable manner to embark on such a remarkable undertaking.

Chapter Three

The way to get holy endowments and qualifications necessary

The path to acquiring the holy qualities and abilities necessary to shape and enable us for the immediate practice of the law is to receive them from the abundance of Christ through fellowship with Him. And in order to have this fellowship, we must be in Christ and have Christ Himself within us through a mystical union with Him.

Here, more than anywhere else, we have ample reason to acknowledge, along with the apostle, that without a doubt, the mystery of godliness is great - so great that it could not have entered into the human heart to conceive it if God had not made it known in the gospel through supernatural revelation. Even though it is clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, the natural person lacks the ability to perceive it there, for it appears as foolishness to them. And even if God expresses it plainly and directly, they will still consider it as enigmatic and allegorical. I have no doubt that it still remains a riddle and parable to many truly godly individuals who have received a holy nature through this means. For even the apostles themselves had the saving benefit of it before the Comforter revealed it clearly to them

(John 14:20). They walked in Christ as the path to the Father before they fully understood Him to be the way (John 14:5). And the best among us only grasp it partially, anticipating its perfect understanding in the next world.

One significant mystery is that the holy disposition and inner state, which equips and enables our souls for immediate obedience to the law, must be obtained by receiving it from the fullness of Christ. It is already prepared and established for us in Christ, and stored up in Him. Just as we are justified through a righteousness accomplished in Christ and credited to us, we are also sanctified by a holy disposition and qualifications that are first accomplished and perfected in Christ on our behalf, and then imparted to us. Just as our inherent corruption originated in the first Adam and was passed down to us, our new nature and holiness are first brought forth in Christ and derived from Him to us, as if propagated. Therefore, we do not need to work alongside Christ in creating or producing that holy disposition within us, but rather, we are to receive it and utilise it in our pursuit of holiness, for it is already prepared for us. In this way, we have fellowship with Christ, as we receive that holy disposition of spirit that originally resided in Him. Fellowship occurs when several individuals share the same thing in common (1 John 1:1-3). Despite the illumination of the gospel, this mystery is so profound that we often believe we must attain a holy disposition by generating it anew within ourselves, by forming and cultivating it from our own hearts. Therefore, many devout individuals exert great effort to mortify their sinful nature and generate a holy disposition within themselves, striving earnestly to conquer their sinful desires and strongly urging their hearts towards godliness, as if desperately trying to extract good qualities from them, like oil from a flint. They believe

that although they are justified by a righteousness accomplished by Christ, they must be sanctified by a holiness achieved by their own efforts. While, out of humility, they may refer to it as infused grace, they still think they must obtain this infusion through the same means of working, as if it were entirely acquired by their own endeavours. Consequently, they acknowledge that embarking on a godly life is difficult and unpleasant because it requires arduous wrestling with their own hearts and affections to reshape them. If only they knew that this path of entry is not only harsh and unpleasant but entirely impossible. The true method of mortifying sin and enlivening themselves to holiness is by receiving a new nature from the fullness of Christ. We do not contribute any more to the production of a new nature than we do to the generation of original sin, although we play a role in receiving it. If they knew this, they could spare themselves from many bitter agonies and cease their toil that is burdensome and futile, instead directing their efforts towards entering through the narrow gate in a way that is more pleasant and fruitful.

Another profound mystery in the process of sanctification is the glorious manner of our fellowship with Christ in receiving a holy disposition of heart from Him. This occurs through our union with Christ and His indwelling presence within us. This union is not merely a general preference of Christ as God, but rather a close and intimate union, where we become one spirit and one flesh with Him. This privilege is exclusive to those who are genuinely sanctified. I aptly describe this as a mystical union, for the apostle also refers to it as a great mystery in an Epistle that is filled with mysteries (Eph. 5:32). This indicates that it is remarkably significant among many other mysteries. It is one of the three primary mystical unions that are paramount in religion. The other two are the union of the Trinity of

Persons within the Godhead and the union of the divine and human natures in the one Person of Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. Although we cannot fully grasp the exact nature of these three unions with our limited understanding, as the depth of these mysteries surpasses our comprehension, we have every reason to believe in their reality because they are clearly revealed in Scripture and serve as a necessary foundation for other aspects of Christian doctrine. Specifically, the union between Christ and believers is explicitly stated in various passages of Scripture, affirming that Christ is present in believers and dwells within them, and they in turn dwell in Him (John 6:56; 14:20). They are so closely united that they become one Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and believers are described as "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones," emphasising the profound oneness between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:30, 31).

Moreover, Scripture employs various comparisons to illustrate this union, which would appear very dissimilar to the things they are used to represent. If there were no genuine and proper union between Christ and believers, these comparisons would only serve to obscure the truth rather than enlighten us. It is compared to the union between God the Father and Christ (John 14:20; 17:21-23), the vine and its branches (John 15:4, 5), the head and the body (Eph. 1:22, 23), and bread and the eater (John 6:51, 53, 54). Not only is it compared, but it is also sealed in the Lord's Supper, where the doctrines of transubstantiation held by the Catholics, consubstantiation held by the Lutherans, or the spiritual preference of Christ's body and blood by the Protestants cannot stand without it. If we were to imagine that the body and blood of Christ are not truly consumed by believers, either spiritually or physically, we would reduce the bread and wine to mere empty symbols that are more likely to mislead us than to establish us in the truth. There is

nothing in this union that is impossible or contradictory to reason, which would compel us to depart from the plain and familiar meaning of the Scriptures that express and illustrate it. Although Christ is in heaven and we are on earth, He can unite our souls and bodies to His without any substantial change to either, through the indwelling of the same infinite Spirit in both Him and us. Thus, our flesh becomes His when it is enlivened by His Spirit, and His flesh becomes ours just as if we were to partake of His flesh and blood. He will be in us Himself through His Spirit, who is one with Him and can establish a closer union with Christ than any material substance can achieve. The Spirit can bring about a more intimate connection between Christ and us. This does not mean that a believer becomes one person with Christ, just as the great mystical union does not make Christ one person with the Father. Nor does this union make a believer into God, but rather the believer becomes the temple of God, just as Christ's body and soul are. The Spirit acts as a vibrant instrument rather than the principal cause. This union does not necessitate that a believer is perfect in holiness, nor does it make Christ a sinner. Christ knows how to dwell within believers in certain measures and degrees, making them holy only to the extent that He dwells within them. While this union may seem like an exalted position for unworthy creatures such as ourselves, considering the preciousness of God's blood by which we are redeemed, it would be dishonouring to God if we did not expect a miraculous elevation to the highest dignity that creatures can attain through the merits of that blood. There is nothing in this union that contradicts our senses, for the bond of this union, being spiritual, is beyond the scope of sensory judgment.

In recent times, many learned individuals have acknowledged only a union between Christ and believers that can be likened to the relationship between separate persons or things. They interpret the relevant Scripture passages accordingly. When Christ is referred to as the Head of the church, they understand it to mean a political leader or governor. Likewise, when it is said that Christ is in His people and they are in Him, they believe it refers to the presence and acceptance of Christ's law, doctrine, grace, salvation, or godliness within them. Thus, they argue that in these instances, Christ should not be understood as Christ Himself, but rather as something produced in believers by Christ. When it is stated that Christ and believers are one Spirit and one flesh, they interpret it as the agreement of their minds and affections. They consider the profound mystery of this union, as mentioned in Ephesians 5:32, to be a harsh figure of speech or an obscure and improper expression, rather than a profound and complex reality. They suggest that Christ and His apostles used convoluted language when discussing matters that are straightforward and easily understood by the church. Consequently, this profound mystery—the union of believers with Christ Himself—which has historically been esteemed and embraced by ancient fathers, numerous eminent Protestant theologians (especially those writing about the doctrine of the Lord's Supper), and the general consensus of the church throughout the ages, is now rejected in the new theological paradigm. In my charitable judgment, the reason for its rejection is not because the learned theologians who refine divinity consider themselves less capable of defending this union compared to the other two mysterious unions, or of refuting the objections of proud sophists who refuse to believe what they cannot comprehend. Rather, it is because they view it as one of the elements of Antinomianism that went unnoticed in the previous

traditional doctrine. They believe that this view leads individuals to become prideful, believing that they are already justified and possess eternal life within them, and that they no longer need to rely on their uncertain performance of sincere obedience as a condition for salvation. They perceive this as undermining the very foundation of a holy life. However, the wisdom of God has established a different foundation for holy living, which contradicts their assumptions. This union, which the theologians reject, is a crucial cornerstone of that foundation, next to the cornerstone itself. In opposition to their corrupted interpretations of the Scriptures supporting this union, I affirm that our union with Christ is the cause of our submission to Christ as a leader in all aspects, and it is the reason for the abiding presence of His law, doctrine, grace, salvation, and all godliness within us. It is also the basis for our alignment with Him in our minds and affections. Therefore, it cannot be entirely equated with their interpretations. This affirmation enhances our understanding of the excellence of this union. It is not a privilege acquired through our sincere obedience and holiness, as some may assume, or a reward of good works reserved for us in the afterlife. Instead, it is a privilege bestowed upon believers from the very beginning of their entrance into a state of holiness. It is the foundation upon which all ability to do good works depends, and all sincere obedience to the law follows as the fruit produced by it.

Now that I have explained this principle, I will demonstrate that although the truth contained within it surpasses natural reason, it is clearly revealed to those whose minds are open to discern the supernatural revelation of the mysterious process of sanctification, which God has provided for us in the Holy Scriptures.

1. There are several passages in Scripture that plainly express this truth. Some texts indicate that all things related to our salvation are stored up for us in Christ and encompassed within His fullness, so we must receive them from that source or not at all (Col. 1:19). It pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell in Him. In the same Epistle, the apostle explains that the holy nature by which we live for God was initially produced in us through Christ's death and resurrection: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:11-13 ESV). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3 ESV). A holy frame of spirit, along with all its necessary qualifications, must be encompassed within these spiritual blessings. They are given to us in Christ's person in heavenly realms, prepared and stored up in Him for us while we are on earth. Therefore, we must receive our holy endowments from Him or not at all. In this passage, some prefer to read "heavenly things" as in the margin, since neither places nor things are explicitly mentioned in the original text. However, the original textual reading is to be preferred over the marginal reading as it accurately conveys the proper sense of the original Greek phrase, which is rendered the same way in two other places in the same Epistle (Eph. 3:10; 6:12). Another relevant text is 1 Corinthians 1:30, which states that "Christ

Jesus... became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (ESV). Christ provides us with sanctification, enabling us to live a holy life, just as He provides wisdom for us to be truly wise, righteousness for our justification, and redemption from all misery to enjoy His glory in the heavenly kingdom. Other Scripture passages clearly demonstrate that we receive our holiness from His fullness through fellowship with Him: "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16 ESV). This refers to grace corresponding to the law given by Moses, which undoubtedly includes the grace of sanctification. "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:3, 5-7 ESV). From this, we can deduce that our fellowship with God and Christ specifically includes having light and walking in it with holiness and righteousness. There are other passages that fully support this principle, indicating not only that our holy endowments are prepared for us in Christ and received from Him, but also that we receive them through union with Him: "Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:10-11 ESV). "But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17 ESV). "I have been

crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20 ESV). "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11-12 ESV). Can we desire clearer teachings from God that all the fullness of the new self is in Christ, along with that spiritual nature and life by which we live for God in holiness, and that they are so inseparably fixed in Him that we cannot possess them unless we are joined to Him and He abides in us? Beware that, due to prejudice and hardness of heart, you do not make God out to be a liar by not believing this exceptional testimony that God has given us His Son.

2. God is pleased to illustrate this mysterious process of our sanctification by using various similes and resemblances that leave no doubt as to its truth, which is something of great importance for us to know and believe. I will attempt to summarise the main resemblances and their significance in a concise statement, allowing those who are spiritually inclined to delve deeper into their meditation. We receive from Christ a new holy nature and disposition that enables us to live a holy life through our union and fellowship with Him, in a similar manner to: (i) how Christ lived in our human nature through His union with the Father (John 6:57); (ii) how we inherit original sin and death from the first Adam (Rom. 5:12, 14, 16, 17); (iii) how the natural body receives senses, movement, and nourishment from the head (Col. 2:19); (iv) how the branch receives sap, nutrients, and the ability to bear fruit from the vine (John 15:4, 5); (v) how a wife bears fruit through her marital

union with her husband (Rom. 7:4); (vi) how stones become a holy temple when built on the foundation and joined with the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-6); (vii) how we receive nourishment from bread by eating it and from wine by drinking it (John 6:51, 55, 57). This last resemblance is used to confirm our communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper.

These seven resemblances illustrate the mystery in question to varying degrees. All of them indicate that our new life and holy nature first exist in Christ and are then imparted to us through a genuine and proper union and fellowship with Him. If anyone argues that the similitude of Adam and his descendants, as well as that of married couples, suggests a relational rather than a real union between Christ and us, they should consider that all nations are truly descended from one blood, which originated in Adam (Acts 17:26). Furthermore, the first woman was formed from Adam's body and was genuinely bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Through this first married couple, the mystical union of Christ and His church is particularly exemplified (Gen. 2:22-24; Eph. 5:30-32). This union encompasses both these resemblances in their proximity and fullness, as those joined to the Lord are not only one flesh but also one spirit with Him.

The purpose of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection was to prepare and establish a holy nature and framework for us within Himself, to be imparted to us through our union and fellowship with Him. It was not intended to enable us to independently generate the initial foundation of such a holy nature through our own efforts.

1. Through His incarnation, a new man was created in a holy state, after the holiness of the first Adam had been tarnished and nullified

by the initial transgression. This new state was far more excellent than that of the first Adam because it involved a genuine union of the divine and human nature in one person, Christ. Thus, these natures shared communion and Christ was capable of acting in His human nature through the power inherent in His divine nature, being one with God the Father. The words He spoke during His time on earth were not from His own human power alone, but the Father who dwelled in Him performed the works (John 14:10). Why did Christ establish such a remarkable state of holiness in fallen human nature, causing it to live and act in communion with God who lived and acted within it? One significant purpose was to pass on this excellent state to His offspring, who would be born of Him and in Him through His Spirit, as the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, we would also bear the image of the heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:45, 49), both in holiness in the present and in glory in the future. He was born as Emmanuel, God with us, for the fullness of the divine nature and all holiness resided in Him bodily, even in His human nature, so that we may be filled with that fullness in Him (Matt. 1:23; Col. 2:9, 10). He descended from heaven as the living bread, so that just as He lives by the Father, those who partake of Him may live in Him (John 6:51, 56), sharing the same life of God within them that was originally in Him.

2. Through His death, Christ liberated Himself from the guilt of our sins that were attributed to Him, as well as from all the innocent weaknesses of His human nature that He bore for a time on our

behalf. By freeing Himself, He also prepared freedom for us from our entire natural condition, which is both weak like His and tainted with pollution, even without guilt and sinful corruption. Thus, the corrupt state of our natural condition, referred to as the "old man" in Scripture, was crucified together with Christ so that the power of sin might be destroyed. This destruction occurs in us not through any wounds that we can inflict upon it, but through our participation in the freedom from it and death to it that has already been accomplished for us through Christ's death. This is symbolised in our baptism, where we are buried with Christ by His death being applied to us (Rom. 6:2-4, 10, 11). "God, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3, 4). Notice here that although Christ died so that we might be justified by the righteousness of God and by faith, not by our own righteousness, which comes from the law (Rom. 10:4-6; Phil. 3:9), He also died so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us as we walk according to His Spirit, as those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:4). His death is likened to a grain of wheat that dies in the ground to produce much fruit (John 12:24), to the Passover lamb that was slain so that a feast could be celebrated (1 Cor. 5:7, 8; 11:24), to bread that is broken to nourish those who partake of it (1 Cor. 11:24), and to the rock that was struck to provide water for us to drink (1 Cor. 10:4). He died to make Jew and Gentile into one new man in Himself (Eph. 2:15), and to see His offspring, those who inherit their holy nature from Him (Isa. 53:10).

By carefully considering these Scriptures, it becomes evident that Christ did not die so that we could form a holy nature within ourselves, but rather so that we could receive one that is already prepared and formed in Christ for us through our union and fellowship with Him.

3. Through His resurrection, Christ obtained spiritual life for us, fully procuring it on our behalf and making it our rightful possession through the merit of His death. Thus, we are said to be brought to life together with Christ even when we were dead in sins, and to be raised up together with Him. Moreover, we are made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, our Head, while we continue to live on earth in our own bodies (Eph. 2:5, 6). His resurrection signifies our resurrection to a life of holiness, just as Adam's fall led to our spiritual death. We ourselves are not the creators or formers of our new holy nature any more than we are of our original corruption. Both are already formed and prepared for us to partake in. Through our union with Christ, we participate in the spiritual life that He obtained for us through His resurrection, enabling us to bear its fruits. This is illustrated in Scripture through the analogy of a marriage union (Rom. 7:4). We are united to Him who rose from the dead so that we may bear fruit for God. Baptism represents not only the application of Christ's death but also His resurrection to us. In it, we are raised up with Him to newness of life, and we are taught to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord because He died to sin once and lives to God (Rom. 6:4, 5, 10, 11).

4. Our sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit, through whom we live and walk in holiness (Rom. 15:16; Gal. 5:25). The Holy Spirit first descended upon Christ in all His fullness, so that He could be communicated from Christ to us. This was signified to John the Baptist through the likeness of a dove descending from heaven and resting upon Christ at His baptism (John 1:32, 33). When the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, He baptizes us into Christ and unites us to Him through Himself, serving as the great bond of union (1 Cor. 12:13). Thus, according to the scriptural language, to have Christ Himself is synonymous with having the Spirit of Christ within us (Rom. 8:9, 10). The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ by taking what belongs to Him and revealing it to us (John 16:14, 15). He grants us an experiential understanding of the spiritual blessings that Christ Himself prepared for us through His incarnation, death, and resurrection.
5. The effective causes of the four primary endowments necessary for equipping us for the immediate practice of holiness are encompassed in the fullness of Christ and stored up for us in Him. These endowments, along with their causes, are richly obtained through our union and fellowship with Christ. When we are joined to Christ, our hearts are no longer left under the dominion of sinful inclinations or a mere indifference towards good and evil. Instead, they are endowed with a powerful inclination and propensity towards the practice of holiness, through the indwelling Spirit of Christ who inclines us to focus on spiritual matters and to resist the desires of the flesh (Rom. 8:1, 4, 5; Gal. 5:17). Moreover, in Christ, we experience full reconciliation with God and a higher favour than

Adam had in his state of innocence. This is because the righteousness that Christ achieved for us through His obedience unto death is imputed to us for our justification. It is called the righteousness of God because it is accomplished by One who is both God and man, and thus of infinite value in satisfying God's justice for all our sins and obtaining His forgiveness and highest favour for us (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:19). To assure us of this reconciliation, we receive the Spirit of adoption through Christ, enabling us to cry out, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Through this Spirit, we are also persuaded of our future enjoyment of eternal happiness and of having sufficient strength to will and perform our duties acceptably until we attain that blessed state. The Spirit of adoption teaches us to conclude that if we are children of God, then we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. It assures us that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death. It assures us that nothing can be against us, and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Even in the face of opposition and difficulties, we will ultimately be "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:17, 23, 35, 37, 39).

Furthermore, this comforting assurance of our justification, future happiness, and all saving privileges does not lead to licentiousness when given through the means of union with Christ. This is because it is inseparably linked with the gift of sanctification by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, we cannot have justification or any saving privilege in Christ unless we receive Christ Himself and His holiness along with any other benefit. The Scripture testifies that there is no condemnation for those who

are in Christ Jesus and who walk according to the Spirit, not the flesh (Rom. 8:1).

1. There may be doubt about whether the saints who lived before Christ's incarnation in the flesh could truly be united with Him as one flesh and receive a new nature through union and fellowship with Him, as prepared for them in His fullness. But we should understand that the same Christ who took on our flesh existed before Abraham and was predestined before the foundation of the world to be sacrificed as a blameless lamb, redeeming us from all iniquity through His precious blood. He possessed the same Spirit then, which later filled His human nature in all its fullness and raised Him from the dead. And He imparted that Spirit to the early church. This Spirit had the power and efficacy to unite those saints with the flesh that Christ would assume in due time, for He was the same in both instances. He bestowed upon them the grace with which He would later fill His own flesh for the salvation of all, including us. Thus, David regarded Christ's flesh as his own and spoke of Christ's death and resurrection as his own, even before their fulfilment: "My flesh also shall rest in hope, for You will not leave my soul in hell; neither will You allow Your holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life" (Psalm 16:9-11). Moreover, saints who preceded David likewise partook of the same spiritual sustenance and drank from the same spiritual source, that is, Christ Himself. Therefore, they too shared in the privilege of union and fellowship with Christ. And when Christ was revealed in the flesh at the appointed time, all things in heaven and on earth, along with the departed saints whose

spirits had been perfected in heaven, as well as the saints then present or to come on earth, were "gathered together in one" and included in Christ as their Head. He was the "chief cornerstone" in whom the entire building of the church, comprising the prophets of old and the apostles who followed His coming, is fitted together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. His incarnation, death, and resurrection are the cause of all the holiness ever given to humanity, from the fall of Adam to the end of the world. This is accomplished through the mighty power of His Spirit, by which all saints, past and future, are joined together as members of His mystical body, with Him as the Head.

Chapter Four

The means by which the Spirit of God accomplishes our union with Christ

The means or tools through which the Spirit of God accomplishes our union with Christ and our fellowship with Him in all holiness are the gospel and faith. The gospel serves as the avenue through which Christ enters our hearts, working faith in us. Faith, in turn, enables us to receive Christ Himself, along with His fullness, into our hearts. This faith is a gift of the Spirit, through which we genuinely believe in the gospel and put our trust in Christ as He is revealed and freely promised to us for our salvation.

The previous discussion about the necessity of being in Christ and having Christ in us through a mystical union to empower us for a holy life might cause us to hesitate in our pursuit of holiness. We may struggle to comprehend how we can elevate ourselves above our natural limitations to attain such a glorious union and fellowship. However, God, in His graciousness, reveals to us two means or tools through which His Spirit enables us to partake in this high privilege. These means are within the reach of rational beings through the working of His Spirit in them.

One of these means is the gospel of the grace of God. Through the gospel, God unveils to us the immeasurable riches of Christ and the hope of glory that comes from having Christ dwelling within us. He invites and commands us to believe in Christ for our salvation and encourages us with the free promise of salvation to all who believe in Him. The gospel serves as God's own instrument, through which He sends Christ to bless us with His salvation. (Acts 3:26). It is through the work of the Spirit and righteousness (2 Cor. 3:6, 8, 9). Faith is generated by hearing the gospel, and therefore it serves as a powerful tool through which we are born again in Christ and Christ is formed within us (Rom. 10:16, 17; 1 Cor. 4:15; Gal. 4:19). There is no need for us to think, 'Who will ascend to heaven to bring Christ down?' or, 'Who will descend to the depths to bring Christ up from the dead, so that we may be united with Him in His death and resurrection?' The Word is close to us, the gospel, the message of faith, in which Christ graciously draws near to us. We can reach Him there without any further effort, if we desire to be joined with Him (Rom. 10:6-8).

The other means is faith, which is produced in us through the preaching of the gospel. This faith serves as our means of reception, enabling us to personally receive Christ Himself with all His fullness into our hearts. This is the central focus of the present explanation.

The faith that philosophers commonly discuss is merely an intellectual habit by which we give assent to a testimony based on the authority of the one testifying. Some argue that faith in Christ is nothing more than believing the truth of religious matters based on Christ's testimony. However, the apostle shows that the faith through which we are justified is faith in Christ's blood, not just faith in His authority as a testifier (Rom. 3:24, 25). While a mere assent to a testimony may be sufficient for

knowledge of things, as pursued by philosophers, we must understand that the purpose of saving faith is not only to know the truth about Christ and His salvation, as testified and promised in the gospel, but also to apprehend and receive Christ and His salvation as given through the promise. Therefore, saving faith must necessarily involve two acts: believing the truth of the gospel and believing in Christ as freely promised to us in the gospel for our complete salvation. Through the first act, we receive the means through which Christ is conveyed to us, and through the second act, we receive Christ Himself and His salvation in the means. It is similar to the act of receiving a breast or cup that contains milk or wine and the act of actually sucking the milk or drinking the wine from them. Both these acts must be performed wholeheartedly, with genuine love for the truth and a desire for Christ and His salvation above all else. This love is our spiritual appetite, necessary for partaking of Christ as the nourishment of life, just as a natural appetite is needed for bodily nourishment. Our assent to or belief in the gospel should not be forced by mere conviction of the truth, which even wicked individuals and devils may experience when they would prefer it to be false. Likewise, our belief in Christ should not be motivated solely by fear of damnation without any sincere love and desire for the enjoyment of Him. Instead, we must embrace the love of the truth by savouring its goodness and excellence. We should consider all things as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord, counting them as rubbish in order to gain Christ and be found in Him (2 Thess. 1:10; Phil. 3:8, 9). We should regard Christ as our complete salvation and ultimate happiness, in whom all fullness dwells (Col. 3:11; Col. 1:19). This love should extend to every aspect of Christ's salvation, including holiness and forgiveness of sins. We should earnestly desire God to create in us a clean

heart and renew a right spirit within us, not being like those who only care about deliverance from hell and nothing else in Christ (Ps. 51:9, 10). Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matt. 5:6). The first of these acts immediately unites us to Christ since its focus is solely on the means of conveyance, the gospel. However, if performed rightly, it is a saving act because it inclines and prepares the soul for the second act, through which Christ Himself is immediately received into the heart. One who believes the gospel with genuine love and appreciation for its truth will undoubtedly believe in Christ with the same sincerity for salvation. Those who know the name of the Lord will surely put their trust in Him (Ps. 9:10). Therefore, in Scripture, saving faith is sometimes described by the first act alone, as if it were simply believing in the gospel, and other times it is described by the second act, as believing in or on Christ: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame" (v. 11). "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" (1 John 5:1). "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (v. 13).

For a better understanding of the nature of faith, it should be further noted that the second and primary act of faith, believing in Christ, includes believing in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are one and the same infinite God, and all work together in our salvation through Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and us. In Him, all the promises of God are fulfilled and affirmed (2 Cor. 1:20). Through Him (as the Mediator), we believe in God who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, so that our faith and hope might be in God (1 Peter 1:21). Trusting in

God or in the Lord is the same as believing in Him, and this is highly praised throughout the entire Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament. The similarity becomes evident when considering that they share the same causes, effects, objects, attributes, opposites, and all the same circumstances, except that in the Old Testament, trust had reference to the promised Christ before His coming, while now it refers to Him who has already come in the flesh. Believing in the Lord and trusting in His salvation are equivalent terms that clarify each other's meaning (Ps. 78:22). I acknowledge that trusting in things seen or known by the mere light of reason, such as our own wisdom, power, wealth, earthly rulers, or any human strength, may not be accurately described as believing in them. However, trusting in a Saviour as revealed through testimony is properly believing in Him. It is also expressed through terms like resting, relying, leaning, and staying ourselves on the Lord, which is referred to as hoping in the Lord. This is because it is the basis of the expectation that is the proper act of hope, although our belief and trust encompass both present and future benefits of salvation. The reason why the Scriptures of the New Testament commonly use the term "believing in Christ" may be because, at the time of writing that part of Scripture, there was a particular need to emphasize belief in the testimony that was newly revealed through the gospel.

Having explained the nature of faith, I now affirm its proper use and function in our salvation: it is the means and instrument by which we actually receive Christ and His fullness into our hearts. This excellent use and function of faith is challenged by various errors. People naturally consider it too insignificant and trivial to produce such great effects, just as Naaman believed that washing in the Jordan was too simple a solution for his leprosy. They despise the true means of entering through the narrow

gate because it seems too easy for such a purpose, thus rendering the entrance not only difficult but impossible for themselves. Some acknowledge that faith is the sole condition for our justification and the instrument to receive it, as previously maintained by the Protestants against the Papists. However, they argue that it is not sufficient or effective for sanctification. They claim that it tends towards licentiousness if it is not accompanied by some other powerful means to ensure a holy way of life. They commend this great doctrine of the Protestants as a comforting remedy for those on their deathbeds or tormented by a guilty conscience. However, they believe it is not suitable for everyday sustenance and that ministers should rarely and sparingly offer it, always with an antidote or correction to prevent the licentiousness it supposedly promotes. Their common antidote or correction is the assertion that sanctification is necessary for salvation, in addition to justification. They claim that while we are justified by faith, we are sanctified by our own observance of the law. Thus, they establish salvation by works, nullifying the grace of justification and rendering it neither effective nor comforting. If this doctrine truly had such a pernicious influence on practice, it could not be recognized as a teaching from the most holy God, and any comfort it provides must be baseless and deceptive. Some recent reformers of the Protestant religion are well aware of this consequence, and therefore they have sought to revise this doctrine. They present saving faith merely as a condition to obtain a right and title to our justification through the righteousness of Christ. This condition must be fulfilled before we can legitimately claim to enjoy it or use any instrument for its actual reception, which they refer to as accepting or receiving Christ. To ensure the practice of holiness through their conditional faith, they do not consider trusting in

God or Christ for salvation to be the primary saving act of faith. They argue that many loose and wicked individuals trust in God and Christ for their salvation just as much as others and, in fact, their confidence only hardens them further in their wickedness. Instead, they propose that the principal act of faith should be obedience to all of Christ's laws, or at least a resolution to obey, a consent to accept Christ as Lord, and a surrender of oneself to His rule in all things. It is evident that the scriptural form of teaching has fallen out of favour with our esteemed intellectuals when trusting in the Lord, which is highly praised in Scripture, is considered a mediocre and ordinary thing. They attempt to dissuade us from acknowledging faith as an instrument of justification by claiming that we, the users of this instrument, become our own primary justifiers, thereby dishonouring God. Yet, it could easily be countered that in this way, we simply become the primary recipients of our justification from God, the giver of it, to whom all the glory belongs.

All of these errors will be refuted if it can be proven that the kind of faith I have described is the instrument by which we actually receive Christ Himself into our hearts, along with holiness of heart and life, in addition to justification, through our union and fellowship with Him. To provide evidence for this, I will present the following arguments.

1. Through faith, we truly experience and possess Christ Himself, not only the forgiveness of sin but also life and, therefore, holiness. Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17). We live for God, yet it is not us but Christ who lives in us through faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:19-20). Whoever believes in the Son of God has the Son and eternal life in Him (1 John 5:12-13; John 3:36).

Whoever hears Christ's word and believes in Him who sent Christ has eternal life and has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24). These texts clearly express the kind of faith I have described. Therefore, the effectiveness or operation of faith, for the purpose of experiencing Christ and His fullness, cannot be merely obtaining a legal right or title to this experience; rather, it must be an entry into it and taking possession of it. We have gained access and entry through faith into the grace in which we stand (Romans 5:2).

2. The Scriptures clearly attribute this effect to faith: through faith, we receive Christ, put Him on, become rooted and grounded in Him. The Scriptures also state that through faith, we receive the Spirit, forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among the sanctified (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:6-7; Galatians 3:14; Acts 26:18). Moreover, the Scriptures illustrate this receiving by the analogy of eating and drinking: whoever believes in Christ drinks the living water of His Spirit (John 7:37-39). Christ is the bread of life; His flesh is true food, and His blood is true drink. The way to eat and drink this is to believe in Christ, and by doing so, we abide in Him, and He in us, and we have eternal life (John 6:35, 47, 48, 54-56). How can it be made any clearer that through faith, we truly receive Christ Himself into our souls, just as we receive food into our bodies through eating and drinking? Thus, Christ is united to us in this way, just as our food is united to us when we eat or drink it. Therefore, faith cannot be a condition merely to obtain a legal right or title to Christ, any more than eating or drinking merely obtains a legal right or title to our food; rather, faith is the instrument by

which we receive Christ, just as the mouth receives and consumes food.

3. Christ, along with His salvation, is freely given by the grace of God to all who believe in Him, for we are saved by grace through faith. And this salvation is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are justified freely by His grace through faith in His blood (Romans 3:24-25). The Holy Spirit, who serves as the bond of union between Christ and us, is a gift (Acts 2:38). Now, something that is given as a gift of grace should not be earned, purchased, or obtained through any work or effort performed as a condition to acquire a right or title to it. Therefore, faith itself should not be considered such a conditional work. If it is by grace, then it is no longer based on works; otherwise, grace would not be grace (Romans 11:6). The condition for receiving a free gift is simply to take it and have it. In this sense, we can acknowledge that faith is a condition, allowing for flexibility in the terms while agreeing on the substance. However, if you give a peppercorn to purchase a title to it, you undermine the freeness of the gift. The free offer of Christ to you is sufficient to confer upon you a right and even make it your duty to receive Christ and His salvation as your own. And because we receive Christ by faith as a free gift, we may consider faith to be the instrument and, so to speak, the hand by which we receive Him.
4. It has already been demonstrated that all spiritual life and holiness are stored up in the fullness of Christ and communicated to us through union with Him. Therefore, the accomplishment of union with Christ is the initial work of saving grace in our hearts. Faith

itself, being a holy grace and part of spiritual life, cannot be present in us before the beginning of this work; rather, it is given to us and produced in the very process of union. And the way in which it contributes to the union is not by merely obtaining a title to Christ as a condition, for then it would need to be performed before the uniting work begins. Instead, it functions as an instrument through which we can actually receive and embrace Christ, who has already come into the soul to take possession of it as His dwelling place.

5. True saving faith, as I have described, possesses a particular aptitude or suitability in its nature and manner of operation to receive Christ and His salvation, to unite our souls with Him, and to equip the soul with a new holy nature that produces a holy way of life through union and fellowship with Him. Just as natural instruments, such as hands and feet, are designed for specific functions according to their nature and natural way of operating, God has fashioned saving faith to fulfil its purpose.

Similarly, we can understand that faith is an instrument specifically designed for our union with Christ and sanctification if we consider its unique suitability for the task. Recognising this is crucial for comprehending the mysterious manner in which we receive and practice all holiness through our union and fellowship with Christ, facilitated by the precious grace of faith. To help you visualise its nature as the instrument I have described, I will present three key aspects.

1. The grace of faith is as well-suited for the soul's reception of Christ and union with Him as any bodily instrument is for receiving and embracing essential things. Through the sincere act of trusting or

believing in Christ for salvation and happiness, the soul casts aside everything that keeps it distant from Christ: reliance on our own strength, efforts, works, privileges; or on worldly pleasures, profits, honours; or on any human assistance or aids for our happiness and salvation. Such confidences are incompatible with our confidence in Christ for complete salvation. Paul, in his confidence in Christ, let go of all confidence in the flesh. He considered his privileges and legal righteousness as loss and regarded all other worldly and religious enjoyments as insignificant compared to gaining Christ and being found in Him (Philippians 3:3, 5-9). The voice of faith declares, "Assyria shall not save us. We will not ride on horses. We shall not say any more to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods'; for in You the fatherless find mercy" (Hosea 14:3). "We have no might against this great company" of our spiritual enemies, "we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You" (2 Chronicles 20:12).

I could provide numerous biblical passages to demonstrate how faith is a grace that empties the self and expels other confidences from the soul, as it rises above them towards Christ as the sole source of happiness and salvation. The very act of trusting or believing in Christ or in God is the means by which our souls approach Christ (John 6:35), draw near to the Lord (Psalm 73:28), seek refuge in the shadow of His wings (Psalm 57:1), anchor our minds on the Lord (Isaiah 50:10; 26:3), lay hold of eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12), lift up our souls to the Lord (Psalm 25:1), commit our way or cast our burden on the Lord (Psalm 37:5; 55:22), and partake of the nourishment of Christ, as we have already discussed. We must consider that Christ and His salvation cannot be seen, touched, or grasped through

physical actions; rather, they are revealed and promised to us in the Word. Now, if anyone can invent another way for the soul to engage in any motion or activity to receive this unseen promised salvation apart from believing the Word and trusting in Christ for the promised benefits, let them do so. Even if Christ were to be earned by works or any other form of conditional faith, faith would still be instrumental in receiving Him. Some may argue that love is more fitting as the uniting grace, but I have shown that love for Christ's salvation is an element of faith. While love may foster a desire for union, when we are in this world, trusting in Christ for all His benefits as promised in the gospel is the most likely way to satisfy this appetite.

1. Saving faith inherently inclines the soul towards holiness and equips it with all the necessary qualities from the fullness of Christ. When we wholeheartedly trust in Christ, affectionately relying on Him for His freely promised salvation, it naturally works within us a rational inclination and ability to practice holiness. This trust encompasses the belief that through Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to God; that our old self has been crucified (Romans 6:2-4); that we live by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25); that we have received forgiveness of sins; that God is our God (Psalm 48:14); that we have righteousness and strength in the Lord, enabling us to do all things (Isaiah 45:24; Philippians 4:13); and that we will experience glorious happiness in the eternal enjoyment of Christ (Philippians 3:20, 21). When the saints in Scripture speak so highly of these spiritual privileges, they reveal the familiar sentiments and language of their faith, their trust in God and Christ. They simply explain the nature and contents of this faith, describing what they receive from the fullness of Christ.

How can we not conclude that those who genuinely love Christ and can think and speak so highly of themselves on solid grounds must be sincerely inclined and profoundly strengthened for the pursuit of holiness?

Given that faith has a natural disposition to enable and fortify the soul for the practice of holiness, we can rightly consider it a suitable instrument for accomplishing every aspect of that practice in an acceptable manner. Those who, with sincere affection, steadfastly believe in Christ for the free gift of His complete salvation can attest through experience that their faith, to the extent of its strength or weakness, propels them to love God wholeheartedly because He loved them first (1 John 4:19). It prompts them to praise Him, pray to Him in Christ's name (Ephesians 5:20; John 16:26, 27), endure afflictions with a cheerful patience while giving thanks to the Father who called them to their heavenly inheritance (Colossians 1:11, 12), love all the children of God out of love for their heavenly Father (1 John 5:1), walk as Christ walked (1 John 2:6), and surrender themselves to live for Christ in all things, compelled by His love demonstrated in His sacrifice for them (2 Corinthians 5:14). The accounts of excellent works produced by faith in the cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11) demonstrate this. While trusting in God may be considered insignificant and contemptible, I see no act of obedience that it cannot generate. Note the excellent manner in which faith operates. Through faith, we live and act in all good works as people in Christ, transcending our natural state by participating in Him and His salvation. We do everything in His name and for His sake. This is the practice of the mysterious way of living in holiness that is unique to the Christian faith in which we exist—yet it is not us who live, but Christ who lives in us

(Galatians 2:20). When Christ and His salvation are known to us solely through the gospel, it is hard to conceive of any other way for such a practice to be possible.

The explanation I have provided regarding the nature and role of true faith, and its suitability for its purpose, is sufficient to demonstrate that it is indeed a profoundly holy faith, as it is referred to (Jude 20). The kind of trusting in Christ that I have described, by its very nature, cannot lead to licentiousness but only to holiness. It establishes us firmly in holiness more than merely accepting the terms of salvation and consenting to have Christ as our Lord can achieve. It is more effective in securing a life of holiness than any resolutions of obedience or acts of surrender that some consider to be the key conditions of our salvation, which are in reality nothing more than hypocritical acts if they are not produced by this faith. There is, indeed, a counterfeit form of dead faith that even wicked individuals can possess. If that leads to licentiousness, let not true faith be blamed. Instead, pay attention to the description of true faith that I have provided, so that you may not be deceived by a counterfeit faith in its place.

I shall now add some thoughts on the efficient cause of this excellent grace and our union with Christ through it. By doing so, it will become evident that this path of salvation is not as easy and trivial as some might imagine. The author and perfecter of our faith, and of our union and fellowship with Christ through faith, is none other than the infinite Spirit of God, and God and Christ Himself through the Spirit. By one Spirit, we are all baptized into one body of Christ and made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13). May God grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in our inner beings, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:16, 17).

When we consider the profound effect of faith, that through it we are elevated to live above our natural condition with Christ and His Spirit dwelling within us, it is not reasonable to believe that it is within the power of human nature to achieve something that raises us to such heights.

Even if God had only restored us to our original natural holiness in our sanctification, this could not have been accomplished without the exercise of His own almighty power to revive those who are dead in sin. How much more is this almighty power necessary to elevate us to this remarkable new state, in which we live and act above the capabilities of nature, by a higher principle of life than what was granted to Adam in his innocence, namely, Christ and His Spirit living and working within us? The natural person brings forth offspring in their own image through the natural power of procreation with which God blessed them at the time of their creation. However, the second Adam, Christ, brings forth His newborn offspring according to His image solely by the Spirit (John 3:5). Those who receive Him, who believe in His name, are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12, 13). Just as Christ took on His own human nature through a personal union with Himself in the womb of the virgin Mary, accomplished by the Holy Spirit coming upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her—the same power by which the world was created (Luke 1:35)—in a similar manner, He takes us into a mystical union and fellowship with Himself through nothing less than infinite creative power. We are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10), and if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

To accomplish the great work of our new creation in Christ, the Spirit of God first works on our hearts through the gospel to produce the grace of

faith within us. If the gospel were to come to us in mere words, without power and the Holy Spirit, the labours of Paul and Apollos to plant and water would be in vain, for we are unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God. In fact, we would consider them foolishness until the Spirit of God enables us to discern their true value (1 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Corinthians 3:6; 2:14). We can never come to Christ through human teaching alone; we must also hear and learn from the Father and be drawn to Christ by His Spirit (John 6:44, 45). And when saving faith is wrought within us, the same Spirit firmly grasps hold of Christ through it. Just as the Spirit opens the mouth of faith to receive Christ, He also fills it with Christ; otherwise, the act of faith would be like a dream where one thinks they are eating and drinking but awakens to find themselves empty. The same Spirit of God not only gave the faith through which miracles were performed but also worked the miracles by means of that faith. Similarly, the Spirit of Christ works saving faith in us and fulfils the purpose of that faith by granting us union and fellowship with Christ through it. Thus, none of the glory of this work belongs to faith, but solely to Christ and His Spirit. Indeed, faith is of such a humbling and self-denying nature that it attributes nothing it receives to itself, but rather acknowledges all as coming from the grace of God. Therefore, God saves us by faith, so that all the glory may be attributed to His free grace (Romans 4:16). Even if Adam had sufficient strength in his state of innocence to exercise the duty of faith as we do, it does not mean he had the strength to elevate himself above his natural condition into union with Christ. This is because faith does not unite us to Christ by its own virtue but by the power of the Spirit working through and with it. Thus, we are passive first and then active in this great work of mystical union. We are first apprehended by Christ, and then we apprehend Christ. Christ first

enters the soul to join Himself to it by giving it the spirit of faith, and so the soul receives Christ and His Spirit through their own power, just as the sun first enlightens our eyes, and then we can see it by its own light. We should also note, to the glory of God's grace, that this union is fully accomplished by Christ giving the spirit of faith to us even before we exercise that faith in receiving Him. It is through this grace or spirit of faith that the soul is inclined and disposed to actively receive Christ. Without a doubt, Christ is thus united to many infants who possess the spirit of faith but cannot exercise faith due to their lack of understanding. However, those who are of riper years and passively joined to Christ by the spirit of faith will also actively join themselves to Him through the act of faith. Until they exercise this faith, they cannot know or enjoy their union with Christ, nor can they make use of it in carrying out other duties of holiness acceptably in this life.

Chapter Five

We cannot attain to the practice of true holiness by any of our endeavours

We cannot achieve true holiness through our efforts alone while remaining in our natural state and without experiencing a new state through union and fellowship with Christ through faith.

It is clear that not everyone possesses that precious faith which allows Christ to dwell in our hearts. In fact, the number of those who have it is small compared to the whole world, which lies in wickedness (1 John 5:19, 20). Furthermore, many who eventually attain this faith go without it for a significant period (Ephesians 2:12). While some may receive the spirit of faith from their mother's womb (such as John the Baptist, Luke 1:15, 44), even they must experience a natural existence through physical birth before they can undergo spiritual regeneration (1 Corinthians 15:46). This leads us to consider two states or conditions of human beings in matters relating to God and godliness, which are vastly different from one another. Those who have the blessing of being born anew and created in Christ through faith are placed in an excellent state, consisting of the enjoyment of Christ's righteousness for their justification and the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ

for holy living in the present and eternal glory, as we have already seen. On the other hand, those who are not in Christ through faith cannot be in a better state than what they inherited from the first Adam through physical birth or what they can attain through the power of their nature, with any assistance God may be pleased to provide. I refer to the latter as a natural state because it consists of things received through natural generation or attainable through natural abilities with divine help, as the Scriptures describe those in this state as natural men (1 Corinthians 2:14). The former I call a new state because we enter into it through a new birth in Christ. It could also be called a spiritual state according to the Scriptures because it is received from Christ, the life-giving Spirit, and the natural and spiritual man are contrasted (1 Corinthians 2:14, 15). Although some refer to both these states as spiritual because they primarily concern the eternal well-being or damnation of the soul or spirit of man.

It is a common mistake for those in a corrupt natural state to seek to reform their lives according to the law without realizing that their state must be changed before their lives can be transformed from sin to righteousness. The pagans, who were unaware of a new state in Christ, were prompted by their consciences to practice various duties of the law based on the knowledge they had through the light of nature (Romans 2:14, 15). The physical descendants of Israel zealously pursued God and godliness and endeavoured to observe the written law, at least in external actions, even though they were enemies of the faith in Christ. Even Paul reached a point where he was blameless in external observances of the righteous requirements of the law while persecuting the church of Christ (Philippians 3:6).

Some individuals who remain in a natural state are so close to the kingdom of God that they are convinced of the spiritual nature of the law. They understand that the law primarily commands us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. They strive and labour with great earnestness to bring their inward thoughts and affections in line with God's law. They aim not only to abstain from some sins, but from all known sins, and to wholeheartedly perform every known duty of the law. They are dedicated in their devout practices, sometimes to the point of overworking their natural strength. Their zeal is fervent, and they are even willing to subject their bodies to fasting and other self-mortifications in order to conquer their sinful desires. They strongly believe that holiness is absolutely necessary for salvation and are deeply affected by the fear of damnation. However, they have not been sufficiently enlightened in the mystery of the gospel to understand that a new state in Christ is required for a new life. Consequently, they labour in vain to reform their natural state instead of rising above it in Christ. Some of these individuals, after spending many years struggling against the current of their sinful desires without success, eventually fall into despair, believing they will never attain holiness. As a result, they either sink into indulgence in their lusts or are consumed by a fearful horror of conscience.

There are several false beliefs that these ignorant zealots hold onto to justify their futile efforts. Some of them think they are capable of practicing holiness because they are not compelled to sin and can abstain from it if they choose to. They add that Christ, through the merit of His death, has restored their freedom of will to do good, which was lost in the Fall, and has set their nature right again. They believe that if they make an effort, Christ will assist them with His saving grace. They also argue that it would

be unjust for God to punish them for sin if they were unable to avoid it, and that it would be pointless for ministers of the gospel to preach and exhort them to saving duties if they were incapable of performing them. They cite examples of heathens and nominal Christians who have achieved great excellence in religious words and works without any knowledge of the faith I have described.

My current task is to liberate those ignorant zealots from their fruitless and tormenting efforts by leading them to despair of attaining holiness in a natural state. Instead, they should seek it only in a new state through faith in Christ, where they can certainly find it without such torment and spiritual anxiety. To accomplish this, I will establish the truth asserted in the guidance and strengthen it against the aforementioned false beliefs through the following considerations.

1. The foundation of this assertion is firmly established in the guidance that has already been explained and is supported by numerous passages of Scripture. If all the necessary qualities required for a holy practice can only be obtained in a state of union and fellowship with Christ through faith, and if faith itself is not acquired through the natural power of free will but through the power of Christ entering the soul by His Spirit to unite us with Himself, then it becomes clear that the pursuit of true holiness through our most vigorous efforts while remaining in our natural condition is utterly hopeless. I need not say more, except to emphasize the abundance of light that the Scripture provides to guide us correctly in this aspect, so that those who deviate from it by following their own false lights or corrupted judgments may find themselves more accountable.

2. It is evident that we cannot practice true holiness while remaining in a natural state, for we must be born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). We are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10). If we were capable of loving God and our neighbour as the law requires without a new birth and creation, then we could live without them, as Christ said, "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28). However, a new birth and creation entail more than simply reforming and repairing our natural state. If the first birth and creation produced both the substance of a person and a state, the second birth and creation had nothing to produce except a new state for the same individual. It is important to note that we were first created and born in Adam, the natural man, but our new birth and creation are in Christ, the spiritual Man. If anyone is in Christ, they are in a new state that is significantly different from the state of Adam before the Fall. They become an entirely new creation, as it is written, "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).
3. The apostle Paul emphatically states that those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:8). Many people are too hasty and negligent in understanding the meaning of this gospel phrase, equating being "in the flesh" to simply being sinful or excessively indulging in sensual desires. They should consider that the apostle speaks of being in the flesh as the cause of sinfulness, just as the following verse speaks of being in the Spirit as the cause of holiness. Whatever the cause may be, it must be distinct from its

effect. Sin is a deficiency within the flesh or something that resides in the flesh (Rom. 7:18), and thus it is not synonymous with the flesh itself. The flesh is that which opposes the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), so it is not solely sinful desires. The true interpretation is that "flesh" refers to the fallen nature of humanity, corrupted by Adam's fall and inherited by us through natural birth. To be "in the flesh" means to be in a natural state, whereas to be "in the Spirit" means to be in a new state through the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ within us (Rom. 8:9). The corrupted nature is called "flesh" because it is received through carnal generation, and the new nature is called "spirit" because it is received through spiritual regeneration. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Thus, if we correctly understand the apostle's words, he has given us sufficient reason to utterly despair of attaining true holiness while remaining in a natural state.

4. The apostle testifies that those who have been instructed in the truth as it is in Jesus have learned to put off their former sinful way of life, characterized by the corrupt desires of the old self, and to put on the new self, which is created in righteousness and true holiness, according to God's likeness (Eph. 4:21, 22, 24). Putting off the old self and putting on the new self is equivalent to not being in the flesh but in the Spirit, as mentioned in the previous testimony. It signifies abandoning our natural state and embracing a new state through union and fellowship with Christ. The apostle himself clarifies that the new self refers to that excellent state where Christ is everything and in everyone (Col. 3:11). Therefore, the old self

undoubtedly refers to the natural state of humanity, in which one lacks the saving enjoyment of Christ. It is called "old" in light of the new state that believers are brought into through regeneration in Christ. This is a manner of expression unique to the gospel, often overlooked by those who believe that the apostle simply means they should renounce sinfulness and pursue holiness in their conduct, attempting to become new individuals by merely turning over a new leaf and leading a different life.

Let them understand that the old and new self represent two contrasting states that encompass not only sin and holiness, but also all other factors that influence and incline us towards their practice. It is necessary to put off the old self, as being crucified with Christ, in order to be freed from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:6, 7). Therefore, we cannot live a new life until we have obtained a new state through faith in Christ. Additionally, the apostle's intention is the same when he instructs us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ as the means by which we can renounce the works of darkness and walk in an upright manner, avoiding the indulgence of fleshly desires (Rom. 13:12-14).

1. Our natural state possesses various qualities that render us entirely incapable of practicing holiness and bind us to a life of sin as long as we remain in it. Here, I will demonstrate that the old self, the flesh, or the natural state is not solely sin, as some may suggest, but it encompasses several aspects, which I shall enumerate, that contribute to its sinful nature, along with various other factors that make it wretched. I have already established that in Christ, we possess all the necessary attributes to cultivate godliness. Conversely, in our fleshly state, we possess everything contrary to

that holy disposition. One aspect of our natural state is the guilt of sin, encompassing both Adam's original sin and the corrupt condition of our nature, as well as our own actual transgressions. Consequently, by nature, we are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3) and subject to God's curse. The blessing of sin forgiveness and freedom from condemnation is not granted to us in the flesh or in a natural state, but only in Christ (Rom. 8:1; Eph. 1:7). Can we imagine that a person can triumph over sin while God is against them and has pronounced a curse upon them?

Another inherent quality, inseparable from the former, is a troubled conscience that pronounces God's wrath upon us due to sin, leading us to abhor Him as an enemy rather than to love Him, as previously discussed. In the case of a seared conscience, it further hardens us in our sinful ways.

A third characteristic is an inherent inclination towards evil, solely tending towards sin, which is referred to as "sin that dwells in us" and "the law of sin in our members." It exerts a powerful hold over us, subjugating and captivating us to the service of sin (Rom. 7:20, 23). It is a fixed propensity to lust, operating without deliberation, and therefore its desires cannot be prevented by diligence or watchfulness. The mindset of the flesh is hostile towards God, as it does not submit to God's law and is incapable of doing so (Rom. 8:7). How futile it is, then, to argue that individuals can do good if they choose, when their minds and will are enslaved to sin?

A fourth aspect is being subject to the power of the devil, who is the god of this world and has blinded the minds of all unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4). He will undoubtedly overcome anyone he contends with on his own turf, that is, in a natural state.

Considering all these characteristics, we can rightly conclude that our natural state has an inherent inability to be good and is spiritually dead in sin (Eph. 2:1), in accordance with the sentence pronounced against mankind's initial sin in Adam: "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Just as you cannot bring a lifeless body back to life through rubbing and stimulation, you cannot bring our natural state to holiness, no matter how fervently motivated or diligent you are. By such motivations and efforts, you cannot rouse any strength or fortifying grace within the natural person, for there is no inherent strength within them to be stirred (Rom. 5:6). Even if you exert all your efforts to the utmost while in this earthly existence, all you can do is sin, as there is no inherent goodness within you, as the apostle Paul demonstrates through his own experience: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Rom. 7:18).

1. We have no solid reason to rely on Christ to assist us in willing or doing what is pleasing to Him while we remain in our natural state, nor can we assume that the ability to choose holiness is restored to us through the merit of His death. As previously explained, Christ had a higher purpose in His incarnation, death, and resurrection than simply restoring the decay and ruins of our natural state. His aim was to elevate us to a new and superior state, surpassing anything the natural state could offer, through union and fellowship with Himself. In this new state, we are empowered to live for God, not by the strength of a natural free will, but by the power of His Spirit living and working within us. Therefore, we can conclude that our natural state is irreparable and desperate because Christ, the sole

Saviour, did not seek to restore it. It is neither holy nor happy, but instead subject to sin and all forms of misery as long as it persists.

Even those who are in a new state in Christ and serve God's law with their minds still find themselves serving the law of sin with their flesh (Rom. 7:25). As long as the flesh remains in them, it lusts against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). While the Spirit brings life to them because of righteousness, the flesh remains dead due to sin (Rom. 8:10). The flesh must be completely abolished through death before we can attain the fullness of holiness and happiness that comes through faith in Christ. After God promised salvation through Christ, the seed of the woman, He placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the entrance to Paradise. This served as a reminder that man's initial state was irretrievably lost and without hope, and that the intended happiness for humanity was entirely new.

Our old natural self was not revived or reformed by Christ's death; rather, it was crucified together with Him and is therefore meant to be abolished and eradicated from within us through the power of His death (Rom. 6:6). It is comparable to a piece of clothing contaminated with the incurable plague of leprosy, which had to be torn off to restore cleanliness to the garment (Lev. 13:56). If Christ does not dwell within us, we are considered reprobates (2 Cor. 13:5), meaning we are in a state that God has rejected from participating in His salvation. Therefore, we should not expect assistance from God to make us holy within this state, but rather to deliver us from it.

1. This in no way absolves those in a natural state from the obligation to live a holy life, nor does it make them exempt from accountability

for their sins at God's judgment seat. For God created mankind upright, but they chose to pursue many sinful ways (Eccles. 7:29). Pay close attention to the words of this passage, and you will see that all those who have chosen to follow sinful paths instead of walking uprightly are included in the term "man" who was originally created upright. And in this text, "man" signifies all of humanity. The first Adam represents all of mankind, just as Jacob and Esau were two nations within Rebecca's womb (Gen. 25:23). God created us all in our first ancestor, in His own image, with the ability and inclination to obey His law. It was in that pure nature that our obligation to obedience was initially placed upon us. The first deliberate transgression, through which our first parent lost the image of God and brought upon himself the sentence of death, was not only his sin but also our sin. "In one man, Adam, all have sinned, and therefore death has spread to all" (Rom. 5:12), because all of mankind was present in Adam's loins when the first sin was committed. This is similar to how Levi can be said to have paid tithes to Melchizedek in Abraham, even before he was born, because when his father Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi was still in his loins (Heb. 7:9, 10). The promise of God that He will not hold parents accountable for the iniquities of their children is a promise belonging to the new covenant established in the blood of Christ. It is "yes" and "amen" to us only in Christ, in whom we receive a new nature different from that which our parents passed down to us. Therefore, we cannot rightfully claim the benefit of that promise in our old natural state (Jer. 31:29-31; 2 Cor. 1:20). Those who consider their inability as a sufficient excuse, for themselves or

others, demonstrate that they have never truly been humbled for the great deliberate transgression committed by all of mankind in Adam's loins. The inability to pay a debt does not excuse a debtor who has squandered away their wealth. Likewise, drunkenness does not excuse the foolish actions of a drunkard but rather exacerbates their sin. Our inability is not merely a lack of capacity for action but a lack of willingness to practise true holiness and righteousness. Naturally, we do not love it, we do not desire it, but we instead lust against it (Gal. 5:17) and hate the light (John 3:20). If individuals in a natural state genuinely loved and desired true holiness, and if they made sincere efforts to practise it out of genuine love, yet failed in their attempts, then they might have some grounds to plead for an excuse (as some do on their behalf) that they were compelled to sin by an unavoidable fate. However, no one has a justifiable reason to make such a plea as an excuse, because no one endeavours to practise true holiness out of genuine love for it until the good work has been initiated in their souls. And when God begins this work, He will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6), accepting their willing hearts even if they fall short in their performance (2 Cor. 8:12). So, how abhorrent and wicked is man, who consumes iniquity like water? (Job 15:16). Man cannot practise holiness because he chooses not to. This is their rightful condemnation, that they prefer darkness over light. They deserve to share in the torments of the devils, as they participate in evil desires alongside them. Their inability to do good will no more excuse them than it excuses the devils.

2. This assertion does not render it pointless to preach the gospel to natural individuals or to urge them towards true repentance and faith in Christ for their conversion and salvation. Our preaching is not intended to bring them to holiness in their natural state, but to elevate them above it and present them as perfect in Christ in the performance of their duties (Col. 1:28). Although they cannot carry out these duties by their natural strength, the gospel becomes effective for their conversion and salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit, which accompanies its proclamation. It quickens those who are spiritually dead and recreates them in Christ by granting them repentance leading to life and a vibrant faith in Christ. The gospel reaches the elect of God not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and with such certainty that they receive it with the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5, 6). The gospel is the ministry of the Spirit that gives life (2 Cor. 3:6-8); it is "mighty through God" (2 Cor. 10:4). Its success for our conversion does not depend at all on the power of our free will, but it imparts into the soul the life and power through which we receive and obey it. Christ can make those who are dead in sin hear His voice and come to life (John 5:25). Therefore, He can also speak to them through His gospel and command them to repent and believe with great success, just as He could say to lifeless bodies, "Talitha cumi" (Mark 5:4); "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43, 44); and to the paralytic, "Rise, take up your bed and go to your house" (Matt. 9:6).
3. There is no reason for us to be swayed by the examples of heathen philosophers, or by any Jews or Christians who outwardly profess

faith but lack a saving knowledge of God in Christ. Their wise sayings and notable achievements in devotion and morality should not cause us to deviate from the truth that has been extensively confirmed through the Holy Scriptures. Do we not have grounds to believe that the apostle Paul, when he was a zealous Pharisee, and at least some of the many Jews in his time who were zealous for the law and had the instruction of the Holy Scriptures, came as close to true holiness as the heathen philosophers or anyone else in their natural state? Yet Paul, after being enlightened with the saving knowledge of Christ, considered himself the foremost of sinners even in his highest previous attainments, though others regarded him as blameless in terms of the righteousness prescribed by the law. He found it necessary to begin living for God in a new way through faith in Christ, and he counted all his former achievements as loss, regarding them as worthless in comparison to knowing Christ (1 Tim. 1:15; Phil. 3:6-8).

And none of the great multitude of Jews who diligently followed the path of righteousness were ever able to attain it because they did not seek it by faith in Christ (Rom. 9:3, 32). What outward actions could be greater than a person giving away all their possessions to the poor or even sacrificing their body to be burned? Yet the Scriptures allow us to consider that these acts may be done without true love and charity, and therefore without genuine holiness of heart and life (1 Cor. 13:3). Individuals in their natural state may have a strong conviction of God's infinite power, wisdom, justice, and goodness, as well as of the judgment to come and the eternal happiness of the righteous and the torments of the wicked. These convictions may

motivate them not only to make lofty professions and speak eloquently about God and godliness but also to exert great effort in avoiding known sins, subduing their desires, fulfilling all known duties to God, and serving Him with their lives and resources to the fullest extent possible. They may even manage to conjure some form of love for God and godliness, driven by the hope of escaping the terrible torments of hell and securing everlasting happiness through their own efforts. However, all their love for God is forced and insincere; they do not genuinely delight in God or His service. They view Him as a harsh Master, and His commandments as burdensome. Secretly, they grumble and complain about the weight of these commandments, and if it weren't for the fear of eternal damnation, they would pay little attention to the enjoyment of God in heaven. They would be pleased to have the liberty to indulge in their lusts without the risk of condemnation. The highest position attainable for those who are born merely according to the flesh, within Abraham's family, is to be children of the bondwoman (Gal. 4:23). Although they may toil more in the service of God than many of His beloved children, God does not accept their service because their best deeds are performed in a slavish manner, lacking any genuine affection towards God. Their deeds are no better than glaring sins. Yet these natural men are not at all indebted to the goodness of their natures for these counterfeit displays of holiness, or for refraining even in the slightest from the most flagrant sins. If God were to leave humanity entirely to their own natural corruptions and the power of Satan (as they deserve), all semblance of religion and morality would quickly vanish from the world, and we would become completely numb to wickedness, similar to cannibals who possess the same inherent goodness as ourselves. However, God, who can restrain the raging fire without extinguishing it and control

the flowing water without changing its nature, also restrains the workings of our natural corruption without eradicating it. Through the greatness of His wisdom and power, He compels His enemies to feign obedience to Him (Ps. 66:3) and to perform many deeds that are good in their substance, even though they are unable to do anything in a truly righteous manner. He has appointed various means to curb our corruptions, such as the law, the terrors of conscience, fearful judgments, rewards in this life, magistrates, human laws, and the necessity of labor for basic needs like food and clothing. The same gospel means that are effective for sanctification also serve to restrain sin. God has gracious purposes in restraining sin: to preserve His church and allow the preaching of His gospel in the world, to create a better opportunity for these natural individuals to receive the teachings of the gospel, to provide a chance for the chosen ones among them to be converted in due time, and to allow those who are not truly converted to experience more of God's goodness in this life and suffer less torment in the hereafter. Despite the vileness and wickedness of the world, we have every reason to praise and magnify the free goodness of God because it could be even worse.

Chapter Six

Those that endeavour to perform sincere obedience to all the commands of Christ

Those who strive to obey all of Christ's commands sincerely, believing that by doing so they can earn their salvation and have a solid foundation to trust in Him, are seeking salvation through works of the law rather than through faith in Christ as revealed in the gospel. They will never be able to achieve sincere and genuinely holy obedience through such efforts.

To understand the terms used in this discussion, it should be noted that salvation is understood here to include justification, along with other saving benefits, and sincere obedience encompasses both heartfelt intentions and their fulfilment. Many people who have a sense of religion tend to believe that the most reliable way to establish a life of holiness and righteousness is to make it the condition for obtaining God's favour and eternal happiness. This can be seen in the prevalence of various false religions throughout history. The heathens, for example, were motivated to practice their best devotion and morality by their knowledge of God's judgment, understanding that those who fail to uphold their obligations to God and

their fellow human beings deserve punishment, as their consciences either accuse or excuse them based on their conduct (Rom. 1:32; 2:14, 15). Through the common light of natural reason, our consciences inform us that it is just for God to expect us to fulfill these duties in order to avoid His wrath and experience His favour. Without divine revelation, we cannot find a better way to attain happiness or motivate ourselves to perform our duties. However, because our consciences also bear witness to our frequent failures in fulfilling these duties, we are inclined, out of self-love, to convince ourselves that our sincere efforts to do our best will be enough to secure God's favour and obtain forgiveness for our shortcomings.

Thus, we can see that our belief in salvation through the condition of sincere obedience originates from our corrupt natural reasoning and is part of the wisdom of this world. It is not part of "the wisdom of God in a mystery, that hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our glory." It is not one of those things of the Spirit of God that "have not entered the heart of man," and that the "natural man cannot receive; for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:6, 7, 9, 14). It is not part of "the foolishness of preaching," through which God was pleased "to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Although a better way has been revealed to us in the gospel, a way to enjoy God's favour, holiness, and salvation without any requirement of works, through the free gift of God's grace received by faith in Christ, it is very difficult to persuade people to abandon the path they are naturally inclined to. This belief has taken hold of their judgments and has become ingrained in them, making it hard to change. Most of those who live under the hearing and profession of the gospel have not come to hate sin for what it is, and to love godliness for its own sake, even though they understand its

necessity for salvation. Therefore, they cannot truly love it. The only way they can try to achieve it is by hypocritically practising their old natural ways, in the hope of avoiding hell and earning heaven through their works. Their consciences bear witness that their zeal and love for God and godliness, their self-denial, sorrow for sin, and strictness of life are, in a way, forced and coerced by slavish fear and selfish hope. They fear that if they were to trust in Christ for salvation through free grace without works, the fire of their zeal and devotion would quickly fade, and they would become careless in their religion, allowing their lusts to run wild and bringing damnation upon themselves. This leads them to regard as the only true and powerful preachers those who preach little or nothing about the doctrine of free grace, but instead focus on rebuking sin and urging people to attain Christ and His salvation through their works, while thundering hell and damnation against sinners.

It has also been observed that some who have strongly advocated for salvation by free grace, without any condition of works, have fallen into Antinomian opinions and licentious practices. The experience of these things has influenced some learned and zealous individuals among us to step back from the doctrine of justification by faith without works, which was previously unanimously professed and vigorously defended by Protestants against the Catholics as a key tenet of true religion. They have convinced themselves that such a path of justification is ineffective and even detrimental to sanctification. They believe that the practice of sincere obedience cannot be established against Antinomian errors and prevailing sinful desires unless it is made the necessary condition for our justification and, consequently, our eternal salvation. Therefore, they conclude that God has certainly made sincere obedience the condition for our salvation. They

have endeavoured to reshape Protestant doctrine and interpret the Holy Scriptures in a manner that aligns with and supports this foundation of holiness, which they consider to be their only reliable one.

However, I intend to demonstrate that this imagined foundation of holiness they hold onto was never established by the holy God. Instead, it is an erroneous foundation that is harmful to true faith and holiness of life. I consider it an error that should be particularly abhorred and detested because we are so prone to be deceived by it. Moreover, it is an error through which Satan, disguising himself as an angel of light and a supporter of holiness, vehemently opposed the gospel in the time of the apostles. He incited people to persecute it out of zeal for the law. This error has also prevailed in establishing and maintaining Popery, which in these days corrupts the purity of the gospel among Protestants and attempts to heal the fatal wound inflicted upon Popery by preaching the doctrine of justification by faith without works.

One aspect emphasized in the directive against this fundamental error is that it promotes a salvation based on the works of the law rather than the faith of Christ as revealed in the gospel. However, its proponents want us to believe that it is the only way of the gospel, so that we may not doubt its power and efficacy for our justification, sanctification, and overall salvation. Their argument is that the law, as a covenant of works, requires us to perfectly fulfill all its commandments in order to live. They, on the other hand, argue for a milder condition of sincere obedience for our life. They claim that they are not advocating for the performance of duties out of obligation to the authority of the law given by God through Moses, but solely in obedience to the commands of Christ in the gospel. They also assert that they do not advocate for salvation through sincere obedience

without Christ, but only through Christ and His merit and righteousness. They acknowledge that both salvation itself and sincere obedience are freely given to them by the grace of Christ, so that everything is based on grace. They also acknowledge that their salvation is by faith because sincere obedience is produced in them through believing the gospel and is inherent in the nature of that faith, which constitutes the complete condition for our salvation. Some even refer to it as the act of surrendering in faith. However, all these arguments are nothing more than deceptive illusions disguising a legalistic way of salvation to make it appear as pure gospel, as I will demonstrate in the following explanations.

1. The apostle Paul condemns all those who seek salvation through the sincere performance of good works as the means to obtain it. He states that they are seeking righteousness by the works of the law rather than by faith (Romans 9:32). Additionally, he warns that those who seek justification by the law are falling from the grace of Christ (Galatians 5:4). This single assertion, if proven, is enough to expose the fallacy of relying on sincere obedience as a procuring condition and to make people detest it as a damning legalistic doctrine that deprives its followers of salvation through Christ. The proof of this assertion is not difficult for those who carefully consider a matter of such great importance for their salvation.

The Jews and Judaizing Christians, with whom the apostle primarily engages in his dispute, did not claim to be justified by perfect obedience according to the strictness of the law. They believed that their obedience needed to be sincere and not hypocritical. We have no reason to doubt that the Judaizing Galatians, who had been exposed to the gospel, also

understood the distinction between sincere obedience and hypocrisy. The Jewish religion compelled its adherents to acknowledge their sinfulness, as evident from their annual humiliation on the day of atonement, various rituals of the law, and numerous clear testimonies in the Scriptures entrusted to them (Psalm 143:2; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20). However, they knew that they were required to turn to the Lord with all their hearts in sincerity and uprightness, and they believed that God would accept sincere obedience. Consequently, they could view it as a condition of the law, even more so than we can regard it as a condition of the gospel (Psalm 51:6, 10; Deuteronomy 6:5; 30:10). Therefore, if the apostle had argued against those who believed that only perfect obedience was necessary for justification, he would have been contending with a mere illusion. They could just as easily consider sincere obedience to be the condition of justification under the law, just as we consider it to be the condition under the gospel.

Furthermore, the apostle does not solely condemn them for regarding sincere obedience to the law given by Moses as the condition of their justification. Rather, he condemns them more generally for seeking salvation through their own works. He cites the examples of Abraham, who lived before the law of Moses, and David, who lived under the law, to illustrate his point. Despite their sincere obedience, neither Abraham nor David was justified by their works. The apostle demonstrates that even those who performed sincere obedience were not justified by it. David, in particular, was devoted to obeying the commands of the law given by Moses, just as we are committed to obeying the commands of Christ in the gospel (Romans 4:2, 3, 5, 6).

Neither does he condemn them for seeking their salvation solely through works, without acknowledging the grace and salvation offered through Christ. The judaizing Galatians still professed belief in the grace and salvation of Christ, although they believed that obedience to the law was a necessary condition for partaking in it. This belief was also held by many other judaizing believers. Undoubtedly, they considered themselves obligated to both Moses and Christ, whom they recognised as their Lord and Saviour. It was not a damning error to view Moses' law as binding at that time, as many thousands of Jews who were true believers regarded the ceremonies of Moses as still in force. Paul was understanding and accommodating towards them in this regard. Other Jews sought justification not only through sincere works but also by placing their trust in the promise made to Abraham, as well as in their priesthood and sacrifices, which were types foreshadowing Christ. Even the most legalistic Pharisees thanked God for their works, attributing them to His grace. They could acknowledge that their salvation was by faith, just as those who assert salvation through sincere obedience do in present times. They believed that their sincere obedience was a result of believing in the Word of God, which encompassed both the gospel and legal teachings. Therefore, they believed it to be encompassed within the nature of faith if faith was considered the condition for their entire salvation.

Let them not rebuild the Judaism that the apostle Paul dismantled, which caused the Jews to stumble at Christ, and put the Galatians at risk of falling from Christ and grace. They must beware of falling under the curse that the apostle has pronounced against anyone, even angels, who preach any other gospel than the one he preached.

1. The distinction between the law and the gospel does not lie in the requirement of perfect obedience versus sincere obedience. Rather, it lies in the fact that the law requires doing, while the gospel does not require doing but believing for life and salvation. The terms themselves differ not only in degree but in their entire nature.

The apostle Paul contrasts the belief required in the gospel with any form of doing for life, as the appropriate condition under the law. The law is not based on faith, but rather on the principle that those who do the commandments shall live by them. However, for the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, their faith is accounted as righteousness. Therefore, even if we seek salvation through an easy and lenient condition of works, we inadvertently subject ourselves to the terms of the law and become obligated to fulfill the entire law perfectly, even if our initial intention was to fulfill only part of it. The law serves as a comprehensive declaration of the only terms by which God will judge those who have not reached the point of despairing over their ability to earn salvation through their own works, and who are willing to receive it as a freely given gift of grace from God in Christ. Consequently, all who seek salvation, whether knowingly or unknowingly, rightly or wrongly, through any amount of works, be it the product of their own superstition or commanded by God in the Old or New Testament, will ultimately stand or fall according to these terms.

1. Sincere obedience cannot be rendered to all the commands of Christ in the gospel unless it is also applied to the moral law as given by Moses, which obliges us through its authority. Some proponents of the condition of salvation through sincere obedience to the

commands of Christ would prefer to be exempt from the authority of the Mosaic law, since it justifies no one and instead pronounces a curse upon all who seek salvation through its works. However, if they were justified at all by sincere works, their regard for Moses' authority would not hinder their success. In fact, many devout Christians believed they were bound to obey not only the moral law but also the ceremonial law, and if they sought justification through works, it would have been through those works. They were unaware of any justification through sincere works exclusively commanded in the gospel. Yet, if they had erred in something absolutely necessary for salvation, the apostles would not have tolerated their error. Whether they like it or not, they must seek their salvation through the works of the moral law as given by Moses, or else they can never attain it through sincere obedience to the commands of Christ. Christ did not cherish their new condition to the extent of abolishing the Mosaic authority of the moral law for its establishment. He did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them, in the practice that they demanded. He declared that anyone who breaks even the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so shall be considered least in the kingdom of Heaven, while those who practice and teach them shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven. He commands us to treat others as we would like to be treated, stating that this encompasses the law and the prophets. This is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that He wants us to acknowledge the authority of the law in obliging us in this matter. He also instructs His disciples to observe and do

whatever the scribes and Pharisees command, for they sit in Moses' seat.

And, to address the matter at hand, when Christ was asked by those who were guilty of the same error of seeking salvation through their own works, He directed them to obey the commands that were already established by the authority of Moses in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He asked them, "What is written in the law? How do you read it? This is what you must do in order to live" (Luke 10:26, 28). He emphasized that if they desired eternal life, they should keep the commandments, such as "You shall not murder" and "You shall not commit adultery."

Similarly, the apostles of Christ also urged believers to fulfil moral duties based on the authority of the law given by Moses. The apostle Paul encouraged them to love one another, stating that the one who loves others has fulfilled the law (Rom. 13:8), and to honour their parents, which is the first commandment with a promise (Eph. 6:2). The apostle John exhorted them to love one another, not as a new commandment, but as an old one. The apostle James urged them to uphold the royal law, as stated in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbour as yourself" and to keep all the commandments of the law, for the one who said, "Do not commit adultery" also said, "Do not murder" (James 2:8, 10, 11). Faithful Protestants have regarded the denial of the authority of the moral law given by Moses as an Antinomian error. Although those who recently opposed Antinomianism do not maintain this error, they establish an even worse error: justification through their sincere works based on the gospel. I believe the term "Antinomian" originated from this error. The authority of the law of Moses initially came from Christ Himself, for Christ was the Lord God of Israel

who ordained the law through angels on Mount Sinai, with Moses acting as the mediator for the Israelites, who were then His chosen people. We, as believing Gentiles, are now joined with them as fellow members of the same body (Eph. 3:6). While Christ has since abolished certain commandments given by Moses, particularly those relating to ceremonial and judicial matters, He has not nullified the binding authority of the moral law. He has left it in full force to obligate us in moral duties that are still to be practised. It is similar to how, when certain acts of a parliament are repealed, the authority of that same parliament remains intact for other unrepealed acts.

I understand that they object by saying that the Ten Commandments of the moral law, which were written and engraved on stones, have also been abolished by Christ (2 Cor. 3:7). However, this argument completely contradicts their conditional covenant. The Ten Commandments are referred to as the "ministration of death" and have been done away with, not because they commanded perfect obedience (since even Christ Himself commands us to be perfect - Matt. 5:48), but because they served as conditions for obtaining life and avoiding death. They were established with a promise of life for those who kept them and a curse for those who broke them (Gal. 3:10, 12). The covenant made with Israel on Mount Sinai has been abolished by Christ, who is the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 8:8, 9, 13). The Ten Commandments do not bind us in the same way as they did under that covenant (Exod. 34:28). By this, I mean that they do not bind us as conditions of that covenant, unless we seek justification through our works. The law, as a covenant, still holds the power to bring a curse upon those who seek salvation through their own works (Gal. 3:10). If it has been abolished, it is only for those who are in Christ by faith (Gal. 2:16, 20; Acts

3:22-25; 15:10, 11). However, the Ten Commandments still bind us because they were given to a people who, at that time, were under the covenant of grace made with Abraham. They serve to show us what duties are holy, just, and good, pleasing to God, and to provide a rule for our conduct. In conclusion, we must continue to practice moral duties as commanded by Moses, but we must not seek justification through our obedience. If we view them as a guide for our lives, rather than as conditions for justification, they cannot be seen as a "ministration of death" or a condemning letter to us. Although their perfection may make it more challenging for us to obtain life through them, they serve as a better rule to reveal our imperfections and guide us towards the perfection we should strive for. It would be wise not to dismiss the authority of Moses' Ten Commandments until our modern theologians can present us with a morality system that is as complete and excellently composed, ordered by the wisdom of God, and more authentic than the decalogue.

Furthermore, those who seek to obtain Christ's salvation through their sincere obedience to all His commands are acting contrary to the way of salvation by Christ, free grace, and faith that is revealed in the gospel, despite their high profession of it.

1. They act in opposition to the way of salvation through Christ, for they attempt to heal and save themselves from the power and defilement of sin and earn God's favour through their sincere obedience before coming to Christ, the only Physician and Saviour. They place their own obedience as the lowest foundation of their salvation and build the experience of Christ upon it, whereas Christ Himself should be the only foundation. They try to sanctify

themselves before having a sure claim on Christ, and in their effort to establish their own righteousness, they do not submit to the righteousness of God in Christ (Rom. 10:3, 4). Sometimes they refer to the righteousness of Christ as their legal righteousness, in order to make room for their own works as the immediate cause of their justification by Christ, thus disregarding the fact that the apostle Paul acknowledged no evangelical righteousness other than that of Christ, which he called the righteousness of faith without the law (Rom. 3:21, 22) and not of the law (Phil. 3:9). In doing so, they render Christ's salvation void while claiming to acknowledge it, and Christ becomes of no benefit to them. Christ is rendered ineffective for them as they seek to be justified by the law (Gal. 5:2, 4). If we desire to be saved by Christ, we must acknowledge ourselves as dead, lost sinners who possess no righteousness for justification except His, and have no life or ability to do good until God unites us with Him in fellowship.

2. They also act in opposition to salvation by grace, as understood in the true meaning of the gospel. We are not saved by grace as the supreme cause of salvation through the intervention of works that are given and accepted by grace as the procuring cause. In such a sense, we might be saved by grace, yet still by a covenant of works. It is comparable to a servant who receives money from his master to purchase an annuity from the master at a reduced rate. The servant may profess that he received the annuity freely, but he has acquired it through his own purchase and can claim it as a rightful debt. However, we are saved by grace as the immediate and complete

cause of our entire salvation, excluding any procurement of our salvation through the condition of works or claiming it as a debt owed according to any law.

The Scripture teaches us that there is a complete opposition and irreconcilability between salvation by grace and works: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). Likewise, there is an opposition between a reward based on grace and one based on obligation (Rom. 4:4), and between a promise of happiness based on the law and one based on grace (Rom. 4:13, 16). God is so protective of the glory of His free grace that He will not save us through any works, even if they are His own works within us, in order to prevent anyone from boasting (Eph. 2:9). He knows that when He heals people through medicine or sustains them through their own labour, they are inclined to attribute the glory more to the means they employ rather than to His sole generosity and goodness.

1. They also act in opposition to the way of salvation by faith. As I have already demonstrated, the faith required for our salvation in the gospel should be understood in a sense that contradicts the notion of doing good works as a condition to earn our salvation. This maintains the true distinction between the terms of the law and the gospel. Believing is opposed to any effort to work for salvation, and the law of works is contrasted with the law of faith (Rom. 4:5; 3:27; Eph. 2:8, 9). Therefore, we must not view faith as a righteous deed encompassing any works performed as a means to secure a right and claim to Christ. Rather, it is simply the hand by which we receive Christ, freely given to us, or the mouth through which we partake of

Him, as has been previously established. God grants us the right to receive Christ and His salvation through the free offer and invitation of the gospel, leaving nothing for our faith to accomplish other than accepting Him as a free gift. In this way, the glory of our salvation is not attributed to our faith or works, but solely to the free grace of God in Christ: "It is by faith, that it might be according to grace" (Rom. 4:16).

2. Christ and His apostles never taught a gospel that required such a condition of works for salvation as advocated by them. The Scripture passages they usually cite in support of their argument are either contradictory to it or significantly different from it – as they would discover from many Protestant interpreters if their attachment to a Popish belief had not blinded them. I will briefly mention just a few of those texts, which will shed some light on the true meaning of the others. The "obedience of faith" mentioned by the apostle Paul as the central aim of gospel preaching (Rom. 1:5) is in direct opposition to their condition of sincere obedience for salvation, just as the law of faith opposes the law of works (Rom. 3:27). This obedience consists of believing the message of the gospel, as the apostle explains: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'" (Rom. 10:16). Faith is imputed as righteousness, not because it is a righteous work in itself, but because through it, we renounce all confidence in any righteous works and rely on the One who justifies the ungodly, as made clear by the very text they often distort for their purposes (Rom. 4:5). They greatly distort the words of Paul:

"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Rom. 2:6, 7), where they claim that Paul is declaring the terms of the gospel when he is clearly stating the terms of the law to demonstrate that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. This is evident from the content of his subsequent discourse (Rom. 3:9, 10). They are evidently aligned with the Papists against the prevailing opinion of the best Protestant theologians in their interpretation of the text: "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24), where they assert that James presents a more accurate expression of the doctrine of justification than the apostle Paul, who teaches justification by faith without works. However, Paul discusses this doctrine as his primary subject, while James only mentions it incidentally as a motivation for the practice of good works, allowing us to easily discern which expressions should be considered most appropriate.

Protestants have adequately demonstrated that James is not speaking of a true saving faith, but rather of a dead faith that even demons possess. He is not discussing justification in the proper sense, but rather the manifestation and declaration of it through its fruits. Furthermore, when he mentions justification by works, he refers to the commandments given in the law of Moses, as evidenced by his citation of the commandments (James 2:8, 11), which the proponents of the new theological ideas want nothing to do with in their justification doctrine.

Another text they often cite is "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may

enter through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). However, the Greek word translated as "right" here is translated as "power" or "privilege" in other instances (John 1:12). In this context, it signifies a rightful possession of the fruit of the tree of life, rather than a mere claim to it. Therefore, this text proves no more than what most Protestants acknowledge, that good works are the path we are to walk in order to partake in and possess the glory of Christ. However, the title to Christ and His glorious salvation is freely given to us without any requirement of works.

They also argue that when the happiness of heaven is referred to as a reward, it must necessarily imply a condition of works. They point to verses such as Revelation 22:12 and Matthew 5:12. Although it is called a reward because it is granted after the performance of good works, and it compensates the works better than any earthly wages can compensate a labourer, it is still a reward of grace and not of obligation (Rom. 4:4). It is not a proper wage, but rather a free gift. As the Scripture states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Another point emphasized in this discussion is that those who strive to perform sincere obedience as a condition to obtain a right and title to Christ and His salvation will never be able to sincerely fulfil any true obedience through such efforts. Despite their earnest labour, fervent prayers, frequent fasting, and commitments to holiness through numerous vows, driven by powerful motives drawn from the infinite power, justice, and knowledge of God, the righteousness and goodness of His commands, the salvation of Christ, eternal happiness and misery, or any other motive contemplated with utmost affection, they will never achieve the desired outcome through such a misguided approach. They may restrain their sinful inclinations and

engage in many hypocritical and servile acts, which may earn them a reputation as exemplary saints among people, but they will be unable to mortify a single sinful inclination or perform a single duty in a manner that pleases God. However, I am critiquing only an error, not the lives of those who hold this belief. I have heard that some preach in a legalistic manner but pray with an evangelical spirit. I have no doubt that their hearts and lives align more with their prayers than their sermons. Although Peter temporarily conformed to Judaism in an outward act of profession, he still lived as a Christian (Gal. 2:11, 14). I only affirm that no godly person did or could attain to godliness through this erroneous path. What a lamentable disappointment this is for those who have attempted to alter Protestant doctrine, perverting and confusing the distinction between law and gospel, causing much contention within the church, all in an effort to secure the practice of sincere obedience against Antinomian errors by making it the procuring condition of salvation. Yet, after all their efforts, the remedy is found to be as ineffective and detrimental to the intended purpose as the disease itself, exerting an Antinomian influence and effect contrary to the power of true godliness!

Much more could be said to refute this novel doctrine. However, if this one point is well established, it should suffice to make the zealous proponents of this belief ashamed of their craft, angry with themselves, and remorseful for investing so much effort and stretching their intellects to uphold such an unprofitable and unsanctifying opinion. It will be enough to prove this by demonstrating that the practice of true holiness cannot possibly be attained by seeking to be saved by the works of the law. I have already established that this doctrine of salvation through sincere obedience aligns with the terms of the law, not the gospel. Those who attribute

justification solely to the gospel and sanctification to the law should also recognize their error. However, because those who advocate for the condition of sincere obedience may not easily be persuaded by what has been said thus far, that it aligns with the law of works, I will further substantiate my argument to sufficiently reveal that "it possesses no other nature and effect than any other doctrine inherent to the law, and produces no better fruit." This will demonstrate that seeking holiness through the law of works is not worthy to be called gospel doctrine.

1. The path of salvation through the works of the law contradicts and undermines the necessary means for a holy life that have been discussed in the preceding instructions and clearly proven from the Scriptures. I have demonstrated that a genuine inclination towards a holy life cannot be achieved without a firm conviction of our reconciliation with God through justification, our eternal happiness, and the sufficient strength to both desire and carry out our duties. Moreover, I have shown that all these and other necessary qualities can only be found in Christ through our union and fellowship with Him. And Christ Himself, along with His fullness, is united to us through faith, which is not a condition to earn a right and claim to Christ, but a means by which we actually receive Him into our hearts, relying on Him for the freely promised salvation in the gospel. These means for a holy life are the very essence of our spiritual existence and joy. Therefore, if we possess them, eternal life has already commenced within us. Since they are the necessary means for a holy life, the beginning of eternal life within us should not be positioned after such a life, as its fruit and consequence, but

rather it must precede it as the cause before the effect. Now, the terms of the law directly oppose this approach. They place the practice of holiness before life and make it the means and cause for obtaining life, as Moses describes: "The person who does these things shall live by them" (Rom. 10:5). According to these terms, one must first perform the prescribed holy duties before having any claim to the promised life or any right to embrace it through faith. And you must pursue holiness without the aforementioned means, or else you will never attain them. Thus, the true means are stripped of their role and, instead of being causes, they are made to be effects and outcomes of a holy life. However, it would be futile to expect such effects and outcomes when the necessary causes are removed. Therefore, the apostle Paul testifies that the way of salvation through the works of the law nullifies faith, renders the promises ineffective, frustrates the grace of God, treats Christ's sacrifice as meaningless, and renders Christ useless and ineffective to us, as if we have fallen from grace (Rom. 4:14; Gal. 2:21; 5:2, 4).

Let us now examine the contemporary doctrine of salvation through the condition of sincere obedience to all the commands of Christ, and we will quickly discover that it is cut from the same cloth as the former legal way of salvation, and it is just as destructive to the means of holiness and holiness itself. It demands from us the performance of sincere obedience before we possess the means necessary to accomplish it. It places obedience as a prerequisite to our justification, assurance of eternal happiness, our actual experience of union and fellowship with Christ, and the acquisition of the new nature that can only be found in Him through faith. This doctrine

undermines the essence of saving faith, through which we truly receive and enjoy Christ and all His blessings. It discourages us from laying hold of Christ and His salvation by telling us, much like Christ told the legalistic worker after all his efforts, that we still lack something (Mark 10:21). It suggests that it would be presumptuous to claim Him as our own until we have fulfilled the condition for our right and entitlement to Him, which is another form of saving faith commonly known as sincere obedience. Through this imposed conditional faith, Satan keeps many troubled souls at a distance, causing them to scrutinise their hearts for many years, trying to determine whether they have fulfilled the condition and whether they possess any right to Christ for their salvation, hesitating to take Him as their own. It acts as a formidable barrier, preventing the soul from approaching Christ until it is demolished by the knowledge of salvation by grace, without any requirement of works to procure it. Though it may be considered as a trivial payment for a vast estate, it is enough to break even the most capable person, because it hinders them from laying hold of the only effective means of holiness, by which that seemingly insignificant payment can be obtained.

1. Those who seek salvation through the works of the law are acting in accordance with their natural state. They live and walk according to the flesh or the old self, rather than the new state of having Christ living within them. I have no doubt that many of them who live under the light of the gospel are participants in the new state in Christ and walk in holiness. However, even the best individuals in this world have both flesh and spirit within them, and to some extent, they may act in accordance with either state. In this matter,

they are acting according to their carnal and natural state. When the Galatians, who initially believed, were led astray to a legalistic approach to salvation, the Apostle Paul rebuked them for their foolishness in seeking to be "perfected by the flesh" after beginning in the Spirit (Gal. 3:3). He likened those who desired to be under the law to Hagar, the bondwoman and mother of Abraham's son, to illustrate that they were walking in the manner of those born according to the flesh, rather than the Spirit (Gal. 4:22, 23, 29). The law was first given to Adam in his original state of innocence to set the terms for his continued enjoyment of the happiness he then possessed. Since then, the flesh or the natural man has been bound to the law, and the law holds dominion over a person as long as they live, that is, until they die to their fleshly state through the body of Christ and are united with Him who is raised from the dead (Rom. 7:1, 4). We are not under the law as a covenant of works in our new state in Christ, as the Apostle testifies: "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14), and "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18). From this, we can firmly conclude that it is impossible to attain true godliness by acting according to legalistic terms. I have already fully proven that it is impossible to be godly while we are in the flesh or in a natural state, and as long as we act according to it, we can do nothing but sin. The law is weakened by the flesh to such an extent that it cannot bring us to fulfill its own righteousness (Rom. 8:3, 4). It is joined to a rebellious nature that is hostile towards it and can never submit to it (Rom. 8:7). It demands

from the natural person a debt of obedience that they are completely unable to repay since the Fall, and as a result, it receives nothing.

Neither do those who attempt to attain holiness by making sincere obedience to Christ's commands a condition for their salvation take a better approach. Their way is essentially the same as that of the previously mentioned Galatians who sought to be perfected in the flesh, not through perfect obedience, but sincere obedience, as has been explained before. Their efforts to secure an interest in Christ through their sincere obedience testify against themselves, revealing that they do not act as people who are in Christ, but rather as people who consider themselves to be without an interest in Christ and still in need of it. And sincere obedience is just as impossible to attain as perfect obedience when we act according to our spiritually dead natural state.

As the law deprives us of all the means of strength that can be obtained through faith in Christ and finds us without strength in our natural state, it, by itself, does not provide us with the strength to fulfill its own commands. "If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law" (Gal. 3:21). It does not even promise life until we have performed the obedience it requires. "The person who does these things will live by them" (Rom. 10:5). It is aptly called a voice of words (Heb. 12:19) because its lofty and grand words are not accompanied by a life-giving power. And the doctrine of life and salvation through sincere obedience is no more gracious or generous towards us, as it demands the performance of the condition before granting us any life or salvation through Christ. Can anyone reasonably expect the strength to sincerely obey by following a doctrine that does not even promise it? The

true gospel is of a more benevolent nature, for it promises that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17), that He will put His laws into our minds and write them on our hearts (Heb. 8:10), and that He will enable us to walk in His statutes, keeping His judgments and doing them (Ezek. 36:27). This word of God's grace, which does not require holiness from us as a condition but promises it to us as a free gift, must surely be the only doctrine capable of building us up and granting us an inheritance among those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32). Since it pleases God to bring us to holiness through believing a doctrine, it is reasonable to expect that God would work in us in accordance with the nature of the doctrine we believe, giving by a giving doctrine and demanding by a demanding doctrine.

1. The approach of attaining life and happiness through the condition of perfect or sincere works is not a rational method for the restoration of fallen humanity, although it may have been suitable for preserving life before the Fall. It prescribes the immediate practice of holiness to revive a person dead in sin - as if one were to say to someone paralysed, "Rise and walk, and then you will be whole and able to walk." We sometimes jokingly say to a child who has fallen on the ground, "Come here, and I will help you up." But if we were to say the same to someone bedridden with paralysis, we would be guilty of mocking and cruelly insulting the afflicted. Those who are humbled and aware of their original sin and spiritual deadness know that they must first live by the Spirit before they can live a holy life (Gal. 5:25). They would inquire, "How will we have the strength to perform the required duty?" If you answer that they must trust in God and Christ to assist them, they may readily

respond that they have no solid basis to trust in God or Christ for any saving grace according to this doctrine, until they have fulfilled this condition, at least in a sincere resolution of obedience. And they assert that they are as incapable of bringing their hearts to such a resolution as a dead person is of raising themselves out of the grave. Let's consider another example. The approach of the doctrine of works is "You must love God first, and then, on that condition, He will love you in return." However, on the contrary, "We love God because He loved us first" (1 John 4:19). And if God withholds His love from us based on any condition, our love for Him will not be absolute but suspended upon the same condition, and it will in no way be contrary to actually hating Him.

2. The law does not heal our sinful corruption; instead, it becomes a cause of sinful desires and actions in those who seek salvation through their works. This happens because our natural corruption is stirred up and intensified when the holy and just law of God is set against it. The fault lies not with the law itself, but with our own hearts. Those who have not experienced this personally should believe the plain teaching of the apostle Paul, who speaks from his own experience (Rom. 7:5, 14). He affirms that sinful desires are provoked by the law in a carnal state, and that sin, taking advantage of the commandment "You shall not covet," produced all kinds of covetousness in him, deceived him, brought death upon him, and became exceedingly sinful. He also declares that he was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and he died. The apostle explains the reason for this irreconcilable enmity

and conflict between his sinful nature and the law: "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." From the explanation given by the apostle, it should be noted that the doctrine of salvation through sincere obedience will yield the same result. Corrupt nature is opposed to both sincere and perfect obedience, and if we make it the condition for our salvation, sin will take advantage of it to become exceedingly sinful in its desires and actions. The effect of the legal doctrine on the natural man can be understood through the proverb, "Do not reprove a scorner, or he will hate you" (Prov. 9:8). Rebuking a madman only serves to enrage him, and such is the condition of the natural man in spiritual matters since the fall of Adam.

We have observed through various experiences that while people generally cling to the idea of salvation through works, many of them despise strict preachers and true advocates of holiness because they trouble their consciences. They try to shield themselves in ignorance of the law, thinking that the less they know, the less accountable they will be. They do not want to hear the truth proclaimed to them (Isa. 30:10). Their influence has, for the most part, obscured the natural understanding of moral duties to such an extent that divine revelation from the Scriptures is necessary to learn them. We can see how inclined legalistic writers are to corrupt the meaning of the law in order to leave room for their own corruptions, just as the scribes and Pharisees did with their distorted interpretations, which Jesus corrected (Matt. 5). From what I have observed, those who seek holiness and salvation without any legalistic conditions, solely relying on the free grace of God in Christ, are the ones who most diligently strive to

understand the purity and perfection of the law. The doctrine of salvation through sincere obedience merely diminishes the perfection required by the law. Yet even this doctrine is further diminished and diluted to the point where the essence of true obedience is lost. A willingness to be saved according to Christ's terms, or an agreement that Christ should be our Lord, or a determination to obey His commandments (which is little more than what ignorant people rely on when they say they hope God will save them because they have good intentions, despite neglecting all religious practice) without any actual pursuit of holiness, is considered by many to be sufficient sincere obedience to enter into a state of salvation and to remain in it. As long as they can make such claims, they will never be regarded as violators of the gospel covenant. The only thing deemed necessary for salvation is to make an effort to do what we can to obey Christ's commands, even though the best we can do is nothing truly good. Those who are more zealous in seeking salvation through works are prone to engaging in superstitious practices because they are more in line with their worldly nature than the spiritual commands of God and Christ. I have no doubt that this has contributed to the prevalence of pagan, Jewish, and Roman Catholic superstitions in the world. We have witnessed how the influence of Roman Catholicism has declined in several nations in recent years, particularly when the central pillar of its doctrine, justification by works, was overthrown by the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone.

If these legalistic enthusiasts are compelled by strong conviction to strive for the practice of spiritual duties in order to pacify their guilty consciences, they may exert great effort and even afflict their bodies through fasting in an attempt to kill their sinful desires. However, their desires remain alive and just as strong as ever, and they display their enmity towards God's law

through inward irritation, discontentment, and resentment, viewing it as a burdensome taskmaster, even though a fear of punishment restrains their outward sinful actions. And once these zealots are enlightened with the understanding that God rejects their slavish service and does not consider it sincere obedience, they fall into despair regarding their salvation. They realize that they have failed in their highest efforts to meet the required conditions, and they can easily discern that their hearts are filled with anger and open hatred towards the law, God, and Christ for prescribing such difficult conditions of salvation that they cannot fulfill, yet must expect to be eternally damned for breaking them. This fills them with blasphemous thoughts against God and Christ, and they can hardly restrain themselves from uttering blasphemy. When they reach this dreadful state, if God does not in His mercy reveal to them the way of salvation by free grace through faith alone, they will attempt, if possible, to numb their consciences to the feeling of sin and completely abandon all religion, which has proven to be an unbearable torment for them. If they cannot numb their consciences, some of them are easily persuaded by Satan to contemplate self-destruction rather than continue living in their hatred towards God, with a spirit of blasphemy and perpetual torment of conscience.

This is the destructive effect of legalistic doctrine on a carnal heart; instead of killing the sleeping lion of our sinful corruption, it only rouses it and fills it with terrible rage. This is evident through the sorrowful experiences of many who have exerted their utmost efforts to follow it, and it is supported by Scripture, which provides a sufficient explanation as to why it cannot be otherwise. Therefore, the doctrine of salvation through sincere obedience, which was devised as a response to Antinomianism, can rightly be classified among the most pernicious Antinomian errors. As for

myself, I detest it with complete aversion and consider it my enemy, as I have experienced its harmful effects. Through some valuable experiences, I have confirmed the truth of the lesson taught by the apostle, that the way to be freed from the mastery and dominion of sin is not to be under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

1. The way of salvation through works was ruined by the curse pronounced on Adam's initial sin, so that now it cannot bring forth life or holiness in us, but only death. The law, which demands both sincere and perfect obedience to God in all things, was revealed to Adam at his creation as the means of maintaining the happy life bestowed upon him. It would have been effective for this purpose if he had not transgressed by eating the forbidden fruit. However, once he subjected himself and his descendants to the dreadful sentence, "You shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17), all the knowledge of God and His law that had previously contributed to the preservation of life turned in the opposite direction. It now worked towards his death, both the death of the soul in sin and the death of his physical body. Consequently, Adam was compelled to hide himself from God as an enemy. It was as if God were saying, "All the light and knowledge you possess will not be able to sustain or restore your life; instead, it will contribute to your death." Therefore, as long as we remain in our natural state, burdened by the guilt and curse of Adam, any knowledge of the law or of God's attributes that the natural man may acquire is likewise cursed for us. Since man did not employ his natural knowledge and wisdom correctly, God resolved to avenge its misuse by providing salvation through a way that opposes it, which

appears foolish to the natural man. God completely abolished the notion of living by our works or by any wisdom or knowledge that the natural man can attain. As it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:19-21).

2. From this, we can conclude that God's purpose in giving the law to Moses was not for anyone to ever attain holiness or salvation through perfect or sincere obedience to it. Although if there had been such a means of salvation at that time, it would have consisted of fulfilling that law, which was given to the church as both a rule of life and a covenant. There was a previous covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a covenant of grace, which promised all blessings freely through Christ, the promised seed, through whom they alone would be saved. The covenant of the law was added so that they would recognize their sinfulness, their subjection to death and wrath, and the impossibility of attaining life or holiness through their works. They would be compelled to rely solely on the free promise for their salvation, and sin would be restrained by the spirit of bondage until the coming of the promised seed, Jesus Christ, and the abundant outpouring of the sanctifying Spirit through Him. The apostle Paul extensively explains this (Galatians 3:15-24; Romans 5:20, 21; 10:3, 4). None of the Israelites under the Old Testament were ever saved by the Sinai covenant, nor did any of them attain

holiness through its terms. Some of them sincerely, albeit imperfectly, followed its commandments, but they were first justified and made partakers of life and holiness through the better covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is essentially the same as the new covenant or testament established through the blood of Christ. Without that better covenant, the Sinai covenant would have brought them no happiness but only sin, despair, and destruction. By itself, it was merely a letter that kills, the ministry of death and condemnation, and therefore it has now been abolished (2 Corinthians 3:6, 8, 9, 11).

We have reason to give thanks to God for delivering His church, through the sacrifice of Christ, from this oppressive yoke of bondage. Furthermore, we should strongly condemn the scheme of those who would impose upon us an even more burdensome and dreadful yoke by transforming our very new covenant into a covenant of sincere works. They offer us no better covenant, similar to what the Israelites had during their time of enslavement, to provide relief in our time of need.

Chapter Seven

We are not to imagine that our hearts and lives must be changed.

We must not assume that our hearts and lives must undergo any degree of change from sin to holiness before we can safely trust in Christ for the certain enjoyment of Himself and His salvation.

By nature, we are inclined to base our salvation on our own works. Even if we cannot make them procuring conditions or causes of our salvation by Christ, we will at least strive to make them necessary preparations to make us fit to receive Christ and His salvation through faith. People are easily convinced that this is not contrary to salvation by free grace, because everything attributed to our works or good qualities in this manner is simply seen as putting us in a suitable position to receive a free gift. Just as good manners and proper respect would lead us to tidy ourselves up before approaching a prince for a free gift, like Joseph did when he came out of the dungeon before appearing before Pharaoh. It appears to be a brazen disregard and disrespect towards the justice and holiness of God and Christ, an intolerable insult and indignity offered to the divine Majesty when anyone presumes to approach His presence in the filthy state of their sins,

completely covered in festering sores without any attempt at healing or cleansing. Moreover, it is even worse when they attempt to invite the Most Holy One into such a foul and stinking cesspool as a sinner's heart, before it has been reformed in any way. The parable about the man who was bound hand and foot and cast into utter darkness for attending the royal wedding without a wedding garment serves as a warning against all such presumption (Matt. 22:11, 13). Many who are horrified by the abominable filth in their own hearts are hindered from coming directly to Christ by such thoughts, which Satan strongly reinforces and amplifies in them through his suggestions, making it impossible to persuade them otherwise until God inwardly teaches them through the powerful illumination of His Spirit. They delay the saving act of faith because they believe they are not yet properly prepared and qualified for it. For the same reason, many weak believers postpone partaking in the Lord's Supper for many years, even for as long as they live in this world, and would likely delay their baptism as well if they had not been baptized in infancy. Against all such thoughts, I will present the following considerations.

1. The error discussed in the previous section is equally detrimental to the practice of holiness and our entire salvation. It can be refuted using the same arguments presented earlier. Whether holiness is considered a procuring condition for our salvation through Christ or simply a condition necessary to qualify us for receiving Christ, we are still subjected to the legal terms of first fulfilling the duties required by the law in order to obtain life. Consequently, we are deprived of the assistance provided by the means of holiness mentioned earlier, such as union and fellowship with Christ, and the

experience of His sanctifying gifts through faith, which should precede the practice of holiness in order to empower us. We are left to toil in vain for holiness while trapped in our cursed natural state, which only exacerbates our sinful corruption instead of putting it to death. As a result, we can never truly prepare ourselves for receiving Christ as long as we live in this world. Thus, our attempts to prepare the way to Christ through holy qualifications only serve to fill it with stumbling blocks and deep pits, hindering our souls from ever attaining salvation through Christ.

2. Any change, no matter how small, in our hearts and lives from sin to holiness is not necessary before we receive Christ and His salvation by faith, according to the terms of the gospel and the Word of God. Christ desires even the most wicked sinners to come to Him for salvation immediately, without delaying to prepare themselves. When the wicked jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved, Paul directed him to believe in Christ, with the promise that he would be saved. The jailer and his household were baptized without any requirement to first reform their hearts and lives (Acts 16:30, 33). Similarly, the three thousand Jews who were converted by Peter's preaching and added to the church on the same day had no need for considerable time to prepare themselves, despite their recent involvement in the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 2:41, 23). Christ commands His servants to go quickly into the streets and lanes, bringing in the poor, the maimed, the blind, and compelling them to come to His feast, without waiting for them to cleanse their sores or change their filthy rags (Luke 14:21-23). Christ wants us to

believe in Him, the One who justifies the ungodly, and therefore He does not require us to be godly before we believe (Rom. 4:5). He came as a Physician for the sick, not expecting them to recover before coming to Him (Matt. 9:12). The vilest sinners are aptly prepared and qualified for His purpose, which is to display the surpassing riches of His grace by forgiving our sins and saving us freely (Eph. 2:5, 7). The purpose of the law of Moses was to increase offenses, so that where sin abounded, grace would abound even more (Rom. 5:20). Christ loved us in our sinful pollution, so much so that He died for us, and He will love us even in it, receiving us when we come to Him for salvation. He has fully satisfied God's justice on behalf of sinners, granting them righteousness, holiness, and salvation through fellowship with Him by faith. Therefore, it is not an affront to Christ or a disregard for God's justice and holiness to come to Him as polluted sinners. On the contrary, it would be an affront and a denial of the saving grace, merit, and fullness of Christ if we attempted to make ourselves righteous and holy before receiving Him and all righteousness and holiness in Him by faith. Christ did not hesitate to touch a leper or wash His disciples' feet without expecting them to be cleansed and perfumed beforehand, unlike worldly great ones who imitate Christ by washing the feet of the poor.

3. Those who receive Christ with sincere faith will never lack a wedding garment to adorn them in the sight of God. Faith itself is highly esteemed and holy in God's eyes (2 Peter 1:1; Jude 20). God loves it because it attributes the glory of our salvation solely to His

free grace in Christ (Rom. 4:16) and renounces any reliance on our own efforts to earn a right to Christ or to make ourselves acceptable to Him. It encompasses a genuine love for Christ as our Saviour and a deep hunger and thirst for His salvation. It is through faith that the soul hungrily feeds on Him. What more delightful wedding garment can sinners bring to their generous God, whose grand purpose is to display the abundant riches of His glorious grace and bounty at this wedding feast? The Father Himself loves them because they love Christ and believe that He came from God (John 16:27). However, we must acknowledge that the excellence of faith lies in the fact that it does not consider itself or any of our works sufficient to make us acceptable in God's sight. It does not seek to be the wedding garment itself but rather purchases from Christ white robes to clothe us, so that the shame of our nakedness may not be exposed (Rev. 3:18). Although faith loves and desires the gift of holiness, it abandons the notion of immediately practicing holiness before coming to Christ for a transformed nature. It embraces Christ Himself and in Him finds everything necessary for life and godliness. Thus, every true believer is clothed with the sun (Rev. 12:1), even with the Sun of Righteousness, the Lord Jesus, who is pleased to be our wedding garment, our feast, and the source of all our spiritual and eternal joy.

To provide further satisfaction and comfort to distressed souls who are gripped by the fear of their own sinfulness and God's wrath, and who hesitate to trust steadfastly in Christ for their salvation until they can observe some change from sin to holiness within themselves, I will mention

several things that such individuals should find in themselves. I will demonstrate that if some of these aspects are not already encompassed in faith itself, they are the fruits and consequences of faith. Therefore, they cannot be reasonably expected before we place our trust in Christ for our salvation.

1. They believe that repentance is necessary before placing faith in Christ for salvation, because repentance is indeed crucial for salvation: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Christ also emphasizes the duty of repentance before faith: "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). However, it is important to understand that Christ requires repentance as the ultimate goal and faith as the means to attain it. Although the goal takes precedence in intention, the means come first in practice and execution. Both repentance and faith are absolutely necessary for salvation. Repentance involves a sincere turning away from sin towards God and His service. And the only way to turn to God is through Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and without whom no one can come to the Father (John 14:6). And how can we come to Christ except through faith? Therefore, if we desire to turn to God in the right way, we must first come to Christ by faith. Faith must precede repentance as the essential instrument provided by God's grace for its effective fulfillment. Repentance is indeed a duty that sinners naturally owe to God, but the crucial question is, "How can sinners fulfill it?" This question is answered by the gospel of Christ: "Repent and believe." The way to repent is to begin with believing. Thus, the central message of John in his baptism of

repentance was that they should believe in the One who would come after him, namely, Christ Jesus (Acts 19:4).

2. Regeneration is also necessary for salvation (John 3:3), and therefore, many believe that it must occur in themselves before they can confidently trust in Christ for their salvation. However, let us consider what regeneration truly means. It is a new birth or creation in Christ (1 Cor. 4:15; Eph. 2:10), where we become partakers of a divine nature that is distinct from what we inherited from the first Adam. Now, faith is the uniting grace through which Christ dwells in us and we in Him, as previously explained. Therefore, it is the initial grace bestowed upon us in our regeneration and the means for all subsequent graces. When you truly believe, you experience regeneration; not before. Those who receive Christ through faith, and only those, become children of God. They are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12, 13).
3. They believe it is necessary to receive Christ as their Lord and Lawgiver by sincerely surrendering themselves to His authority and making a resolution to obey His laws before accepting Him as their Saviour. This is a key teaching of the new theology, where receiving Christ as Lord is considered the essential act of saving faith. Without this surrender to His kingly authority, the faith I described earlier, which involves trusting in Christ for salvation, is deemed nothing more than presumptuous. They assert that Christ will not grant His salvation to those who do not first submit to His rule. He regards them as His enemies because they refuse His reign over

them, and He demands that they be brought before Him and put to death (Luke 19:27). I affirm as an absolute truth that Christ will save only those who sincerely yield themselves to obey His royal authority and laws.

However, we must observe that individuals are not brought to this holy surrender or sincere resolution of obedience before receiving His salvation, but rather through receiving it. People who have never truly recognised their spiritual death in sin may easily make a resolution of complete obedience to God when they are on their deathbeds, facing imminent danger, or preparing for the Lord's Supper. They do so in order to reconcile with God and trust in Christ securely for salvation. Yet, all such resolutions are futile and hypocritical, easily broken as soon as they are made. Those who are aware of the corruption within their own hearts understand that their minds are hostile to God's law and cannot submit to it (Romans 8:7). They know that they cannot sincerely devote themselves to obedience before trusting in Christ for His salvation and for the gift of a new heart that enables them to will and do what pleases God. If Christ had never come into the world to save us, we would still be bound to obedient purposes, resolutions, and surrender. However, He knew that we are incapable of holy obedience unless He first makes us partakers of salvation. We will never obey Him as our Lawgiver until we receive Him as our Saviour. He is a saving Lord. Trust in Him first to deliver you from the guilt and power of sin, the dominion of Satan, and to grant you a new spiritual disposition. Only then, out of genuine devotion, will the love of Christ compel you to wholeheartedly surrender yourself to live for the One who died for you (2 Corinthians 5:14). You will be able to declare with unwavering resolve, "O

Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:16).

Some people believe that certain good works are necessary before we can safely trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. They base this belief on the teachings of our Saviour, who said that if we do not forgive others, our heavenly Father will not forgive us. He also instructed us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12, 15). Additionally, restitution is required for things acquired wrongly from others before receiving sacramental atonement through the trespass-offering (Leviticus 6:5, 7). In response, I would like to point out that these teachings highlight the close connection between forgiving others, making restitution, and receiving forgiveness for our sins. These actions are necessary to prepare us for prayer and to receive the grace of pardon through the sacraments.

A living faith cannot exist without these fruits. Therefore, we cannot pray or partake in the sacraments in faith without demonstrating these qualities. However, if we strive to perform these actions before placing our trust in Christ for forgiveness and salvation, our efforts will be in a slavish and hypocritical manner, lacking true holiness and acceptability. Our forgiveness of others will not be accompanied by genuine love for them, as we love ourselves for the sake of God. Similarly, our acts of restitution will be forced and insincere, comparable to Pharaoh allowing the Israelites to go or Judas returning the thirty pieces of silver out of fear and pressure. Once the fear that compelled us is removed, we will be quick to retract our forgiveness and wrong others again, just as Pharaoh brought the Israelites back into bondage after releasing them (Exodus 14:5).

If you genuinely desire to forgive others from the heart and love them again, you must first grasp, through faith in Christ, the love and mercy that

God has shown towards you. Then, in accordance with the Apostle's instruction, you will be able to show kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness towards one another, just as God, for the sake of Christ, has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32). Zaccheus' readiness to make restitution was a result of experiencing Christ's love, and his joyful acceptance of Christ into his home was evidence of the genuine faith that already resided in his heart.

I will list several other qualifications that troubled souls often seek within themselves as a means to be properly prepared to trust in Christ for their salvation. They labor anxiously for a long time, yet find themselves unable to attain these qualifications. As a result, they sink into sorrowful despondency, afraid to apply the consolations of God's grace in Christ to their wounded consciences. Let those who are perplexed pay attention to the following details and consider whether their own souls possess any of these qualities. O you afflicted, tossed with tempests, and without comfort, what qualifications do you desire that would encourage you to grasp onto Christ for salvation?

It is likely that in the bitterness of your soul, you will respond, "Oh, let me first have some love for God and godliness in my heart, and be freed from my hateful rising against Him and His service! Let me have good thoughts of God—His justice, mercy, and holiness—so that I may justify Him even if He were to damn me, and so that I may not be filled with murmuring and blasphemous thoughts against Him. Let the raging of my lust be diminished, and the filthy state of my wicked heart be cleansed to some extent. Let me have a holy reverential fear of God, rather than a mere terrifying horror. I want to be more affected by God's wrath and not have a careless and indifferent attitude. I desire to be more humbled by my sin, to

detest it, and to feel ashamed of it. I want to be truly sorry for my sin with godly sorrow, not just because of the punishment it brings, but because it grieves and vexes the Holy Spirit of God. I long to make a willing and sincere confession of my sin, to pour out my soul to the Lord in fervent prayer for forgiveness, and to praise and glorify Him wholeheartedly. I don't want to be lifeless like a stone in the duty of prayer, as I currently am."

Are these the things you desire, O poor troubled soul? The best response I can offer for your swift comfort is to inform you that these things are indeed good, but your desires are ill-timed. It is unreasonable for you to expect these holy qualifications while you are in your natural state, burdened by the guilt of sin and the fear of God's wrath, before you have received atonement and the new spiritual life that comes through faith in Christ. By desiring these qualifications prematurely, you only exacerbate your corruption, harden your heart, and worsen the stench of your wounds. Such good qualifications are included in the nature of faith, and for the most part, they follow after it. Therefore, they cannot be obtained before you trust in Christ for your salvation. I will discuss these qualifications in more detail, showing how they relate to faith, in their proper order.

Love for God's salvation and the gift of holiness is an inherent part of faith, and without it, faith cannot be genuine. Therefore, act in faith first, and as you grasp the understanding of God's love for your soul, it will gently draw and compel you to love God and His service wholeheartedly. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We cannot surpass God in love, and we must perceive His love in order to love Him. If we view Him as a God who is against us, who hates us and will condemn us, our innate self-love will breed hatred and resentment towards Him, regardless of our intentions. The love that fulfils the law must emanate from

sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5). If hatred prevails in you more than love, how can you expect to have good thoughts of God? Instead, you may have blasphemous or, at the very least, murmuring thoughts about Him. Ill-will never speaks or thinks kindly. The first right and holy thoughts you can have about God are thoughts of His grace and mercy towards your soul in Christ, which are encompassed within the grace of faith. Attain these thoughts first by believing in Christ, and they will generate love for God within you, along with all good thoughts about Him, gradually freeing you from blasphemous and murmuring thoughts. Love does no harm (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Once you have this love, you will be able to regard God as just and merciful, even if He were to condemn you while extending His grace to others. You will also be able to think well of His holiness and His decrees, which some find difficult to accept.

The way to overcome your raging lusts is through faith, as it purifies the heart and works through love (Acts 15:9; Galatians 5:6). The soul must find delight in God and Christ through faith; otherwise, it will crave fleshly and worldly pleasures. The more you struggle against lust without faith, the more it will be stirred up, even if you manage to restrain yourself from acting upon those desires. Pray for a holy fear of God, combined with fear of falling short of the promised rest due to unbelief (Hebrews 4:1). Such fear is a component of faith, and it will cultivate in us a reverential, even childlike fear of God and His goodness (Hebrews 12:28; Hosea 3:5). We must have grace to serve God with reverence. In the margin, it says, "We must have or hold fast grace." The only way to hold fast to grace is through faith, and this will quickly calm any panic and tormenting horror.

If you want to be free from carelessness and disregard for the wrath of God, the way to achieve this is by first believing and avoiding despair. Carelessness often stems from despair, as people, for the sake of their own peace, tend to trivialise the evils they believe they cannot prevent. As the proverb says, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32). True repentance for sin is either a part of faith or a result of it. Upon believing, we will remember our own wicked ways and actions that were not good, and we will despise ourselves for all our abominations (Ezekiel 36:31). We will willingly renounce our own righteousness and consider it worthless in comparison to gaining Christ through faith (Philippians 3:7-8). However, beggars will make the most of their filthy rags until they are clothed in better garments, and the crippled will not discard their crutches until they have a better support to rely on. Genuine sorrow for sin is produced in us by believing in God's pardoning grace. It is a known experience that a pardon from a prince can sometimes bring tears from even the most stubborn criminal faster than the fear of the gallows. This was evident when the sinful woman washed Christ's feet with her tears (Luke 7:37-38). We are unlikely to be sorry for grieving God with our sins if we view Him as an enemy who will rid Himself of His burden and seek retribution through our eternal destruction.

Believing in God's forgiving and accepting grace is essential in leading us to make a sincere confession of our sins. The people freely confessed their sins when they were baptized by John in the Jordan River for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4-5). The confessions of those in despair are forced, similar to the coerced confessions and cries of criminals on the rack. A pardon more readily opens the mouth for a genuine confession than the ultimatums of "Confess and be hanged" or "Confess and be damned."

Therefore, if you desire to freely confess your sins, first believe that God is faithful and just to forgive your sins through Christ (1 John 1:9).

And if you wish to pray to God or praise Him with heartfelt affection, you must first believe that God will hear you and grant you what is best for you for the sake of Christ (John 16:23-24). Otherwise, your prayers will be mere lip service, for how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? (Romans 10:14). You must first come to Christ, the altar, through faith, so that through Him, you may offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Hebrews 13:10, 15).

Lastly, moving from specific points to the overall statement presented in the guidance, if you inquire, "What must we do to carry out the deeds of God or attain any saving qualifications?" I must guide you to faith as the paramount action and the significant preparatory step for all good qualifications. This is best answered in the words of our Saviour: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:28-29).

Chapter Eight

Be sure to seek for holiness of heart and life only in its due order

Make sure to seek holiness of heart and life in its proper order, as ordained by God, after union with Christ, justification, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this order, earnestly pursue holiness by faith as an essential part of your salvation.

I hope the reader will carefully observe throughout these instructions that the desired holiness, which serves as the ultimate goal in this entire discussion, does not solely rely on the grace or act of faith specifically required by the gospel. Although faith is a saving gift of Christ, it is considered here more as a preceding means to receiving Christ and His salvation, rather than a received part of His salvation. The intended holiness, on the other hand, consists of conforming to the entire moral law, to which we are naturally obligated even if there had never been a gospel or a duty such as believing in Christ for salvation.

Now, within this instruction, three crucial aspects are included that are vital in guiding us towards the achievement of this great goal, and therefore, they deserve our sincere contemplation.

First and foremost, it is of utmost importance to understand the appropriate position and order in which God has established the practice of holiness within the mystery of our salvation. It is a significant aspect of Christian wisdom to seek holiness solely in that order. We acknowledge that God is the God of order, and His infinite wisdom is evident in appointing the order of His creation, which we must adhere to in order to achieve our worldly goals. Likewise, in spiritual matters, God has established an everlasting covenant that is ordered in all things and secure (2 Samuel 23:5). The benefits of this covenant have a systematic dependence on one another, akin to links in a golden chain, although several of them and our entitlement to all of them are granted to us simultaneously. Sufficient has already been said to illustrate the order in which God leads us to the practice of the moral law. First, He brings us into Christ through faith, like branches in a vine, so that we may bear much fruit (John 15:4, 5). He initially cleanses our consciences from dead works through justification, enabling us to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). He first enables us to live in the Spirit and then walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). This is the prescribed order in the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation, even though the law prescribes a completely different approach, requiring us to first fulfill its commands in order to be justified and live. However, this approach proves to be a lethal letter for us.

Now, carefully consider the significant advantages you have in attaining holiness by seeking it in the right gospel order. You will benefit from the love that God has demonstrated towards you by forgiving your sins, accepting you into His favour, granting you the Spirit of adoption, and freely giving you the hope of His glory through Christ. These precious gifts will persuade and compel you with sweet allurements to love God in return,

knowing how deeply He loves you. You will be motivated to love others for His sake and wholeheartedly devote yourself to obeying all His commands out of genuine love for Him. Additionally, you will receive the assistance of the Holy Spirit, empowering you to obey and fortifying you against your own corruptions and the temptations of Satan. With both favourable winds and currents, you will make significant progress in your pursuit of holiness. On the contrary, if you rush into immediate compliance with the law without embracing Christ's righteousness and His Spirit along the way, you will find yourself facing contrary winds and currents. Your guilty conscience and corrupt nature will undoubtedly undermine and thwart all your endeavours to love and serve God in true obedience. Instead, you will stir up sinful desires rather than stirring yourself up for genuine obedience, or at best, you will merely engage in slavish and hypocritical performances. Oh, how I wish people would understand the rightful place of holiness in the mystery of salvation and seek it only where they have all the advantages of gospel grace to find it! Many fail in their zealous pursuit of godliness, and after expending much fruitless effort, God brings disaster upon them, even to their eternal destruction, just as He did with Uzza, who suffered temporal destruction because he did not seek God in the proper order (1 Chronicles 13:10).

Secondly, we need to view holiness as an essential aspect of the salvation received through faith in Christ. Some individuals are so immersed in a works-based covenant that they accuse us of deeming good works unnecessary for salvation if we do not acknowledge them as conditions to secure an interest in Christ or as prerequisites to prepare us for receiving Him by faith. On the other hand, when they are taught by the Scriptures that we are saved by faith alone, without works, they begin to disregard

obedience to the law, considering it completely unnecessary for salvation. They believe they are only obligated to it out of gratitude, and if it is entirely neglected, they have no doubt that free grace will save them without consequence. Furthermore, some have fallen into strong Antinomian delusions, believing that freedom from the bondage of the law, achieved through the blood of Christ, entails having no conscience about breaking the law in their conduct.

One cause of these conflicting errors is that many are inclined to think that salvation means nothing more than being delivered from hell and experiencing heavenly happiness and glory. Consequently, they conclude that if good works are a means to glorification and precede it, they must also be a preceding means to our entire salvation. Conversely, if good works are not necessary for our complete salvation, they are deemed unnecessary for glorification as well. However, while salvation is often referred to in Scripture, particularly in terms of its perfection in the state of heavenly glory, its comprehensive and accurate meaning encompasses freedom from the evil of our natural corrupted state and all the holy and joyous blessings we receive from Christ our Saviour, either in this world through faith or in the world to come through glorification. Justification, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the privileges of adoption are examples of components of our salvation that we partake in during this life. Similarly, the transformation of our hearts to align with God's law and the righteous fruits produced in us by Jesus Christ in this life are essential aspects of our salvation.

God saves us not only from the consequences of our sinful state in the future, but also from our present sinful impurity through the regenerating and renewing work of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:29; Titus 3:5).

Christ was named JESUS, meaning "Saviour," because He saved His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Therefore, part of our salvation includes being delivered from our sins, which begins in this life through justification and sanctification, and is perfected in glorification in the life to come. Can we reasonably doubt whether it is a proper part of our salvation through Christ to be revived and live for God when we were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins? Is it not part of our salvation to have the image of God restored in holiness and righteousness, which we lost through the Fall? Isn't it part of our salvation to be freed from the dishonourable slavery to Satan and our own desires, and to become servants of God? Moreover, we are honoured greatly to walk by the Spirit and produce the fruits of the Spirit. All of this constitutes holiness in heart and life.

Therefore, we conclude that holiness in this life is absolutely necessary for salvation, not only as a means to the end, but also as an integral part of the end itself. Although we are not saved by good works as a cause of salvation, we are saved for good works as the fruits and effects of saving grace, which God has prepared for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). Indeed, one aspect of our salvation is being delivered from the bondage of the covenant of works, but the purpose of this deliverance is not to grant us the freedom to sin (which is the worst form of slavery), but rather to enable us to fulfil the royal law of liberty and to serve in newness of spirit rather than in the oldness of the letter (Galatians 5:13; Romans 7:6). Moreover, holiness in this life is a necessary means to make us suitable to partake in the inheritance of the saints in heavenly light and glory. Without holiness, we can never see God (Hebrews 12:14), and we are as unfit for His glorious presence as swine are for the chamber of an earthly prince. I acknowledge that some individuals may be converted when they are near death and have

little time to practice holiness in this world. However, the grace of the Spirit is active like fire (Matthew 3:11), and as soon as it is given, it will immediately produce inward love for God, Christ, and His people. This will be sufficient to manifest God's righteous judgement in saving them on the day of judgement, even though some may not have enough time to demonstrate their inward grace through outward works, like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:40, 43).

The third and final aspect to consider in this guidance is that holiness of heart and life should be earnestly sought through faith as an essential part of our salvation. Many ignorant people who live under the gospel harden their hearts in sin and ultimately destroy their souls by placing their trust in Christ for an imagined salvation that does not involve holiness but only forgiveness of sin and deliverance from eternal torments. They desire to be free from the punishment deserved by sin, but they love their sinful desires so much that they hate holiness and have no desire to be liberated from the bondage of sin. The way to confront this harmful delusion is not to deny, as some do, that trusting in Christ for salvation is a saving act of faith, but rather to show that no one can truly trust in Christ for salvation without also trusting in Him for holiness. Furthermore, those who do not wholeheartedly desire true salvation do not truly desire to be made holy and righteous in their hearts and lives. If God and Christ grant you salvation, holiness will be a part of it. If Christ does not cleanse you from the filth of your sins, you have no share in Him (John 13:8).

How strange is the salvation they desire, those who do not care for holiness? They want to be saved but remain completely dead in sin, estranged from the life of God, devoid of the image of God, disfigured by the image of Satan, enslaved to their own filthy desires, utterly unfit for the

enjoyment of God's glory. Such a salvation was never purchased by the blood of Christ, and those who seek it are abusing the grace of God in Christ and turning it into licentiousness. They want to be saved by Christ but remain outside of Christ in a carnal state. However, God does not free anyone from condemnation except those who are in Christ, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Alternatively, they would try to divide Christ, taking only a part of His salvation and disregarding the rest. But Christ cannot be divided (1 Corinthians 1:13). They desire their sins to be forgiven not so that they may walk with God in love in the future but so that they may continue their enmity against Him without any fear of punishment.

But let them not be deceived, for God cannot be mocked. They do not comprehend the true nature of salvation, nor have they ever truly grasped the extent of their lost condition and the enormity of sin. What they trust in Christ for is merely a figment of their own imagination, and therefore their trust is a glaring presumption. True faith in the gospel compels us to approach Christ with a deep thirst, longing to drink from the wellspring of living water, which is His sanctifying Spirit (John 7:37-38). We earnestly cry out to be saved, not only from hell, but from sin itself, saying, "Teach me to do Your will; Your Spirit is good" (Psalm 143:10), "Turn me, and I shall be turned" (Jeremiah 31:18), "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). This is the pathway that the doctrine of salvation by grace compels us to follow towards a life of holiness, by compelling us to seek it through faith in Christ as an integral part of the salvation that is freely given to us through Him.

Chapter Nine

We must first receive the comforts of the gospel

We must first receive the consolations of the gospel, so that we may sincerely fulfill the obligations of the law.

When mankind fell from obedience to God, which they were originally enabled and inclined to perform through the consolations of their blissful state in Paradise, God could have justifiably chosen never to bestow any consolations upon them again, as an incentive to their duties. Thus, with fear, grief, and despair hindering their path to holiness, they would have remained unable to escape the sentence of death pronounced for their initial transgression. The justice of God is evident in the framework of the legal covenant, in which He promises us no life, comfort, or happiness until we have fully accomplished His law. This can be seen in the proclamation on Mount Sinai, expounded throughout Leviticus 26. By nature, we are so strongly inclined towards this legal approach to salvation that it is difficult to dissuade those living under the light of the gospel from prioritising the duties of the law over the consolations of the gospel. Even if they cannot secure salvation itself through their works, they ensure that all the comforts

of salvation are contingent upon their own efforts. They consider it as unreasonable to expect comfort before duty as it is to receive wages before work or the fruits of the earth before the labour of the farmer (2 Timothy 2:6). They believe that the most effective way to secure obedience to God's law is by anchoring all our consolations to its fulfillment. They argue that the contrary doctrine strengthens the hands of the wicked by falsely prophesying peace to them where there is no peace (Ezekiel 13:16, 22), and it opens the floodgates to all kinds of licentiousness. Therefore, some preachers advise people not to be overly concerned or hasty in seeking comfort, but rather to diligently focus on performing their duties. They tell them that by doing so, their ultimate condition will be safe and happy, even if they never experience the comfort of their salvation in this world.

To properly understand what I have stated in opposition to common misconceptions, it is important to note that I do not claim that the sole place for gospel comfort is before the duties of the law. I acknowledge that God provides comfort to His people at every stage, both before and after the performance of their duties. The greatest consolations often come after the fulfillment of these duties. However, God does grant some comforts to His people in advance, as a kind of advance payment, to equip them for His service, even though the majority of the reward is received later on. By stating this, I am not promoting peace for those who persist in their sinful natural state. The comforts I speak of cannot be experienced without renouncing the false confidences that enable unregenerate individuals to persist in sin. They also require the effective work of the Spirit, which transforms us into good trees capable of bearing good fruit. While these comforts are granted before the sincere practice of the law, they are not bestowed upon us in our corrupt sinful nature. Instead, they are given

within and alongside the new holy nature that immediately produces a holy practice. They are, in essence, comforts derived from the spiritual benefits through which our new state and nature are formed and constituted. Examples of these benefits include redemption, justification, adoption, and the gift of the Spirit. It is important to clarify that I do not refer to an ecstatic or overwhelming joy, but rather a comforting experience that reasonably provides some measure of strength against the weight of fear, grief, and despair, which are inherent in our sinful and miserable state.

This explanation of my assertion should sufficiently address common objections. I trust that the truth of it will be further demonstrated through the following arguments.

1. This truth logically follows from the principles of holiness that have already been established. I have demonstrated that we need to have a firm belief in our reconciliation with God, our eternal happiness in heaven, and our sufficient strength to desire and accomplish what pleases God through Jesus Christ. These qualities are necessary to incline us towards the practice of holiness. We can attain these attributes by receiving Christ Himself, along with His Spirit and all His abundance, by placing our trust in Him for our complete salvation, as freely promised to us in the gospel. Through faith, we truly receive Christ, just as we physically receive nourishment by eating and drinking. Now, let sound reason judge: can we truly believe in the love of God, our everlasting joy, and our ability to serve Him, and yet be devoid of any comfort? Can we accept the good news of the gospel, receive Christ and His Spirit into our hearts, without any relief from the burdensome weight of fear, grief,

and despair? Can the salvation of Christ be devoid of comfort, or can the bread and water of life lack a delightful taste for those who partake in hunger and thirst? God will not bestow such benefits upon those who do not desire and value them above worldly possessions. And surely, the very act of receiving these benefits will bring comfort to such individuals, unless they receive them blindly, which they cannot do, as the act of giving and bestowing them opens the eyes of a sinner, turning them from darkness to light, allowing them to spiritually perceive the things that pertain to their present and future peace. They thereby gain some encouraging and strengthening comfort, enabling them to pursue holiness.

2. Peace, joy, and hope are encouraged in Scripture as the sources of other holy duties, while fear and overwhelming grief are discouraged as hindrances to true religion. "The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). "Fear involves punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). This is why the apostle emphasizes the exhortation to "rejoice in the Lord always," as it is a duty of utmost importance and necessity (Philippians 4:4). What are these duties but comfort itself? And can we believe that these duties are necessary for the continuation of a holy practice, but not for its initiation, when the work is most challenging and encouragement is most needed? Therefore, if we truly desire to keep

God's holy commandments, we must first strive to attain a state of comfort in our spirits and not delay in doing so.

3. The usual approach of gospel teaching, as it is presented in the Holy Scriptures, is to first comfort our hearts and thereby establish us in every good word and work (2 Thessalonians 2:17). This method is clearly demonstrated in various Epistles written by the apostles. They first inform the churches of the abundant grace of God towards them in Christ and the spiritual blessings they partake in for their strong consolation. Then they exhort them to live a holy life that aligns with such privileges. This method is not only observed in entire Epistles but also in numerous specific exhortations to duty, where the comforting benefits of God's grace in Christ are used as arguments and motives to stir up the saints towards a holy practice. However, these comforting benefits must first be believed and their comfort applied to our own souls; otherwise, they will not have the power to engage us in the intended practice.

To provide a few examples, among the multitude that could be cited, we are urged to engage in holy duties because we are dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:11), and because sin will not have dominion over us, for we are not under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14). We are encouraged because we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, and God will give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit dwelling in us (Romans 8:9, 11). We are motivated because our bodies are the members of Christ and the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:15, 19), and because God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians

5:21). We are inspired because God has promised to dwell in us, walk with us, be our Father, and make us His sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18; 7:1). We are uplifted because God has forgiven us for Christ's sake, considers us His beloved children, and Christ has loved us and given Himself for us; we who were once in darkness are now light in the Lord (Ephesians 4:32; 5:1, 2, 8). We are motivated because we have been raised with Christ and, when Christ, who is our life, appears, we will also appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1, 4). We find assurance because God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5), and because of the many promises made to us (2 Corinthians 7:1). Explore the Scriptures, and you will delightfully observe that this is the consistent approach found in gospel exhortations. Likewise, you will find a similar vein of comfort running through the prophetic exhortations in the Old Testament.

Some may argue that the apostles used this method in their writings to saints who had already practised holiness, in order for them to continue and grow in it. But I can easily respond to that by saying, "If this method is necessary for mature saints, it is even more necessary for beginners who find the task of obedience most difficult and are in greatest need of strong consolation." And I hope to demonstrate how we can grasp these consolations by faith right from the very beginning of a holy life.

Furthermore, the gospel offers peace and comfort freely to those who have not yet embraced holiness so that, if they are willing to receive it, they may be converted from sin to righteousness. When the apostles entered a house, their first words were, "Peace be to this house" (Luke 10:5). In their initial preaching to sinners, they acquainted them with the good news of salvation through Christ, available to all who would receive it as a free gift

through faith (Acts 3:26; 13:26, 32, 38; 16:30, 31). They assured them that if they wholeheartedly trusted in Christ for all His salvation, they would receive it, even though they were currently the chief of sinners. This was sufficient comfort for all who truly valued spiritual comfort and earnestly desired it. Such an approach aligns with the purpose of the gospel, which is to magnify the richness of God's grace in all our spiritual experiences. God will grant us His consolations before and after our good works, so that we may understand that He bestows upon us eternal comfort and a good hope through His grace, not as a result of our works (2 Thessalonians 2:16).

1. The nature of the duties prescribed by the law necessitates a state of comfort in the soul for their sincere performance. I have already sufficiently demonstrated that these duties require a conviction of our reconciliation with God, a confidence in our future happiness, and the strength to walk in holy obedience. Just as Joshua needed to be strong and courageous to faithfully follow the law commanded by the servant of the Lord, Moses (Joshua 1:7), I will briefly mention the comforts without which several significant duties cannot be sincerely carried out. Can we truly love God and take delight in Him above all else while considering Him as our eternal enemy, perceiving no love and mercy in Him towards us that would make Him a suitable and beloved object in our eyes?

What a mournful tune will the heart produce in the act of praise if we believe that all the perfections for which we praise God will only amplify our misery rather than bring us happiness? How devoid of heart will it be to pray to Him and offer ourselves in His service if we have no comforting hope that He will accept us? Can we truly rid ourselves of anxious worries

by casting our cares upon the Lord if we do not perceive that He cares for us? Will we be able to endure affliction with patience and cheerfulness, and remain steadfast under persecution, unless we have peace with God and rejoice in the hope of His glory? (Romans 5:1-3). What reason could persuade us to willingly submit, as our duty demands, to the stroke of impending death if God were to lay it upon us, when we have no comforts to alleviate the dreadful fear of eternal torment in hell?

If we were to be called upon to suffer martyrdom for the Protestant faith, as our ancestors in this nation have done, we would find it necessary to forsake the recent novel ideas that have arisen in times of ease and embrace the comforting doctrine of past Protestants, which, by the grace of God, empowered countless courageous and joyful martyrs.

1. The state of those who are to be converted from sin to godliness necessitates that, once they are convinced of the futility of their former false confidences and their spiritual deadness due to original sin, as well as their exposure to God's wrath, they should be provided with a fresh supply of gospel comforts to embolden their fainting souls for holy practices. How little do many soul physicians consider the condition of their unconverted patients who are entirely devoid of spiritual life and strength, and must be made aware of it? One who prescribes physical exercise to a person bedridden by severe paralysis, without first employing effective means to restore their strength, deserves to be called a merciless and taunting tormentor rather than a wise and compassionate physician. How unreasonable it is to prescribe immediate acts of love towards God and universal obedience out of love as the cure for those who

perceive nothing but wrath and enmity from God in their present state? It is akin to demanding that a person work without strength, promising them strength only once their work is done. For comfort or joy is called so because it strengthens (Nehemiah 8:10).

Indeed, it is true that the law, which brings condemnation, obliges individuals to obedience. However, our merciful God does not expect sincere obedience to His law from these feeble and miserable individuals, for the sake of their salvation through Christ, until He has first delivered them, to some extent, from the distress, enslaving fears, and despair that keep them captive under the law of sin and death. We may demand that a strong and healthy person work first, and then expect to provide them with food, drink, and wages. But a person who is weak and famished must first receive food or a reviving tonic to strengthen their heart before they can work.

1. Both Scripture and experience demonstrate that this is the method by which God leads His people from sin to holiness. Although some may experience terrors for a while to make sin more bitter and the salvation of Christ more precious and acceptable to them, they are once again delivered from their terrors through the comforts of God's salvation, so that they may be prepared for holiness. Generally, a holy life begins with comfort and is sustained by it.

At the time of Adam's first creation, God bestowed upon him the comfort of His love, favour, and the bliss of Paradise to encourage obedience. When Adam lost these comforts through the Fall, he was no longer able to obey until he was restored through the new comfort of the promised seed. Christ, the second Adam, always set God before Him and knew that because God

was by His side, He would not be shaken. Therefore, His heart was glad, and His glory rejoiced (Psalm 16:8-9). This willingness enabled Him to endure His agony and bloody sweat and to be obedient unto death, even death on a cross. God drew the Israelites to obedience with the cords of kindness, with the bands of love, by removing the yoke from their jaws and setting food before them (Hosea 11:4). David, for our instruction, reveals how he was led to a holy way of life: "Your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness" (Psalm 26:3); "I hope for your salvation, O Lord, and I do your commandments" (Psalm 119:166).

We find various examples in the New Testament of sinners experiencing joy upon receiving Christ (Acts 2:41). When the gospel reached the Thessalonians, they received the word with much affliction yet with joy in the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5, 6). Upon hearing the word of God, the Gentiles were glad, and those appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48). The apostle Paul, moved by the love of Christ, surrendered himself to live for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

I dare to appeal to the experience of anyone who obeys God out of genuine love. Let them examine themselves and consider whether they were led to devote themselves to God's service in love without a comforting sense of God's love towards them. I can confidently say that such extraordinary cases do not occur in the process of being born again.

1. What a comfortless religion it is when people are not allowed any comfort beforehand to strengthen them for the challenging acts of devotion that go against their natural inclinations, such as plucking out a right eye or cutting off a right hand. Instead, they are expected to perform such actions with love and delight, amidst their present

fears, despondency, and corrupt desires, and hope that by doing the work thoroughly and sincerely, they will eventually attain a more comfortable state. If true spiritual comfort, as well as salvation, is conditional upon our good works, then it is completely absent from the world. This has already been demonstrated as the condition of the law, which brings no comfort but wrath (Romans 4:14, 15). Many find the path of godliness detestable. They believe that they will never experience a pleasant moment in this world if they walk in it, and they would rather find solace in sinful pleasures than have no comfort at all.

Others toil for a while in such a joyless religion, inwardly fretting and resenting the burden of it, and eventually grow weary and abandon all religion because they know no better. Those who impose such heavy and burdensome obligations on people may claim that they are not to be blamed because they are preaching the gospel of God and Christ. However, in reality, they are preaching a gospel of their own making, contrary to the true nature of the gospel of Christ, which is good news of great joy for all people (Luke 2:10). An uncomfortable gospel cannot originate from God the Father, who is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3), nor from Christ, who is the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25), nor from the Spirit, who is the Comforter (John 14:16, 17).

God meets those who rejoice and do righteousness (Isaiah 64:5). He desires to be worshipped with gladness and singing, as exemplified in the temple through various musical expressions and numerous musicians. Christ speaks to us through His gospel so that His joy may abide in us and our joy may be complete (John 15:11). God approves of no sorrow except

godly sorrow, which can never exist in us without some comfort from God's love towards us. Those who are disheartened by the lack of comfort in a religious life have not yet understood the true path of religion; otherwise, they would discover that the ways of wisdom are pleasant and all her paths are peaceful (Proverbs 3:17).

Chapter Ten

That we may be prepared by the comforts of the gospel

To sincerely perform the duties of the law, we need to be prepared by the comforts of the gospel. This preparation involves obtaining assurance of our salvation through the very faith by which Christ enters our hearts. Therefore, we must strive to believe in Christ with confidence, persuading and assuring ourselves, as we believe, that God freely grants us a share in Christ and His salvation according to His gracious promise.

It is evident that the comforts of the gospel, which are essential for a holy life, cannot be truly received without some assurance of our connection to Christ and His salvation. Some of these comforts include a firm conviction of our reconciliation with God, our future heavenly happiness, and the strength to do what is pleasing to God through Christ, as previously discussed. Thus, it becomes clear that this assurance is crucial in enabling us to pursue holiness. These comforts precede the duties of the law in the natural order of things, just as a cause comes before its effect, although there may not be a temporal gap. My present task is to explain what this assurance is, as it is so vital to holiness, and as I have asserted, we must act

upon it through the very faith by which we receive Christ into our hearts - namely, through justifying saving faith. This doctrine may seem strange to many modern-day Protestants, whereas it was once embraced by prominent Protestants whom God used to restore the purity of the gospel and defend it against the Papists for many years. They commonly taught that faith is a persuasion or confidence in our own salvation through Christ, and emphasized the importance of personally applying Christ and His salvation through belief. This doctrine played a significant role in dismantling the superstitious beliefs of the papacy, which relied heavily on doubtfulness regarding salvation. However, many of the successors of these Protestants have abandoned their teachings, leaving their writings to be shamefully ridiculed by the Papists. This departure has persisted longer among us than other aspects of our new theology, and it is upheld by those who claim to abhor the corrupt doctrines built upon such principles by the Papists. Modern theologians may believe they stand on the shoulders of their predecessors, benefiting from their labours and possessing greater insight than them, just as the schoolmen may have thought of the ancient fathers. However, even with this perspective, they may not be able to see as far if their predecessors' eyes were more enlightened by the Spirit of God to understand the mysteries of the gospel. Why then should we not consider this to be the case in the present situation? In recent years, many false notions have blinded people in terms of assurance. Some believe that because salvation is not promised to us unconditionally, but rather on the condition of believing in Christ for it, we must first directly believe in Christ for our salvation. After that, we can reflect on our faith and evaluate it based on various signs and marks, particularly the fruit of sincere obedience. Only upon such examination, if we are certain that our faith is

true and saving, can we believe with assurance that we will be saved. They argue that our salvation comes through the direct act of faith, while assurance comes through the reflex act of faith. They also claim that many possess genuine faith and will be saved, yet they never experience any assurance of their salvation in their lifetime. They observe from Scripture and personal experience that many precious saints of God often struggle with doubts about their salvation and the sincerity of their faith and obedience. Therefore, they conclude that assurance should not be deemed absolutely necessary for justifying faith and salvation, as it may cause doubting believers to become disheartened and fall into despair. They believe that the former Protestants were guilty of a clear absurdity in making assurance an essential element of saving faith. According to them, all who hear the gospel are obligated to exercise saving faith, yet they are not absolutely required to believe that they themselves will be saved. If that were the case, many would be obliged to believe something not specifically declared in the gospel concerning their individual salvation - even something that would be a blatant falsehood, as the gospel reveals that many of those called are not chosen for salvation and will perish forever (Matthew 20:16). It is not surprising, then, that the appearance of such a great absurdity leads many to conceive that saving faith is either a trusting and relying on Christ as the sole sufficient means of salvation without assurance, or a longing and daring to trust or rely on Him in a state of suspense and uncertainty regarding our salvation, or at best, with a probable opinion or conjectural hope of it.

Another objection raised against the doctrine of assurance is that it "destroys self-examination and gives rise to pride and arrogance, as if individuals already knew their places in heaven before the day of

judgement." It is believed to foster carelessness in fulfilling one's duties, a sense of worldly security, and all kinds of licentious behavior. Consequently, doubting one's salvation is praised as necessary for maintaining humility, religious fears, vigilance, the scrutiny of one's spiritual state and actions, diligence in good works, and overall devotion.

In response to these opposing views, I will strive to uphold the ancient Protestant doctrine of assurance, as outlined in the direction. First, I will present some observations that will help clarify its true meaning and effectively address the strongest objections raised against it.

1. It is essential to carefully observe that the assurance being discussed is not a persuasion that we have already received Christ and His salvation, or that we have already been brought into a state of grace. Rather, it is the understanding that "God graciously intends to give Christ and His salvation to us and bring us into a state of grace, even though we have been entirely in a state of sin and death until this present moment." Therefore, this doctrine does not promote presumption in wicked and unregenerate individuals that their state is already good. Instead, it encourages them to approach Christ confidently to attain a good state. I acknowledge that many, if not most, must be taught to doubt the goodness of their present state, as this doubt reflects humility. Before we can have well-grounded assurance that we are in a state of grace and salvation, we must examine ourselves to ascertain the certainty and sincerity of our faith and obedience. This assurance, commonly known as the reflex act of faith (if it can be called an act of faith at all, being a spiritual sense or feeling of what is within oneself), is not the essence of the

faith by which we are justified and saved. Furthermore, many precious saints lack this assurance and are plagued by doubts that contradict it. They may not know at all whether things will turn out well for them on the day of judgement, and even if they attain this assurance, it may sometimes waver or be completely lost. It is crucial that we strive to lead a holy life to attain this assurance, as it is immensely beneficial to our growth in faith and holiness. Most Protestants among us, when they speak or write about assurance, refer specifically to the reflection-based kind. I have briefly explained enough to demonstrate that what I assert is in line with the commonly accepted doctrine of assurance and does not undermine any of its positive outcomes. Therefore, it is not guilty of the evils falsely attributed to it by some. The kind of assurance I am referring to does not answer the question of whether one is already in a state of grace and salvation. Another significant question must be answered by the soul to enter a state of grace: whether God, in His gracious pleasure, is now willing to bestow Christ and His salvation upon me, despite my past wickedness. It is crucial to resolve this question with comforting assurance through a direct act of faith, in which we persuade ourselves (without reflecting on any personal qualifications) that God is ready to receive us into the embrace of His saving mercy in Christ, regardless of our prior transgressions. This assurance is based on the gracious promise: "I will call them 'My people' who are not My people, and her 'Beloved' who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons and daughters of the living God" (Romans 9:25-26).

2. The assurance we seek is not a persuasion that we are saved regardless of our actions or how we live, but it is limited to the free grace of Christ, whereby we partake in holiness and forgiveness and walk in the path of holiness, leading to the enjoyment of God's glory. We will not genuinely desire or strive to obtain such a salvation unless we first come to recognize our own sinfulness and misery, despairing of our own righteousness and strength. We must hunger and thirst for the sanctifying grace of God in Christ, so that we may walk in His ways of holiness and experience the heavenly glory. The faith by which we receive Christ must not only involve a belief in our own happiness, but also include these and similar qualities that make it a most holy faith. Certainly, an assurance that is qualified in this way will not give rise to pride in us, but rather humility and self-abasement, unless one considers it prideful to rejoice and boast in Christ while having no confidence in our own abilities (Philippians 3:3). It will not undermine religious fear or breed worldly security; instead, it will cause us to fear straying from Christ, our only refuge and security, and to avoid walking in the ways of the flesh. Noah had every reason to enter the ark and remain there with assurance of his preservation, yet he would have had good reason to fear leaving the ark, knowing that his safety from perishing in the flood depended solely on staying within its confines. How, then, could a persuasion of salvation in the path of holiness breed laziness, carelessness, or licentiousness? On the contrary, it strongly entices and motivates us to "always excel in the

work of the Lord, because [we] know that [our] labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Those who are convinced of God's free grace towards them in Christ are not concerned with earning their salvation through legalistic works. Satan is ready to suggest that such an attitude is sinful carelessness leading to licentiousness. However, those who believe this false suggestion from Satan reveal that they do not yet understand what it means to serve God out of love and are still bound to obedience by the bit and bridle of slavish fear, like horses and mules without understanding (Psalm 32:9).

1. Be cautious of regarding assurance as completely incompatible with any doubting within the same soul. One significant reason why many Protestants have deviated from the doctrine of their predecessors in this matter is because they believe that there can be no true assurance of salvation in those who experience doubts, even though they acknowledge many individuals as genuine believers and precious saints of God who indeed wrestle with doubts. True, indeed, this assurance is inherently contrary to doubting, and if it were perfect to the highest degree, it would entirely eliminate all doubts from the soul; even now, it diminishes them to some extent. However, do not the best saints on earth have both flesh and spirit within them? (Galatians 5:17). Is there not a conflict between the law of their members and the law of their minds? (Romans 7:23). Can one who truly believes not say, "Lord, help my unbelief"? (Mark 9:24). Can anyone on earth claim to have received any grace to the highest degree and to be completely free from contrary corruption? Why, then, should we think that assurance cannot be

genuine unless it is perfect and eradicates all doubts from the soul? The apostle commended the Thessalonians for having much assurance, suggesting that there can be varying degrees of true assurance (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Peter had some assurance of Christ's help when he walked on water at Christ's command, yet he also had doubts, as evidenced by his fear when he saw the strong wind. He had some faith that was contrary to doubting, although it may have been small, as indicated by Christ's words to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:29-31). It is strange to think that the flesh and the devil will never oppose true assurance and assault it with doubts. There may be times when a believer is so overwhelmed by doubts that they are unable to perceive any assurance within themselves. They are far from claiming knowledge of their place in heaven already (as some mockingly suggest); in fact, they may express uncertainty about having any assurance of being there and need diligent self-examination to uncover it. However, if even during such times they can rebuke their soul for doubting, saying, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him" (Psalm 42:11), if they can acknowledge their doubts as their own weakness (Psalm 77:10), then these doubts originate from the flesh and the devil. If they continue to address God as their Father and confess their doubts about His fatherly love, praying for God to grant them assurance of His love which they do not currently sense, and to dispel those fears and doubts, then, I say, such an individual possesses true assurance, even though they must strive to attain a higher degree. For if they were not convinced of the truth of God's

love towards them, they could not reasonably condemn their fears and doubts regarding it as sinful; neither could they rationally pray to God as their Father or request His assurance of a love they do not consider to be true.

Do accept that it is the nature of saving faith to resist and wrestle with slavish fears of wrath and doubts about our own salvation, and you essentially acknowledge that there is, and must be, an element of assurance of our salvation within saving faith. By this assurance, it counters doubts, and in essence, you share the same viewpoint as me in this assertion, regardless of how peculiar my wording may appear to you. If we thoroughly consider what I have said about our imperfection in assurance, just as in other graces, this ancient Protestant doctrine would be relieved of much prejudice and gain greater respect among us.

Lastly, it is crucial to note that the reason why we are to assure ourselves in our faith that "God freely gives Christ and salvation to us personally" is not because it is a truth before we believe it, but because it becomes a definite truth when we believe it, and it will never be true unless we, to some extent, persuade and assure ourselves that it is so. There is no absolute promise or declaration in Scripture that God certainly will or does give Christ and His salvation to any one of us in particular; nor do we know it to be true already through Scripture, sense, or reason before we absolutely assure ourselves of it. Indeed, we are currently without Christ's salvation, in a state of sin and misery, under God's curse and wrath. However, I shall prove that we are commanded by God to assure ourselves in this way, and the Scripture sufficiently encourages us not to deceive ourselves by believing a falsehood but, according to our faith, it shall be unto us

(Matthew 9:29). This is a peculiar form of assurance, far distinct from other conventional forms; hence, it is unsurprising that it may be weak and imperfect, difficult to attain, and subject to various doubts. We are compelled to believe other things based on the clear evidence we have that they are true, and they would remain true whether we believe in them or not. Therefore, we cannot deny our assent without rebelling against the evidence provided by our senses, reason, or conscience. However, in this case, our assurance is not impressed upon our thoughts by any evidence of the matter; rather, we must cultivate it within ourselves with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This process brings our thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Only God can justly require this type of assurance because He alone calls things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). He alone can bring things into existence that do not yet exist and make something true, based on our belief in it, even if it was not true before. Only He can fulfil that promise: "Whatever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them" (Mark 11:24). "Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?" (Lamentations 3:37). Therefore, this faith is owed exclusively to God and greatly brings glory to Him. People may often demand a similar kind of belief, such as when someone says, "I will forgive your transgression and be your friend if I can see that you believe it and consider me a friend." However, their fallible word is not sufficient grounds for us to persuade ourselves absolutely that we will receive their promised favor.

The faith of miracles sheds some light on this matter. Christ assured those on whom the miracles were performed, and who had been given the power to perform them, that the miracles would occur if they believed without

doubting the outcome (Mark 11:22, 23). There is a reason for this analogy, as the purpose of working miracles was to affirm the doctrine of the gospel, which teaches salvation through faith in Christ's name, as clearly indicated in the Scriptures. In truth, the salvation of a sinner is a remarkable miracle. It is reported that wizards often require those who approach them to believe that they will obtain what they desire, or at the very least, that the wizards possess the ability to fulfill their desires. In doing so, the devil, who is the master of these wizards, presents himself as an imitation of God, attempting to claim the honour and glory that belong solely to God.

Now that I have explained the nature of the assurance I have directed to, I will present several arguments to prove that there is, and must necessarily be, such an assurance or conviction of our salvation within saving faith itself.

Firstly, this assurance of salvation is implicit in the previous description of the faith by which we receive Christ and His salvation into our hearts. I described faith as a grace of the Spirit, through which "we wholeheartedly believe the gospel and also believe in Christ, as He is revealed and freely promised to us in it, for all His salvation." In the explanation, I demonstrated that believing in Christ is equivalent to resting, relying, leaning, and placing our confidence in Christ or God through Christ for our salvation. Some may prefer this description because it employs terms commonly used even by those who deny the necessity of assurance. However, these ordinary terms do encompass assurance in the nature of faith, and they cannot exist without it. This indicates that many people implicitly hold and profess the doctrine of assurance, even if they believe otherwise. Believing in Christ for salvation, as freely promised to us, inherently involves a reliance on Christ with a conviction that salvation will

be freely given, as it has been freely promised to us. If believing with a divine faith, grounded in the infallible truth of the promise, did not to some extent exclude mere uncertainty and wavering opinion or conjecture, it would not be worthy of being called faith. It would be absurd for someone to claim that faith is merely believing that we will be saved by Christ if we fulfill certain conditions He requires. In such a case, it would leave us in the same state of uncertainty about our salvation until those conditions are met.

But I have already refuted such an absurd notion by demonstrating that this believing in Christ is not only the condition of our salvation but also the means by which we actually receive it. Believing, being the rightful action of faith, naturally has its opposites, such as wavering (Rom. 4:20), doubting (Matt. 14:31), and fearing (Mark 5:36). These contrary attitudes greatly elucidate the nature of faith and show that belief must entail some confidence, for without it, doubting would be inherent to faith itself. After all, how can anyone who understands the value of their immortal soul and the peril of losing it avoid fear, doubt, and distress of heart through a belief that doesn't assure them of their salvation? The other terms used by orthodox teachers, such as "trusting" and "resting" on Jesus Christ, etc., to describe faith, must include assurance of salvation because they convey the same meaning as believing in Christ. The soul requires adequate support to withstand oppressive fears, troubles, cares, and despair, so that it may trust and rest in this manner. Trusting and hoping in the Lord rightly involves assuring ourselves, in the face of all fears and doubts, that the Lord is our God and He has become our salvation. "I trusted in You, O Lord; I said, 'You are my God'" (Ps. 31:14). "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust" (Ps. 18:2). "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid" (Isa. 12:2). "O my soul,

hope in God, who is the health of my countenance and my God" (Ps. 42:11). True hope is founded solely in God, that He will bless us, and that He may serve as an anchor for the soul, firm and steadfast (Heb. 6:17-19). If you trust, rely, and anchor yourselves in Christ or hope in Him without any assurance of salvation through Him, you are making no better use of Him than if He were a broken reed. To truly anchor yourselves in the Lord, you must regard Him as your God, as the prophet instructs, "Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God" (Isa. 50:10). If you wish to rest in the Lord, you must believe that He deals bountifully with you (Ps. 116:7), for otherwise, you may unknowingly find yourself on the path to damnation. It shows little regard for Christ and your soul if you dare to rest under God's wrath without any conviction of a secure interest in Christ. People may delude themselves with such trust or rest when they are at ease, but in times of temptation, it dissipates and proves not to be genuine faith, but rather a source of shame. The soul that lives in such wavering and doubting regarding salvation finds no true rest, but is "like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind; that person is double-minded and unstable in all their ways" (James 1:6, 8).

If you persist in mere uncertainty and doubt regarding salvation through Christ, your desire to trust is nothing more than a feeble wish without any firm resolve, and you are not yet willing to take the risk of persuading and assuring yourselves of your desire to trust and rely on Jesus Christ. In response to this, I can say that you cannot do even this much in a proper manner unless you desire and dare to persuade and assure yourselves of your salvation through Christ, despite all the reasons you have to doubt and fear otherwise. If it is objected that we can trust in Christ solely as a sufficient means of salvation without any assurance of the outcome, I will

acknowledge that the sufficiency of God and Christ is indeed a good foundation for us to rest upon. However, we must understand that this sufficiency includes not only the power but also the goodwill and mercy of God towards us. For what use is the sufficiency of God and Christ's power to us if we do not have His goodwill? And if this belief is truly held, it will eliminate any doubts concerning your salvation.

1. Several passages of Scripture explicitly state that we are to be assured of our salvation through the faith by which we are justified and saved. Let me provide some examples. We are urged to draw near to God with full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22). Many interpret this verse as referring to what they call the reflex act of faith because they believe that all assurance must necessarily come through reflection. However, the words of the text clearly prompt us to understand it as referring to the very act of faith by which we draw near to God, that is, the direct act, and it is the very faith by which the righteous live - the faith that justifies and saves (v. 8).

And this assurance must be complete, at least in its true and proper nature, in contrast to mere doubt and uncertainty, although we are still to strive for the highest degree of perfection. The same faith by which we are encouraged to draw near to God and by which the righteous live is later declared to be the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). Why would saving faith be given such lofty titles and attributes if it did not contain a sure persuasion of the great things we hope for in our salvation, making them evident to the eyes of our mind as if they were already present in their substance, even though they are not visible to our physical eyes? The faith through which we become partakers of Christ

and belong to His house is worthy to be called "confidence" and is accompanied by rejoicing hope: "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm until the end" (Heb. 3:6, 14). What is confidence in anything other than trusting in it with a firm conviction of its truth? If we only have a strong opinion about something without absolute certainty, we usually say that we are not entirely confident about it. The faith by which we are justified should resemble the faith of Abraham, who against all hope believed in hope that his offspring would be multiplied according to God's promise. Despite the lifelessness of his own body and Sarah's womb, he had no evidence from his own qualifications to assure himself of it, and all appearances were to the contrary (Rom. 4:18, 19, 23, 24). As absolute as the promise was to Abraham, it would not be fulfilled without this assurance of faith, and through a similar faith, the free promises of salvation through Christ will be absolutely fulfilled for us.

The apostle James explicitly requires that when we ask good things from God, we should do so in faith, without doubting - clearly including assurance. He plainly tells us that without it, a person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Therefore, we can firmly conclude that without assurance, we will not receive the salvation of Christ (James 1:6, 7). And what the apostle James instructs us not to doubt is our obtaining the things we ask for, as we can also learn from similar instructions given by Christ Himself: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

There could be more passages of Scripture cited to support the same point, but these are sufficient to demonstrate that we are obligated to assure ourselves of our salvation in faith itself, otherwise we are unlikely to experience it. Living in a state of mere suspense and doubtfulness regarding

our salvation is not humility, but rather proud disobedience. This assurance must be in the direct act of faith by which we are justified and saved. As for what is known as the reflex act of faith, it is universally acknowledged that it is not absolutely necessary for anyone's salvation, and it is sinful and harmful for many to believe that they have already entered into a state of grace and salvation.

God provides us with sufficient basis in Scripture to come to Christ with confident faith right from the start, trusting assuredly that Christ and His salvation will be given to us without any failure or delay, regardless of how vile and sinful our condition may have been before. The Scripture speaks to the most wicked sinners in a manner that seems purposefully designed to engender immediate assurance of salvation in them. This promise is universal: "Whoever believes in Christ will not be put to shame," without making a distinction between Jew and Greek (Rom. 10:11, 12). And this promise is confirmed by the sacrifice of Christ, who was given for the world and lifted up on the cross for the very purpose that "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-16). His invitation is open to all: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink," and this drink is promised to everyone who believes (John 7:37, 39). The command to believe is presented not only in general terms but also specifically, and the promise of salvation upon belief is applied personally, even to those who were previously in a state of sin and wrath, such as the wicked, persecuting, self-destructive jailer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). God commanded those who had lived completely in sin before to call Him their own Father in their very first return (Jer. 3:4). Likewise, God declares, "You are My people," and they will say, "You are my God," confidently affirming their

personal connection to Him (Hos. 2:23). God has joined confidence and salvation inseparably together: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15).

Many people fail to make proper use and benefit from the revelation of God's abundant grace towards sinners. They say that if we see that we have fulfilled the condition of believing, then we may confidently claim Christ as our own. They overlook the primary use they should make of these revelations. The very act of fulfilling the condition is to immediately take Christ as our own, to eat and drink Him by confidently believing in Him for our salvation. If an honest wealthy man says to a poor woman, "I promise to be your husband if you will have me; just say the word, and I am yours," can't she confidently respond, "You are my husband, and I choose you as my husband"? Shouldn't she say that rather than saying, "I do not believe what you say"? If an honest person says, "Just take this gift, and it is yours; just eat and drink, and you are warmly welcomed," can't I accept the gift and eat and drink without any further hesitation, with the assurance that it is freely mine? If I do it with doubt, I undermine the honesty and credibility of the giver, as if he were not a person of his word. Similarly, if, fearing to be too confident for fear of believing a lie, we come to Christ with doubts and in a state of mere uncertainty as to whether we will be freely received, despite God's free invitations and promises, wouldn't we undermine the faithfulness of God? Wouldn't we be guilty of calling God a liar? As the apostle John teaches, because we do not believe the testimony that God has given about His Son: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:10, 11).

And what if the promised salvation is not absolutely intended for all who hear the gospel? It is enough that God faithfully gives us His word that

those who believe will receive it, and no one else, and He has absolutely intended to fulfill His word so that no one will find it to be a lie, and He has inseparably linked belief and salvation together.

On this basis, God is justified in causing the promise of this salvation to be proclaimed to all and in rightly demanding that all believe in Him confidently for their own salvation, so that it may be seen whether they will give Him the glory of His truth. And if they do not, He is justified in rejecting them and punishing them severely for dishonouring Him through their unbelief. In this case, we should not look to the secret decrees of God, but to His revealed promises and commands. Just as God promised the Israelites in the wilderness that He would give them the land of Canaan and would fight for them against their enemies, and He commanded them not to fear or be discouraged, so that the promise would be fulfilled for them, yet God never absolutely decreed or intended that those Israelites should enter, as the subsequent events quickly made evident (Deut. 1:20, 21, 29, 30). Nevertheless, were they not obligated in this case to trust confidently in God to give them victory over their enemies and possession of the land? Did they not have sufficient grounds for such faith? Would it not have been just for God to consume them in the wilderness for their unbelief? "Let us therefore fear, lest, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, any of you should seem to have failed to reach it... Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (Heb. 4:1, 11).

1. The faithful individuals described in the Old and New Testament Scriptures commonly professed their assurance and conviction of their relationship with God and His salvation. They were directed by

God's Word to do so, and genuine saints always had some true assurance. We should not assume that this assurance was based on their own self-righteousness, but rather on the promises of God through direct faith. We can assess the typical profession of faith exhibited by saints through a few examples. Let's start with the profession made by the Israelites when they were in a state of corruption, just after their exodus from Egypt. During that time, only a few of them could confidently assert, based on their own righteousness, that they were already in a state of grace – an assumption that many nowadays consider the sole basis for assurance. Despite their corrupt state, the children of Israel sang the triumphant song of Moses, declaring, "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; he is my God," and so on (Exodus 15:2). Moses taught them to affirm their personal interest in salvation through this song and guided them in their duty. They did not find fault with Moses, as some do with ministers today, for encouraging them to express greater confidence in their song than they can find solely from their qualifications. Instead, they engaged in the exercise of faith, in line with the song. Undoubtedly, this faith was genuine for a few of them, though it was merely superficial for others. This is evident from the testimony that when "they believed his words, they sang his praise" (Psalm 106:12).

Numerous other psalms and songs appointed by divine authority in the Old Testament serve as clear evidence of the assurance of faith commonly professed and expected from people during that time. Psalms such as 23, 27, 44, and 46 reflect this assurance. Many other psalms or verses within

psalms could be cited. Only a few individuals in comparison could have fully complied with such psalms, even though they were true believers, if the entire assurance of God's love depended solely on their certain knowledge of the sincerity of their own hearts.

We have a great multitude of witnesses gathered from the entire history of the Old Testament (Hebrews 11) who, by their faith, did, endured, and achieved great things. Their examples are presented to encourage us to believe and save our souls (Hebrews 10:39). If we carefully consider these examples, we will find that many of them clearly guide us towards a saving faith that inherently contains an assurance of the outcome. I acknowledge that we often read about the fears and doubts experienced by the saints in the Old Testament. However, we also read how they themselves condemned these doubts as contrary to faith, as seen in the Psalms (Psalm 42:11, 31:22; 78:7, 10). The most mournful psalm in Scripture begins with an expression of some assurance (Psalm 88:1). It is worth noting that the doubts encountered by the saints of old were usually caused by extraordinary afflictions or grave transgressions, not by common shortcomings or the inherent corruption of human nature, nor by uncertainty regarding their election. There was no notion that it is an act of humility to doubt and that they were not obligated to be confident in God's salvation, for that would imply that many should be obliged to believe a falsehood. It is difficult to find any instances of such occasions for doubting under the Old Testament, although they have become all too common among us now under the New Testament.

During the time of the apostles, it is reasonable to expect that the assurance of faith would have grown stronger. This is because the salvation of Christ was revealed, the Spirit of adoption was abundantly poured out,

and the church was freed from its previous bondage under the fearful legal covenant. Paul could demonstrate to the early Christians, based on their own experiences, that they were "children and heirs of God" because they had not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, by whom they cried, "Abba, Father." The Spirit itself bore witness with their spirits, as the Syriac and Vulgar Latin translations render it, and as a similar Greek phrase is rendered (Romans 9:1), "that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs" (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6). Furthermore, the apostle told the Ephesians that after they believed, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit, which served as a guarantee of their inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). In other words, they were sealed from the moment they believed, as the original words are in the same tense. If this witness, seal, and earnest of the Spirit were not common among believers, it would not have been sufficient to prove that they were children of God. Such a mode of argumentation could have driven some to despair if they lacked this witness, seal, and earnest.

Let us now inquire whether the Spirit bears witness that we are the children of God and enables us to cry, "Abba, Father," through the direct act of faith or what they call the "reflex act" of faith. We must not think that it is done through enthusiasm, without any ordinary means. Nor can we reasonably imagine that only a few believers who are so certain of their own sincerity can call God "Father" by reflecting on it and grounding an act of faith regarding their own interest in Christ. No, surely. Therefore, we may judge rather that the Spirit works this in us by giving us saving faith itself, through the direct act of which all true believers are enabled to trust assuredly in Christ for the enjoyment of the adoption of children and all His salvation, according to the free promise of God, and to call God Father

without reflecting on any good qualifications in themselves. For the Spirit is received through the direct act of faith (Galatians 3:2), and thus He is the Spirit of adoption and comfort to all who receive Him. Those who assert that the Spirit witnesses our adoption only by assuring us of the sincerity of our faith, love, and other gracious qualifications, through the reflex act of faith, commonly teach that we must then try whether the Spirit witnessing is the Spirit of truth or of delusion, by carefully examining whether our inward grace is sincere or counterfeit. In this way, the testimony of the Spirit becomes so difficult to discern that it is of no help to us, and all our assurance ultimately depends on our own certain knowledge of our own sincerity.

There are several other pieces of evidence to show that believers in the time of the apostles were generally convinced of their salvation. They loved and eagerly awaited the coming of Christ to judge the world (1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Timothy 4:8). They loved all the saints because of the hope that was stored up for them in heaven (Colossians 1:3-5). Even the Corinthians, who were very worldly and still spiritual infants, were persuaded that they would judge the world and angels, and that their bodies were members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3, 15, 19). When the gospel first came to the Thessalonians, it came "in the Holy Spirit" and "with much assurance," so that they received it with joy in the midst of affliction, without having had enough time to gain assurance through reflecting on their good qualifications (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 6). Likewise, the Hebrew believers, when they were enlightened at their conversion, joyfully endured the plundering of their possessions, knowing that they had a better and lasting inheritance in heaven. This was their confidence, which they were not to cast aside, for the righteous live by faith. Thus, it becomes

evident that this confidence is necessarily part of justifying saving faith (Hebrews 10:34, 35, 38).

Now, those who bring forth the examples or experiences of many modern Christians to disprove everything I have asserted, should carefully consider whether these are suitable to be weighed against all the examples and experiences from Scripture that I have presented from the Old and New Testament. I admit that the profession of assurance of salvation is less common among Christians in these times than in the past, and we can attribute it to certain teachers who have abandoned the doctrine of earlier Protestants on this matter and have propagated various errors, as previously mentioned. They now try to use the doubts in Christians, which have mainly been caused by their teachings, as an opportunity to confirm the truth of their doctrine. However, the nature of saving faith remains the same. I maintain that in these days, as well as in the past, it always includes some assurance of salvation through Christ, which becomes evident at the very least in resisting and condemning all doubts, praying against them, and striving to trust confidently and call God "Father" – except in cases of extraordinary spiritual desolation, which should not be used as the basis for evaluating our condition.

We should not rely on the judgment of many concerning themselves. They may falsely believe that they have no assurance at all because they have not yet identified, through marks and signs, that they are already in a state of grace. Or they may think that assurance does not exist when there are many doubts, or that it is weak and overwhelmed by doubting to the point where it can hardly be discerned, like life in a fainting fit. However, if they are better informed, they may come to recognize some assurance within themselves. We must also be cautious not to mistake those who are

not true believers for genuine believers and not to judge this matter based on their experiences, which is a common error. Some people's misguided charity leads them to consider all those who are filled with doubts and concerns about their salvation as true believers, even though they may only be convicted of sin and have some zeal for God that does not align with the knowledge of salvation through Christ. They believe it is their duty to comfort such ignorant individuals by persuading them that their condition is good and their faith is right, even though they have no assurance of salvation. In doing so, they falsely judge the nature of faith out of their blind charity towards those who are still in ignorance and unbelief. Instead of providing comfort, they lead them astray from seeking consolation through saving faith in Christ and ultimately contribute to the eternal ruin of their souls.

1. The primary role of this faith in its direct saving act is to actually receive Christ and His salvation into our hearts, as has been demonstrated. This role cannot be rationally fulfilled unless we persuade our hearts to some extent and assure ourselves of His presence and enjoyment. Just as the body receives things into itself through the hands and mouth, the soul receives these things and truly grasps them through the faculty of the will, making a choice and embracing them in a manner of present joy and possession, just as it does through the faculty of the understanding in perceiving and apprehending them. In the same way, the soul derives comfort from external things, as a righteous person cannot derive inward comfort from worldly possessions, spouse, friends, etc., unless they choose them as good and consider them rightfully theirs. This is the only

rational way in which the soul can actively lay hold of Christ and truly possess Him and His salvation, as He is freely offered and promised to us in the gospel through the grace of faith, which God has designated as our primary instrument for receiving and embracing Him. If we do not choose Christ as our sole salvation and source of happiness, or if we remain in a state of uncertainty and doubt as to whether God will be pleased to give Christ to us or not, it is clear that our souls are completely detached from Christ and have no grip or enjoyment of Him. They do not even claim to have received Him or chosen Him, nor are they fully convinced that it is lawful for them to do so; rather, they are still unsure whether they have any valid basis or right to lay hold of Him or not.

Let any rational person judge whether the soul can truly and adequately act in receiving and enjoying Christ as its Saviour, Head, or Husband while it is still uncertain whether it is the will of Christ to be joined with it in such a close relationship. Can a woman honestly accept someone as her husband without being assured that he is fully willing to be her husband? The same can be said about the various aspects of Christ's salvation that are to be received through faith. It is evident that we do not truly receive the benefit of forgiveness of sins, in order to cleanse our consciences from the guilt that burdens them, unless we have a firm conviction that God has indeed forgiven them. We do not actually receive into our hearts the reality of our reconciliation with God and adoption as His children, along with the rights to an eternal inheritance, until we can assure ourselves that God graciously chooses to be our God and Father, accepting us as His children and heirs. We do not truly receive sufficient strength to encourage our hearts towards

holiness in the face of difficulties until we steadfastly believe that God is with us and will not abandon us.

Therefore, we can firmly conclude that whoever seeks salvation through faith but does not seek to have assurance or confidence in their own salvation is deceiving themselves and deluding their soul with a mere illusion instead of having true saving faith. In essence, they are seeking to be saved in their corrupt natural state without actually receiving and grasping the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation.

1. Another important and necessary role of saving faith is to purify the heart and enable us to live and walk in the practice of all holy duties by the grace of Christ and with Christ Himself living within us, as explained earlier. However, faith is unable to fulfill this role unless some assurance of our own connection to Christ and His salvation is inherent in its nature. If we desire to live for God, not ourselves, but by Christ living in us, following the example of Paul, we must be able to assure ourselves as he did, saying, "Christ loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). We are taught that if we live in the Spirit, we should also walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). It would be presumptuous if we were to strive to live above our natural strength and power by the Spirit before we have made sure of our life in the Spirit. I have demonstrated that we cannot fully experience the comforting benefits of the saving grace of Christ, which the gospel promises and encourages us to embrace in our pursuit of holiness, unless we have some confidence in our own participation in those saving benefits. If we do not firmly believe that we are dead to sin and alive to God through Christ, that we have been raised with

Christ, that we are no longer under the law but under grace, and that we are members of Christ's body, the temple of His Spirit, children of God, it would be hypocritical to serve God based on such privileges as if we considered ourselves to be partakers of them.

Anyone who thinks they should doubt their salvation is not a suitable disciple for this kind of teaching. They may respond to the preachers of the gospel, saying, "If you want to lead me to holiness, you must employ more effective arguments, for I cannot act upon these principles because I do not have enough faith to believe that I have any part in them. Arguments based on God's justice and wrath against sinners, as well as His mercy towards those who sincerely obey, would have a stronger influence on me." Oh, what a wretched and inadequate kind of saving faith this is, which cannot equip a believer to live according to the purest and most powerful principles of grace, but instead leaves them to operate based on legalistic principles that can never truly lead them to serve God acceptably out of love! And just as such a faith completely fails in the proper manner of obeying based on gospel principles, it also fails in the very essence of certain significant duties, which inherently involve assurance of God's love in their rightful performance. These include the great duties of peace with God, rejoicing in the Lord always, unashamed hope, acknowledging the Lord as our God and Saviour, praying to Him as our heavenly Father, offering our bodies and souls as acceptable sacrifices to Him, casting all our cares of body and soul upon Him, contentment and heartfelt thanksgiving in every circumstance, boasting in the Lord, rejoicing in His praise, finding joy in tribulation, putting on Christ in our baptism, receiving Christ's body broken for us and His blood shed for us in the Lord's Supper, willingly entrusting our souls to

God as our Redeemer whenever He may call for us, loving the second coming of Christ and eagerly anticipating it as our blessed hope.

When we experience sudden doubts about whether we are already in a state of grace, especially when we are called to undertake certain immediate duties like partaking in the Lord's Supper or performing any duty that requires assurance for its proper execution, we must find relief by confidently trusting in Christ for the present gift of His salvation. Otherwise, we will be compelled to neglect the duty or perform it inadequately or insincerely. If we cannot judge ourselves to be in a state of grace through the reflex act of faith, unless we find that we sincerely perform these duties, or if we do not possess a holy faith that enables or inclines us to fulfil them, then how can we be enabled and inclined by a faith that lacks true assurance of our salvation? Therefore, I conclude that we must necessarily have some assurance of our salvation in the direct act of faith, through which we are justified, sanctified, and saved, before we can rightfully assure ourselves that we are already in a state of grace through the reflex act.

Grant me a saving faith that produces such fruits as these. No other faith will be effective through love and therefore will not lead to salvation in Christ (Gal. 5:6). The apostle James urges you to demonstrate your faith through your actions (James 2:18). In this test, the faith of assurance emerges with praise and honour. When God called His people to work outward miracles through it, all things became possible for them, and it has frequently resulted in acts of righteousness that can rightfully be regarded as great spiritual miracles. From this faith, the people of God have exhibited heroic fortitude, where their absolute obedience to God has been demonstrated in their deeds and their endurance, as recorded in the Holy

Scriptures and church history. And if we ever find ourselves facing fiery trials, as Protestants did in the past, we will discover that the doctrine of assurance will encourage us to suffer for the sake of Christ.

1. On the contrary, the doctrine that excludes assurance from the nature of saving faith yields many harmful consequences. It tends to deprive our souls of all assurance of salvation and genuine comfort, which are essential for a vibrant religious life, by placing them after sincere and universal obedience. Yet, if we do not have assurance first, we can never attain to this obedience or any assurance that depends on it, as has been demonstrated. Moreover, it subjects us to continual doubts about our salvation and tormenting fears of God's wrath, eradicating true love for God and resulting only in servile and hypocritical service. It serves as one of the main supports for the various superstitions in Catholicism, such as their monastic orders, the concept of satisfaction for sin through acts of penance, bodily mortifications, pilgrimages, indulgences, and reliance on the merits of saints, among others. Once people have lost the understanding of the correct way to assure themselves of salvation, they will grasp at any straw to avoid drowning in the abyss of despair.

There is no way to provide solid comfort to the wounded spirits of those who see themselves devoid of all holiness, under God's wrath and curse, dead in sin, and unable to even think a good thought. It only increases their terror and anguish when you tell them that they must first acquire faith and obedience, and only then can they believe that God will receive them into His grace and favour. Alas! They know that they cannot believe or obey unless God assists them with His grace and favour. What if they are on the

verge of death, struggling with the pains of death, and have no time or opportunity to acquire good qualifications or examine their worthiness? You must have a quicker way to comfort such individuals by revealing to them the free promise of salvation for the worst of sinners through faith in Christ. Encourage them to apply these promises and confidently trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, holiness, and glory. Assure them that God will help them believe sincerely in Christ if they desire it with all their hearts, and that it is their duty to believe because God commands it.

The same doctrine leads to various other problems. People are unwilling to acknowledge the worst in themselves and tend to think their qualifications are better than they truly are, in order to avoid despair. Others are content without any assurance of their relationship with Christ because they believe it is not necessary for salvation and that only a few achieve it. In this, they demonstrate little love for Christ or their own souls. Some cultivate doubts about their salvation as a sign of humility, though they hypocritically complain about them. Many spend their time examining their own hearts in search of evidence of their relationship with Christ when they should instead focus on receiving Christ and walking confidently in Him through faith.

Some are troubled by doubts about whether they should address God as "Father" and how they should perceive Him in prayer. They take offense at ministers who, in their public prayers, use expressions that the people cannot join in, such as acknowledging God as their God and Father, or Christ as their Saviour. For the same reason, they are also offended by the public singing of many of David's psalms. They even avoid participating in the Lord's Supper because they are unsure about their relationship with Christ.

Although true believers have some assurance of salvation in saving faith itself, this assurance is greatly weakened in many individuals due to the contrary doctrine they are exposed to, resulting in numerous doubts. As a consequence, other good qualities are inevitably diminished and become so obscure that discerning them becomes exceedingly difficult. Therefore, it becomes a challenging task for true believers to gain the certain knowledge of their own sincerity, which some claim to be the sole assurance of faith. Certain individuals prescribe specific signs and indications to differentiate between sincerity and hypocrisy, making it nearly impossible for believers to sufficiently evaluate themselves unless they possess above-average knowledge and experience.

Consequently, many believers walk through life burdened by the bitterness of their souls, constantly grappling with fears and doubts. This is why they lack courage and fervour in their spiritual journey, often preoccupied with earthly matters and living in fear of suffering and death. Even if they obtain some assurance through the reflex act of faith, they frequently lose it due to sins and temptations. The solution to avoid these hardships is to obtain assurance and consistently uphold it, renewing it whenever necessary through the direct act of faith by confidently trusting in the name of the Lord and relying on God, especially when walking in darkness and encountering a lack of personal qualifications (Isa. 50:10). I have no doubt that the experiences of devoted Christians can testify to the truth of this.

Chapter Eleven

Endeavour diligently to perform the great work of believing

Make a diligent effort to believe in Christ in the right manner without delay, and then continue and grow in your most holy faith. By doing so, your experience of Christ, your union and fellowship with Him, and your pursuit of holiness through Him, will be initiated, sustained, and enhanced within you.

After explaining the powerful and effective means for holy living, my remaining task is to guide you in putting them into practice and improving upon them for the immediate achievement of the desired outcome. It should be evident from the preceding instructions that faith in Christ is the starting point for a holy life, and it lays the foundation for all other righteous duties within the soul.

It has already been sufficiently demonstrated that by faith, Christ Himself, along with all the necessary qualities to enable us to live a holy life, is actually received into our hearts. This is the unifying grace through which the Spirit of God establishes a mystical marriage between Christ and us, making us branches of the noble vine, members of the body joined to

the glorious head, living stones of the spiritual temple built upon the precious living cornerstone and sure foundation, and partakers of the bread and drink that descended from heaven and give life to the world. This grace enables us to transition from our corrupted natural state to a new state of holiness in Christ, moving from death in sin to a life of righteousness. It also provides us with comfort, stability, and strength in every good word and deed.

If we ask the question, "What must we do to do the works of God?" Christ provides the answer: "Believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:28, 29). He emphasizes the importance of the work of believing, which is the foremost work of God, the work from which all other good works proceed.

The first aspect of this instruction is to prompt you to actively engage in the great work of believing in Christ and to guide you in doing so. You must consider four distinct elements within it.

1. The first is that you must diligently strive to perform the great work of believing in Christ. Many people pay little attention to this duty. It is not known through natural understanding like many moral duties; rather, it is only revealed supernaturally through the gospel, and it is considered foolishness by those who rely solely on their natural senses. These individuals may be alarmed by other sins and examine themselves concerning them, even making lists to aid their memory and devotion. However, the great sin of not believing in Christ is rarely contemplated during their self-examinations or included in their extensive lists of sins. Even those who acknowledge that believing in Christ is a necessary duty for salvation often neglect to make diligent efforts to fulfil it. This may

be because they believe it to be a mere emotional response that can be easily performed at any time without exerting effort or diligent endeavour. Alternatively, they may view it as equally difficult as all the works of the law and deem it utterly impossible to accomplish through their most diligent efforts unless the Spirit of God works it within them by His mighty power. Consequently, they believe it is futile to strive until they experience this inward working of the Spirit in their hearts. Lastly, some consider it a duty so exclusive to the elect that it would be presumptuous for them to attempt it unless they know themselves to be chosen for eternal life through Christ. Despite these obstacles, I urge you to diligently engage in this duty by considering the following: its worthiness, as evidenced by its preciousness, excellence, and necessity that have already been revealed.

If the natural understanding were not clouded in matters of salvation, it would reveal to us that we cannot discover the way of salvation on our own. It would condemn those who disregard the revelation of the way of salvation given to us by God in the gospel, as declared in the Holy Scriptures. The primary purpose of preaching the gospel is for the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5), so that we may be brought to Christ and all other forms of obedience. Indeed, the ultimate goal of all revealed doctrines in the entire Scriptures is to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). The law given by Moses was intended for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4), and Christ was the fulfilment of that righteousness. The moral law itself was revealed to lead us to salvation through faith in Christ, for without it, the knowledge of the

law would be of no benefit to fallen mankind, who are unable to fulfil it. Therefore, those who disregard the duty of believing and consider it foolishness are essentially disregarding, despising, and demeaning the entire counsel of God revealed in the Scriptures. The law, the gospel, and even Christ Himself become ineffective for the salvation of such individuals. The only result they can attain through the saving doctrines of the Scriptures is hypocritical moral duties and slavish performances, which will be like filthy rags in the sight of God on the Day of Judgment. Although many do not consider the sin of unbelief during self-examination and do not include it in their lists, they should know that it is the most destructive sin of all. All the sins listed would not be condemning, nor would they dominate their conduct, if it were not for unbelief. This one prevailing sin makes it impossible for them to please God in any duty whatsoever (Heb. 11:6). If they do not pay attention to this primary sin now, God will ultimately call it to their attention with great severity, for "he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). "The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:7, 8).

1. Believing in Christ is a task that requires diligent effort and labour to accomplish. We must labour to enter into that rest, lest anyone fall through unbelief (Heb. 4:11). We must strive for the full assurance of hope until the end, so that we may be followers of those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises (Heb. 6:11, 12). It is a work that necessitates the exertion of might and power, thus we need to be strengthened with power through the Spirit in our inner

being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:16, 17). I acknowledge that it is easy, pleasant, and delightful in its essence, as it is an inward motion of the heart without burdensome physical labour. It involves accepting Christ and His salvation as our own, which is immensely comforting and enjoyable. The soul is propelled by love for Christ and its own happiness, an affection that makes even difficult tasks easy and pleasurable. However, it becomes challenging for us due to the opposition we face from our own inner corruptions and Satan's temptations.

It is not an easy task to receive Christ as our happiness and free salvation with genuine confidence and fervent affection, especially when the weight of sin burdens the conscience and the wrath of God is revealed through the Word and terrifying judgments. This difficulty is compounded when we have long been accustomed to seeking salvation through our own works and view the way of salvation by free grace as foolish and harmful. Additionally, our desires strongly incline us towards worldly and carnal pursuits, and Satan does his utmost to hinder us from sincerely fulfilling this duty through his own suggestions, false teachers, worldly allurements, and terrors.

Many works that are easy in themselves prove to be difficult for us to perform in our specific circumstances. Forgiving our enemies and loving them as ourselves may seem like a simple mental act, but many who are aware of their duty find it challenging to bring their hearts to actually do it. Similarly, casting our cares on God for worldly matters may seem easy for the rich, but it becomes difficult for the poor who have large families to provide for. Even the seemingly easy and comforting duty that Moses

exhorted the Israelites to perform when they were trapped at the Red Sea by Pharaoh and his chariots - "Fear not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show you today" (Exod. 14:13) - was not easily carried out.

Ironically, the very easiness of certain duties makes them difficult to perform. For example, Naaman the Syrian struggled to accept the simple and easy remedy of washing himself to be cleansed of leprosy because he thought it was too trivial (2 Kings 5:12, 13). Similarly, in the case of believing in Christ, some people are offended by the duty, considering it too slight and easy a remedy to cure the soul's leprosy. They believe that a more challenging task should be assigned to achieve such a great end as eternal salvation. Even though the work of believing may appear easy to many, common experience has shown that people are more readily inclined to engage in the most burdensome, unreasonable, and inhumane practices. For instance, the Jews and Christian Galatians were more easily swayed to take on the yoke of Moses' law, which no one could bear (Acts 15:10). The heathens were more easily convinced to burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods (Deut. 12:31). The Papists are more easily led to make vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, adhering to rigorous rules of monastic discipline, subjecting their bodies to fasting, scourging, and pilgrimage, and enduring the excessive tyranny of the papal hierarchy through a multitude of burdensome superstitious and absurd devotions.

Those who underestimate the work of faith due to its easiness reveal that they have not yet grasped the multitude of their sins, the terrible curse of the law, and the wrath of God under which they were condemned. They have not recognized the darkness and futility of their minds, the corruption and hardness of their hearts, and their bondage to the power of sin and Satan.

They have not truly been humbled, and without such humility, they cannot believe in the right manner. Many sincere believers have experienced that it is a difficult task to bring their hearts to the duty of believing. It has required vigorous struggles and fierce battles against their own corruptions and Satan's temptations. It is such a challenging work that we cannot accomplish it without the mighty working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Only He can make it absolutely easy for us and determines whether it remains difficult based on the varying degrees of grace He chooses to impart to our souls.

1. Although we cannot perform this great work in the right manner until the Spirit of God works faith in our hearts through His mighty power, it is necessary for us to endeavour it. We cannot perform any holy duty acceptably unless the Spirit of God works it in us. However, this does not excuse us from our own efforts; rather, it stirs us up to greater diligence. As the Scripture says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). The Spirit works faith in the elect by urging them to endeavour to believe. This is in line with the means that the Spirit employs, namely the exhortations, commands, and invitations of the gospel. These would have no effect if we were not to obey them until faith had already been worked in us.

Likewise, we cannot find that the Spirit of God effectively works faith or gives strength to believe until we act upon it. Just as all internal virtues, like other internal habits, are discerned through their actions, we cannot perceive love for God or others in our hearts until we act upon it. Children

do not know their ability to stand on their feet until they make the effort to do so. Similarly, we do not know our spiritual strength until we gain experience and understanding through its use and exercise.

We cannot know or absolutely assure ourselves that the Spirit of God will give us the strength to believe before we act in faith. Such knowledge and assurance, if genuine, already involve having faith to some extent. Whoever confidently trusts in Christ for the strength to believe through His Spirit essentially trusts in Christ for their own salvation, as it is inseparably linked with the grace of saving faith. Although the Spirit works other duties in us through faith, He directly works faith in us through hearing, knowing, and understanding the Word. As it is written, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

In the Word, the Spirit does not make an absolute promise or declaration that He will work faith in a specific unbelieving heart or give strength to believe to any particular individual, or initiate the work of believing in Christ. For faith itself is the first grace through which we have a personal interest in any saving promise. It remains hidden in God's secret counsel and purpose concerning us whether He will grant us His Spirit and saving faith, until our election is revealed by our actual belief.

Therefore, as soon as we understand the duty of believing, we must immediately apply ourselves to its vigorous performance. In doing so, we will find that the Spirit of Christ has strengthened us to believe, even though we do not know for certain beforehand. The Spirit comes upon the elect invisibly, working faith within them, like the wind that blows where it pleases and no one knows its origin or destination, yet we hear its sound and thereby recognize it when it has passed by (John 3:8). We must therefore commence the work before we know that the Spirit is or will be

working in us for salvation. And if we belong to Christ, we will be willing to engage in the work, for "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power" (Psalm 110:3). It is sufficient that God reveals to us in the gospel what faith is and the foundation we have to believe in Christ for our own salvation. He requires this duty of us and will assist us in its performance if we wholeheartedly devote ourselves to it. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:6). "Arise and work, and the LORD will be with you" (1 Chronicles 22:16). Therefore, whoever receives this gospel revelation as the Word of God in genuine love is taught by the Spirit and will certainly come to Christ through faith (John 6:45). Anyone who rejects it despises God, calls Him a liar, and justly deserves to perish due to their unbelief.

1. Although the Spirit works saving faith exclusively in the elect, and others do not believe because they are not among Christ's sheep (John 10:26), and it is referred to as the faith of God's chosen ones (Titus 1:1), everyone who hears the gospel is obligated to the duty of believing, just as they are obligated to all the duties of the moral law. This obligation exists prior to their knowledge of their own individual election, and they are subject to condemnation for unbelief, as well as for any other sin. "Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18). The apostle Paul shows that the elect Israelites obtained salvation, while the rest who were not chosen were blinded. Yet even these were cut off from the good olive tree because of their unbelief (Rom. 11:7, 20).

We cannot have certain knowledge of our election to eternal life until we believe. It remains a hidden matter in God's unfathomable counsel until it is revealed through our effectual calling and belief in Christ. The apostle recognized the election of the Thessalonians by observing the evidence of their faith, that the gospel came to them "not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" and that they had "received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:4-6). If we desire to ascertain our calling, we must first examine our faith (1 Cor. 1:26-27). Therefore, we must believe in Christ before knowing our election, otherwise we will never come to know it and will never have faith.

It is not presumptuous for us to place confident trust in Christ for eternal life before we have any solid evidence of our election. This is because God, who cannot lie, has made a general promise "that everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame," without making any distinction among those who fulfill this duty (Rom. 10:11-12). This promise is as firm and certain to be fulfilled as any of God's decrees and purposes, making it a valid and sufficient basis for our confidence. It is certain that all whom the Father has given to Christ through the eternal decree of election will come to Him, and it is equally certain that Christ will never cast out anyone who comes to Him, regardless of who they are (John 6:37). We need not fear that we will violate God's decree of election by confidently believing in Christ for our salvation before knowing what God has specifically ordained for us. For if we believe, we will eventually be counted among the elect, and if we refuse to believe, we will willingly place ourselves among the reprobate, those who stumble at the word and are disobedient, as they were destined to be (1 Peter 2:8).

I would like to emphasize that even though we have no proof of our specific election before we believe, we should confidently trust in Christ to make it evident to us by granting us the salvation that is exclusively for the elect. All the spiritual and saving blessings that God bestows upon His people in Christ are specifically reserved for those whom He chose in Christ before the world was created (Eph. 1:3-4). However, we must trust in Christ for those saving blessings; otherwise, we will have none at all. We should pray in unwavering faith, believing that God will remember us with the favour He shows to His people, so that we may experience the goodness of His chosen ones and share in His inheritance (Ps. 106:4-5). Therefore, we should have full confidence in God, trusting that He will treat us as His chosen people.

This clearly shows that it is not presumption but rather our solemn obligation to engage in the significant task of believing in Christ for salvation without questioning beforehand whether we are elected or not. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

The second aspect I want to address is the necessity of striving for a proper manner of fulfilling this duty. This is crucial because the absence of it will render your faith ineffective for sanctification and salvation. The great duty of love, which is the fulfillment of the law and the primary fruit of sanctification, must flow from sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:5). There exists a counterfeit faith that does not truly welcome Christ into the heart and does not produce genuine love or obedience, as exemplified by Simon Magus (Acts 8:13, 23), who, despite his faith, remained in the "gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Similarly, there were Jews to whom Christ

would not entrust Himself because they did not openly confess Him, fearing they would be expelled from the synagogue (John 2:24; 12:42). The apostle James also speaks of this kind of faith: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (James 2:14, 19). Therefore, be cautious not to deceive yourselves with a counterfeit faith, but rather possess the genuine faith in God's chosen ones.

The key to distinguishing between true and false faith lies in understanding the correct manner of believing that leads to salvation. Hypocrites may perform the same actions as genuine believers, but they lack the proper manner of performance, which is the essence of excellence in this work. One of the main reasons why "many strive to enter through the narrow door and are not able" is because they are ignorant and deficient in the right way of exercising the faith that enables them to enter (Luke 13:24). I acknowledge that only God is capable of effectively guiding us in the right way of believing. When we recognize our own foolishness and propensity to go astray, and when we genuinely desire and strive to believe in Christ correctly, we can confidently trust that Christ will guide us. God has promised that even simple and foolish travellers will not go astray on the path of holiness and that He will teach sinners along the way. He guides the humble in judgement and teaches them His ways (Psalm 25:8-9). He also commands those lacking wisdom to ask for it from Him in faith, without doubting (James 1:5-6). However, we must understand that God guides us according to the principles laid out in His Word, and we must make an effort to learn the right way of believing from the Word itself. Otherwise, we will not be able to trust God correctly for guidance and direction in this significant work.

To assist you in this matter, I have previously provided a description of saving faith in this treatise, explaining that it consists of two acts: believing the truth of the gospel and believing in Christ as revealed and freely offered to us in the gospel for our salvation. Your primary endeavour should be to perform both of these acts in the right manner, as I will now explain in detail for each of them.

Firstly, it is crucial that you strive for a genuine belief in the truth of the gospel of Christ. This will equip, dispose, and encourage you to believe in Christ as He is revealed and promised in the gospel. By doing so, you will overcome any unsettling thoughts and objections raised by Satan or your own conscience, as well as conquer any corrupt inclinations that hinder a joyful acceptance of Christ and His salvation. Through experience, it has been observed that when individuals falter in the second act of faith, the root cause can usually be traced back to a deficiency in this first act. There is often some false notion or misconception within them that contradicts the belief in the truth of the gospel. This false belief acts as a stronghold of sin and Satan that must be dismantled before they can truly receive Christ into their hearts through faith. If they truly understood the nature of Christ as revealed in the gospel and rightly discerned the truth and excellence of it, they would not hesitate to place their trust in Him. We are in great danger of entertaining such false notions due to our ignorance, self-conceit, guilty consciences, corrupt affections, and numerous errors that cloud our judgement in matters of salvation. Moreover, Satan labours to deceive us, as he did with Eve, using his cunning to corrupt our minds and divert us from the simplicity of the gospel found in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). Therefore, I will provide you with specific instructions of utmost importance to

prevent the defects to which we are most susceptible in the first act of our faith.

1. You must fully believe and be convinced that by nature, like everyone else, you are a child of wrath, separated from God due to the sin of the first Adam. You are spiritually dead in your transgressions and sins, subject to the curse of God's law and the power of Satan, and destined for eternal misery. It is impossible for you to reconcile with God or gain spiritual life and strength to do good works by attempting to obtain salvation through the terms of the legal covenant. You cannot escape from this sinful and miserable condition through your own reasoning and understanding; it requires supernatural revelation and the infinite power that raises the dead. We should not fear, as some do, to acknowledge our own wretchedness and sinfulness, nor should we be willing to think better of ourselves than we truly are. Instead, we should sincerely desire and be glad to know the worst about our own condition. Even when we have discovered the worst about ourselves, we should be willing to believe that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked, beyond what we can comprehend (Jeremiah 17:9). This is necessary to produce true humility, self-despair, and self-loathing within us, so that we may highly value and earnestly seek the salvation of Christ as the one essential thing. It causes us to detest sin and become aware of our need for the great Physician, being willing to follow any of His prescriptions, regardless of the suffering involved, rather than relying on our own wisdom (Matthew 9:12). The lack of this humility is what hindered the scribes and Pharisees

from entering the kingdom of heaven as readily as the tax collectors and prostitutes (Matthew 21:31).

2. You must firmly believe that there is no way to be saved without receiving all the saving benefits of Christ: His Spirit as well as His merits, sanctification as well as the forgiveness of sins, through faith.

Many souls are ruined because they trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins without considering holiness. However, these two benefits are inseparably connected in Christ, so that only those who are enabled to walk in holiness, that is, "not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1), are freed from condemnation by Christ. It is also detrimental to seek only the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ while pursuing holiness through our own efforts according to the terms of the law. We can never live for God in holiness unless we are dead to the law and live solely through Christ dwelling in us by faith. Faith that does not embrace holiness along with the forgiveness of sins from Christ will never sanctify us, and as a result, it will never lead us to heavenly glory (Hebrews 12:14).

1. You must firmly believe in the all-sufficiency of Christ for your own salvation, as well as for all who believe in Him. His blood is capable of cleansing from all sin (1 John 1:7). No matter how great and terrible our sins may be, no matter how long they have persisted, He is able to deliver us from the power of sin and mortify our strong corruptions.

In Scripture, we find that even abominably wicked individuals have been saved by Him: idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, covetous, drunkards, extortioners, and so on (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Those who have sinned

against the light of nature, like the heathens, or against the light of Scripture, like the Jews. Even those who have denied Christ, like Peter, or persecuted and blasphemed Him, like Paul. Many who have fallen into great sins are eternally ruined because they do not consider the grace of Christ sufficient for their forgiveness and sanctification. When they believe they have gone too far and are beyond all hope of recovery, they question how they can live with their sins upon them (Ezekiel 33:10). This despair silently works in many souls, causing them to become careless about their souls and true religion. The devil fills some with abhorrent, filthy, and blasphemous thoughts with the intention of making them believe their sins are too great to be forgiven. However, such thoughts are often the least of their sins, and rather the devil's sin than their own, as they are forced into them against their will. But if their hearts are somewhat polluted within them, Christ testifies that "all kinds of sins and blasphemies will be forgiven, except the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 12:31). As for those guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the reason they are never forgiven is not due to any insufficiency in the blood of Christ or the merciful pardon of God, but because they never repent of that sin and never seek God's mercy through Christ, persisting in obstinacy until death. Scripture attests that "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance" (Hebrews 6:5-6). Therefore, the merits of Christ are sufficient for all who seek mercy by believing in Him.

There are others who despair of ever gaining victory over their lusts because they have made many vows and resolutions in the past, and have made vigorous efforts against them in vain. Such individuals must persuade themselves that the grace of Christ is sufficient for them when all other means have failed. They should have the faith of the woman with the issue

of blood, who, despite not being healed by any remedies prescribed by physicians, believed that if she could just touch the clothes of Christ, she would be made well (Mark 5:25-28). Those who despair due to the magnitude of their guilt and corruption greatly dishonour and underestimate the grace of God, His infinite mercy, and the infinite merits of Christ's blood and the power of His Spirit. They deserve to perish with Cain and Judas. In this wicked generation, many people who indulge in licentiousness secretly harbor despair, which leads them to be desperate in swearing, blaspheming, whoring, drunkenness, and all manner of wickedness. No matter how heinous and abhorrent our sins and corruptions may be, we must learn to consider them insignificant in comparison to the grace of Christ, who is both God and man. He offered Himself up as an infinitely valuable sacrifice for our salvation, through the eternal Spirit, and is capable of recreating us as easily as He created the world with a mere word.

1. You must firmly believe in the truth of the general free promise, specifically in your own case, that if you sincerely believe in Christ, you shall have everlasting life just like anyone else in the world. You do not need to fulfill any works or conditions to have a share in Christ, for the promise is universal: "Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame" (Romans 9:33), without exception. If God does not exclude you, then you must not exclude yourself. Instead, confidently conclude that no matter how vile, wicked, and unworthy you may be, if you come to Christ, you will be accepted just like anyone else in the world. You must believe in the great article of the Creed—the forgiveness of sins—in your own case, when you are

personally concerned, for it will be of little benefit to believe it in the case of others. This is what prevents many broken and wounded spirits from coming to the great Physician when they are convinced of the abominable filthiness of their hearts, realizing that they are dead in sin without even a spark of true grace and holiness. They think it is pointless for people like them to trust in Christ for salvation, believing that Christ will never save someone like them. But why so? At worst, they can only be lost creatures, and Christ came to seek those who are lost. If those who are dead in sin cannot be saved, then all must despair and perish, for no one has any spiritual life until they receive it through believing in Christ.

Some believe themselves to be worse than others, thinking that no one has as wicked a heart as theirs, and even if others are accepted, they will be rejected. But they should know that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), and that God's purpose is to "show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7), which is most glorified by pardoning the greatest sinners. It is simply our ignorance to think ourselves as nobodies, for everyone else, just like us, is naturally "dead in trespasses and sins." Their minds are hostile to God, not submitting to His law, and they cannot do so (Romans 8:7). "Every intention of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). They all have the same corrupt source of abominations in their hearts, even though we may have exceeded many others in various actual sins.

Others believe that they have stayed too long and therefore will find no place for repentance, even if they seek it earnestly with tears (Hebrews

12:17). But behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2), as long as God calls you through the gospel. Although Esau was rejected for seeking earthly blessings rather than the spiritual blessings of the birthright, those who seek the enjoyment of Christ and His salvation as their sole happiness will not be rejected. If you come into Christ's vineyard at the eleventh hour of the day, you will receive your reward just like those who came early in the morning, because the reward is given by grace, not merit (Matthew 20:9-10). In this regard, you must firmly believe that Christ and His salvation are freely given as a gift to those who do not work to earn any right or title to Him, or any worthiness or deservingness to receive Him. Simply "believe in him who justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5). If you place any condition of works or good qualifications between yourself and Christ, it will become a partition wall that you can never climb over.

1. You must firmly believe that it is the will of God for you to believe in Christ and have eternal life through Him, just like anyone else. Your act of believing is a duty that is highly pleasing to God, and He will assist you in this work, just as He assists anyone else, because He calls and commands you through the gospel to believe in Christ. This encourages us to embark cheerfully on the task of believing, as when Jesus commanded the blind man to be called, and they said to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you" (Mark 10:49). A command from Christ made Peter walk on water (Matthew 14:29). In this matter, we are not to delve into God's secret of predestination or the purpose of His will in His gracious invitations and commands, through which we are required to believe in Christ. This

divine will is affirmed by His oath: "As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11). Christ testifies that He "would often have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37). And the apostle Paul testifies that "God desires all people to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4), and so on.

You must reject and dismiss all thoughts that contradict this conviction. Even if only a few are saved, your salvation will not make the number too great, for few will join you in the duty of believing. Even if the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against you through various terrible judgments, and the Word of God and your own conscience condemn you, and it seems as if Christ regards you no better than a dog, as He did the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:26), you must interpret all these things in a positive light—that their purpose is to drive you to Christ—just as the curses of the law and all their dreadful consequences served the purpose of leading you to Christ (Romans 10:4). If a prophet or an angel from heaven were specifically sent by God to proclaim the sentence of eternal damnation against you, it would be your duty to believe that God sent them to give you timely warning for the very purpose of believing and turning to God through faith and repentance. Jeremiah prophesied against the Jews, declaring that God would "pluck up, break down, and destroy" them because of their sins, yet he himself taught them that if they turned from their evil ways, God would relent of the disaster He had pronounced against them (Jeremiah 18:7-8, 11). Jonah preached nothing but certain destruction

to Nineveh, announcing that the city would be overthrown in forty days (Jonah 3:4), yet the intention behind this terrifying message was for the people of Nineveh to escape destruction through repentance.

The most severe and absolute declarations of divine punishment against us in this world must always be understood with a hidden provision of salvation for us, based on our faith and repentance. We should believe that God pronounces His judgements against us in such a terrifying manner so that we may escape them by seeking refuge in His free mercy through Christ.

Be cautious of entertaining thoughts that God has decreed to show no saving mercy to you, or that you have already committed the unforgivable sin, or that it is futile for you to attempt the act of believing because God will not assist you in it. If such thoughts prevail in your hearts, they will cause more harm than the most blasphemous thoughts that frighten you or the grossest sins you have ever committed because they hinder your belief in Christ for salvation. "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'" Christ says, "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17). Therefore, we must reject all thoughts that hinder us from coming to Christ as extremely sinful and harmful, arising from our own corrupt nature and Satan's deception, and completely contrary to the mind of Christ and the teachings of His Spirit.

And what reason do we have to entertain such unbelieving thoughts? Has God made us part of His inner circle, enabling us to know that He has decreed our damnation before it becomes evident through our final unbelief and impenitence? As for the unforgivable sin, it consists of "renouncing salvation through Christ with a whole heart, after we have come to know it and have been convinced of its truth by the gospel." It is the sin that the

Christian Hebrews would have committed if they had turned away from Christianity and embraced the religion of the unbelieving Jews who considered Christ to be an impostor and were vehement persecutors of Him and His ways (Hebrews 6:4-5). Those who have committed this sin remain relentless, malicious enemies of Christ and His ways until the end, without any repentance. Therefore, if you can find within yourself a genuine desire to have a relationship with Christ and to be a better Christian than you currently are, if you are troubled and saddened by the wickedness of your heart and life and long for faith, love, and true obedience, and if your heart is not maliciously inclined to persecute the gospel or to prefer atheism, licentiousness, or any false religion over it, then you have no reason to suspect that you are guilty of this unforgivable sin.

Add to all these a firm belief in the incomparable and glorious excellence of Christ and the way of salvation through Him. You are to consider the experience of Christ as the only true salvation and genuine happiness, a happiness that holds immeasurable riches of glory and will overflow with abundant peace, joy, and glory for all eternity. We must regard everything else as worthless compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Philippians 3:8). Such a conviction will allure and incline your will and affections to choose and embrace Christ as the ultimate good, and you will never be satisfied until you experience Him and reject anything that competes with Him or His enjoyment. Christ is precious in the eyes of all true believers (1 Peter 2:7). Their high esteem of His incomparable preciousness and excellence motivates them to sell everything in order to obtain this priceless pearl (Matthew 13:46). It leads them to say, "Lord, always give us this bread" that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"

(John 6:33, 34, 68). "Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is as ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you" (Song of Solomon 1:3). They are lovesick for Him because, in their eyes, He is the most excellent among ten thousand (Song of Solomon 5:8, 10).

Just as the glory of God, manifested in the magnificent beauty of the temple and in the wisdom and splendour of Solomon, drew worshippers from all corners of the earth, the unparalleled excellence of Christ, which was foreshadowed by the glory of Solomon and the temple, more powerfully attracts believers in the present age of the gospel. The devil, who is the god of this world, knows how crucial it is for our salvation to perceive the full glory and excellence of Christ. Therefore, wherever the gospel is preached, he works tirelessly to obscure the glory of Christ in the ministry and blind the minds of people, "lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:4). One who is convinced of the truth of the gospel may hesitate to embrace it until they also see its goodness, that Christ is altogether lovely and excellent.

Now I turn to the second key act of faith, which is actually receiving Christ Himself, His Spirit, and all His saving benefits into the heart. This act involves believing in Christ as He is revealed and freely promised to us in the gospel, for the sake of His complete salvation. The Spirit of God habitually predisposes and inclines our hearts to perform this act correctly by enabling us to carry out the first act of faith as instructed earlier—believing firmly in the great truths of the gospel that deliver us into a form of teaching (Romans 6:17). We are to obey this teaching from the depths of our hearts and follow it as our model in the way we exercise faith in Christ for salvation. Therefore, I only need to briefly exhort you to put your faith

into action in Christ according to the form and pattern that has already been extensively explained to you.

You are to believe in Christ as the sole and more than sufficient source of your happiness and salvation, completely abandoning any notion of finding happiness through our own wisdom, strength, righteous works, or any earthly or worldly confidences whatsoever. We must consider all other confidences as loss for the sake of Christ, following the example of the blessed apostle (Philippians 3:3, 7, 8). We should not be saddened by the fact that we have nothing else to rely on for our salvation besides Christ; rather, we should rejoice that we need nothing else and that we have a secure and incomparably superior foundation to rely upon. We must resolve to place the burden of our souls entirely on Christ and seek salvation in no other way, regardless of the outcome.

If a cripple does not place their full weight on a strong staff but part of it on a rotten one, they are likely to fall. If a swimmer does not fully commit their body to the water to keep them afloat but instead clings to weeds or struggles to feel the ground, they may sink to the bottom. Christ must be all our salvation or nothing at all. If we seek to be saved by any other means, as the Galatians did through circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to us (Galatians 5:2).

You are also to receive Christ solely as a free gift given to the chief of sinners, resolving not to perform any conditions to earn a right or title to Him, but to come to Him as a lost sinner, an ungodly creature, trusting in "Him who justifies the ungodly" and "buying Him without money" and "without any price" whatsoever (Romans 4:5; Isaiah 55:2). Do not look at your faith, love, or any good qualifications in yourself as the basis for trusting in Christ, but solely on the free grace and loving-kindness of God

in Christ. "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 36:7). For if you make your own faith, love, or good qualifications your primary foundation and build Christ upon them instead of building everything on Christ, you invert the order of the gospel, and Christ will be of no benefit to you.

Another thing to carefully observe is that you must come to Christ not only for deliverance from the wrath of God and the torments of hell, but also for a new holy heart, a transformed life, and everything necessary for this transformation. You must come to Him with a fervent love and affection, esteeming Him more valuable than a thousand worlds, as the sole excellent portion. You should loathe and abhor yourself as a vile, sinful, and wretched creature, considering all things as worthless compared to His surpassing excellence. So that you can sincerely say from the depths of your heart, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25).

Lastly, you must strive to approach Him with full confidence and assurance of faith, relying on Christ with certainty for your own personal salvation, based on the general promise that "whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame" (Romans 9:33). You should rebuke any doubts, fears, or hesitations concerning your salvation through Christ, echoing the words of the psalmist, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" (Psalm 42:11).

The third aspect of this instruction is to avoid any delay in the act of believing in Christ. As long as we fail to do so, we remain under the power of sin and Satan, and under the wrath of God, with nothing but the breath in our nostrils separating us from hell. It was dangerous for Lot to linger in Sodom, as fire and brimstone could rain down upon him. The one who has

unintentionally caused a person's death must quickly flee to the city of refuge, lest the avenger of blood pursue and strike him down while his heart is still hot (Deuteronomy 19:5, 6). We should hasten and not delay to keep God's commandments (Psalm 119:60), and to seek refuge in the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:18). God commands us to flee in this manner through faith, for without it, it is impossible to please God in other duties. This work can be accomplished as soon as you hear the gospel. "As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me." (Psalm 18:44). "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:8). We have many examples of those who received the Word by faith upon hearing it for the first time. Three thousand people were added to the church on the very same day that Peter first preached the gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). Many Jews and Gentiles were converted upon hearing the apostle Paul's message for the first time in Antioch (Acts 13:48). The jailer and his entire household believed and were baptized on the same night that Paul preached to them (Acts 16:33, 34). The gospel came to the Thessalonians "not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 6). If God opens the hearts of His people to listen attentively, they can be sufficiently instructed in the knowledge of the gospel by a single brief sermon, enough to begin practicing saving faith. And once they understand their duty, God expects immediate action without allowing any respite in a state of unbelief.

When Satan cannot succeed in convincing people to completely reject the duty of believing, his next attempt to ruin their souls is to persuade them to at least delay and postpone its performance, using various false reasoning and imaginations he puts into their minds. The most ignorant and worldly individuals are easily swayed to defer this duty until they have indulged in the pleasures, profits, and honours of this world to their heart's content.

They hope that they will have ample time for repentance before they die, typically waiting until they are confronted with infirmities, old age, or sickness. However, such delays reveal that they are truly unwilling to repent and believe, except when forced by necessity, and that they value the pleasures, profits, and honours of the world above God, Christ, and their own souls. In doing so, they render themselves more unfit for this great duty through their habitual walk in sin and by squandering the precious time of their health and strength, which is most suitable for the performance of this important work. They greatly provoke God to never grant them time or grace to repent of it.

Others believe that, once they have heard the gospel of salvation through Christ, they can lawfully postpone believing in it until they have thoroughly examined the truth of some other doctrine or until God provides them with additional means to fully assure them of the gospel's truth. These individuals, known as "seekers," waste the day of grace, constantly learning but never attaining knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7). However, the truth of the gospel is so clearly evident in its own light that, unless people willingly close their eyes or blind themselves due to pride and love for their sinful desires, they would easily perceive it as God's truth. The image of God's grace, mercy, power, justice, and holiness is clearly engraved upon it. It is a sign of pride when people do not consent to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the "doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Timothy 6:3). If they were humble and sincerely inclined to do God's will, they would "know whether the doctrine is of God or not" (John 7:17). They would quickly be convinced of the truth by Moses, the prophets, Christ, and the apostles speaking to them through Scripture. And if they refuse to listen to them, they will not be persuaded even if someone were to rise from the

dead or perform any other miracle to confirm the divine authority of the gospel (Luke 16:31).

There is another group of people who delay the great work of believing, to the detriment of their souls, by simply relying on attending outward means of grace and salvation instead of making efforts to receive Christ through faith, even though they are convinced of the truth of the gospel. They consider this as waiting upon God at the doors of His grace and salvation, engaging in the prescribed means appointed by Him, and sitting under the teaching of the sanctuary. However, they must understand that this is not the true waiting on God as required in Scripture. Instead, it is disobedience to God and to the means He has ordained. God expects us to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves" (James 1:22), and to come in and partake in the spiritual feast (Luke 14:23), rather than just standing at the door or sitting under the teaching, lest Christ view us as mere eavesdroppers. The holy waiting on the Lord commended to us in Scripture is always accompanied by faith and hope in the Lord and depends on them. "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:13, 14). "It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lamentations 3:26).

What is it that these deluded ones are waiting for before they fulfill the duty of believing? Is it for more knowledge of the gospel? The way to increase your knowledge, just like any other talent, is to make use of what you have already received. Believe wholeheartedly in Christ for your salvation, based on the little knowledge of the gospel that you possess, and you will have a share in the promise of knowledge contained in the new

covenant: "They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest" (Jeremiah 31:34).

Is it for the appointed time of your conversion that you are waiting? Then you are waiting like those helpless people who lay at the pool of Bethesda, waiting for the season when the angel would come down and stir the waters. Know that if you enter into Christ now through faith, you will find in Him the waters of life, and the Spirit moving them to heal and revive your soul. God has ordained that it is your duty to strive for the present time to be the time of your conversion: "As the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts'" (Hebrews 3:7-8). And you will never know the time God has appointed in His secret counsel to grant you faith until you actually believe.

Are you waiting for any manifestations or outpourings of God's saving love to your soul? Then the way to obtain it is to believe so that the "God of hope may fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Romans 15:13). You have more than enough manifestation of God's love to your soul through the free promises of life and salvation in Christ. Just trust in the name of the Lord and rely on your God when you walk in darkness and see no other light of sensible comforts. Otherwise, waiting for comforts in vain will only bring you sorrow from the hand of the Lord (Isaiah 50:10-11).

Are you waiting for any qualifications to prepare you for the work of believing? If these qualifications are good and holy, you cannot obtain them before faith. Rather, they are included in the nature of faith or are its fruits, as has been extensively explained. If these qualifications are bad and sinful, it is strange that anyone would wait for them, yet it is true. Some foolishly wait to be terrified with a sense of God's wrath and despairing thoughts, considering them as the pains of the new birth, although by their nature,

they are more the pains of spiritual death and give birth to hatred towards God rather than holiness. Therefore, we should strive to prevent them by believing in God's love in Christ rather than waiting for them. It is true that God makes these despairing thoughts, as well as other sins, work for the good of those who are delivered from them by faith in Christ. They are moved to hate sin, value Christ and the comforts of His gospel more, and loathe and abhor themselves. Yet many are brought to Christ without experiencing these thoughts, as God gives them the knowledge of their own sins and Christ's salvation together. Several examples of this were mentioned earlier, those who received the Word with joy upon hearing it for the first time. We should not desire or wait for any evil or sin, such as these despairing thoughts, in the hope that something good will come out of it. Nor should we expect to get worse before we get better, when we can and should get better immediately by believing in Christ.

The fourth aspect of this guidance is that we should continue and grow in the most holy faith. And in order to do so, we must not assume that once we have obtained the grace of saving faith and have been born anew in Christ, our names being recorded in heaven, we can be careless. As long as we remain in this life, we must strive to remain in the faith, rooted and steadfast, not shifting away from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:23). We are to "hold firmly to the faith we profess" and "rejoice in the hope of our confidence" until the end (Hebrews 3:6, 14). We should "build ourselves up in our most holy faith" and abound in it with thanksgiving (Jude 20; Colossians 2:7). Although we receive Christ freely through faith, we are still spiritual infants in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1). We must not consider ourselves to have already attained perfection but strive to be

deeply rooted and built up in Him until we reach maturity and become like Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

If the new nature is truly within us through regeneration, it will have a desire for its own continuation and growth until it reaches perfection, just as a newborn baby desires milk (1 Peter 2:2). Our task is not only to receive Christ and a new holy nature through faith but also to live and walk according to it, to resist the devil and extinguish his fiery darts with it. We are also called to "grow in grace" and to "perfect holiness in the fear of God," knowing that we are kept by God's mighty power through faith for salvation (1 Peter 1:5). Just as our Christian warfare is the battle of faith (1 Timothy 6:12), our spiritual life and holiness continue, grow, or decline in accordance with the state of our faith. When faith begins to waver due to fear and doubt, the person themselves starts to sink (Matthew 14:29-31). Faith is like Moses' hands; as long as they were raised, Israel prevailed, but when they lowered, Amalek prevailed (Exodus 17:11). This continuation and growth in faith require our effort and diligence, although we attribute all the glory to the grace of God in Christ, who is both the initiator and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

The church encounters great challenges in its journey through the wilderness of this world towards the heavenly Canaan, just as it faced difficulties in its initial deliverance from Egyptian bondage. In fact, we often face even greater challenges in pursuing perfection than we did at the beginning of the good work. God's wisdom and mercy ordain that we should be tested by the harshest providential circumstances and the fiercest assaults of our own sinful nature and Satan's temptations after we have been given the grace to stand firm in times of adversity.

Therefore, you must strive to continue and progress in the same right manner as I have taught you to begin this great work of believing in Christ. Your faith should remain consistent from the beginning to the end, even though it may grow in intensity. Our faith is imperfect and often accompanied by doubt in this world, so we need to pray, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24), and therefore we must strive for greater faith to receive Christ more perfectly. If you see that your faith has produced good works, let that increase your confidence in Christ for salvation through His grace alone. However, be cautious not to change the nature of your faith by shifting from trusting in the grace and merits of Christ to relying on your own works, as taught in the erroneous doctrine of "first justification by grace and faith only, but second justification by works" propagated by the papacy.

Beware also of placing your trust in faith itself as a righteous work, rather than placing your trust in Christ through faith. If you find that your belief, as I have described it, does not produce the fruits of holiness that you desire, do not diminish your confidence in Christ; instead, increase it, knowing that the weakness of your faith hinders its fruitfulness. The greater your confidence in God's love for you in Christ, the greater your love for God and His service will be. If you fall into serious sin after the work of faith has begun in you, like David and Peter did, do not think that you must abandon your confidence and expect only wrath from God and Christ. Do not refuse to be comforted by the grace of Christ, even if it may take some time. Such thinking would only make you more weak and prone to falling into other sins. Instead, strive to believe with greater confidence that you have "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," and that "He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1, 2). Do not let the guilt of sin

linger on your conscience, but quickly wash it away in the fountain of Christ's blood, which is available to us for such occasions. In doing so, you will be humbled for your sins in a gospel manner, and you will detest your own sinfulness and genuinely sorrow over it out of love for God. If not for the prayer of Christ upholding Peter's faith, he could have been eternally ruined by denying Christ, just as Judas was ruined by betraying Him (Luke 22:31, 32).

Even if all your qualifications seem clouded, and you cannot see any grace in yourselves, still trust in Him who justifies the ungodly and came to seek and save the lost. If it appears that God is treating you as an enemy, bringing upon you some terrible affliction as He did to Job, be cautious not to condemn your faith and its fruits as if they are unacceptable to God. Instead, declare, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him; but I will maintain my ways before Him" (Job 13:15). Strive to keep and increase your faith by continually exercising faith, by trusting in God to preserve and strengthen it. Be confident that He who initiated a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

Chapter Twelve

Make diligent use of your most holy faith

You must diligently utilise your most holy faith to immediately fulfil the duties of the law by no longer conforming to your old natural state or any principles or practices associated with it. Instead, solely live according to the new state received through faith, embracing the principles and practices that pertain to it. Strive to continue and grow in this manner of living. This is the only way to achieve an acceptable performance of those holy and righteous duties to the best extent possible in this present life.

Here, I am guiding you on the method of living where you make use of faith and all the other effective means of holiness discussed earlier, which faith grasps for the immediate fulfilment of the law, the ultimate goal of this entire discourse. Therefore, this direction deserves careful consideration as the primary guidance, with all preceding and subsequent directions serving as support. As for its meaning, I have already explained that our old natural state is the one inherited from the first Adam through natural birth, referred to as "the old man" in Scripture, and when we are in it, we are said to be "in the flesh." On the other hand, our new state is received from the second

Adam, Jesus Christ, through being born anew in union and fellowship with Him by faith. This new state is called "the new man," and when we are in it, we are said to be "in the Spirit." The principles and practices belonging to the natural state are those that individuals can acquire and utilise before they come to be in Christ by faith. Conversely, the principles and practices proper to the new state encompass the diverse holy endowments, privileges, and joys that we partake in through faith in Christ, as already demonstrated to be the sole effective means of a holy life.

We are said to live according to either of these states, or to the principles and practices that belong to them when we are moved and guided by their influence to engage in actions that align with them. For example, kings act in accordance with their status by commanding with authority and displaying generosity. Poor individuals act in a manner of service and obedience, and children, regardless of distinction (Esther 1:7; Prov. 18:23; 1 Cor. 13:11). Therefore, the manner of practice that is being directed here involves moving and guiding ourselves in the performance of the works of the law through gospel principles and means. This is a remarkable and excellent art of godliness that every Christian should strive to master. The reason why many experience shame and confusion after exerting much zeal and effort for a long time in pursuit of true godliness is because they were never acquainted with this sacred art and never endeavoured to practice it in a genuine gospel manner. While some worldly arts are referred to as mysteries, this spiritual art of godliness is undoubtedly a great mystery (1 Tim. 3:16) because the means to be employed in it are deeply profound, as has been explained. One cannot be a skilled artist in this realm until they understand these means and can put them into practice. It is a manner of practice that surpasses natural ability and would never have entered the

minds of the wisest individuals in the world if it had not been revealed to us in the Scriptures. Yet, even when it is plainly revealed in the Scriptures, it remains a perplexing riddle to those who are not inwardly enlightened and taught by the Holy Spirit. Even many godly individuals guided by the Spirit only walk in it to some extent and have only a vague perception of their own understanding. They can barely articulate the way in which they walk to others, much like the disciples who walked with Christ, the way to the Father, yet did not comprehend that knowledge within themselves: "Lord, we know not whither You go, and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). This is the reason why many believers who are in a state of spiritual poverty are so weak in Christ and attain only a small degree of holiness and righteousness. Therefore, to acquaint you better with this highly significant mystery, I will first demonstrate that the Holy Scriptures direct us to this manner of practice as the only effective means for the performance of holy duties. Then, I will provide you with necessary instructions to understand how to walk rightly in it, continue, and progress until you are perfected in Christ.

Regarding the first point, the Holy Scriptures extensively and clearly direct us to this manner of practice and to continuing and growing in it. It is worth noting the wide range of distinct words and phrases through which the Holy Spirit imparts this mystery. Many individuals who frequently read the Scriptures, and even those who claim to be gospel preachers, fail to comprehend or pay attention to them. This demonstrates that the things of the Spirit of God appear as foolishness to them, and they are not yet acquainted with the precise language and form of sound words. They remain strangers to the very vocabulary of the gospel that they profess and claim to teach.

Therefore, I will now present to you a collection of these distinct words and phrases found in the Holy Scriptures that express and commend this mysterious manner of practice as the only way to truly attain holiness in heart and life. I will group together those that convey similar meanings so as not to confuse your thoughts with an abundance of them.

1. This manner of practice is depicted in Scripture as "living by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 10:38), "walking by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7), "faith working by love" (Gal. 5:6), "overcoming the world by faith" (1 John 5:4), and "quenching all the fiery darts of the wicked by the shield of faith" (Eph. 6:16). Some may consider living and walking by faith to merely involve stirring ourselves up and encouraging ourselves to fulfill our duties based on our beliefs. The Jews, for example, might have claimed to live by faith because they professed and assented to the teachings of Moses and the prophets, which moved them to zeal for God. However, they sought righteousness not through faith but by following the works of the law (Rom. 9:32). Similarly, Paul may have thought he lived by faith when he was a zealous Pharisee, but later he realized that the life of faith involved dying to the law and living for God. It was not he who lived, but Christ who lived in him (Gal. 2:19, 20). Just as being justified by faith is the same as being believed on in Christ (Rom. 5:1), living, walking, and working by faith is synonymous with living, walking, and working through the means of Christ and His saving provisions that we receive and utilise by faith to guide and motivate ourselves in the practice of holiness.

2. The same concept is conveyed by the phrases "walking, rooted and built up in Christ" (Col. 2:6, 7), "living to God, and not to ourselves, but having Christ living in us" (Gal. 2:19, 20), "good conduct in Christ" (1 Peter 3:16), "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, so as to walk honestly, as in the day" (Rom. 13:13, 14), "being strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10), "doing all things in the name of Christ" (Col. 3:17), "walking in the name of the Lord" (Zech. 10:12), "going in the strength of the Lord; making mention of His righteousness, even His only" (Ps. 71:16). These phrases occur frequently and sufficiently elucidate one another, indicating that we are to practice holiness not only by virtue of Christ's authority but also by relying on His strengthening provisions to move and encourage us in this pursuit.
3. It is also conveyed by the phrases "being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1), "conducting ourselves in the world not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12), and "holding fast to grace, that we may serve God acceptably, laboring abundantly" in such a way that the entire work is not accomplished by us, but "by the grace of God that is with us" (1 Cor. 15:10). By 'grace', we can understand the privileges of our new state given to us in Christ, which should influence and guide us in the performance of holy duties.
4. It is also signified when we are instructed to 'put off the old' and 'put on the new man'; and to continue doing so, even though we have already done it to some extent; and to avoid our 'former sinful conduct' (Eph. 4:21, 22, 24); and to abstain from sin because we

have 'put off the old' and 'put on the new man' (Col. 3:9, 10). As I have previously explained, this twofold man does not simply refer to sin and holiness; rather, the former represents our natural state with all its abilities, which only equip us for the practice of sin, while the latter represents our new state in Christ, which provides us with all the necessary means for the practice of holiness.

5. We understand the same concept when we are taught not to 'walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit', so that we may be 'free from the law of sin' and 'that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:1, 2, 3); and to 'put to death the deeds of the body through the Spirit' and to be 'led by the Spirit' because we 'live by the Spirit' and have 'crucified the flesh with its passions and desires' (Gal. 5:24). The apostle uses these expressions to indicate not only that we are to practice holiness but also the means by which we can do so effectively. By 'flesh', he refers to our old nature inherited from the first Adam, and by 'Spirit', he means the Spirit of Christ and the new nature that we have through Him dwelling within us. We are said to walk according to either of these natures when we make the properties or characteristics of either of them the guiding principles of our conduct. Therefore, when it is said that 'we may bear fruit to God', it means that we must strive to produce the fruits of holiness not by the power of the law, which is a condemning force to which the flesh is bound and which stirs sinful impulses within us, but by the power of the Spirit and His abundant provisions that we partake in through our mystical union with Christ (Rom. 7:4, 5, 6), and by the influence of the principles that belong to

the new state revealed in the gospel, through which the Holy Spirit is ministered to us.

6. This is the way of life that the apostle Paul instructs us to follow, using his own example, that the ongoing pursuit of our lives should be "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, in the hope that I may attain the resurrection from the dead," and to strive and press forward in this knowledge (Phil. 3:10-12, 14). Surely, he means an experiential knowledge of Christ, his death, and resurrection that truly transforms us to be conformed to them by dying to sin and living for God. By this, he directs us to use Christ, his death, and resurrection by faith as the powerful means of holiness in our hearts and lives, and to continue growing in this manner of living until we attain perfection in Christ.

The second aim is to provide you with necessary instructions so that your steps may be guided correctly to continue and progress in this path of holiness until you are made perfect in Christ. Since we are naturally inclined to misunderstand this path and are entirely incapable of finding or discerning it through our own reason and understanding, we should pay close attention to these instructions derived from the Holy Scriptures. We should fervently pray for God to grant us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may discern the path of holiness through it and walk rightly in it, in accordance with the gracious promise: "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not go astray" (Isa. 35:8).

1. Let us observe and carefully consider in our entire way of life that although we partake in a new holy state through faith in Christ, our

natural state still remains to some extent with all its corrupt principles and tendencies. As long as we live in this world, our understanding of Christ and his perfections is only through faith, whereas by our senses and reason, we may perceive much within ourselves that is contrary to Christ. And this faith is imperfect, so true believers have reason to pray for God's help in their unbelief (Mark 9:24). Therefore, even though we receive a perfect Christ through faith, the extent and degree of enjoying him is incomplete. We continue to hope, as long as we are in this world, to experience him in a greater degree of perfection than we have thus far. We are still weak in our union with Christ (2 Cor. 13:4), like children in comparison to the perfection we anticipate in the next world (1 Cor. 13:10, 11). We must continue to grow until we become fully mature in Christ (Eph. 4:13). Some are weaker and more immature in their faith, having received Christ to such a limited extent that they can be considered carnal rather than spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). And because all the blessings and perfections of our new state, such as justification, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the holy nature, and adoption as children, are located and stored up in Christ and inseparably linked to him, we can only receive them to the extent that we receive Christ himself through faith, which is only to an imperfect degree in this life.

The apostle Paul presents himself as a model for all those who are mature in the truth of grace to emulate. However, he admits that he has not yet reached the perfect degree and measure of saving blessings. Nevertheless, he continues to press forward towards the goal, striving to know Christ more fully and be found in Him, relying not on his own righteousness but

on the righteousness that comes from God through faith. He seeks to gain a deeper experiential knowledge of Christ, to share in His sufferings, and to experience the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:8, 10, 14). While believers are already justified, they eagerly await the hope of righteousness, the complete enjoyment of Christ's righteousness (Gal. 5:5). They have received the firstfruits of the Spirit but anticipate a fuller experience of it. The Spirit testifies that they are children of God, yet they groan inwardly, longing for the full experience of their adoption (Rom. 8:23).

Since our reception and enjoyment of Christ, along with the blessings of our new state in Him, is imperfect in this life, it is evident that our former natural state, with its characteristics, still remains to some extent and is not completely eradicated. Therefore, believers in this world partake to some degree in these two contrasting states. While believers have indeed put off the old self and put on the new self, where Christ is all and in all, they must continue to put off the old and put on the new, for the remnants of the old self remain. They are described as "not in the flesh but in the Spirit" because their true and enduring state is in the Spirit, as designations are typically based on the better part. However, the flesh still exists within them, and they must diligently strive to put to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom. 8:9, 13).

Therefore, in the Scriptures, believers are often described with attributes that seem contradictory in relation to these two opposing states. It may appear that one passage contradicts another, yet both are true in different respects. For example, the apostle Paul truthfully states, "I live, yet not I" because he lives for God through Christ residing in him, but in another sense, according to his natural state, he does not live for God (Gal. 2:20). He also acknowledges being "carnal, sold under sin," but at the same time,

he does not allow sin and hates it. Paul demonstrates how both statements are true in different respects. He says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing," and "I delight to do the will of God according to the inward man." He serves the law of God with his mind, but with his flesh, he serves the law of sin (Rom. 7:14, 15, 18, 22, 25). John affirms that anyone who claims to be without sin deceives themselves and is a liar (1 John 1:8). Yet, he also asserts that those born of God do not continue in sin because the new spiritual nature of Christ remains in them (1 John 3:9). Believers are weak and incapable of doing anything on their own, yet they are strong and can do all things (2 Cor. 12:10, 11; Phil. 4:13). They are considered dead because of sin but alive because of righteousness (Rom. 8:10), and although they experience physical death, they will never truly die (John 11:25, 26). Believers are sons who inherit the promises by birthright, yet in some respects, they may not differ from servants. They can be under the law and simultaneously under grace as heirs according to the free promise (Gal. 4:1, 2). They have been redeemed from the curse of the law, received forgiveness of sins, and have the promise that God will never be angry with them or rebuke them again (Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; Isa. 54:9). However, on the contrary, the curse written in the law is sometimes poured out upon them, and they still need to pray for deliverance from guiltiness and the forgiveness of their debts. They can expect that God will punish them for their iniquities (Dan. 9:11; Ps. 51:14; Matt. 6:12; Amos 3:2).

The contradictions mentioned in the Scriptures concerning believers sufficiently demonstrate that they partake in two opposing states in this life. This is a straightforward and effective way to reconcile these apparent contradictions, regardless of any other approaches used to reconcile some of them. There is no reason to question that the old state remains in believers

to some extent, as all sound Protestants acknowledge the presence of sinful depravity and pollution in our natures, commonly referred to as 'original sin', which continues in everyone as long as they live in this world. While certain penal evils may be said to persist within us, we cannot assume that this original pollution continues in us when considered in relation to Christ, but rather when considered in relation to our old state inherited from Adam.

Thus, the first sin of Adam is imputed, in some respect, even to those justified by faith, and they remain, to some extent, under the punishment and curse declared: 'In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die' (Gen. 2:17). Consequently, this original guilt and pollution are passed down to the children of believing parents, as well as others, through natural generation. If such a significant and fundamental aspect of our natural state persists in believers, namely, subjection to the guilt of the first sin and corruption, which forms a major part of the threatened punishment and death, and leads us to commit actual sins, then why should we not conclude that other aspects of the same state also continue in them? This includes the guilt of their own actual sins, subjection to God's wrath, and the curses and punishments pronounced against them in the law. Moreover, why should we not believe that all the miseries of this life, including death itself, are inflicted upon believers at least to some degree as consequences of sin?

An objection may arise that this doctrine of believers' twofold state diminishes the perfection of our justification by Christ, the abundance of His grace and spiritual blessings, the merits of His death, and the power of His Spirit, thereby greatly reducing the consolation of believers in Christ. However, this objection can be easily addressed if understood correctly. Despite this twofold state, it remains true that believers, while on earth, possess all the perfections of spiritual blessings: justification, adoption, the

indwelling of the Spirit, holiness, eternal life, and glory, all found in and through Christ (Eph. 1:3). In Christ, who is now in heaven, the old self is completely crucified. Believers are dead to sin and to the law and its curse. They are also made alive together with Christ, raised up with Him, and seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6). Through faith, believers personally receive and enjoy all these perfect spiritual blessings of Christ to the extent that they receive and enjoy Christ Himself dwelling within them, and no more.

Therefore, believers are in a new state, free from the guilt, pollution, and punishment of sin, as well as from God's wrath, all miseries, and even death itself, while they are in this world. In fact, all the guilt, pollution, punishments of sin, and any other evils they experience according to their natural state do not harm them in this new state. Instead, they work for their good and are seen as advantages, leading to the destruction of the flesh and the perfection of the new man in Christ. Nevertheless, it remains true that our reception and enjoyment of Christ and His perfections are only in an imperfect measure and degree until faith is transformed into heavenly vision and the full experience of Christ. Therefore, our old sinful state and its associated evils are not completely abolished during this lifetime. The kingdom of heaven, or the grace of Christ within us, is comparable to leaven in meal, gradually uniting with the meal until the whole is leavened (Matt. 13:33). It is also like the morning light dispelling darkness, shining more and more until the perfect day (Prov. 4:18).

This should not be seen as a diminishing of the merits of Christ's death or the power of His Spirit, as Christ never intended for us to enjoy His spiritual blessings beyond our union with Him and our faith in Him. Nor did He aim for us to be made holy or happy in the flesh through a

reformation of our natural state, as has been explained. This does not diminish the consolation of believers in Christ either, for they can understand that they have the perfection of grace and happiness in Christ and that they experience it in this world to the extent that they enjoy Christ Himself through faith. They can also anticipate enjoying it to a greater measure and being fully liberated from their sinful and miserable state when the frame of nature inherited from the first Adam is dissolved through death.

This instruction is highly valuable in shaping our souls to practice holiness solely through the gospel principles and means belonging to our new state, which we partake in by faith in Christ. Thus, it can easily address a significant objection often raised by Papists and Quakers, who triumphantly ask which doctrine is more likely to lead people to true godliness. They argue whether their teaching, which claims that perfect holiness can be attained in this life, or ours, which acknowledges that it is impossible for us to perfectly keep the law and cleanse ourselves from all sin as long as we live in this world, even though we strive to do our best.

They believe that common reason will support their argument against this doctrine, claiming that it discourages efforts towards perfection and hardens people's hearts by allowing them to indulge in sin because they cannot avoid it. However, in reality, it is the doctrine of the perfectionists that encourages people to indulge in sin and to consider evil as good. For instance, the Papists consider the inclination of the flesh against the spirit as not sinful, but rather as good material for the exercise of their virtues, since even the most perfect individuals in this life are not without it. This doctrine also discourages those who strive for holiness through the right means, by faith in Christ, leading them to believe that their efforts are in vain because

they still find themselves sinful and far from perfection despite their best efforts to attain it. It hinders our diligence in seeking holiness through the principles and means by which it can truly be found. After all, why would someone be diligent and watchful in avoiding the influence of their own carnal principles if they believe that their carnal state, along with its principles, has been completely abolished and no longer poses a danger to them? While the doctrine of perfectionists may serve to promote certain good works, it undoubtedly impedes a significant portion of the work that Christ intends for us to engage in as long as we live in this world. We must acknowledge that our old state, along with its sinful principles, still exists to some extent; otherwise, we will not be prepared for the important duties of confessing our sins, repenting, praying earnestly for forgiveness, sorrowing genuinely with a godly sorrow, accepting the consequences of our sins, giving glory to God for His justice, and offering Him the sacrifice of a contrite and humble spirit. We must be humble in spirit and diligently work towards our salvation with fear and trembling.

Some have questioned how it aligns with our justification by Christ that we are still liable to punishment for our sins and obligated to pray for forgiveness. This doubt arises from a lack of understanding of the twofold state of believers in this life. Without grasping and keeping this in mind, we will never be equipped to consistently practice the important duties that contribute to putting off the old self, putting on the new self, and crucifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit. These duties include continual prayer for God to renew a right spirit within us and sanctify us completely, pressing forward towards perfection, desiring the nourishment of the Word and the participation in other ordinances. Christ has ordained that His earthly church should be engaged in such works, yet perfectionists either

consider them unnecessary or pretend that they no longer require Christ as their spiritual Physician and Advocate with the Father, or as the atoning sacrifice for their sins. Therefore, they are not suited to be members of the earthly church and are unlikely to become members of the heavenly church unless they attempt to climb up there prematurely, without the appropriate means.

1. Do not despair in trying to purify the flesh, or the natural man, from its sinful desires and inclinations, and do not attempt to practice holiness solely through your own willpower and resolutions, while relying on the grace of God and Christ to assist you in these efforts. Instead, resolve to trust in Christ to work within you, to give you the will and ability to do His good pleasure by His own power. Often, those who are aware of their own sin and misery first attempt to tame the flesh, to subdue and eradicate its lusts, and to transform their corrupt nature to be more inclined towards holiness through their struggles and wrestling with it. They hope that by fully committing themselves and resolving to do their best, they will be able to achieve great victories in conquering their lusts and performing challenging duties. Some zealous divines make it their primary task in preaching and writing to encourage people towards this resolution, believing it to be the pivotal point of transition from sin to godliness. They argue that this does not contradict the life of faith, as they trust in the grace of God, through Christ, to assist them in all such resolutions and endeavours. In this way, they strive to reform their old state and be perfected in the flesh, instead of putting it off and walking according to the new state in Christ. They place

their trust in worldly and carnal things for holiness and rely on their own will, purposes, resolutions, and efforts, rather than on Christ. They trust in Christ to help them through this carnal approach, whereas true faith would teach them that they are nothing and that their efforts are in vain. Trying to purify the flesh, or the natural man, from its evil desires and make it pure and holy is as futile as attempting to wash a blackamoor white. It is desperately wicked and beyond all remedy. It will inevitably lust against the Spirit of God, even in the most devout saints on earth. Its mindset is enmity towards the law of God and cannot submit to it. Those who seek to cure it and make it holy through their own resolutions and efforts act contrary to the purpose of Christ's death. He did not die so that the flesh, or the old natural man, could be made holy, but so that it could be crucified and destroyed within us. He died so that we might live for God, not for ourselves or by our own natural power through resolutions and efforts, but through Christ living in us and His Spirit producing righteousness within us. Therefore, we must be willing to accept that the natural man remains vile and wicked as we found it, until it is completely abolished through death. However, we must not condone its wickedness; rather, we should groan for deliverance from the body of this death and be grateful to God that there is deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our approach to mortifying sinful desires and lusts should not involve trying to purge them from the flesh, but rather putting off the flesh itself and rising above into Christ through faith, and walking in the new nature that comes from Him. As the proverb says, "The way of life is above to the

wise, that he may depart from hell beneath." Our willingness, resolution, and endeavour should not be focused on what we can do in our own strength or power, but on allowing Christ and the power of His Spirit to work in us. After all, in our flesh, there is no good thing. We have every reason to trust in God and Christ for help in such resolutions and endeavours towards holiness, as they align with Christ's purpose in our redemption and the way of living by faith.

It is possible that Peter sincerely resolved to die with Christ rather than deny Him, and to do all that he could in his own strength to achieve that goal. However, Christ quickly revealed to him the weakness and futility of such resolutions. We also see through experience that many resolutions made in times of sickness or danger often amount to nothing. It is not sufficient for us to rely on Christ to help us act and endeavour only to the extent that creatures can; even the worst of men receive such help. Christ is the JEHOVAH in whom we live, move, and have our being. It is likely that the Pharisee trusted in God to assist him in his duties, as he thanked God for his performance of them. Unfortunately, this is the extent of the faith that many rely on for holy living.

Instead, we must trust in Christ to enable us beyond the strength of our own natural abilities, through the power of the new nature we have in Him and His indwelling Spirit. Otherwise, our best efforts will be entirely sinful and mere hypocrisy, regardless of the help we expect from Him. We must also be cautious not to depend on any resolution to walk in Christ, written covenants, or any previous experience of holiness for our sanctification. We must understand that the efficacy of these things only continues as long as we continue walking in Christ and Christ in us. They must be sustained by

the continual presence of Christ within us, just as light is maintained by the presence of the sun and cannot exist without it.

You must not seek to obtain forgiveness of sins, God's favour, a new holy nature, life, and happiness through any works of the moral law or any rituals and ceremonies. Instead, you should live as those who already possess all these things, according to your new state in Christ. You are to receive them more and more by faith, as they are already prepared and stored up for you, freely given in your spiritual Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. If we live as those who still need to strive for these blessings, it clearly shows that we consider ourselves to be without them and without Christ Himself, in whom they are all found. Therefore, we are living according to our old natural state, as if we are still in the flesh, attempting to attain salvation through our carnal works and observances instead of relying entirely on Christ through faith.

This approach aligns with the principles of the covenant of works, as I have previously explained. We have no basis to trust in Christ and His Spirit to work holiness in us in this manner, for we are dead to the legal covenant through the body of Christ. If we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the law. When the Galatians were deceived by false teachers who urged them to seek justification and life through circumcision and other works of the Mosaic law, the apostle Paul rebuked them for trying to attain perfection in the flesh, which directly contradicted their initial experience with the Spirit. He accused them of rendering Christ ineffective and falling from grace. Similarly, when some of the Colossians sought perfection through the observance of circumcision, dietary restrictions, sacred times, and other worldly regulations, Paul admonished them for not holding fast to the head, Jesus Christ. He pointed out that they were not dead and risen with Christ,

but were still living in the ways of the world. Paul made it clear that those who seek salvation in such ways are walking according to their old natural state. The true way of living by faith in Christ is to walk as those who already possess the fullness of Christ through faith and do not need to seek them through any other means.

In this sense, it is true to say that believers should not act for life but from life. They should live as those who are not trying to earn life through their works, but as those who have already received and derived life from Christ, and act from the power and virtue received from Him. This reveals that the Catholics and all others who believe they can justify, purify, sanctify, and save themselves through their own works, rituals, or ceremonies are walking in a carnal way. They are living as if they have no present interest in Christ and will never attain holiness or happiness until they learn a better way of practising religion.

Do not think that you can truly incline your heart towards the immediate practice of holiness by relying solely on practical principles that merely bind, press, and urge you to perform holy duties. Instead, let such principles stir you to first go to Christ in faith, so that you may be genuinely inclined towards the immediate practice of holiness in Him through gospel principles that strengthen and enable you, as well as obligate you. There are practical principles that only serve to bind, press, and urge us towards holy duties by demonstrating the reasonableness, equity, and necessity of our obedience, without showing us how, as those who are naturally dead in sin and under God's wrath, we may have the strength and ability to perform them. For example, the authority of God as the lawgiver, our complete dependence on Him as our Creator, Preserver, and Governor, in whose hands lie our life, breath, and eternal happiness; His all-seeing eye that

searches our hearts and discerns our thoughts and intentions; His perfect justice in rendering to each according to their deeds; His almighty and eternal power to reward the obedient and punish transgressors for eternity; the indescribable joy of heaven and the dreadful damnation of hell.

Such principles as these strictly bind our consciences and strongly affect our prevailing emotions of hope and fear, thereby pressing and urging our hearts towards the performance of holy duties, if we firmly believe them and deeply contemplate them through frequent, serious, and vibrant meditation. Consequently, some consider them to be the most effective and powerful means to cultivate any virtue within the soul and prompt immediate performance of even the most difficult duties. They believe that the life of faith primarily consists of living to God in holiness through constant belief in and meditation on these principles. They regard anything that reminds them of such principles as highly effective for promoting holiness, such as contemplating death, looking at a skull, keeping a ready-made coffin nearby, walking among graves, and so on. However, this is not the kind of living to God that the apostle refers to when he says, "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

If someone uses these obliging principles to urge them to seek strength from Christ in order to live a holy life, they are walking as one who has received Christ as their sole source of life through faith. Otherwise, they are walking like any other natural person. For the natural person can be motivated by these principles, partly through natural understanding and to a greater extent through the light of Scripture, without possessing any true knowledge of salvation through Christ, as if Christ had never come into the

world. They may be strictly bound by these principles and vehemently urged and pressed towards holy duties, yet all the while they are left to rely on their own natural strength or rather weakness, not being assured by any of these principles that God will give them the strength to assist them in performing these duties. They cannot do anything right until they receive new life and strength from Christ through a more precious saving faith. If these principles were sufficient to lead us to a holy way of life, there would be no need for new life and strength from Christ. Therefore, this manner of practice is no better than walking according to the flesh, conforming to our corrupt state, and seeking to attain perfection through the flesh. Undoubtedly, Paul was very diligent in this way of life when he was a blinded Pharisee. Even the pagan philosophers could attain to it to some extent through the light of common reason. The demons possess such principles, which they firmly believe, yet they are not improved by them. These principles belong to the natural wisdom by which the world did not know God, and not to the wisdom of God revealed in the mystery of the gospel, which is the only sanctifying wisdom and power of God unto salvation.

What can you produce but corruption by pressing someone who is entirely diseased, from head to toe, with motives to holiness? They have nothing within them but wounds, bruises, and festering sores. One who truly recognises their own wickedness and spiritual deadness by nature will despair of ever attaining holiness through such principles that offer no life and strength, but merely impose an obligation to urge and press them towards duty.

What are mere obligations to someone who is spiritually dead in sin? While the soul lacks spiritual life, sin is provoked and inflamed by the

imposition and urging of the law's obligations and commands. The actions of sin are prompted by the law, and sin, taking advantage of the commandment, produces in us all kinds of sinful desires (Romans 7:5, 8). Nevertheless, these obliging principles are indeed good and excellent when used properly in the gospel; just as the apostle says of the law, it is good if used lawfully (1 Timothy 1:8). The humbled sinner is well aware of their obligations, but what they truly lack is life and strength. They despair of living according to these obligations until they receive this life and strength through faith in Christ. Therefore, these obliging principles move them to first go to Christ, so that they may be empowered to fulfill their purpose through the strengthening and life-giving principles of God's grace in Christ.

There are some who only use gospel principles to impose obligations and urge towards duty, without providing any life and strength for their performance. They believe that "Christ died and rose again to establish a new covenant of works for our salvation and to give us an example of good works through His own obedience, rather than to secure life, obedience, and good works for us." Those who hold such views do not truly understand and embrace the principles of the gospel; instead, they distort and misuse them, going against their true nature and purpose. As a result, they render these principles as ineffective for their sanctification as any other natural or legal principles would be.

Stir yourself up and strengthen yourself to fulfill the duties of holiness by firmly believing that you have a share in Jesus Christ and all spiritual and everlasting benefits through Him. Do not approach the performance of the law with prevailing thoughts or apprehensions that you are still without an interest in Christ and the love of God through Him. Reject the idea that the

curse of the law, the power of sin and Satan, and the attractions of this world are your only portion, and that your strength comes solely from your own free will's purposes and resolutions. When such thoughts prevail and influence your actions, it is evident that you are walking according to the principles and practices of your old natural state, and you will be inclined to yield to the dominion of sin and Satan, withdrawing from God and godliness, just as Adam was moved to hide himself from God after realizing his own nakedness (Genesis 3:10).

Therefore, in order to live a holy life, your first step is to conquer and expel these unbelieving thoughts by placing confident trust in Christ. Persuade yourselves by faith that His righteousness, Spirit, glory, and all His spiritual benefits belong to you, and that He dwells in you and you in Him. With the power of this confidence, you will engage in the practice of the law, and you will be strong against sin and Satan, able to do all things through Christ who strengthens you. This confident persuasion is of great importance in shaping and preparing our hearts to walk according to our new state in Christ. It is the essence of living by faith. It becomes evident that faith is not only a means to receive Christ but also to work through Him, and it cannot be effective for our sanctification unless it contains some assurance of our relationship with Christ, as has been explained.

In this way, we act as those who are above the natural sphere, elevated to union and fellowship with Christ. The apostle maintained a conviction in his heart that Christ had loved him and given Himself for him, and through this conviction, he was enabled to live a life of holiness, with Christ living in him through faith. He also teaches us that we must maintain a similar conviction if we desire to walk in holiness with Christ. We must understand that our old self was crucified with Him, and we must consider ourselves

"dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:6, 11). This is the means by which we can be "filled with the Spirit, strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," which God would not require of us if He had not appointed the means (Ephesians 6:20). Christ Himself lived in a constant conviction of His excellent state; He always kept the Lord before Him and was convinced that because God was at His right hand, He would not be shaken (Psalm 16:8).

How can it be reasonably expected that a person would act according to their new state without assurance that they are in it? In worldly matters and occupations, it is a rule of common prudence that every person should know and carefully consider their own state, so as not to act arrogantly above it or despicably below it. Yet, it is often difficult to bring some individuals to a proper understanding of their worldly condition. If the same rule were applied to spiritual matters, undoubtedly the knowledge and conviction of the glory and excellence of our new state in Christ would elevate the hearts of believers above slavery to their base desires and inspire them to joyfully walk in the path of God's commandments. If Christians had a better understanding of their own strength, they would undertake greater things for the glory of God. However, this knowledge is not easily attained; it can only be acquired through faith and spiritual enlightenment. Even the most devout believers have only a partial understanding, and it is for this reason that the conduct of believers often falls short of their holy and heavenly calling.

Consider which attributes, privileges, or characteristics of your new state are most fitting and compelling to incline and strengthen your heart to love God above all else, renounce all sin, and devote yourself to wholehearted obedience to His commands. Strive to walk in the conviction of these

qualities so that you may attain to the practice of these great duties. I combine these aspects together because to "love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength" is the foremost and greatest commandment, which leads us to obedience in all things, accompanied by a hatred and abhorrence of all sin as that which is contrary to God and detestable in His sight. The same effective means that produces one will also produce the other, and holiness primarily consists of these aspects. Therefore, the chief blessings of our holy state are most fitting and powerful in enabling us to immediately carry out these duties, and they are to be embraced and relied upon for this purpose through faith. Specifically, you must firmly believe that all your sins are forgiven, that you are reconciled to God, and that you have access to His favour through the blood of Christ. You must believe that He is your God and Father, who loves you completely and is your all-sufficient eternal portion and source of happiness through Christ.

Such thoughts as these present God as an exceedingly lovely object to our hearts and thereby attract and captivate our affections. Our affections cannot be compelled by commands or threats; they must be sweetly won and drawn by alluring influences. We must not entertain any suspicions that God would become a terrifying everlasting enemy to us if we were to love Him, for "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. He who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:18-19). David loved the Lord because he was convinced that He was his strength, rock, fortress, God, and the horn of his salvation (Psalm 18:1-2). Love, which leads to obedience to the law, must arise from sincere faith, by which we apprehend the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation with God through the merits of the blood of Christ (1 Timothy 1:5; Hebrews 9:14).

To properly prepare and equip your hearts for the practice of these essential duties, the Holy Scripture directs you to walk in the conviction of other significant attributes of your new state. These include having fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3), being the temple of the living God (2 Corinthians 6:16), living by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25), being called to holiness and created in Christ Jesus for good works, having the assurance that God will sanctify you completely and make you perfect in holiness in the end (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Ephesians 2:10), knowing that your old self is crucified with Christ and through Him you are dead to sin and alive to God, having been set free from sin and becoming slaves of righteousness, producing fruit leading to holiness and ultimately eternal life (Romans 6:6, 22). "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:3-4).

When these convictions are deeply rooted and consistently maintained in our hearts, they strongly equip and encourage us to practice universal obedience, opposing every sinful desire. We view obedience not only as our duty but also as our great privilege, knowing that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. God surely works in us both to will and to do according to these principles because they properly belong to the gospel, the New Testament, which is the ministry of the Spirit and the power of God for salvation (2 Corinthians 3:6, 8; Romans 1:16).

To fulfill other duties of the law, you should consider not only the endowments, privileges, and properties of your new state that enable you to love God and practice universal obedience, but also those that have a particular force and suitability to the nature of specific duties. You must strive to assure yourselves of them through faith, so that you may be

encouraged and strengthened to perform these duties. I will provide some examples of this approach in various duties, which will help you understand how to navigate the rest.

When it comes to the duties related to the worship of God, if you want to draw near to Him with a sincere heart, you must do so with full assurance of faith in your enjoyment of Christ and His salvation. And if you desire to fulfill the great duty of trusting in the Lord with all your heart, casting your cares upon Him, and committing yourself to His guidance in all your concerns, persuade yourself, through Christ, that God, according to His promise, will never fail or forsake you. Believe that He cares for you as a loving Father, that He will withhold no good thing from you, and that He will work all things for your good. This assurance will strengthen and embolden you in practicing this duty. However, if you live in constant uncertainty regarding your privileges, you will be susceptible to worldly fears and anxieties, despite what your heart may desire. You will be inclined to rely on human strength, even though your conscience clearly warns you that such an act is a grave sin of idolatry.

If you seek strength to submit cheerfully and patiently to God's hand in bearing any affliction, even death itself, the way to fortify yourself is to firmly believe that your "momentary afflictions are achieving for you an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Trust that Christ is your gain in both life and death, that His grace is sufficient for you, and His strength is made perfect in your weakness. Know that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear, and in the end, He will make you more than a conqueror over all evil. Until you possess such convictions, you will be prone to fret and complain under the weight of affliction, and you may

resort to improper means to deliver yourself, even when your conscience clearly advises against it.

Would you confine yourself to observing God's own institutions in His worship? Believe that you are complete in Christ and have all the spiritual blessings and perfection in Him. Trust that God will build you up in Christ through the ordinances He has appointed. This understanding will lead you to consider His ordinances sufficient and render human traditions and inventions unnecessary in the worship of God. However, if you do not grasp the fullness found in Christ, you will be prone to behave like the Papists, grasping at every straw and multiplying superstitious practices endlessly in an attempt to satisfy your spiritual needs.

If you desire to confess your sins to God, pray to Him, and wholeheartedly praise Him for His blessings, including afflictions and prosperity, believe with certainty that God is faithful and just to forgive your sins through Christ. Recognize that you are part of a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise that are pleasing to God through Christ. Trust that God hears your prayers and will fulfill them according to His goodness. Understand that all of God's ways towards you are merciful and true, whether He prospers or afflicts you in this life. If you remain doubtful or hold different beliefs regarding these privileges, your confessions, prayers, and praises will be mere lip service, lacking heartfelt devotion, and resembling the works of slaves or Pharisees.

Likewise, if you have firm belief, you will be enabled to listen to and receive the Word as the Word of God, meditating on it with delight. You will willingly acknowledge the strictness and spirituality of God's commands and impartially examine your ways against them. Trust that the Word is the power of God unto salvation and that Christ, our great

Physician, is willing and able to heal you no matter how severe your condition. Where your sin abounds, His grace towards you abounds even more. Without these comforting beliefs, all the acts of hearing, meditation, and self-examination will feel unfamiliar and lackluster. They will be performed carelessly, half-heartedly, or hypocritically, driven by slavish fear and reluctance, lacking genuine willingness and readiness of mind. Similarly, when it comes to receiving the sacraments, believing that you can have communion with God and Christ through them, and that you have a great High Priest who bears the iniquity of your holy offerings and ensures your eternal acceptance before the Lord, will greatly strengthen you.

In the same manner, you are to approach all duties towards your neighbour as required in the second table of the law. Act with a conviction of the privileges of your new state, which hold a unique power to encourage and strengthen you in performing these duties. To love your neighbour as yourself, treating them as you would want to be treated, without bias or self-interest, honouring them and refraining from harming their life, chastity, worldly possessions, or reputation, and avoiding covetousness towards their belongings, as commanded in the second table of the Ten Commandments, you must hold the persuasion not only that these actions are just and fair towards your fellow human beings, and that you are bound to fulfill them, but also that they align with the will of your heavenly Father. He has begotten you in His own image, in righteousness and true holiness, and has bestowed His Spirit upon you so that you may be like-minded with Him in all things. Furthermore, they reflect the mindset of Christ, who resides in you and whom you reside in. Recognise that God and Christ are kind, compassionate, patient, and full of goodness towards all people, whether good or bad, friends or enemies, poor or rich. Understand that

Christ came into the world not to destroy, but to save, and that you possess the same spirit. Realise that injuries inflicted upon you by your neighbour cannot harm you, and there is no need for you to seek your own good at the expense of injuring them because you have all the desirable happiness in Christ. Even when your enemies intend harm, all things work for your good through Christ.

These perspectives, instilled in us by the spirit of faith, will undoubtedly cultivate a righteous disposition within us, fully equipped for every good work towards our neighbour. Likewise, your hearts will be purified, genuinely embracing love for your brethren in Christ. You will approach them with humility, gentleness, patience, and love, bearing with one another, if you maintain steadfast belief and conviction in the manifold bonds of love that unite you inseparably with them through Christ. Recognise that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all. Ultimately, you will be able to abstain from all carnal and worldly desires that wage war against the soul and hinder godliness. This will be possible through an assured conviction not only that gluttony, drunkenness, and lechery are repulsive and detestable, and that the pleasures, profits, and honours of the world are vain and empty, but also that you have been crucified to the flesh and the world. You have been resurrected, raised, and seated in heavenly places with Christ, and in Him, you possess pleasures, profits, and honours that far surpass anything the world has to offer. Recognise that you are members of Christ, the temple of His Spirit, citizens of heaven, children of the day, not of the night or darkness. Therefore, it is beneath your status and dignity to engage in deeds of darkness and to pursue worldly and carnal matters.

Thus, I have provided enough examples to motivate you to familiarise yourselves with the various endowments, privileges, and properties of your new state in Christ, as revealed in the gospel of your salvation. Through these, the new nature within you is equipped for holy actions, just as the common nature of humanity is furnished with the necessary abilities for its intended functions. I also encourage you to make use of these by faith, as they serve to strengthen you for both universal obedience and specific duties. By walking in this manner, your hearts will be comforted and established in every good word and work, and you will grow in holiness until you reach perfection in Jesus Christ.

If you strive to grow in grace and holiness, trust firmly that God will enable you, through this way of living, to accomplish everything necessary for His glory and your eternal salvation. He will graciously accept the obedience you are able to offer through Christ, in proportion to the measure of your faith, and pardon your shortcomings, even if you fail in many things and fall short in various aspects of holiness and acts of obedience. Therefore, do not attempt to perform your duties in any other way, even if you cannot yet achieve as much as you desire through this approach. This instruction is crucial to establish us in the life of faith, so that the awareness of our many failings and flaws does not lead us to despair or prompt us to resort to carnal principles and means for assistance against our sinful tendencies. Let us not consider living and acting by faith as insufficient for our sanctification and salvation. The apostle Paul exhorted the Galatians to "walk by the Spirit," even though "the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh," causing them to be unable to do what they desire. We should understand that although the law demands utmost perfection in holiness from us, the gospel allows for our

weaknesses. Christ is so gentle and humble in heart that He accepts what our feeble faith can achieve through His grace, and He does not demand or expect more from us for His glory and our salvation until we grow stronger in grace. In the Old Testament, God showed great leniency to His people. Moses, the lawgiver, permitted them to divorce their wives because of the hardness of their hearts, although it was not so from the beginning. He also tolerated the customary practice of polygamy. While Christ does not tolerate the continuation of such practices in His church, as His Spirit is abundantly poured out under the gospel, He remains just as willing as ever to bear with the failings of His weak saints who genuinely desire to obey Him.

We have another example of God's leniency, which is more relevant to our present discussion. God commanded that the fearful and faint-hearted should not be compelled to enter into battle against their enemies but allowed to return home to their houses. Although fighting against their enemies in battle was a significant duty during that time, God understood the weakness of some and granted them this concession (Deut. 20:3, 8). Similarly, under the gospel, while it is an important aspect of Christ's service to courageously endure great afflictions and even death for His name's sake, those who are weak in faith and lack the courage to enter into battle are undoubtedly permitted by Christ to use honest means to escape the hands of persecutors and preserve their holy profession. Christ will accept them in this weaker form of service and consider them better than if they were to risk denying His name by exposing themselves to martyrdom when they could have avoided it. Peter experienced sin and shame by going beyond the measure of his faith and placing himself in the hands of his persecutors when he followed Christ to the high priest's hall. Instead, he

should have made use of the indulgent dismissal that Christ granted to him and the rest of His disciples, saying, "Let these go their way" (John 18:8). Christ deals with His people as a good and caring shepherd who will not push His sheep too hard. "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40:11). He would not impose strict fasting on His disciples when their spirits were not ready for it because He knew that imposing duties beyond their strength is like putting a piece of new cloth on an old garment or new wine into old wineskins, which ultimately ruins everything (Matt. 9:14-17).

The precept of Solomon, "Do not be overly righteous" (Eccles. 7:16), is very useful and necessary when understood correctly. We must be cautious not to be too stringent in demanding righteousness from ourselves and others beyond the measure of faith and grace. Overdoing often leads to undoing. Children who go beyond their physical abilities in walking often experience many falls, and the same can happen to new believers in Christ when they unnecessarily undertake duties that exceed the strength of their faith. We should be content with doing our best at present, according to the measure of Christ's gift, even if we know that others are able to do much better. We should not despise small beginnings but praise God for anything that is pleasing in His sight, hoping that He will continue to sanctify us and eventually bring us to perfection in holiness through Jesus Christ our Lord. In all things, we should carefully heed the apostle's wise instruction: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you" (Rom. 12:3).

Chapter Thirteen

Endeavour diligently to make the right use of all means

Make every effort to diligently utilise all the means prescribed in the Word of God for obtaining and practicing holiness, but do so only by believing in Christ and walking in Him, according to your new state by faith.

This instruction could have been included in the explanation of the previous guidance, as its purpose is the same - to direct us in the mysterious way of practicing holiness in Christ through a life of faith. However, its significance and comprehensiveness warrant separate treatment, as a distinct directive. There are two noteworthy points to consider.

Firstly, although all holiness is effectively attained through a life of faith in Christ, the use of any means appointed in the Word to attain and promote holiness is not rendered invalid, but rather affirmed. This is crucial to address the arrogance and ignorance of certain worldly proponents of the gospel who, inflated with a false sense of their faith, imagine themselves to be in a state of perfection that exempts them from all ordinances except for singing "Hallelujahs." It also serves as a rebuttal against the Papists, who

swing to the opposite extreme by piling up numerous means of holiness that God never commanded and that never entered His mind. They falsely accuse the Protestant doctrine of faith and free grace, suggesting that it undermines the diligent use of means for holiness and salvation, and promotes a community of lazy Solifidians. We do indeed affirm and declare that "A true and vibrant faith in Christ alone, through the grace of God, is sufficient and effective to receive Christ and all His fullness, to the extent necessary in this life, for our justification, sanctification, and eternal salvation." However, we also affirm and declare that "God has appointed various means to engender, maintain, and deepen this faith, and to put it into practice and exercise, in order to achieve its purpose. These means are to be diligently employed," as mentioned subsequently.

True believers, through their experience, recognize that their faith requires such aids, and those who consider themselves above needing them reject God's counsel against themselves, much like the proud Pharisees and lawyers who deemed it beneath them to be baptized by John (Luke 7:30). However, we believe that no means other than those appointed by God in His Word are necessary or lawful to be employed for the pursuit of holiness. We understand that holiness is a component of our salvation, and thus those who believe that men may invent effective means for attaining it partially ascribe their salvation to human efforts, thereby robbing God of His glory as our sole Saviour. Such individuals plainly reveal that though they "draw near to God with their lips and honour Him with their words, their hearts are far from Him. Their worship is in vain, for they teach human precepts as doctrines" (Matt. 15:7-9).

The second noteworthy aspect and primary intention of this directive is the correct manner of utilising all the means of holiness for the acquisition

and practice of it, which can only be done through believing in Christ and walking in Him, in accordance with our new state by faith. This has already been established as the sole effective way to attain this great objective. We must employ these means as aids to the life of faith in its inception, continuation, and growth, and as instruments subordinate to faith, the principal instrument, in all its actions and exercises. It is through faith that the soul receives Christ and walks in all holiness by Him. We must be cautious not to use these means in opposition to, but in subordination to, the path of sanctification and salvation by God's free grace in Christ through faith. By misusing them, they can become hindrances rather than aids to our faith. We must not idolize any of these means and replace Christ with them, as the Papists do, by placing our trust in them as if they are capable of conferring grace to the soul through righteousness, to be performed as conditions for obtaining God's favour and Christ's salvation. Nor should we regard them as absolutely essential for salvation, to the extent that true faith becomes void and ineffectual when we are deprived of access to some of them. The Holy Scriptures, along with all the means of grace appointed therein, have the ability to make us wise unto salvation solely through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 3:15). Therefore, our prudent endeavour must be to use them without any opposition to the grace of God in Christ. God's ordinances are like the cherubim of glory, positioned with their faces towards the mercy seat. They are intended to guide us to Christ.

Many people are ignorant of the correct use of the means of grace, despite their zealous and diligent engagement with them. As a result, they not only waste their efforts and miss out on the benefits of these means but also twist and distort them to their own destruction. The Jews, living under the Mosaic law, had access to many more ordinances of divine worship than

we do under the gospel, yet their observance of these became a snare for them. They tragically turned away from God and Christ because the "veil of ignorance" shrouded their hearts, preventing them from seeing the purpose of those ordinances, which was to lead them to the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, they sought salvation through the ordinances as acts of righteousness and through other works of the law. In doing so, they stumbled over the stumbling stone (Rom. 9:31, 32; 10:4, 5; 2 Cor. 3:13, 14). To prevent you from stumbling and falling into the same destructive error, I will explain in detail how to correctly make use of several key means of holiness appointed in the Word of God, following the right approach outlined in the previous instruction.

We must diligently strive to know the Word of God as contained in the Holy Scripture and to utilise it for the purpose of becoming wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). While there are other means that contribute to the growth and well-being of our faith and our new state in Christ, this one is absolutely essential for its very existence. This is because faith comes from hearing the Word of God and it receives Christ as revealed through the Word, as I have previously demonstrated. Rahab the Canaanite was justified by faith even before she had any visible participation in the ordinances of the church. However, she did have the Word of God, essentially the same Word that was written in the Scriptures and was then present in the books of Moses. Although this Word was not brought to her through a book of the Holy Scripture or the preaching of a holy minister, she received it through the report of the heathens (Josh. 2:9, 11).

Our primary task here is to acquire a knowledge of the Word that is necessary and sufficient to guide us in receiving Christ and walking in Him

by faith. We should not adopt the mindset of those who believe that knowledge of the Ten Commandments is sufficient for salvation, or those who believe that mysteries should remain hidden from the understanding of the common people and that only readily acceptable and easily received teachings should be preached to them based on the light that is in all humanity. Some ministers may unknowingly share this mindset, unintentionally aligning with the Quakers in a fundamental aspect of their heresy. Instead, our main aim should be to know the mystery of the Father and the Son as revealed in the gospel, in which all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col. 2:2, 3). Knowing this mystery leads to eternal life, while ignorance of it leads to eternal death (John 17:3; 2 Cor. 4:3).

You must understand that Christ is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 10:4), and therefore, you should strive to know the commands of the law. Not so that you can immediately practice them and thus secure salvation through your works, but rather to realize your inability to fulfill them, the enmity in your heart towards them, the wrath you are under for breaking them, and the impossibility of being saved by your own works. This understanding will prompt you to seek refuge in Christ and rely solely on the free grace of God for justification and the strength to fulfill the law acceptably through Christ in your conduct. To achieve this, you should strive to grasp the utmost strictness of the commands, the absolute perfection and spiritual purity they demand. This will deepen your awareness of sin, stir you to turn to Christ for the forgiveness of sin, purity of heart, and spiritual obedience, and bring you closer to the experience of His presence. As Christ affirmed, the scribe who understood the magnitude of the command to love the Lord

with all their heart and soul was not far from the kingdom of God (Matt. 12:34).

The most crucial knowledge for your salvation is to understand two key points: the inherent sinfulness and wretchedness of your natural condition, and the sole sufficiency of God's grace in Christ for your salvation. This understanding will lead you to be humbled in regard to your human nature and to be exalted solely in Christ. To gain a better understanding of these two fundamental points, you should learn about the parallel between the first Adam and the second Adam (Rom. 5:14). You should grasp how sin and death entered the lives of all the descendants of the first Adam through his disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit, and how righteousness and eternal life are bestowed upon all the spiritual descendants of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, through His obedience unto death, even death on the cross.

Additionally, it is important to comprehend the true distinctions between the two covenants: the old covenant and the new covenant, or the law and the gospel. The former confines us under the guilt and dominion of sin, as well as the wrath and curse of God, with its stringent terms of "do all the commandments and live" and "cursed are you if you do not do them and fail in the slightest point." On the other hand, the latter opens the gates to righteousness and life for all believers (i.e., the new covenant) through its gracious terms of "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and live." In other words, all your sins shall be forgiven, and holiness and glory shall be freely bestowed upon you through His merit and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the gospel principles that you should follow in order to attain holiness in Christ. Specifically, I want to highlight the importance of studying the sixth and seventh chapters of the

Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. In these chapters, the powerful principles of sanctification are discussed purposefully and distinguished from the weak and ineffective principles that we are naturally inclined to follow.

I need not specifically recommend any other aspects of religion for your learning, as acquiring knowledge of these key points I have mentioned and applying them in your life, living and walking by faith in Christ, will naturally lead you to understand all other matters pertaining to life and godliness. If there are any areas where your beliefs differ from the truth that leads to salvation, God will reveal even that to you (Phil. 3:15).

However, let me warn you against the danger of losing Christ by placing your knowledge in His position and relying on it for your salvation, instead of gaining Him through your knowledge. One reason why the Jews perished was because they found satisfaction in a form of knowledge and truth found in the law (Rom. 2:20). Similarly, many Christians who rely on their knowledge may end up facing harsher consequences, as they place their religion and salvation primarily in the knowledge of their Lord's will and their ability to talk and debate about it, without actually living according to it (Luke 12:47). You should not, under any circumstances, base your religion and hope of salvation on the mere task of reading chapters or repeating sermons without understanding them, as some Papists do with their lessons in the Latin mass and canonical hours. Tragically, experience has shown that many seemingly devout and frequent hearers of the Word remain in a state of lamentable and astonishing ignorance of the saving truth. Their condition fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving" (Matt. 13:14, 15).

Another means that should be diligently used to promote the life of faith is the examination of our state and actions in accordance with the Word of God. We need to assess whether we are currently in a state of sin and wrath or of grace and salvation. If we find ourselves in a state of sin, we must acknowledge our sickness and turn to the great Physician while there is still time. And if we are in a state of grace, we can have the assurance that we belong to the truth and confidently testify before God with a good conscience (1 John 3:19, 21). This will strengthen our hearts through faith, provide comfort, and establish us in every good work. If we discover that our ways are evil, we must repent and turn to the Lord our God through Christ, for apart from Him, no one comes to the Father (Lam. 3:40; John 14:6). However, you must be cautious in the process of self-examination so that it does not hinder or destroy the life of faith, as it unfortunately does for many instead of promoting it. Beware of trusting in your self-examination rather than in Christ, as some do. They believe they have made peace with God merely because they examined themselves on their sickbed or before partaking in the Lord's Supper, even though they found themselves to be utterly unworthy. They do not rely on Christ to make them better but on their own deceitful intentions and resolutions.

Do not think that you must start this work by doubting whether God will show mercy to you and save you. You need not leave this as a question for debate until you have resolved it through self-examination. This is a common and dangerous error that undermines the very foundation of this work. It is rooted in the sin of unbelief, which, once it takes hold, greatly influences and dims all inward qualities of peace, hope, joy, and love for God and His people before they have a chance to be fully tested and provide evidence of salvation. It leads people to think their own qualities

are better than they actually are, out of fear of falling into utter despair. Thus, it hinders and undermines the purpose of self-examination and proves destructive to our souls, for "to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure" (Titus 1:15). Instead, you should begin this work with a firm assurance of faith. Even if you find your heart to be wicked and depraved (as many of God's chosen servants have discovered), know that the door of mercy is open for you and that God will surely save you forever if you trust in His grace through Christ.

I have previously explained that this confident assurance is part of saving faith and that we have sufficient grounds for it in the free promises of the gospel, even when we find ourselves in darkness and cannot see any light shining through our gracious qualities. If we start this work with such confidence, it will enable us to be impartial and unafraid to acknowledge the worst in ourselves. We will be willing to recognize that our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, even beyond what we can comprehend (Jer. 17:9). And if we do possess any holy qualities, this confidence will preserve them in their strength and radiance, providing clear evidence that we are presently in a state of grace.

Pay close attention to the distinction between these two questions: "Will God graciously accept and save me, though I am a vile sinner, through Christ?" as I mentioned earlier, and "Am I already in a state of salvation?" The former question should be answered affirmatively through confident faith in Christ, while the latter is the subject of self-examination. Do not waste your time, as many do, in obsessing over whether you are good enough to trust in Christ for salvation or whether you possess any faith before you dare to act in faith towards Christ. Remember that even if you cannot find evidence of faith or holiness within yourself, if you now believe

in Him who justifies the ungodly, it will be credited to you as righteousness (Rom. 4:5).

If you love Christ and care for your own soul, do not waste your time examining whether you have committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit, unless it is with the purpose of assuring yourself more and more that you are not guilty of it. Any uncertainty in this matter will only harden you in unbelief. Remember that the question to be resolved is whether you are presently in a state of grace, and to answer it, you must be willing to acknowledge both the best and the worst in yourself. Humility does not require you to overlook your good qualities and focus only on your corruptions. Instead, your main task is to determine if there is any trace of saving grace amidst the ocean of your corruption. It is consistent with humility to recognize and acknowledge any spark of true holiness within you, but remember that the praise and glory for it belong not to you but to God (Phil. 1:11). When evaluating inherent grace, consider its nature rather than its degree. Do not deny the promptings of the Spirit within you because of the strong desires of the flesh against the Spirit. Do not deny that you are spiritual to some extent and babes in Christ, even if you find yourselves more inclined towards carnality and the old nature outweighing the new (Gal. 5:17; 1 Cor. 3:1).

Above all, examine and test whether you are in the faith. For if you are certain of this, you secure all things pertaining to life and godliness. But if you doubt this, you will certainly doubt the truth of any other qualifications and suspect them to be merely carnal and counterfeit. It is a well-known truth that to the unbelieving, nothing is pure, and those who have not truly received Christ by faith are presently in an unregenerate state, even if they appear to be pure and godly (2 Cor. 13:5; Titus 1:15).

And do not let the outcome of this examination rely solely on your knowledge of the exact time, sermon, conversation, or Scripture passage that led to your initial conversion to the faith, although it is beneficial to know if possible. Some individuals who previously lived in profound ignorance or in direct opposition to true faith and holiness may recall such circumstances of their conversion and find comfort in reflecting upon them, like the apostle Paul, who experienced a sudden transformation from persecuting rage to becoming a disciple and apostle of Christ. However, other sincere believers may be entirely unaware of such specifics, like John the Baptist, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). Even those who have been raised in religious environments and possessed knowledge of the Holy Scriptures from childhood, such as Timothy (2 Tim. 3:15), and many who first turned away from gross ignorance and profanity towards external reformation before gradually drawing closer to the kingdom of heaven through imperceptible stages, may be uncertain of the precise moment when they were truly born again through the spirit of faith.

Additionally, some individuals deceive themselves by believing they know the exact time and Scripture passage that brought about their conversion. They may engage in extensive discussions regarding God's work in their hearts and boastfully glorify their own experiences, yet in the end, these experiences are insufficient to prove that they have attained even the smallest measure of true saving faith.

Therefore, in order to avoid unjustly condemning or justifying our faith based on inadequate evidence during its examination, the best approach is to evaluate it according to the inseparable characteristics of genuine saving faith. We must ask ourselves questions such as: Have we become fully

aware of our sinfulness and the spiritual death and misery of our natural state to the extent that we despair completely of ever attaining righteousness, holiness, or true happiness while remaining in it? Have the eyes of our understanding been enlightened to perceive the excellence of Christ and the sole sufficiency and all-sufficiency of His grace for our salvation? Do we value the enjoyment of Him above all else and desire it with our whole heart as our ultimate happiness, regardless of any suffering we may endure for His sake? Do we long with our entire being to be delivered from the power and practice of sin, as well as from God's wrath and the torments of hell? Do our hearts come to Christ and cling to Him for salvation by placing our trust in Him alone, and do we strive to trust in Him confidently despite the fears and doubts that assail us?

If you discover within yourself a faith that possesses these characteristics, no matter how small it may be, and even if it faces significant disbelief and various corruptions within your soul, you can conclude that you are presently in a state of salvation. Your ongoing task is to continue and grow in this faith, walking in a manner worthy of it.

You should also examine the outcomes of your faith and see if you can demonstrate your faith through your actions, as you have been taught (James 2:18), so that you can avoid being deceived in your judgment about it. While it is true, as I have mentioned, that doubts about your faith can lead to doubts about the genuineness of other qualities that stem from it, it is possible that you may obtain clear evidence of your sincerity that can overcome and dispel all your doubts. In this regard, you should not only inquire whether your inclinations, intentions, affections, and actions are morally good and holy, but also consider the principles by which they are generated and influenced. Are they motivated by a fear of hell and the

desire to gain heaven through your works, which are legal and worldly principles that can never generate true holiness? Or are they guided by gospel principles, such as love for God because He loved you first, love for Christ because He died for you, and the hope of eternal life as a free gift from God through Christ? Are you dependent on God to sanctify you by His Spirit according to His promises? Remember that the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6), and the Spirit sanctifies us not through legal principles, but through gospel principles.

Furthermore, take note that you don't need to trouble yourself with finding a multitude of signs and indicators of true grace if you can find a few good ones. Specifically, you can know that you have passed from death to life if you love your fellow believers (1 John 3:14). This means loving all those whom you can genuinely consider to be true believers, and doing so because they are true believers and for the sake of the truth that resides in them. Just as Solomon discerned the true mother of the child by her affection towards the child, the mother-grace of faith can be discerned by the love that it generates in us towards all true believers.

In conclusion, you are fortunate if you can find enough evidence of the outcomes of your faith that allows you to express your sincerity in these moderate terms: "Pray for us, for we are confident that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honourably in all things" (Heb. 13:18).

Meditation on the Word of God is highly valuable and advantageous for the pursuit and practice of holiness through faith in Christ. It is a duty in which the soul feeds and reflects upon the Word as its spiritual nourishment, digesting it and turning it into sustenance that strengthens us for every good work. Our souls are satisfied with it, like with marrow and fatness. We remember God on our beds and meditate on Him during the

night watches (Psalm 63:5, 6). The new nature can rightly be called "the mind" because it lives and operates by focusing on and contemplating spiritual things. Therefore, this duty should be practiced not only at certain times, but throughout the day (Psalm 119:97), even in our ordinary tasks at home and outside. Merely having a habitual knowledge of the Word will not benefit us without actively engaging with it through frequent meditation. Some may believe that extensive preaching of the Word is unnecessary once people have already grasped the essential aspects of salvation. However, those who have been regenerated by the Word discover through experience that their spiritual life is sustained and increased by frequently pondering the same Word. Therefore, like newborn infants, they crave the pure milk of the Word in order to grow (1 Peter 2:2). They desire to be reminded of the same truths by preachers so that they can nourish themselves through meditation, even though they are already acquainted with them and firmly established in the present truth (2 Peter 1:12).

However, our greatest skill and primary concern lies in practising this duty in a manner that supports, rather than contradicts, the life of faith. We must not rely on the performance of a daily meditation routine as a righteous work to earn God's favour, instead of relying on the righteousness of Christ. It is our tendency to grasp at any straw rather than trust solely in the free grace of God in Christ for our salvation. Furthermore, the purpose of our meditation should not be mere speculation and knowledge of the truth, but rather to press it forcefully upon our consciences and to stir up our hearts and affections for its practice. As we stir ourselves towards holy living, we must carefully observe the extent to which different aspects of God's truth are powerful and effective in achieving this goal, so that we can make use of them accordingly. We must not imagine, as many do, including

some experts in the field of meditation, that we can genuinely cultivate love for God and holiness within our hearts, or bring about profound changes and develop holy qualities or virtues, simply by strongly focusing on God's eternal power and divinity, His supreme authority, omniscience, perfect holiness, exact justice, the fairness of His law, and the reasonableness of our obedience to it, as well as the immeasurable happiness prepared for the godly and the misery for the wicked throughout eternity.

Meditating on such matters is indeed very useful in impressing upon our consciences the strictness of our obligation to holy duties and motivating us to approach Christ by faith for the life and strength to perform them. However, in order to receive this life and strength that enables us for immediate action, we must meditate on Christ's saving benefits as revealed in the gospel. The gospel is the only doctrine that carries the power of God for our salvation, through which the life-giving Spirit is ministered to us. It is able to build us up and grant us an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Romans 1:16; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Acts 20:32). You must be careful to exercise faith in your meditation; mix the Word of God's grace with it, or else it will not benefit you (Hebrews 4:2). If you frequently set God's lovingkindness before your eyes and meditate on it with belief, you will be strengthened to walk in the truth (Psalm 26:3). By beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, you will be transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18). This kind of meditation is sweet and delightful to those who are guided by the spirit of faith, and it does not require the assistance of artificial methods that the common people may find difficult to grasp. You may allow your thoughts to flow freely without restricting them to any rules of method. You will find your souls greatly enlivened and enriched with the grace of God

through it, which cannot be achieved by any other form of meditation, no matter how methodical or intricately crafted according to the rules of art.

The sacrament of baptism can be of great benefit in promoting the life of faith if it is used in accordance with its nature and institution, as it is a seal of the righteousness of faith, just as circumcision was in the past (Romans 4:11). However, we must be cautious not to turn it into a seal of the opposite righteousness of works, as the carnal Jews did when they sought to be justified by the law of Moses. Many Christians also fall into this trap by transforming the new covenant into a covenant of works, demanding sincere obedience to all of Christ's laws as a condition for our justification. They believe they have entered into this newly devised covenant through their baptism. I can say of baptism, when it is perverted and misused, what the apostle said of circumcision: "Baptism indeed profits if you keep the law, but if you are a breaker of the law, your baptism is no baptism" (Romans 2:25). If you are baptized but continue in the misuse of this sacred ordinance, "Christ shall profit you nothing; Christ has become of no effect to you; you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:2, 4).

Be cautious not to idolise baptism and replace Christ with it, as the Papists do, who believe that it bestows grace through the mere act of its administration. Also, be aware of ignorant people who trust in their baptism rather than in Christ, similar to the Pharisees who relied on circumcision and other external privileges. We should know that God is not well pleased with many who are baptized, and there will come a time when He will punish both the baptized and the unbaptized, just as He will punish the circumcised and the uncircumcised.

Furthermore, be cautious not to elevate baptism to an equal standing with faith in your salvation, as some do, who consider all baptism invalid except

for that which is administered to individuals who have reached the age of understanding. Those who refuse to be rebaptized at such an age are deemed alienated from the true church, Christ, and His salvation, regardless of their faith in Christ. Even if the baptism of infants were invalid, the absence of true baptism would not damn those who are otherwise convinced. Circumcision was as necessary as baptism in its time, yet the Israelites omitted it for forty years in the wilderness without fearing that anyone would be deprived of salvation because of it. Many precious saints in the early days of persecution entered heaven through the baptism of suffering for the name of Christ before they had the opportunity to be baptized with water. During those ancient times when the custom of delaying baptism prevailed, we should not assume that none were in a state of salvation through faith in Christ, even if they deferred or neglected that ordinance.

Furthermore, it is not enough to avoid the dangerous errors of those who distort baptism contrary to its institution; you must also be diligent in making use of it for the purposes for which it was instituted. Let me urge you to ask yourselves seriously: "What good use do you make of your baptism? How often do you reflect upon it?" Many ordinary Christians, and perhaps even sincere converts, think so little about their own baptism and fail to properly utilise it that it has no more benefit to their souls than if they had never been baptized. Their sin is even more severe as they render such an ordinance ineffective through their own negligence. Although baptism is administered to us only once in our lives, we should frequently contemplate its significance and ask ourselves: "What were we baptized into?" What does this ordinance symbolise? What commitments did it entail? Accordingly, we must stir ourselves up and strengthen our resolve through

our baptism to lay hold of the grace it represents and to fulfil its commitments. We should often remember that baptism signifies our discipleship to Christ and our obligation to follow Him rather than Moses, and to believe in Him for our salvation. Just as John baptized with a baptism of repentance, instructing people to believe in the One who would come after him, namely, Jesus Christ. We should recall that our baptism signified our union with Christ, our status as children of God through faith in Christ, our release from the former schoolmaster, the law. It also represented our identification with Christ's death and resurrection through faith, the forgiveness of our sins, our incorporation into the body of Christ, and our participation in the Holy Spirit.

We can understand from these things, which are more fully revealed in the gospel, that the nature and purpose of baptism is to lead us to have faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins, holiness, and all aspects of salvation through our union and fellowship with Him. Diligently embracing this sacrament will undoubtedly benefit the life of faith.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is like a spiritual feast that nourishes our faith and strengthens us to live in holiness through Christ's living presence and work within us, as long as we observe it according to the pattern given by Christ in its initial institution, which is recorded by three evangelists. It was also revealed directly from heaven by Christ Himself to the apostle Paul, so that we would be more obliged and motivated to observe it meticulously. Its purpose is not merely to remind us of the historical event of Christ's death, but to engage with the mystery of it: that His body was broken for us and His blood is the blood of the New Testament or covenant, shed for us and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Through this sacrament, we receive and partake in all the promises of the

new covenant that are recorded. It serves to remind us that Christ's body and blood are represented by bread and drink, and they are more than sufficient nourishment for our souls, leading to eternal life. We are to partake of Him by faith, believing that when we truly believe in Him, He is as intimately united to us by His Spirit as the food we eat and drink is united to our bodies. Christ Himself provides further explanation of this mystery in John 6.

Moreover, this sacrament not only reminds us of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and our enjoyment of them through faith, but it is also a means and instrument by which God truly presents and gives Christ and His salvation to genuine believers. It serves to stir and strengthen believers to receive and feed upon Christ through present acts of faith as they partake of the outward elements. When Christ says, "Eat, drink; this is My body, this is My blood," it can mean nothing less than the fact that Christ truly gives His body and blood to true believers in that sacrament, just as they truly receive it by faith. It is similar to a prince bestowing an honourable office on a subject by presenting them with a staff, sword, or signet and saying, "Take this staff, sword, or signet; this represents such an office or position." Or if a father were to give a deed of land to his son and say, "Take it as your own; this represents such a farm or estate." In common sense and reason, such expressions imply the actual gift and conveyance of the offices, positions, and lands through those outward signs. Therefore, the apostle Paul asserts that the bread in the Lord's Supper "is the communion of the body of Christ" and the "cup is the communion of His blood," indicating that Christ's body and blood are genuinely communicated to us and we truly partake in them, just as we do with the bread and cup.

The main excellence and advantage of this sacrament is that it not only symbolises and represents our dependence on a crucified Saviour, but it is also a precious instrument given to us and received by us through faith. This makes it a token of love worthy of the intense affection that filled Christ's heart when He instituted it, just before completing His greatest act of love by sacrificing His life for us. It is important to note this diligently so that we may properly appreciate and derive the saving benefits from this sacrament.

One reason why many disregard and seldom or never partake in this sacrament, and consequently find little benefit from it, is because they mistakenly believe that God only presents empty signs and symbols of Christ and His salvation through it. They assume that the Scriptures plainly reveal these truths and therefore do not require the aid of such a sign. However, if they understood that God truly imparts Christ Himself to their faith through those signs and symbols, they would value it as the most delightful feast and eagerly partake in it whenever the opportunity arises.

Another reason why many rarely or never participate in this sacrament and fail to experience its benefits is because they believe it exposes them to the danger of consuming their own damnation, as expressed in the alarming words of the apostle: "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." Consequently, they consider it safer to completely abstain from this potentially perilous ordinance, or at the very least, deem it sufficient to partake in it once a year to avoid such a risk. Even when they are compelled by conscience to partake, their fearful apprehensions strip away any comforting fruit it could bear. Instead of striving to receive Christ and His salvation through this sacrament, they consider themselves successful if they escape

condemnation. It is akin to the belief held by Jewish Rabbis that the high priest's life was in great danger when he entered the Holy of Holies once a year, and therefore he spent as little time as possible there, lest the people think he had been struck dead by God's hand. Upon emerging alive, he would typically celebrate a feast of thanksgiving, rejoicing in his remarkable deliverance.

However, there is no need for us to be excessively terrified by the apostle's words, for they were directed against the Corinthians' gross misuse of the Lord's Supper, a situation that we can easily avoid by following the apostle's instructions. He provides a remedy against the abuse, which involved failing to discern or distinguish the Lord's body from ordinary food and partaking of it in such disorder that some went hungry while others got drunk. Furthermore, the alarming word "damnation" can be rendered more gently as "judgement," as indicated in the margin. In fact, the apostle himself (v. 32) interprets it as a merciful, temporal judgement that serves as a means of discipline from the Lord, preventing us from being condemned along with the world.

It is true that we are prone to sin by receiving this sacrament unworthily, just as we are also inclined to defile, to some extent, all other sacred things we engage with. Thus, the awareness of our danger could fill us with servile fear when it comes to using all other means of grace, including this sacrament. However, we have a great High Priest who bears the iniquity of our holy things (Exod. 28:38), under whose righteousness we are to approach God without slavish fear, but rather with full assurance of faith, in this sacrament as well as in other sacred ordinances. We are to rejoice in the Lord during this spiritual feast, just as the Jews were commanded to do during their appointed festivals (Deut. 16:14, 15).

There are other abuses of this sacrament, similar to those mentioned earlier regarding baptism, which make it contrary to, rather than supportive of, the life of faith. Some replace Christ with it by trusting in it as a righteous work to earn God's favour or as an ordinance capable of bestowing grace upon the soul through the mere act itself. Others consider it so essential that they believe faith alone is insufficient without it. As a result, they partake in a disorderly manner, even on their sickbeds when they fear death, treating it as their last rites. The Papists horribly idolise it through their belief in transubstantiation, the adoration of the bread and wine as God, and their practice of the mass as a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead. We should cautiously understand that the true body and blood of Christ are given to us, along with the bread and wine, in a spiritual and mysterious manner through the unfathomable work of the Holy Spirit, uniting Christ and us together through faith, without any transubstantiation occurring in the outward elements.

Prayer is to be used as a means of living by faith in Christ, according to the new nature. It involves making our requests known to God with supplication and thanksgiving. The importance of prayer as an eminent means is evident because God requires it (1 Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12). It is our priestly work (1 Peter 2:5; compared with Ps. 141:2) and the mark of the saints (1 Cor. 1:2). God is a God who hears prayer (Ps. 65:2). He desires to be sought after by His people so that He may bestow His blessings upon them, even if initially they do not seek Him (Ezek. 36:37; Phil. 1:19, 20). Prayer prepares us for thanksgiving and transforms blessings into double blessings (Ps. 66:16, 18, 19; 50:15; 2 Cor. 1:10, 11). Although prayer does not change God's will, it is the ordinary means by which His will is

accomplished. Therefore, our trust and assurance should not lead us to neglect this duty but rather to faithfully carry it out (2 Sam. 7:27).

Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, through whom justification and sanctification are promised, is also the Mediator for the acceptance of our prayers (Heb. 4:15, 16). The Spirit who sanctifies us, brings us into union with Christ, and reveals the things of Christ to us, is a Spirit of prayer (Zech. 12:10; Gal. 4:6). The Spirit is like a fire that ignites the soul and lifts it up in prayer to God. Those who do not pray are spiritually dead, even if they are considered children of Zion, they are like stillborn, lifeless children who do not cry out (Acts 9:11), not counted among the living in Jerusalem. They may be Christians in name but heathens in nature (Jer. 10:25).

Prayer is a duty of such magnitude that it encompasses all the service of God. It is a foundational duty that, if performed, leads to the proper performance of other acts of worship. Other ordinances of worship serve as aids to prayer (Isa. 56:7). Prayer is the great means by which faith expresses itself and fulfils its entire work. It allows us to pour out our holy desires and affections to God (Ps. 62:8), producing a sweet fragrance, akin to Mary's box of precious spikenard (Mark 14:3; John 12:3). The same promises are made to both faith and prayer (Rom. 10:11-13). Prayer is our continual incense and sacrifice through which we offer ourselves, our hearts, affections, and lives to God (Ps. 141:2). It encompasses all aspects of grace and must be practised in order for us to engage in other forms of grace. Through prayer, we receive both riches and holiness (Ps. 138:3; Luke 11:13; Heb. 4:16; Ps. 81:10). Israel prevailed as long as Moses held up his hands in prayer (Exod. 17:11). Hannah found strength in prayer amidst her sorrows (1 Sam. 1:15, 18), peace is sustained (Phil. 4:6, 7), and the disordered soul is restored, as was the case with Hannah (1 Sam. 1:18; Ps.

32:1-5). Incense was continually burned while the lamps were tended (Exod. 30:7, 8). Prayer is added to the spiritual armour, not as a separate piece, but as a means of putting on and utilising all the pieces properly, enabling us to stand firm in times of evil (Eph. 6:18). It transforms us into the likeness of Christ in holiness and causes our spiritual faces to shine, just as Christ was transfigured physically while praying (Luke 9:29), and Moses' face shone after speaking with God (Exod. 34:29).

Hence, we are encouraged to engage in this duty frequently (Eph. 6:18), praying at all times and in all circumstances. We should follow the example of the saints by praying publicly with the congregation (Acts 2:42; 10:30, 31). Solemn acts of prayer should be a daily practice (Matt. 6:11), even multiple times a day, such as morning and evening (Dan. 6:10; Ps. 92:2) or three times (Ps. 55:17). In addition, we should pray on special occasions (James 5:13, 14) and offer brief ejaculations that do not hinder other responsibilities (Ps. 129:8; 2 Sam. 15:31; Neh. 2:4). Prayers should be solemn, offered in our private spaces (Matt. 6:6) and within our families (Acts 10:30, 31). Just as sacrifices were multiplied on Sabbaths, days of atonement, and other appointed times (Num. 28), prayer should also be frequent.

In summary, a Christian should wholeheartedly devote themselves to this duty (Ps. 109:4), without limits (Ps. 119:164). However, the key is to practice this duty rightly for the sake of holiness, solely through faith in Christ. We ought to pray, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1), not only regarding the content but also the manner of prayer. Christ provides some guidance in the brief pattern of prayer He taught His disciples, but to fully understand it, we must consult the entire Word (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). We require the Spirit of Christ to guide us in this duty, which is why we are

instructed to pray by the Spirit, that is, the Holy Ghost (Jude 20; Eph. 2:18). It is only the Spirit of God that directs and empowers us to pray rightly. To do so, follow these rules:

1. Pray with your hearts and spirits (Isa. 26:9; John 4:24), where the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of prayer primarily reside (Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:17). Pray with understanding (1 Cor. 14:15, 16), for we are renewed in knowledge (Col. 3:10; 2 Peter 1:3), so praying in ignorance cannot sanctify. Pray with sincere and heartfelt desire for the things we ask, for God sees the heart (Ps. 62:8). Prayer is primarily an affair of the heart (Ps. 27:8). God hears the heart even without words, but He never accepts words without a sincere heart (1 Sam. 1:13). Your prayer becomes odious hypocrisy, mocking God and taking His name in vain when you utter petitions for the coming of His kingdom and the doing of His will, yet harbor hatred for godliness in your heart. This is lying to God and flattery with your lips, not true prayer, and God regards it as such (Ps. 78:36). You must also have a sense of your needs and understand that only God can meet them (2 Chron. 20:12).

And fervency in those desires is required (James 5:16). You must pray with attentiveness, being mindful of what you pray for, otherwise, you cannot expect God to pay attention to it (Dan. 9:3). Keep watch over it (1 Peter 4:7). Engage in this duty with focused intention. God sees when your heart wanders while you pray without attentiveness (Ezek. 33:31). Merely reciting numerous prayers without understanding, attention, or genuine affection is not true prayer but rather sinning and hypocrisy, similar to how Papists mumble their Latin prayers on beads, parroting words they do not

comprehend. Similarly, ignorant individuals repeat their form of English prayers and consider it fulfilling their duty, even though their heart is not engaged, and their thoughts are elsewhere. This is mere lip service, mere physical exercise, offering a lifeless body to God, a plain deceit (Mal. 1:13, 14), a form of godliness that denies its power (2 Tim. 3:5), through which Popery has deprived the world of the power of this and all other sacred ordinances. They claim, "God pays attention and approves of what they speak." I respond, "He sees them in order to judge them as hypocrites and profane individuals, for not understanding, paying attention to, or approving of what they utter." He takes no pleasure in fools (Eccles. 5:1, 4). They would not behave this way with an earthly prince.

1. You must pray in the name of Christ because the Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:14) and leads us to God through Christ (Eph. 2:18). Just as I have explained that walking in the Spirit is synonymous with walking in Christ, so is praying in the Spirit and through Christ. Just as we are to conduct ourselves in the name of the Lord and do all things in His name, we must also pray in His name, as commanded (John 14:13, 14). It is not enough to conclude our prayers with "through Jesus Christ our Lord," but we must approach for blessings in the garments of our Elder Brother and rely on His worthiness and strength for everything.

Likewise, we must praise God for all things in His name, acknowledging them as gifts received for His sake and through Him (Eph. 5:20). We must solely grasp His strength and plead nothing else, acknowledging nothing else for our acceptance except Him. We must not arrogantly present our own works, as the proud Pharisee did (Luke 18:11, 12), except as fruits of

grace and rewards of grace (Isa. 38:3). Praying in the Spirit is based on gospel, not legal principles (Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:3), with deep humility and a sense of unworthiness (Ps. 51), with a broken spirit, despairing of acceptance apart from Christ's merit (Dan. 9:18). Even if your expressions, struggles, and heartfelt emotions have been significant, without this foundation, it is all abominable.

1. Therefore, you must not think that you will be accepted based on the goodness of your prayers and trust in them as acts of righteousness. This would be idolising your prayers and replacing Christ with them, which is completely contrary to praying in the name of Christ. The Papists, for instance, hope to be saved by reciting their set number of prayers on their rosary beads, and they receive indulgences based on the quantity and type of prayers they say. Likewise, some ignorant Protestants rely on their prayers as righteous duties, considering one prayer to be more acceptable than another due to the supposed holiness of the form, particularly the Lord's Prayer, which they use as a help in times of need or danger. Even if they cannot personally relate it to their own situation, they turn it into an idol. Some people use it and other passages of Scripture as a spell or charm to ward off the devil. Others believe their prayers are more acceptable in one location than another because of the perceived holiness of the place. Some put their trust in much speaking, considering it to be the enlargement of their hearts (Matt. 6:7). They attempt to appease God and silence their conscience with a few prayers, allowing them to live as they please.

2. Pray to God as your Father, through Christ as your Savior, in faith, believing in the forgiveness of sins, your acceptance with God, and the attainment of all other things you desire from Him, as far as they are necessary for your salvation. This is praying in Christ (Eph. 3:12), and it is done by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Without this, prayer is lifeless and lacks sincerity; it becomes nothing more than a dead body (Rom. 10:14; Ps. 77:1, 2). You can judge the correctness of your prayers not merely by your emotional response or the eloquence of your words, but by the presence of this faith. Although you may not be assured that you will receive everything you ask for, you can have confidence that you will receive everything that is good. You must strive to exercise this faith, and if there is any sin weighing on your conscience, you should seek first to obtain forgiveness for it and cleanse it through faith. In doing so, you can lift up holy hands without anger or doubt (1 Tim. 2:8). The sin of anger is specifically mentioned here because it is contrary to love and forgiving others. This is where the strength, vitality, and power of prayer lie. Put your faith into action, and you will be empowered and succeed.

3. You must strive in prayer to activate and engage every other sanctifying grace, motivated by faith. In doing so, the fragrance of these graces will be released: godly sorrow (Ps. 38:18), peace (Isa. 27:5), joy (Ps. 105:3), hope (Ps. 71:5), desire and love for God (Ps. 4:6), love for His commands (Ps. 119:4, 5), and love for His people out of love for Him (Ps. 122:8). Seek the Holy Spirit Himself as the first priority (Luke 11:13; Ps. 37:5), along with all spiritual things

(Matt. 6:33). Praying solely for carnal things reveals a carnal heart and perpetuates its carnality. Pray for faith (Mark 9:24) and for things that will most glorify God (2 Chron. 1:11, 12). When praying for outward things, demonstrate faith by submitting to God's will. This type of prayer sets your heart in a holy state (Matt. 26:42; Luke 22:42, 43). Your aim should be to hallow God's name (Matt. 6:9), not satisfy your own lusts (James 4:3).

4. Strive to bring your soul into order through this duty, even if it is disordered by guilt, anguish, excessive cares, or fears (Ps. 32:1, 5; 55:16, 17, 20, 22; 69:32; Phil. 4:6, 7; 1 Sam. 1). A watch must be frequently wound up. Wrestle in prayer against unbelief, doubt, fears, cares, and the flesh's reluctance towards what is good. Wrestle against all evil lusts and desires, lack of affection, impatience, and troubled spirit—anything that contradicts a holy life and the exercise of graces and holy desires for yourself or others (Col. 4:12; Rom. 15:30). Stir yourself up for this duty (Col. 2:1, 2; Isa. 64:7). Even though the flesh resists and is reluctant, do not give in, but resist by the power of the Spirit (Matt. 26:41). In doing so, you will find the Spirit helping you in your weaknesses (Rom. 8:26, 27). Even when it seems that God is delaying, do not grow weary or discouraged (Luke 18:1, 7). The greater the agony, the more earnestly you must pray (Ps. 22:1, 2; Luke 22:42). This is to be devoted to prayer (Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18). In this way, you will discover that prayer is a significant matter of the heart, not something that can be done while thinking of other things. It requires the full strength of faith and

affection that you can muster. Through this, you can attain a holy disposition.

5. Make good use of the entire content and manner of prayer as regular and exceptional circumstances require. Use prayer to stir up grace within you through wrestling and to cultivate a holy disposition in your hearts. In confession, condemn yourself in relation to the flesh, but not as you are in Christ. Do not deny the grace that you have as if you were only wicked before and now need to start over. This hinders praise for the grace received by those who are already converted. In supplication, strive to stir up godly sorrow (Ps. 38:18) and a holy awareness of your own sin and misery. Consider the aggravations of your sin. Complaint and lamentation form a significant part of prayer, as seen in the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Alongside your petitions, include pleadings with arguments that strengthen faith and ignite affection. These pleadings can be drawn from God's attributes (Num. 14:17, 18), promises (2 Sam. 7:26, 28, etc.; Gen. 32:9, 12), the righteousness of your cause (Ps. 17:2, 3), and the benefits and advantages of your request for the glory of God and your own comfort (Ps. 115:1, 2; 79:9, 10, 13). Naked petitions are insufficient when the soul is wrestling against corruptions, dangers, and seeking mercies. Christ's extensive prayer in John 17 consists mostly of pleadings rather than requests.

And we must also engage in praise and thanksgiving to stir up peace, joy, love, and so on (Gen. 32:10; Ps. 18:1, 2, 3; 33:1; 104:34). It is especially important to offer much praise to God for the mercies of the new state in Christ (Eph. 1:3), as it will enable you to give thanks for all the benefits that

come from it (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18), and use those benefits as a plea to encourage faith and duty. While it is good to use the brief ejaculation, "Lord, have mercy on me," it cannot fulfill the purpose and use of the entire duty of prayer, as some lazy and worldly individuals would prefer, using it as an excuse to neglect the duty. However, it is not necessary to make use of the entire content and at all times, but only as ordinary or extraordinary occasions may require.

1. Do not confine and limit your prayers to any prescribed form, as it is impossible for any such forms to be devised that can adequately and suitably address all the various conditions and necessities of the soul at all times. I do not condemn all forms, such as the Lord's prayer given by Christ, although it is easy to show that Christ never intended it to be a fixed form of prayer, binding anyone to the precise wording. It is evident that the Spirit of God has expressed it in different words (Matt. 6; Luke 11). However, it is better to pray using that form or other forms than not praying at all. It would be uncharitable to take away crutches or wooden legs from lame people, even though they are regarded as lifeless aids. I say it is completely unlawful to bind ourselves to any form because none can appropriately and suitably fulfill the duty in relation to specific occasions (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; John 15:7; 1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:20). You must make the entire Scripture your common prayer book, just as the early church did, as it is the language of the Spirit that addresses all situations and conditions and is most fitting to speak to God in. And if you use a form, you must allow the Spirit to guide you beyond the form according to the Word; otherwise, you

quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). If you understand the principles of prayer and have a lively sense of your needs and heartfelt desires for God's grace and mercies, you will be able to pray without forms, and your affections will give rise to words from the abundance of your heart. There is no need to be overly anxious or fearful about words, for undoubtedly, the Spirit, who helps us speak to people, will also help us much more in speaking to God if we desire it (1 Cor. 1:5; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11, 12). God does not look for eloquent words or artificial compositions, and we need not concern ourselves with them in private prayer (Isa. 38:14). If you confine yourself to forms, you will become formal and limit the Spirit in this way.

2. Another means appointed by God is the singing of psalms, which refers to songs on sacred subjects composed to a melody. It includes hymns, songs of praise, and spiritual songs with a sublime spiritual character, such as Psalm 45 and the Song of Solomon. God has commanded it in the New Testament (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19), although in these days many question whether it is an ordinance or not. There were many commands for it under the Old Testament as well (Ps. 149:1-3; 96:1; 100).

Singing existed even before the time of David, as Moses and the children of Israel sang (Exod. 15). David, inspired by the Spirit, composed psalms to be sung publicly (2 Sam. 23:1, 2) and privately too (Ps. 40:3; 2 Chron. 29:30; Ps. 105:2). Other songs were also made for various occasions and used, whether they were part of the Scripture or not. Solomon himself composed one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). This teaches us that

it is lawful for us to do the same if they are in accordance with the Word (Isa. 38:9-14).

The content of Scripture can be sung (Ps. 119:54). Christ and His disciples sang a hymn (Matt. 26:30), which was likely one of David's psalms. These psalms were written for our instruction, just like other parts of Scripture (Rom. 15:4), and should be used in singing. They speak of things in the New Testament, either figuratively or explicitly, and we can understand them better now than the Jews could under the Old Testament (2 Cor. 3:16; Gal. 2:17).

Both Christians and Jews practiced this duty in the past (Acts 16:25). Pliny, a pagan, even noted their antelucani hymni (the hymns they sang before daylight). These songs or hymns can be used at all times, especially for holy mirth or rejoicing (James 5:13). However, this text should not be understood exclusively in the context of singing, just as in prayer (Ps. 38:18; 2 Chron. 35:25).

The proper manner of this duty is of utmost importance. First, do not rely solely on the melodiousness of the voice, as God takes pleasure only in the melody of the heart (Col. 3:16). Also, do not make the recreation of your senses the ultimate goal, as that is merely a carnal act. *Non musica chordula, sed cor; non clamans, sed amans, psallit in aure Dei*: "Not a musical string, but the heart; not crying, but loving, sounds in the ear of the Lord." This spiritual music was symbolised by musical instruments in ancient times. Second, use singing for the same purpose as meditation and prayer, according to the nature of what is sung. It should serve to quicken faith (2 Chron. 20:21, 22; Acts 16:25, 26) and to bring joy and delight in the Lord, glorying in Him (Ps. 104:33, 34; 105:3; 149:1, 2; 33:1-3). You are not truly right until you can wholeheartedly rejoice in the Lord, expressing joy

and mirth in a holy manner (James 5:13; Eph. 5:19). It also helps to gain more knowledge and instruction in heavenly mysteries and in your duty, teaching and admonishing one another (Col. 3:16). Many psalms are called Maschils (as indicated by their titles), which means they are psalms of instruction.

Thus, we are to sing psalms that speak in the first person, even if we cannot personally apply them to ourselves as words spoken by us concerning ourselves. In doing so, we are not lying. David speaks of Christ as if speaking of himself, serving as an example of affliction and virtue to instruct others. When we sing such psalms, we do not claim them as our own words, but as words of instruction. Therefore, there is no falsehood involved, just as the Levites, the sons of Korah, Jeduthun, and other musicians were bound to sing them (Ps. 5, 39, 42). While it is good to personify all the good we can, we have enough freedom in using psalms that, even if we cannot personally apply them as if speaking and thinking the same, we still achieve the purpose if we sing them for our instruction. This applies to psalms such as Psalms 6, 26, 46, 101, and 131.

Psalms have a particular suitability for teaching and instructing because the pleasantness of the metre, whether spoken or sung, aids in memory retention (see Deut. 31:19, 21). The arrangement of words in the psalms exhibits a variety of clever artistry for this reason. There are also alphabetical psalms, such as Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145. The melodic quality of the sound brings instruction with delight, akin to a medical dose sweetened, and sorrow is naturally alleviated, preparing the mind for spiritual joy and calming turbulent emotions (2 Kings 3:15; 1 Sam. 16:14-16). Just as Orpheus, Amphion, and others were renowned for civilising rough and uncultured people through music.

1. Fasting is also an ordinance of God to be observed for the same purpose and goal. It is recommended to us in the New Testament (Matt. 9:15; 17:21; 1 Cor. 7:5), and we have examples of its practice (Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23). Under the Old Testament, there were frequent commands and examples of fasting, especially during times of extraordinary affliction (1 Sam. 7:6; Neh. 9:1; Dan. 9:3; 10:2, 3; 2 Sam. 12:16; Ps. 35:13; 2 Sam. 3:31, 35; Joel 2:12, 13). Additionally, there was the annual observance of the great day of atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31), during which fasting was required upon penalty of being cut off. There is a prophecy of the same practice in the times of the New Testament (Zech. 12:12). Fasting was predominantly employed on exceptional occasions, and it aids in cultivating holiness through faith, as it is a fitting support for extraordinary prayer and humility (Joel 1:14; 2:12). However, the crucial aspect is to observe fasting correctly, as detailed below.

a. Do not trust in fasting as a means of meriting or satisfying, as the Papists and Pharisees do, placing it in the position of Christ. Do not see it as a means to confer grace by itself or to mortify lusts, as many do who may find it easier to harm their bodies than to overcome their desires. Nor should you consider it as a purifying ritual or something inherently pleasing to God. Do not imagine that prayer is unacceptable without it, as this goes against faith. Fasts, like feasts, are not substantial parts of worship because they pertain to the physical rather than the spiritual. Although they were instituted rites and had figurative and instructional purposes

in the Old Testament, that use has now ceased, including the practices associated with fasting on the day of atonement and other figurative rites such as wearing sackcloth, applying ashes, tearing garments, pouring out water, or lying on the earth. The kingdom of God does not consist of these things. Trusting in them hardens the soul.

- b. Use fasting as a means to aid in extraordinary prayer and humility, so that the mind may not be preoccupied with eating, drinking, or bodily pleasures. It is only beneficial as a support for the soul, removing hindrances. The best fast is when the mind is diverted from earthly delights, as in the case of John the Baptist, when heavenly contemplation and godly sorrow capture the soul.
- c. Employ fasting in a manner that is suitable for its purpose, without which it is worthless. If abstinence leads to a gnawing appetite that distracts your mind, it is better to eat sparingly, following the example of Daniel during his great fast. Some individuals lack enough spiritual-mindedness to fully devote themselves to fasting and prayer without significant distraction. For them, it is better to eat than to push beyond their limits in something that is not absolutely necessary, as it would only result in a slavish act, similar to the case of virginity. Christ did not want His weaker disciples to be burdened with this duty. Nevertheless, such individuals should strive to be aware of the weakness and carnality that hinder their use of this excellent aid.

2. I will briefly mention vows. Do not think that you can bring about good in yourselves through vows and promises, as if your own strength can accomplish what God's law cannot. We have children make promises to improve their behaviour, but we know how well they keep them. The devil will urge you to make vows, only to tempt you to break them and further trouble your conscience.

3. Another significant means is fellowship and communion with fellow believers.

Firstly, this means must be pursued diligently. Whoever God saves should be added to a visible church and participate in the fellowship of other saints. If the opportunity for joining a church is unavailable, their heart should still be inclined towards it. Sometimes the church may be in a state of spiritual wilderness and unable to engage in visible communion and ordinances, but those who believe in Christ should always be willing and desirous to add themselves and unite together. They should continue steadfastly in fellowship. Additionally, God instructs His people to separate themselves from the fellowship and company of the wicked as much as possible. And when we are compelled to associate with them, we ought to show charity towards their souls and bodies.

This communion with saints is to be practised through private conversations and in public assemblies. Undoubtedly, it should be employed for the pursuit of holiness, as can be demonstrated.

Firstly, in general, because God ordinarily communicates salvation to His people through or in a church. He either brings them into fellowship or presents the light of truth to the world through His churches. A church is the dwelling place of God, where He resides. He has established His name and

salvation there, just as He did in ancient Jerusalem. He has given His churches officers and ordinances through which He converts others. His springs are found there. He enables the various members of a church to convey His grace and abundance from one to another, similar to how the members of a physical body convey the fullness of the head to the rest. All the newborn are brought forth and nurtured by the church, and therefore, all who desire salvation should join a church. Those who love the church and stand united as members, brothers, and companions shall prosper. Those who are not members of the church, or at least the mystical body, are warned of the wrath that awaits them. They cannot have God as their Father if they do not have the church as their mother. This is why those who desire fellowship with God grasp the garments of His people.

Secondly, fellowship with fellow believers contributes to holiness in many ways.

1. It provides manifold helps to holiness, such as:

- The Word and sacraments, including all the ministerial office and labour in watching over our souls. None of these helps can be experienced without the fellowship of saints, each with one another. If believers were to stand alone without maintaining fellowship with each other for mutual assistance and the common good, none of these things could have continued. Furthermore, no believer could exist in the present day through ordinary means, and even the very name of believers would have been abolished.

1. Mutual prayer becomes more powerful when all pray together. The Bible affirms that where two or three gather in His name, He is

present among them. United prayer carries great strength and effectiveness.

2. Mutual admonition, instruction, and consolation are necessary to help one another when they are on the verge of stumbling and to promote the good work within each other. The proverbial wisdom states, "He that walks with wise men shall be wise." Woe to the one who is alone and falls without anyone to lift them up. In the fellowship of the church, there are many helpers and watchmen. Soldiers find security in the company of their comrades, and the church is likened to an army with banners. Just as iron sharpens iron, the fellowship of believers sharpens their affections. Additionally, the counsel of a friend brings joy to the heart, and the wounds and reproofs of the righteous are like precious balm.
3. External support is provided within the fellowship, which helps mitigate afflictions and should be shared mutually. The burden of affliction becomes heavier when no one cares for our souls. Therefore, it is crucial to have a community of believers who support and care for one another.
4. Excommunication is implemented in cases where offences are exceedingly grave or individuals remain obstinate in sin. This ordinance is intended for the purpose of "destroying the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved" (1 Cor. 5:5). It is better and more hopeful to be cast out by the church for the sake of personal transformation than to be completely outside the church at all times. It is preferable to be a lost sheep than a goat or swine. Excommunication only severs actual communion until repentance

becomes evident, and it does not completely abolish the title and relationship of a brother and church member. However, it declares one to be an unnatural brother and a harmful, corrupt member at present, unfit for participating in acts of communion. Nevertheless, admonition should still be offered, and any means that may help in the person's healing and restoration are to be employed. The church extends a helping hand to such an individual, even though it does not join hands in fellowship with them or share communion with them. Yet, if they lack the grace to repent, it would have been better for them to have never known the path of righteousness.

5. In church fellowship, we have the living examples of saints before our eyes, teaching and encouraging us. We can observe the conduct of saints within the fellowship and learn from them, following their example. They provide guidance and inspiration for our own spiritual journey.

We engage in various holy duties that are required and pertain to this fellowship and communion. All actions associated with this fellowship are considered holy, such as listening to sermons, partaking in sacraments, praying, and offering mutual admonitions. Let's consider some of these holy acts, which we perform towards others rather than merely receiving them:

1. Engaging in godly discourse, teaching, admonishing, and comforting others in Christ. We can engage in such conversations and interactions more effectively with those we have a close fellowship with in Christ. Others, who do not share our faith, may disregard or devalue these precious conversations. However, holy

discourse is highly valued and should be practised among the saints. It greatly contributes to the growth of holiness.

2. Assisting, supporting, and interacting with Christ in His members.

In church fellowship, we have the opportunity to do good to Christ in His members. As members of Christ ourselves, we not only act from Christ but also towards Christ in this context. On the other hand, when we do good to others outside the fellowship, we do it for the sake of Christ but not directly to Christ. We have the advantage, as members of Christ, to fulfill all the duties that are incumbent upon us towards fellow members. This would not be possible if we were separated from them, just as a physical body part cannot fulfill its function towards other parts when detached from them.

Secondly, it is important to use the means for the attainment of holiness only in Christ.

1. One rule is not to trust in church membership or churches themselves, as if being in a particular fellowship or relation automatically pleases God. Church membership is merely a means to have fellowship with Christ and engage in the duties that come with that fellowship. The Israelites stumbled by relying on their worldly privileges instead of seeing them as subservient to Christ. We should follow the example of Paul, who did not boast in his privileges but in Christ (Phil. 3:3-5, etc.). We should not take pride in human leaders such as Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, but in Christ. Otherwise, we are glorying in the flesh and in people. Trusting in church privileges leads to formalism and licentiousness, and it is the source of corruption in churches.

2. Only follow a church as far as it follows the way of Christ and maintain fellowship with it solely because it follows and has fellowship with Christ. If a church deviates from Christ, we should not follow it, regardless of its age or reputation. Just like the Israelite church was not to be followed when it persecuted Christ and His apostles, many who clung to that church fell away from Christ. We are to listen to the church, but not every entity that claims to be a church. We should only listen to it when it speaks as a true church in accordance with the voice of the Shepherd. While we should submit ourselves to ministers of Christ and stewards of His mysteries, our ultimate allegiance should be to Christ Himself, and our submission to the church should be in accordance with His will.

We should not let our fear be taught by the teachings of men. The doctrines of any individuals should be tested against Scripture, regardless of the authority they claim to have. Blindly following church leaders without limits has led the church into spiritual corruption and various abominations. We are baptized into the name of Christ, not into the name of the church.

1. Do not believe that you have to reach a certain level of grace before you can fully join a church of Christ and participate in all its ordinances. Once you have surrendered yourself to Christ and understood the duty of communion, commit yourself to a church of Christ, even if you feel weak and inadequate. The special communion found in church ordinances will strengthen you. How can you generate warmth if you are alone? The disciples immediately embraced fellowship once they were converted. Churches should be willing to receive the weak ones of Christ,

nourish His lambs, and carry them on their sides. How else will the weak ones of Christ grow stronger if not through the nourishment provided by other parts of the body? It is unreasonable to expect that Christians will grow to the same level of grace outside of church fellowship as those who are in the pastures of tender grass. We must be willing to receive those whom we may need to bear with, as bearing and long-suffering are important aspects of church fellowship. The weakest among us need the strengthening power of church communion, and we are obligated to receive them just as Christ has received us. We do not reject or separate the weaker parts of the body but honour and adorn them.

During the apostolic times, admission into churches was based on a profession of faith with a display of seriousness. However, weeds infiltrated the wheat, and numerous scandals arose that brought reproach upon the ways of Christ. Even with the strictest measures, it is impossible to keep out all hypocrites. Nonetheless, we must take the utmost care not to hinder those who possess even the smallest measure of true grace.

1. Maintain communion with a church for the sake of communion with Christ. Therefore, you must only partake in Christ's pure ways and seek Him by faith. Through the enjoyment of these spiritual advantages, you can receive and demonstrate the godliness and holiness mentioned earlier, striving for spiritual growth and an increase in grace. Choose fellowship with the most spiritually-minded churches. Judge churches and individuals according to the standard of the new creation and put them to the test. Otherwise, a church may corrupt you.

Ensure that your participation in church communion serves its purpose and contributes to your spiritual growth, rather than causing harm. Take advantage of the benefits not only within your own church but also through communion with other churches when providence brings you among them, as your membership in a particular church implies a responsibility to have communion with all churches of Christ in His ways, as you are called to it. It is an abuse to claim membership in a church in one location and therefore refuse fellowship with a church in another location, for if we are members of Christ, we are members of one another, regardless of whether we are individuals or churches.

Make an effort to join in fellowship with the godly people in your local area so that you can have more frequent and consistent communion. Just as Onesimus, though converted in Rome, became part of the church in Colossae because he lived there, the practice of the apostles was for the saints to unite in separate communities based on their places of residence, and this should not be violated. They can best watch over, admonish, comfort, and edify one another, which are the benefits of communion. Those who seek communion where they cannot enjoy these benefits are truly destroying communion.

I would like to add to this point that church fellowship without practicing the ways of Christ is merely a misuse of His name and a counterfeit form of church fellowship consisting of hypocrites. It is audacious for such individuals to invite others to join their communion and tyrannical to compel them. Every Christian is obligated to seek a better church fellowship through reformation, and those who do so are the most devoted members of Christ's church. They ask, "Is this the way to experience Christ?" as the purpose of a church fellowship is to enjoy Christ within it.

1. Above all, do not abandon the church in times of persecution when you need its support the most and face the greatest test of your loyalty. This is a sign of apostasy. We should stick together as if we were one flesh, even in the face of imprisonment and death, otherwise, we are denying Christ in His members.

Chapter Fourteen

That you may seek holiness and righteousness only by believing

To seek holiness and righteousness solely by believing in Christ and walking in Him by faith, as directed earlier, take encouragement from the numerous benefits of this path and its remarkable qualities.

This instruction can serve as a concluding statement, urging us to wholeheartedly and joyfully embrace the gospel principles mentioned earlier, supported by significant motives. Many refrain from pursuing godliness because they are unaware of the way, or the way they envision seems unfamiliar, unpleasant, disadvantageous, and filled with discouragement, akin to the Israelites' wearisome journey through the wilderness to Canaan, which led to their constant complaints (Numbers 21:4).

However, this is an exceptionally good and excellent way that those who truly understand it and genuinely desire godliness cannot dislike. I will demonstrate its excellence through several specific points. Before we proceed, it is important to recall the way I have taught, which is union and fellowship with Christ, attained through faith in Christ as revealed in the

gospel. It is not achieved through adherence to the law, in a natural state, or by attempting to obtain it before coming to Christ in order to secure Christ through these efforts, which is like swimming against the current. Rather, we must first apply Christ and His salvation to ourselves for our comfort, relying on confident faith. Then, we are to walk in that faith according to the new nature in Christ, rather than in a natural state, and utilize all the means of holiness appropriately for this purpose. Now, the following desirable qualities demonstrate that this is an excellent and advantageous way.

Firstly, it possesses the quality of humbling all human beings and exalting only God, in His grace and power through Christ. Thus, it aligns with God's intention in all His works and the ultimate goal He aims for (Romans 11:6; Isaiah 2:17; Ezekiel 36:21-23, 31, 32; Psalm 145:4). It is a suitable means for achieving the primary objective that we should strive for, which is to hallow, sanctify, and glorify God's name in all things. This objective is the first and foremost petition (Matthew 6:9) and the purpose behind all our actions (1 Corinthians 10:31). It was also the purpose of giving the law (Romans 3:19, 20). God created all things for Christ and desires Him to have preeminence in all things (Colossians 1:17, 18), so that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13). This quality serves as a strong argument to prove that it is God's way and bears the imprint of His image. We can say that it is like Him and in accordance with His heart, just as Christ proves His doctrine to be from God using this argument (John 7:18). Similarly, Paul proves that the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and salvation by grace through faith are from God because they eliminate all boasting by human beings (Romans 3:27, 28; 1

Corinthians 1:29, 30, 31; Ephesians 3:8, 9). This quality is evident in the mystery of sanctification through Christ in us by faith. It demonstrates that:

1. We are unable to accomplish anything through our natural will or the power of the flesh, and God will not enable us to do anything in that manner (Romans 7:18), regardless of how much our nature is stirred by the law or natural aids (Galatians 3:11, 21). Therefore, it leads to self-loathing and humility, causing us to view our nature as desperately wicked, beyond recovery, and not capable of being reformed but only discarded by putting on Christ. Even after we have put on Christ, our nature remains wicked and nothing else.
2. It demonstrates that all our good works and devotion to God are not accomplished by our own power and strength, but by the power of Christ living in us through faith. God enables us to act, not merely according to our natural abilities, as He enables carnal people and all other creatures, but above our own abilities through the union with Christ and His indwelling Spirit. All people live, move, and exist in Him, and by His universal support and sustaining of nature, they are able to act (Hebrews 1:3), so the glory of their actions as creatures belongs to God. However, God acts more directly in His people, who are united as one flesh and one Spirit with Christ, and they do not act by their own power but by the power of the Spirit of Christ in them. They are closely united to Him and are the living temples of His Spirit. Therefore, Christ is the immediate agent behind all their good works, and these works are properly attributed to Christ, who works in and through us. Yet, they are also the works of the saints by virtue of their fellowship with Christ, through whom

their faculties are enlightened and empowered. Thus, we should ascribe all our works to God in Christ and thank Him for them as free gifts. God enables us to act, not by ourselves like others, but by Himself. The wicked are supported in their actions only according to their own nature, resulting in wickedness. Therefore, it is said that all live, move, and exist in God (Acts 17:28). But God enables us to conquer sin, not by ourselves, but by His own power. The glory of enabling us belongs solely to Him, as the Pharisee had to acknowledge (Luke 18:11), but it is also the glory of Him working all things in us. Yet, we work in unity with Christ, just as He works in unity with the Father through the Father working in Him. We live as branches by drawing sustenance from the vine, we act as members by the guidance of the head, and we bear fruit through our union with Christ as our husband. We work in His strength as the living bread that we feed on. He is everything in the new man, and all the promises are fulfilled in Him.

Secondly, it possesses the quality of being compatible with other doctrines of the gospel, unlike contrary errors. Therefore, it serves to confirm us in many other aspects of the gospel and demonstrates its truth by its harmony with other truths. It fits seamlessly into the same golden chain of the mystery of godliness and provides evidence for the truth of other doctrines through their alignment with it. I have shown that when people misunderstand the true path of sanctification, it leads to misinterpreting Scripture in other matters of faith and deviating from the truth towards Popish, Socinian, and Arminian beliefs. This happens because individuals cannot genuinely accept something as true if they do not perceive it to be in

accordance with godliness. However, this way of holiness will prove that these gospel doctrines, which they reject, are indeed in accordance with godliness. It will also demonstrate that the tenets they embrace out of a misguided zeal for holiness are, in fact, contrary to true holiness, even though Satan may appear to their natural understanding as an angel of light in promoting such doctrines. Regardless of what people say, it is certain that legalists are actually the Antinomians. I will provide examples of some truths confirmed by this way of holiness.

1. The teaching of original sin, which includes not only the guilt of Adam's sin and a corrupt nature but also a complete inability to do spiritual good and a propensity to sin, which is rebellion against God, applies to all people by nature (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12). Many deny this doctrine because they believe that if people accept it, they will use it as an excuse for their sins, become inclined to despair of striving for good works, give up their efforts, and become licentious. They think it would be more conducive to godliness to hold and teach that there is no original sin or corruption inherited from Adam, or at least that it is abolished either in the world through universal redemption or in the church through baptism. They argue that free will is restored, enabling people to incline themselves to do good, so that they may be more encouraged to engage in good works and their neglect may be inexcusable. All of these arguments are indeed compelling against seeking and striving for holiness by the free will and power of human nature, which is the path of endeavouring that I directed you to avoid. If there were no new way to holiness since the Fall, original sin might lead us to

despair. However, there is a new birth, a new heart, a new creation, and therefore I have directed you to seek holiness by the Spirit of Christ, willingly doing good by a spiritual power as new creatures and partakers of the divine nature in Christ. It is also necessary to know the first Adam in order to know the second (Romans 5:12), to believe in the Fall and original sin, so that we may be compelled to turn to Christ in faith for holiness as a free gift, knowing that we cannot attain it by our own power and free will. The old man and the old creation are without strength and life, and that is why a new man and a new creation are needed (John 3:5, 6; Ephesians 2:8).

However, original deadness cannot hinder God from working faith and creating hunger and thirst for Christ through the Spirit and the gospel in those whom He has chosen to walk in holiness and love before Him (1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5; Acts 26:18). Through the Spirit, we are made alive in a new head and become branches of a different vine, living for God not by our natural abilities but by the power of the Spirit.

1. It confirms our belief in the doctrine of predestination, which many deny because they claim it discourages efforts by asserting that all events are predetermined. This argument may hold some force against endeavours by the power of our own free will, but it does not apply to endeavours for holiness through God's operation, where He grants us faith and all holiness through His Spirit working in us through Christ. We are to place our trust in Christ for the grace of the elect and in God's goodwill towards humanity (Matthew 3:17; Luke 2:14; Psalm 106:4, 5). Election by grace does away with seeking through works but not through grace (Romans 11:5, 6).

Here, we are taught to seek salvation only in the way of the elect, and we can infer that holiness is attained by God's will and not our own. This understanding may motivate us to desire holiness in accordance with God's will (Romans 9:16; Psalm 110:3). Considering that the doctrine of sanctification through Christ reveals that we are God's workmanship in all the good that is wrought in us, we can acknowledge that He has ordained His pleasure from eternity without infringing upon the natural liberty of our corrupt wills, which do not extend to good works. Man's natural free will can coexist with God's decree, as was the case in paradise: "Decretum radix contingentiae."

2. It confirms our belief in the true doctrine of justification and reconciliation with God through faith, relying solely on the merits of Christ's blood without any works of our own. It does not view faith as a work to earn favour through the righteousness of the act, but rather as a means to receive the gift, like the actual eating and drinking of Christ, rather than a condition that entitles us to Him as our sustenance.

Many despise this profound gospel doctrine, believing it undermines the strongest foundations of holiness and opens the door to licentiousness. They consider the conditional nature of works to attain God's favour and avoid His wrath, as well as their perceived necessity for salvation, to be the most crucial and effective incentives for holiness. They believe that this other doctrine unleashes licentiousness. Truly, this argument would hold some weight if people were to be led to holiness through moral persuasion, with their natural efforts spurred on by the demands of the law and driven by

slavish fears and mercenary hopes. In such a case, the force of these motives would indeed be nullified by the doctrine of justification by free grace.

However, I have already demonstrated that a guilty and spiritually dead individual cannot be motivated to serve God out of love through any of these motives. Our sanctification does not come through our own efforts to work holiness within ourselves, but rather through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, the very same faith by which we are justified. I have also shown that the demands of the law actually stir up sin, and freedom from it is necessary for true holiness, as the apostle teaches (Romans 6:11, 14; 7:4, 5). This path of sanctification affirms the doctrine of justification by faith, as the apostle affirms (Romans 8:1). If we are sanctified and restored to the image of God and to life by the Spirit through faith, it is evident that God has accepted us, pardoned our sins, and extended His favour to us through the same faith, apart from the law. Otherwise, we would not experience the fruits and effects of His favour leading to our eternal salvation (Romans 8:2). Indeed, His justice would not allow Him to bestow life without works if we were not made righteous in Christ through that same faith. We cannot expect to receive holiness freely from Christ on any rational grounds unless we also trust in the same Christ for free reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for our justification. Guilty and cursed creatures, who are unable to work due to their deadness under the curse, cannot be brought to a rational love for God unless they apprehend His prior and unconditional love for them, without any requirement of works (1 John 4:19).

The primary objection and reason behind numerous controversies and the writing of many books is the fear that people will rely on being saved

regardless of how they live. However, sanctification is an outcome of justification and stems from the same grace. We trust in both through the same faith, with the latter leading to the former. Such a faith, no matter how confident, does not promote licentiousness but rather holiness. We acknowledge that justification by grace eliminates holiness achieved through legal efforts, but not holiness received by grace. Therefore, there is no need to live as a Papist and die as an Antinomian.

It affirms our belief in the doctrine of genuine union with Christ, which is extensively presented in Scripture. Some consider this doctrine a futile notion and cannot accept it because they believe it does not foster holiness but rather presumption. However, I have demonstrated that it is absolutely necessary for experiencing spiritual life and holiness, which are found in Christ and inseparably connected to Him. We cannot possess them without a real union with Him. Just as the members and branches cannot live without being united to the vine and head, and the stones cannot be part of the living temple without being genuinely joined to the cornerstone, so it is with us.

It affirms our belief in the doctrine of the certain and final perseverance of the saints. Some argue that this doctrine makes people careless about good works. I respond by saying that it makes people care less about seeking them through their own natural strength and in a state of fearful servitude. Instead, it encourages them to trust in God's grace for good works when they are genuinely inclined to desire them through regeneration. It motivates them to engage in these works with grace. I have shown that fears of damnation will never lead individuals to perform acts of love; only a comforting doctrine can accomplish that.

Lastly, it possesses the excellent quality of being the unfailing, effectually powerful, solely sufficient, and reliable way to attain true holiness. Those who possess the truth within them discover this, as do those who have experienced true humility. Seeking holiness in any other manner is in vain. Therefore, take the risk, like the lepers did, or else you will perish. All other paths either stir up sin or deepen despair. Seeking holiness through the law and operating under the curse only breeds slavish and hypocritical obedience at best, restraining sin rather than mortifying it. The Jews pursued another path and could not attain it. Those who seek it through alternative means will find themselves lying down in sorrow. And that

1. Because in our natural state, we are under the law, we are spiritually dead and deserving of God's wrath (Ephesians 2:1, 3). The law does not provide help but instead curses us (Galatians 3:10) and does not bring life through its obligations (Galatians 3:21). We cannot produce holiness within ourselves (Romans 5:6). Therefore, a humble person finds it futile to seek holiness through the law or their own strength because the law is powerless due to our sinful nature. It is like attempting to build without a foundation or telling a cripple to walk without providing any strength.
2. Only in this way, through Christ, is God reconciled to us (2 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 1:7). It is through this way that He loves us and becomes the rightful object of our love (1 John 4:19). And only in this way do we receive a new and divine nature through the Spirit of Christ indwelling in us, effectively leading us towards holiness with life and love (Romans 8:5; Galatians 5:17; 2 Peter 1:3,

4). We are given new hearts in accordance with God's law, enabling us to wholeheartedly serve Him according to our new nature, and we cannot help but serve Him (1 John 3:9). This provides a firm foundation for godliness and love for God with all our heart, strength, and soul. Sin is not merely restrained but mortified. It is not just the external aspects that are cleansed, but also the internal aspects, as the image of God is renewed. Consequently, holy actions naturally follow. Though we may not be perfect in degree due to our old nature, we do not sin in accordance with it.

Fourthly, this way is highly delightful to those who are on it (Proverbs 3:17), and this can be seen in various respects.

1. It is an incredibly straightforward path, easily discovered by those who recognize their spiritual deadness under the law and experience renewal in the spirit of their minds, leading them to know and firmly believe in the truth of the gospel. Although such individuals may be troubled by numerous legalistic thoughts and struggles, when they earnestly consider the matter, the way becomes so evident that they deem it foolish and madness to go in any other direction. Thus, "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isaiah 35:8; Proverbs 8:9). An enlightened soul, once genuinely humbled, cannot conceive of an alternative way (Proverbs 4:18). Moreover, when we are in Christ, His Spirit serves as our guide along this path (1 John 2:27; John 16:13). Hence, we need not be consumed by distracting thoughts concerning knowledge of our way, as legalistic individuals are burdened by countless moral dilemmas that multiply to the point of despairing about finding the true path of faith due to various

doubts and manifold complexities. Here, we can be certain that God will teach us our duties sufficiently to prevent us from being led astray into destructive error (Psalm 25:8, 9, 14). It is deeply troubling for a traveller to be uncertain of their way and lack a guide, especially when their journey is a matter of great significance, even life and death. It is truly heart-wrenching. However, those who are on this way can be assured that although they may occasionally make mistakes, they will not err destructively but will rediscover their path (Galatians 5:7, 10).

2. It is easy for those who walk in this way by the guidance of the Spirit, although it may be challenging to enter it due to the resistance of the flesh or the temptations of the devil, which frighten or deceive us. Here, you have holiness as a free gift received through faith, an act of the mind and soul. Whoever desires may come and freely partake, without any requirements other than a willing mind (John 7:38; Isaiah 55:1; Revelation 22:17). However, the burden of the law is unbearable when duty is imposed upon us according to its terms (Matthew 23:4; Acts 15:10). We are not left in this way to conquer our desires through our own efforts, which would be a futile undertaking, but what is required of us is given, and the law is transformed into promises (Hebrews 8:6-13; Ezekiel 36:25, 26; Jeremiah 31:33; 32:40). We have everything in Christ now (Colossians 3:11; 2:9, 10, 15, 17). This is a universal remedy, surpassing a thousand others. How delightful would this free gift of holiness be to us if we truly understood our own needs, limitations, and sinfulness? How willing are some to toil endlessly and afflict

their bodies in a melancholic legalistic manner to attain holiness, rather than perish forever? Therefore, how eager should we be when the call is simply, 'Take and have; believe and be sanctified and saved?' (2 Kings 5:13). Christ's burden is light because His Spirit carries it (Matthew 11:30). There is no weariness, only renewal of strength (Isaiah 40:31).

3. It is a path of peace (Proverbs 3:17), free from the fears and terrors of conscience that inevitably plague those who seek salvation through works, for "the law brings wrath" (Romans 4:15). It is not the path of Mount Sinai but of Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:18, 22). The doubts about salvation that people encounter arise from placing conditions of works between themselves and Christ, as has been evident in this discussion. However, our journey on this path is by faith, which rejects such fears and doubts (John 14:1; Mark 5:36; Hebrews 10:19, 22). It is free from fears of Satan or any evil (Romans 8:31, 32), and free from the slavish fear of perishing due to our sins (1 John 2:1, 2; Philippians 4:6, 7). Faith lays hold of infinite grace, mercy, and power to secure us: "The Lord is our protector and shade on the right hand" (Psalm 121:5). Free and powerful grace answers all objections.
4. It is a path adorned with love, like Solomon's chariot (Song of Solomon 3:10). We are to continually keep God's loving-kindness and all the gifts of His love before our eyes (Psalm 26:3), including Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession. These engender peace, joy, hope, and love (Romans 15:13; Isaiah 35:10). You must believe for your justification, adoption, the gift of the Spirit, and the future

inheritance, as well as your death and resurrection with Christ. In believing for these things, your entire journey is adorned with flowers and bears fruits on each side, akin to walking through the garden of Eden rather than the wilderness of Sinai (Acts 9:31). It is the role of the Spirit, our guide, to be our comforter and not a spirit of bondage (Romans 8:15). Peace and joy are significant aspects of this path (Philippians 4:4-6). God does not drive us forward with whips and terrors or through the rod of the schoolmaster, the law, but rather leads and persuades us to walk in His ways through allurements (Song of Solomon 1:3; Hosea 11:3, 4). Consider such alluring promises (2 Corinthians 5:15; 7:1; Romans 12:1).

5. Our very movement, actions, and walk in this path bring us pleasure and delight. Every good work is performed with joy; even the laborious aspects of the journey are pleasant. Carnal individuals wish that duties were not necessary as they find them burdensome, but for us, they are enjoyable. This is because we do not attain holiness through our own carnal struggles against our desires, suppressing them out of fear and with regret and sorrow. We do not rely on our conscience and the law to hinder their actions. Instead, we naturally act according to our new nature and fulfill our spiritual desires by walking in God's ways through Christ. In Christ, our sinful lusts and pleasures are not only restrained but removed, while pleasures in holiness are freely bestowed upon us and implanted within us (Romans 8:5; Galatians 5:17, 24; John 4:34; 40:8; 119:14, 16, 20). We have a new taste and preference, love and inclination,

through the Spirit of Christ. We view the law not as a burden but as our privilege in Christ.

Fifthly, it is a highly exalted path, surpassing all others. The prophet Habakkuk is elevated to this path when, after all visible sources of help and support fail, he resolves to "rejoice in the Lord" and "take joy in the God of his salvation." By making God his strength through faith, he declares that "his feet shall be like the feet of a deer" and "he shall walk upon the high places" (Habakkuk 3:18, 19). These are the "heavenly places in Christ Jesus" where God has positioned us, having been revived and raised up together with Him (Ephesians 2:5, 6).

1. We live in a lofty manner here, for "we do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit," with Christ in us and His fullness (Romans 8:1, 2; Galatians 2:20; 5:25). We walk in fellowship with God who dwells within us and walks with us (2 Corinthians 6:16, 18). Therefore, our works hold greater value and excellence than the works of others because they are "accomplished in God" and are the fruits of God's Spirit (John 3:21; Galatians 5:23; Philippians 1:11). We can discern their acceptability and goodness through our gospel principles, which others do not possess (Romans 7:6).
2. We are enabled to perform the most challenging duties (Philippians 4:1, 3), and nothing is too difficult for us. Consider the great works accomplished through faith (Hebrews 11; Mark 9:23) – works that carnal individuals perceive as folly and madness to undertake due to their magnitude. They are honourable achievements in both doing and suffering for the sake of Christ.

3. We walk in an honourable position with God, on honourable terms.

We are not guilty creatures seeking pardon through works, nor are we servants striving to earn our sustenance. Instead, we are sons and heirs, journeying towards the full possession of the happiness to which we are entitled. Thus, we have great confidence in the presence of God (Galatians 4:6, 7). We can draw closer to God than others and walk before Him without slavish fear, not as strangers but as members of His own family (Ephesians 2:19, 20). This empowers us to accomplish greater things, as we walk as free individuals (Romans 6:17, 18; John 8:35, 36). It is a regal path; to us, the law is a royal law, a law of liberty and privilege, not a burdensome yoke of compulsion.

4. It is exclusively the path of those esteemed and cherished by the Lord - His chosen and redeemed ones. It is their special privilege to walk in it. "No unclean beast goes there" (Isaiah 35:8, 9). No carnal person can traverse this path; only those who have been taught by God can do so (John 6:44-46). It would not have entered their hearts without divine revelation.

5. The preparation of this path came at a great cost to Christ. It is a costly path (Hebrews 10:19, 20; 1 Peter 3:18).

6. It is a venerable path, where you can follow in the footsteps of the entire flock.

7. It is the path to perfection. It leads to a holiness that will eventually become absolutely perfect. The only difference lies in the degree and manner of manifestation compared to the holiness of heaven. In

heaven, the saints live by the same Spirit, and God is all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28; John 4:14). They bear the image of the same spiritual person (1 Corinthians 15:49). Here on earth, we possess only "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Romans 8:23) and "live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). We are "not yet fully matured in Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Sanctification in Christ is the beginning of glorification, just as glorification is the completion of sanctification.

Chapter Fifteen

The Doctrine of Justification Opened and Applied

W^{alter Marshall} "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:23-26).

The apostle, after refuting and overthrowing any justification by works for both Jews and Gentiles in the preceding discourse, is now proving his assertion (verse 21, 22): "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference," demonstrating that in the times of the gospel, there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. In the justification of both, the righteousness of God apart from the law is

revealed. He supports this by explaining what the gospel teaches about the means of justification since the gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness (Romans 1:16, 17): "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith."

Therefore, these words declare the gospel way of justification through the righteousness of God. They do so clearly and comprehensively, presenting the great and glorious benefit that is the first blessing we receive through union with Christ and the foundation of all other blessings. This text is considered to be the *evangelium evangelii*, a crucial part of the written gospel, succinctly yet fully expressing this excellent point more than any other passage.

Please note the subject discussed in these words, namely, the justification of individuals or their being justified. It is important to clarify and eliminate any ambiguities or misunderstandings. Justification means 'making just,' similar to how sanctification means 'making holy' and glorification means 'making glorious.' However, it does not refer to making a person just by infusing grace and holiness into them, as the Papists teach, as they confuse justification and sanctification. Rather, justification refers to being declared just in trial and judgement through a decisive verdict that absolves guilt, removes blame and accusation, approves, judges, acknowledges, and pronounces a person as righteous. The meaning of the term changes depending on context. It is a legal word, a term used in law with reference to trial and judgement. As the Apostle Paul stated, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not

vindicate me. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Corinthians 4:3-4). Justification is directly opposed to condemnation in judgement, as seen in the passage, "If two men are in a dispute and they go to court to be judged, and the judges declare one to be righteous and the other wicked" (Deuteronomy 25:1). Additionally, Jesus said, "By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). Justification is also opposed to accusation and condemnation, as stated, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?" (Romans 8:33-34). Furthermore, Job affirms, "If I justify myself, my mouth will condemn me" (Job 9:20), and "I will state my case and be vindicated...Who then can bring a charge against me?" (Job 13:15-19). In these instances, justification is clearly contrasted with accusation or fault, as well as the passing of a sentence of condemnation. It is said, "Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty and bringing down on their heads what they have done, and vindicating the innocent by treating them in accordance with their innocence" (1 Kings 8:32). Therefore, it is sinful to justify the wicked (Isaiah 5:23; Proverbs 17:15; Job 27:5). Actions must already exist and be brought to trial in order to be justified (Job 33:32; Isaiah 43:9, 26).

The justice of righteousness does not depend on the inherent nature of an action, but on its conformity to a rule of judgement. Therefore, actions are considered just and righteous in relation to God's standard of judging. This righteousness is evident when actions are evaluated according to the rule and an estimate is made. This estimate can result in approval or disapproval, justification or condemnation, determining whether the action is deemed sinful or not, or a violation of the law. This understanding can also be applied to the righteousness of individuals with regard to their

habits or actions. When righteous individuals undergo trial and judgement, they are said to be specially justified at that time, as if they were made righteous when their righteousness is declared. This is similar to how Christ was proclaimed the Son of God at the resurrection (Acts 13:33) because He was declared to be the Son of God at that moment (Rom. 1:4). Likewise, those of us who are currently adopted are said to "wait for our adoption," referring to its manifestation (Rom. 8:23). Even God is said to be justified when we judge His actions as we should and consider them righteous (Job 32:2; Ps. 51:4; Luke 7:29), although nothing can be added to God's infinite righteousness. Wisdom is also said to be "justified by her children" (Matt. 11:19). Therefore, justification is not a real change within a sinner themselves (although a real change accompanies it), but rather a relational change in reference to God's judgement. The word is used in this sense in the text and throughout Scripture in matters of judicature. Some even argue against the Papists that it is never used in Scripture in any other sense, except as a figurative expression borrowed from its proper meaning. In the text, it is undoubtedly meant to be deemed and accounted as just in the sight of God, as this is the only form of justification discussed (Rom. 3:19, 20). I have taken the time to explain the meaning of the word at length because its misunderstanding, due to its composition, has led to a papal error that obscures and even undermines the intended benefit. Thus, it is necessary for us to contend for the true sense of the word.

In this text, we find the following points:

1. The individuals who are justified: (i) Sinners; (ii) All types of sinners who will believe, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.
2. The justifier, or the one who brings about justification: God.

3. The cause that prompts justification: grace.
4. The means by which justification is accomplished: the redemption of Christ.
5. The reason or basis for justification: the remission of sins.
6. The instrument through which justification is obtained: faith.
7. The time of declaration: the present time.
8. The purpose or goal of justification: to demonstrate God's justice.

From these points, we can draw several useful observations that help explain the nature of justification. These observations will be further explained and supported by the text. Finally, I will combine all of these points together.

I. Those who are justified are sinners. They are individuals who have fallen short of God's approval (John 5:44), God's image of holiness (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24), and eternal happiness (1 Thess. 2:12; Rom. 5:2; 2 Cor. 4:17).

1. The law condemns all sinners and strikes them dead as if by a thunderbolt (Rom. 3:20). It pronounces shame, confusion, and misery upon them instead of glory and happiness, according to its strict terms (Rom. 2:6-12), which no one can fulfill, whether they are Jews or Gentiles (Rom. 8:7). There is no hope unless free grace restores them.
2. Christ came solely to save sinners and died for this purpose: "When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). And "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the

worst" (1 Tim. 1:15). "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13). "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

And God must be believed in for salvation as a God who "justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). One must have faith, as one who does not rely on their works, in Him who justifies the ungodly.

II. Sinners of all kinds, without distinction, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, are the subjects of this justification. This is the main point that the apostle is trying to make, to demonstrate that whereas Jews and Gentiles were universally condemned by the light and law of nature or the written law, "the righteousness of God is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Rom. 3:21-22) without distinction. This was a crucial point to argue against the Jews of that time, who claimed exclusive rights to justification through their legalistic practices and circumcision. Therefore, the apostle Paul strongly emphasized this point (Rom. 10:11-12). It was a newly revealed truth to the apostles that the Gentiles could be accepted without becoming Jews, and it was highly valued as a glorious revelation (Acts 10:28, 45; Eph. 3:4-5, 8; Col. 1:25-27). And it is confirmed throughout the Scriptures.

1. Because, despite the Jews' privileged status under the law, they were just as much in need of free justification as the Gentiles due to their violation of the law. They had no superiority over the Gentiles based on their works; in fact, they were considered greater sinners (Rom. 2:23, 24). When the need and worth are equal, God can justly justify one as well as the other (Rom. 3:9).

2. God is the God of both the Gentiles and the Jews (Rom. 3:29), as He promised (Rom. 4:9, 12, 13; Gal. 3:8; Isa. 19:25; Zech. 14:9).
3. Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, so that he could be the father of those who believe, even though they are uncircumcised, and they can inherit the same blessing (Rom. 4:10-12).
4. This is further evident by the fact that justification is solely by faith and does not depend on the law. It is based solely on the righteousness of another, making Jews and Gentiles equally capable of it.

III. The justifier, or efficient cause of justification, is God. It is an action of God (Rom. 8:33). He alone can authoritatively and irrevocably justify.

1. This is because He is the lawgiver and has the power to save and destroy (James 4:12). This matter pertains to God's law and can only be decided in His court. He is the judge of the world (Gen. 18:25). It is of little value to be justified by man or by ourselves alone (1 Cor. 4:3, 4).
2. The debt of suffering for sin and fulfilling righteousness is owed to Him, and therefore He alone can provide a discharge or release for the debtor (Ps. 51:4; Mark 2:7).

IV. "God justifies souls freely by His grace, freely by His grace." One of these statements would have been sufficient, but repeating it emphasizes the significance of this truth and captures our attention. It reveals the impulsive cause of justification and God's gracious manner of bestowing it. This highlights God's undeserved favour, in contrast to any works of our own

righteousness that could claim it as a debt owed to us. "Now to him that works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as debt" (Rom. 4:4). "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Rom. 11:6). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 1:9-10). Grace is the manifestation of mercy and love freely shown by God's own will, because He chooses to show mercy and loves us (Rom. 9:15). This is further confirmed by:

1. The fact that there is nothing in us that could move God to condemn us, for we have all sinned (Eph. 2:3; Ezek. 16:6).
2. God intends to eliminate boasting and to have His grace glorified and exalted in our salvation. He desires to receive all the praise and glory, while we experience the blessedness. "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7, 9; Rom. 3:27).

V. "God justifies sinners through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood." This is the means by which our justification is accomplished, namely, the redemption and propitiation through the blood of Christ, which embodies the righteousness of God stored up in Him.

By 'redemption' is properly meant a deliverance achieved through the payment of a price, and thus the words 'redeem' and 'redemption' are frequently used in this context (Exod. 13:13; Num. 3:48, 49, 51; Lev. 25:24, 51, 52; Jer. 32:7, 8; Neh. 5:8). From this precise meaning, it is metaphorically used to signify a deliverance without a price (Luke 21:28; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), or rather, by metonymy, it represents the highest effect, the state of glory. Therefore, the state of glory is called 'redemption' as it is the ultimate completion and culmination of Christ's redemption. Hence, it is referred to as the 'purchased possession'.

By 'propitiation' is meant that which appeases God's wrath for sin and earns His favour. This propitiation in Christ is typified in two ways: first, in the sacrificial offerings where blood was shed, and secondly, in the mercy seat which was referred to as the propitiation because it covered the ark containing the law, and the blood of the sacrifices for atonement was sprinkled before it by the high priest. This mercy seat symbolised God's favour towards a sinful people by dwelling among them (Heb. 9:5).

Now, this doctrine is confirmed for the following reasons:

1. Because Christ, in accordance with the will of God, offered Himself as a ransom for us to redeem us from sin, punishment, wrath, and curse. 'He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity' (Titus 2:14). He gave Himself up to death for us, was delivered for our offenses; His death was the price of our redemption, so that we may be justified in the sight of God. God gave Him up to death, sparing Him not, that He may become righteousness. 'He gave His own life as a ransom for many' (1 Cor. 1:30; Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6). 'He bought us with a price' (1 Cor. 6:20). 'He redeemed us not with

silver and gold, but with His precious blood, like that of a lamb without blemish' (1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2 Peter 2:1; Rev. 5:9). 'He suffered the penalty due to us for sin' (1 Peter 2:24). 'He bore our sins in His own body on the tree' (Gal. 3:13). 'He was made a curse for us,' and in this way, He redeemed us from the curse of the law, and to become a curse, He was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:5, 6). He subjected Himself to the law, obeying both actively and passively (Gal. 4:4), and obeyed His Father even unto death, doing and suffering according to His commandment (John 14:31; Heb. 10:7), and His obedience was for our justification. Compare Romans 5:19 with Philippians 3:8, 9. Thus, Christ satisfied both our need for righteousness and our need for punishment, addressing our flaws, the contamination of sin, and our lack of righteousness, as well as our guilt and liability to punishment, so that we may be free from wrath and accounted as righteous in the sight of God. His suffering was the culminating act of redemption, and thus all is attributed to it (Heb. 2:9, 10) - even His blood, although other actions and sufferings are also involved (2 Cor. 8:9). We are made righteous by Him as we were made guilty by Adam (Rom. 5:12).

2. God accepted this price as satisfaction for His justice, which He demonstrated by raising Christ from the dead and accepting Him as payment for all our sins: 'He was justified in the Spirit' (1 Tim. 3:16) on our behalf, 'raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25). 'It is God who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Is it Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God' (Rom. 8:33, 34). And 'by one offering He has perfected forever

those who are sanctified' (Heb. 10:14). And 'this sacrifice was a sweet-smelling aroma to God' (Eph. 5:2). If Christ had succumbed under the weight of our sins and had not been raised, the payment would not have been completed, and the debt would not have been discharged: 'of righteousness, because I go to my Father' (John 16:10).

3. This redemption is in Christ, both in terms of its benefits and availability. It can only be obtained if we are in Christ and have Christ. This is precisely what the text states and demonstrates, that He is the propitiation and, as such, He is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). We have redemption and righteousness in Him (Eph. 1:7; 2 Cor. 5:21), and through Him, we are freed from condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Christ died so that His offspring might be justified (Isa. 53:10, 11) - those who are in Him through spiritual regeneration (1 Cor. 4:15).

VI. 'The formal cause of justification, or that in which it consists, is the remission of sin, which means not only the removal of guilt and punishment but also the fault itself. It is a pardon grounded in justice, which also clears the fault. Through Him, we are justified from all the things that the law charges us with' (Acts 13:39). For individuals subject to the law, there is no middle ground between not imputing sin and imputing righteousness, and thus these terms are used interchangeably: 'Through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified' (Acts 13:38, 39; Rom. 4:6-8; 2 Cor. 5:19, 21; Rom. 5:17). This is accomplished through the shedding of Christ's blood (Eph. 1:7; Matt. 26:28).

VII. God justifies a sinner through faith in Christ's blood. Faith is the instrumental cause of receiving this benefit, faith in the blood of Christ.

1. This faith is a belief in Christ, so that we may be justified through Him: 'Knowing that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law' (Gal. 2:16). We put our faith in Christ for justification, recognizing our inability to attain justification through our own works.
2. This faith does not justify us as an act of righteousness, earning and procuring our justification through the mere act of believing. That would be a justification by works, akin to the legalistic approach under the law, which stands in stark contrast to grace and the free gift of justification. It excludes any consideration of our works as our righteousness, whether you call it 'legal' or 'evangelical', even if you regard it as insignificant (Rom. 11:6). In this case, faith is considered as non-working (Rom. 4:5). It is not faith that replaces the righteousness of the law, but rather the righteousness of Christ, which atones for what we should have done or suffered, as has been explained.
3. God justifies us through faith, which serves as the instrument by which we receive Christ and His righteousness, and through which we are properly justified. We are said to be justified by faith metonymically, due to the righteousness received through it. To be 'justified by faith' is the same as being 'justified by Christ' (Gal. 3:8; Rom. 5:19). Through faith, we receive forgiveness of sins (Acts

26:18; 10:43). Its effect is the reception of justification, not the achievement of it, similar to how a person can be said to be sustained by their hands or nourished by their mouth when those are merely receiving the food and drink that nourishes them. The cup represents the liquid in the cup (1 Cor. 11:26, 27). See Romans 1:17 and 3:22. Christ is in us through faith (Eph. 3:17), received, eaten, and drunk (John 1:12; 6:51, 53, 54).

4. This faith is to be understood as excluding all our works for justification. We defend the doctrine of justification by faith alone against the Papists, and nothing expresses it more fully in the language of Scripture (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:8, 9; Rom. 4:16).

5. We must understand faith in its full sense of receiving forgiveness not only for the punishment but also for the fault itself. We believe that God does not account any fault to us, not even the smallest sin. When faith is said to be counted as righteousness, it is because of the object it receives (Rom. 4:5-8; 2 Cor. 5:19, 21). We believe that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us just as our sins are imputed to Him. Otherwise, we would not receive forgiveness of sins through belief, which contradicts the notion of charging us with sin and condemnation. To remove the charge of sin, we also receive the gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:17). We experience this through the reception of Christ's redemption and His shed blood (Eph. 1:7; Matt. 26:28).

VIII. In setting forth Christ as a propitiation through faith in His blood, God aimed to declare His righteousness under the gospel. This

righteousness provides the forgiveness of not only present sins but also past sins, including those committed during the Old Testament period when God showed forbearance in pardoning long before His justice was fully satisfied by Christ's atonement (Heb. 13:8; Rev. 13:8; Matt. 18:26). The basis for these pardons is now revealed through Christ's coming, ensuring that these pardons do not undermine the justice of God, which has now been satisfied (Exod. 34:7; Ps. 85:10).

1. By this righteousness, we mean the righteousness of God mentioned in the previous statement (Rom. 3:21, 22), which the text confirms. It is not God's essential righteousness, which is an inherent quality of God, but rather the righteousness that is bestowed upon all who believe—Christ's righteousness, which fulfills the purpose of the law (Rom. 10:3, 4). It is therefore referred to as 'God's righteousness' because Christ achieved it for us, it is given to us, and we receive it through faith. It is the righteousness by which Christ satisfied the requirements of the law on our behalf, the price by which He redeemed us. It is called 'God's righteousness' because it is the work of God and is accepted and approved by Him, just as Christ is called the 'Lamb of God' because God provided Him and accepts Him as an offering (John 1:29). In a similar manner, Christ's kingdom is called the 'kingdom of God' because it is established, upheld, and ruled by God Himself (Eph. 5:5). Christ, who obediently died to accomplish this righteousness, is both God and man (Phil. 2:6, 8). This is the righteousness of God referred to here and in other passages—the righteousness that is from God through faith (Phil. 3:9).

2. In the gospel era, God aimed to manifest His righteousness by forgiving sins committed in the time of His forbearance under the Old Testament (Rom. 3:25). He also justifies those who believe in Christ at present, for it was through the righteousness of the same Christ that sins were pardoned in the Old Testament as well (Heb. 13:8). Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), although the righteousness was not actually fulfilled and revealed during that time. However, it was symbolically represented through sacrifices, ransoms, and redemptions (Heb. 10:1-3, 9, 10). Thus, it was a period of God's forbearance, as He pardoned sins without immediate payment and satisfaction. He exercised patience and did not demand the debt until Christ paid it all (Matt. 18:26). But God promised that He would reveal His righteousness in due time (Isa. 56:1; 51:5, 6; Ps. 98:2; Dan. 9:24). And He has indeed fulfilled this promise through the appearance of Christ (2 Tim. 1:10).

IX. The purpose of this manifestation is for God to appear just in forgiving both past and present sins and as the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. In this, the essential attribute of God, His justice, is exalted and appears glorious in justifying sinners through the aforementioned righteousness of God.

1. As God justifies freely by grace, He desires to demonstrate His justice in justifying sinners. It would be a flaw in God's justice to forgive without satisfaction and the fulfillment of righteousness. Therefore, although He is gracious and merciful, He will not acquit the guilty without proper atonement (Exod. 34:7; Gen. 18:25; Exod.

23:7). The saints of God understood that God had a righteousness and redemption through which He forgave sin, even though it was not fully revealed at that time (Ps. 51:14; 130:7, 8; 143:1, 2). God desires justice and mercy to meet in our salvation (Ps. 85:10).

2. God intends to show that He alone is just and, therefore, saves us not by our own righteousness but by His righteousness. Indeed, His righteousness is magnified by our unrighteousness, although God is not unrighteous in executing vengeance (Rom. 3:4, 5; Dan. 9:7).

3. God wants it to be evident that He is the sole provider and accomplisher of our righteousness. Thus, He justifies us not only by His judgement but also by procuring righteousness on our behalf. He justifies us through His own righteousness, not by our own (Isa. 54:17; 45:22, 24, 25), so that we may boast in the Lord alone (1 Cor. 1:30, 31).

Use I. This serves as an instruction, providing encouragement and consolation, that the great happiness of those who are in Christ lies in the forgiveness of their sins and being accounted just in the sight of the judge of the world. This is made possible through the redemption achieved by the blood of Christ. This benefit encompasses all the blessings and consequences of a blessed life (Rom. 4:6). The person to whom God imputes righteousness without works experiences blessedness, just as Abraham did, including all spiritual blessings in Christ. Those who have faith are blessed along with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:9). This righteousness, being the foundational blessing, is revealed from faith to faith. Those who are justified by faith and through this righteousness live by faith,

continuously receiving it and finding nourishment and comfort in it (Rom. 1:17).

1. They are freed from the accusation of sin and fault before God (Rom. 8:33, 34). Who can bring any charge against them or present an indictment, accusation, or charge before God's tribunal? It is God who justifies them, and Christ has died and risen again. They are redeemed from among humanity, being the firstfruits to God and the Lamb. There is no deceit in their mouths, and they are without fault before the throne of God (Rev. 14:4, 5. See also Col. 1:22).
2. They are delivered from all condemnation in terms of judgment and execution, from the curse and wrath of God. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:10). "You have taken away all your wrath; you have turned from your fierce anger" (Ps. 85:3, see vv. 5, 6). The wrath of God is an unbearable burden and the basis of all miseries. However, this foundation is demolished, and a foundation of blessedness is laid. Through this, we have peace with God and are fully reconciled to Him (Rom. 5:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19). "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col. 1:21, 22). Now, where there is no blame before God, there can be no wrath from God.
3. They have no need to seek salvation through the works of the law, and thus they are freed from an unbearable yoke and endless rituals

imposed by the Pharisees and the Papists. They are delivered from constant frights, doubts, fears, and terrors caused by the law (Acts 15:10; Rom. 8:15); from a law that brings wrath (Rom. 4:15); from a law that provokes sin (Rom. 6:5); from a law that brings death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:6, 7, 9); from Mount Sinai, which leads to bondage (Gal. 4:24).

4. Therefore, they are delivered from a condemning conscience that would otherwise gnaw at them like a worm. "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:14). A guilty conscience is a defiled conscience, and it renders all acts of service and duty as lifeless works unsuitable for the worship of the living God. It is through the blood of Christ, applied by faith, that the defilement of guilt is removed from the conscience. Thus, the blood of Christ has the sole efficacy to cleanse the conscience from sin (Heb. 10:1-4, etc.). As a result, they obtain a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21), free from offense towards God (Acts 24:16).
5. It is an everlasting righteousness that secures their standing in Christ (Dan. 9:24). It is an eternal redemption that has been obtained (Heb. 9:12). While under the law, those who were justified on a given day might fall back into condemnation and require another sacrifice for sin the next day. They did not experience a true cleansing of conscience from sin through those sacrifices, and therefore, they

could not have a lasting deliverance from guilt. However, in Christ, it is entirely different. Here we have an effective, complete, and perpetual redemption that reaches the sinner's conscience, purging away all sins, present and future (1 John 1:7).

6. It is a righteousness of infinite value because it belongs to the one who is God, and His name is JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer. 23:6; Heb. 9:14). Therefore, it has greater power to save than Adam's sin had to destroy or condemn (Rom. 5). In Christ, the power of God is revealed (1 Cor. 1:24). Through faith, we are empowered and conquer. Moreover, there is an abundance of mercy and grace that comes to us through JEHOVAH our Righteousness, abundant redemption (Ps. 130:7). It must be plentiful because it is infinite. While no creature could satisfy for sin, Jehovah could do so abundantly. Therefore, in Christ, God's mercy triumphs over our sins (Ps. 103:11, 12).
7. In this righteousness, both God's grace and justice are at work on our behalf. Justice may seem terrifying and opposed to mercy, and it can be dreadful to natural people. However, for believers, justice is pacified and appeased through this righteousness. Christ satisfied justice for our sins. Justice becomes our ally, joining with grace. Instead of being against us, it is entirely for us, speaking contrary to what it speaks to sinners outside of Christ (Josh. 24:19, 20). We can even appeal to justice for forgiveness through mercy in Christ (Rom. 3:26).
8. Through this righteousness, we can be certain of holiness and glory, liberation from the power and dominion of sin, as well as from the

accusation and guilt in our consciences. This was the purpose of Christ's death (Titus 2:14; Rom. 6:6, 14; 8:3, 4, 30). "Those he justified, he also glorified." The law strengthened sin, as sin had the authority to rule over us due to the curse. Satan also had dominion. However, through this righteousness, we are delivered from sin and Satan, and even from death itself (Heb. 2:14, 15; Hos. 13:14). By the same token, through this excellent righteousness, we are raised to a better state than we had in Adam initially. Christ died so that we might receive the adoption of sons and the Spirit, be brought into a new covenant, and be set on the path of holiness, serving out of love (Gal. 3:14; 1 John 4:19; Gal. 4:5; Heb. 9:15; Rom. 5:11; Luke 1:74; Col. 2:13).

9. Therefore, we can be certain that all things will work together for our good. All things will work for our good through grace, leading us to glory, because God is for us. He is the Creator and Ruler of all things (Rom. 8:28, 31, 33). God will never be angry with us or rebuke us in anger again (Isa. 54:9; Rom. 5:2, 5).
10. Hence, we can come before God without shame, with boldness, to the throne of grace in Christ's name (John 14:13, 14), and expect every good thing from Him. "In him, and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Eph. 3:12). "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings" (Heb. 20:22, 23). Christ's blood intercedes for us in heaven (Heb. 12:24), and we can boldly plead for satisfaction on His account.

11. We live in a time when this righteousness is fully revealed, and sin has been brought to an end (Rom. 3:21, 22). This is our advantage over those who lived before Christ's coming, who were under types and shadows of this righteousness. We have the substance itself in its own light, and therefore we are not under the law, which they were under as a tutor. We are not servants but sons, called to freedom (Gal. 3:23, 26; 4:7; 5:13). The preaching of the old covenant as a church ordinance to be enforced has ceased. The law is not to be preached now in the same terms as Moses preached it for justification (Rom. 10:5-8; 2 Cor. 3:6, 7; Gal. 3:13, 24). It is contrary in terms of faith, though it served a purpose.

Use 11. For self-examination to determine whether we are in Christ and have received this justification by faith with all our hearts.

1. Consider whether you have a genuine awareness of sin and your condemnation by the law. This is necessary for us to turn to Christ, and one of the main purposes for which the law was given (Gal. 3:22-24; Matt. 9:13; Acts 2:37). Without a sense of sin, there will be no appreciation of Christ or desire for holiness. Instead, there may be an abuse of grace leading to carnal security and licentiousness. Those who were bitten by the fiery serpents looked up to the bronze serpent.
2. Do you trust only in free mercy for justification in the sight of God, renouncing all your works in this matter as incapable of standing before God's exact justice? Do you cry out for mercy like the humble tax collector? Perfectionists and self-righteous individuals have no part in this matter (Luke 18:13, 14). Paul, despite anything

the world might think he had to boast about, considered it all as nothing compared to knowing Christ and being found in Him. He did not rely on his own righteousness, which comes from the law, but on the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is based on faith. This is the redeeming and propitiating righteousness of Christ, which he desired to be justified by and believed in, contrasting it with anything inherent in himself, which he called his own righteousness (Phil. 3:6, 8, 9; Rom. 4:5).

3. Do you have confident trust in Christ, not remaining in a state of mere doubt? By merely doubting, we cannot receive anything good from God (James 1:6, 7). Mere doubt does not free the conscience from the guilt of sin (Heb. 10:22), but leaves the soul in a state of fear. The confidence of Abraham is the example and model of our justifying faith, which we should strive to emulate. It is a belief with full persuasion, even in the face of hopelessness (Rom. 4:20, 24). Although a believing soul may experience doubts, it fights against them and does not surrender to their dominion (Ps. 42:11; Mark 9:24). There is always something contrary to doubt within it, striving against them.
4. Do you come to Christ seeking forgiveness of sins for the right purpose, namely, to be freed from the dominion of sin before the living God (Heb. 9:14; Ps. 130; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24)? If not, if you do not seek it for the right purpose and genuinely desire the favour and fellowship of God, then you have not truly received it.

5. Do you walk in holiness and strive to demonstrate this justification through the fruits of faith shown in good works? If not, your faith is dead, for true faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9). If Christ is yours, He will be both righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 8:1, 9; John 13:8). If God has shown you favour, He will surely cleanse you. Although faith alone justifies without the cooperation of works in the act of justification, that faith is not so alone as to be without the accompaniment of good works. Just as the eye alone sees but is not alone without other bodily members, so true faith is accompanied by good works. The apostle James declares that faith without works is dead and urges us to show our faith by our works. This means that works are not conditions for attaining justification but rather sure evidence of justification achieved through faith, and they are necessary (James 2:14, 15). The gospel is not a covenant of works that requires another righteousness attained through performing works for eternal life. Works justify us against accusations from those who deny that we have justification by faith or a true and living faith or that we are good trees (Matt. 12:33, 37). However, works do not serve as our righteousness themselves, nor as conditions for obtaining Christ's righteousness, nor as qualifications for it.

Use III. This serves as an exhortation to various duties.

I. To the wicked. It is a warning against persisting in sin, under God's wrath, and heading towards damnation. For there is a door of mercy open to them, a righteousness prepared so that they may be freely accepted by God. Some people are recklessly stubborn, loving strangers and following after

them (Jer. 2:25). They are determined to take the risk and convince themselves that they will fare just as well as others. And some people desire justification but seek it in the wrong way. Some turn to the Pope to quiet their consciences through deceit, while others rely on their own works and performances. However, you are urged to seek the true righteousness. In the gospel, Christ says, "Behold Me, Behold Me," for the kingdom of heaven is open, and mercy and righteousness are freely offered (Isa. 55:6, 7; Jer. 3:12). Repentance is preached alongside the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38). Beware of neglecting this opportune time, this day of salvation (Heb. 2:1, 3).

1. If you do, you will remain under God's wrath (John 3:36) and under the curse of the law, which, like a flood, sweeps away all those who are found outside of this ark, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ps. 11:5, 6).
2. Your condemnation will be worsened by rejecting such a great salvation (Heb. 2:3). You will have no excuse for your sins when you reject mercy (John 15:22). You cannot say that you are ruined by your past sins beyond recovery and that striving is in vain because forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you (Ezek. 33:10, 11). And how terrible a sin it is to despise the blood of the Son of God! (John 3:18, 36.)

Objection I. If God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5), why should I forsake ungodliness at all? (Rom. 6:1.)

Answer. You cannot truly seek justification unless you have a desire to live for God and be in friendship with Him, for justification is God's way of bringing us into friendship with Him (Rom. 5:1, 2) and reconciling us (2 Cor. 5:19). The purpose you should have in seeking justification is to seek

God's friendship and the enjoyment of Him. Why would a person seek pardon if they intend to continue in rebellion and defy their ruler? (1 Peter 2:24.) Those who seek pardon without intending to return to obedience are doing so mockingly (Gal. 6:7, 8).

Objection II. My sins are so great that I have no reason to hope.

Answer. Christ's righteousness is for all types of sinners who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles (and how great were the sins of both groups!) (Rom. 1, 2, 3) and even for those who killed and crucified the Lord of glory (Acts 2:23, 36; 1 Cor. 2:8), even for the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15; Acts 16). "Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more" (Rom. 5:20). Your sins are merely the sins of a creature, but His righteousness is the righteousness of God (John 6:37; Rom. 10:3, 11, 13).

Exhortation II. It encourages those who desire to turn to God to do so in the right way through faith in Christ for justification. They should not seek it through works, as most people in the world do and are inclined to do (Rom. 9:31, 32). However, this doctrine may seem foolish and even harmful to a natural person. "Become a fool, that you may become wise" (1 Cor. 3:18); otherwise, you will labour in vain, exhaust yourselves in futility, and experience constant discomforts and discouragements. For while you are in the flesh, under the law and its curse, you cannot perform any good work before God has received you into favour. Justification naturally precedes true holiness of heart and life (1 Tim. 1:5; Heb. 9:14). Faith is the primary work and essential duty (John 6:29; Gal. 5:6; Isa. 55:2). Therefore, as long as you do not believe, you dishonour Christ and His death (Gal. 2:21, 5:2-4). Therefore, come boldly, even if you have been a great sinner (Acts 10:43), and seek righteousness in Christ along with holiness (Rom. 8:1).

Question: But how can I obtain faith?

Answer: Faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8) and comes through the gospel (Rom. 1:15-17). Faith comes by hearing the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:17), and that preaching is accompanied by the working of faith, not in mere words, but in power (1 Thess. 1:5), surpassing what can be achieved by natural or human means (John 6:63). Therefore, if you have no initial spark of faith within you, your only recourse is to attend to the gospel and meditate on your sin and misery, as well as the excellence of Christ, so that your heart may be inclined to believe (Song of Solomon 1:3; Gal. 2:16; Ps. 9:10), for this is the way in which God begets faith (Isa. 55:3). However, if you have a desire and inclination to turn from yourself to Christ in the inclination of your heart, so that you prefer Christ above all else, then the Spirit has begun the work and will continue it, enabling you to pray confidently for faith (Song of Solomon 1:4; Luke 11:13; Mark 9:24).

Objection III: But without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). How can I obtain holiness? I cannot sanctify myself, and the confidence you speak of may diminish my diligence.

Answer: If you have righteousness in Christ, God will make you holy, and this confidence is the only way to attain holiness because of that righteousness (Rom. 5:21). The new covenant is confirmed in Him, promising a new heart. If your sins are forgiven, you will be delivered from its power and be revived by the same death and resurrection of Christ that justifies you (Col. 2:12, 13).

Exhortation III. It urges those who are justified by faith to:

1. Walk humbly, recognising that they are nothing in themselves. They should acknowledge their natural enmity towards God and the

gravity of their sins. They are saved freely by the righteousness of another, not by their own efforts. In fact, they have fallen so far that God's justice would have been against them if it hadn't been satisfied. But now they see that Christ has satisfied it, and His righteousness surpasses their sins.

2. Praise and glorify God through Christ for His grace. What abundant grace and love are manifested in God's act of washing and cleansing us through His Son's blood! And how remarkable it is that He made His Son sin and a curse for us! Moreover, what a glorious and excellent righteousness God has bestowed upon us in Christ!
3. Walk in comfort, relying on this righteousness. Triumph over sin and affliction, being confident in expecting great things from God. Even though you may feel unworthy and be reminded of your unworthiness by grace, remember that you stand on the righteousness of Christ. Rejoice in the hope of God's glory, for if Christ died to reconcile you when you were His enemies, how much more will He save you by His life now that you are reconciled. Ask boldly for what you need, for God is present in Christ's humanity as the mercy seat. Whenever sin pricks your conscience and objections trouble you, look to the brazen serpent, confess your sins, and trust in the forgiveness offered. Meditate on Christ's righteousness and the abundance of grace found in Him. Even if you see much ungodliness in yourself and lack good qualifications, take comfort in knowing that Christ is near (Isa. 50:10; 2 Thess. 2:16, 17). In all your sins, turn to this fountain for cleansing (Zech. 13:1; 1 John 1:7). If sin weighs on your conscience, it weakens your peace and

spiritual strength. Do not remain under guilt with a slavish fear; you have a righteousness that can deliver you from it. Apply it through faith so that you may no longer have a condemning conscience regarding sin. Your righteousness surpasses anything that perfectionists can attain.

4. Hold firmly to this path of justification, despite all the noise and opposition in the world. The devil will try to scare you away from it or steal it from you, just as he did with the Jews, the Galatians, the Papists, and many Protestants. The apostle refers to it as a spiritual bewitchery. The devil will tempt you to rely on works, claiming it promotes holiness and that you need works to obtain Christ, even placing works as the foundation. But if you lose this righteousness of Christ under any pretext, you lose everything. Do not dishonour Christ by thinking that you need to earn what you already have fully in Christ. Do not think that the gospel requires another justification to obtain it, for the gospel is not a legal covenant but a declaration of the righteousness that comes through faith. Once justified, we become heirs through adoption and promise. This doctrine glorifies God and humbles the creature, which is a significant sign of its truth. Therefore, beware of carnal reason, which goes against this truth and makes Christ's righteousness a stumbling block to you.
5. Live as one who enjoys God's favour in Christ. Give Him the honour for it. Walk in holiness, knowing the price at which you have been redeemed. Love God who loved you first. Believe that God will enable you to live a holy life. Specifically, walk in love towards fellow believers and extend forgiveness to your enemies. Your

awareness of your own sins and God's forgiveness will lead you to have compassion and forgive others. Without that, you cannot pray or trust in the reasonable expectation of receiving forgiveness for your own sins. Desire that grace may be exalted in others and patiently await the full declaration of justification on the day of judgment. In the present, your justification is known only by faith, but outwardly you are treated as a sinner. On that day, your righteousness will be openly displayed, and you will be dealt with accordingly.

The End.