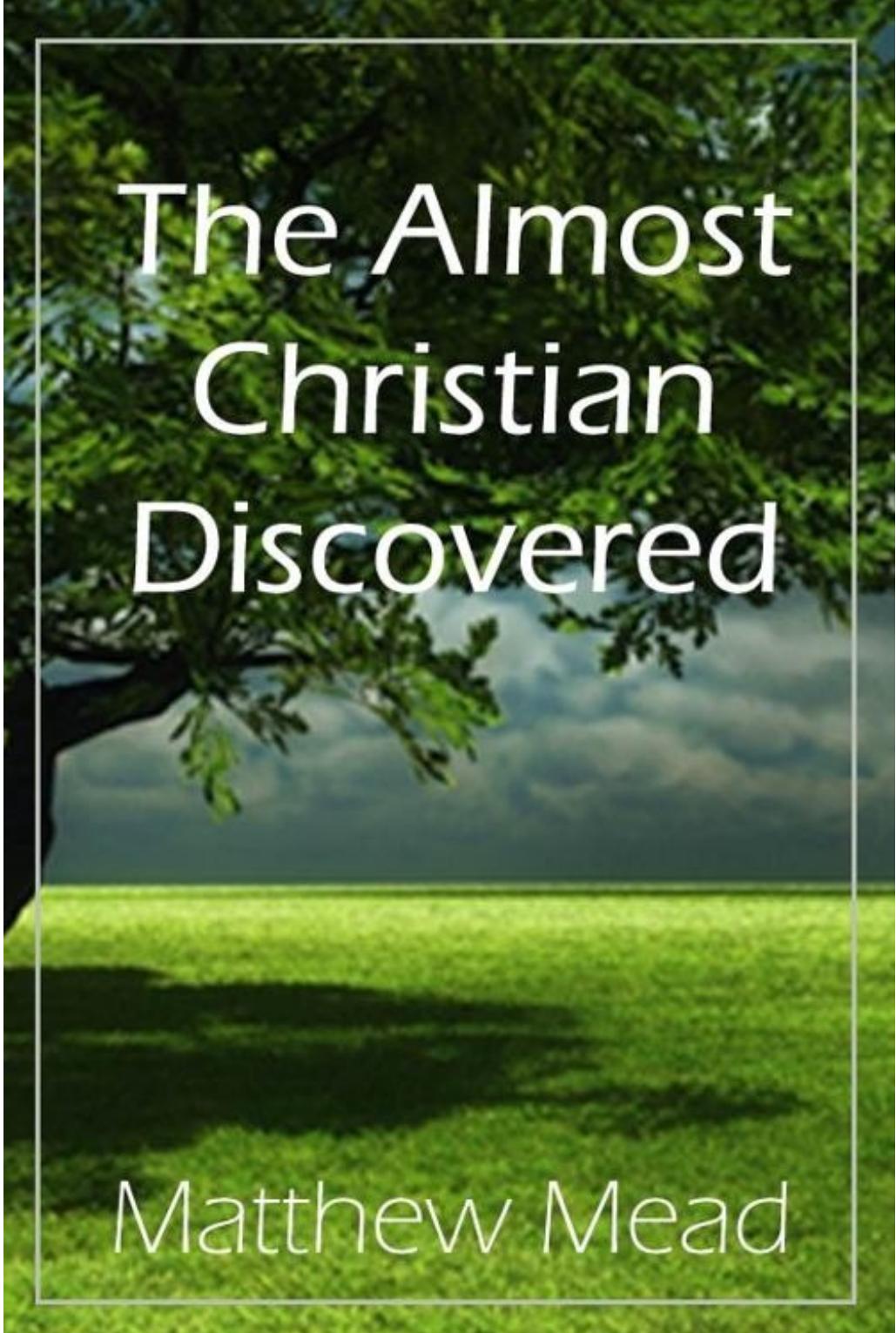
The background of the book cover features a scenic landscape. In the foreground, there is a large, leafy tree branch on the left side. Below it is a lush green lawn. In the middle ground, there are rolling green hills or mountains. The sky above is bright and hazy, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

The Almost Christian Discovered

Matthew Mead



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"*You almost persuade me to be a Christian.*" - Acts 26:28

Dedication.

To those who were the auditors of these sermons—grace and peace be multiplied. Beloved, what the meaning of that providence was, that called me to the occupation of my talent among you this summer, will be best read and understood by the effects of it upon your own souls. The kindly *increase of grace and holiness in heart and life*, can only prove it to have been in mercy. Where this is not the fruit of the Word, there it becomes a judgment. The Word of God travels with life or death, salvation or damnation—and brings forth one or the other in every soul that hears it. I would not for a world (were it in my power to make the choice) that my labors, which were meant and designed for the promotion of your immortal souls to the glory of heaven, in a present pursuance of the things of your peace—should be found to have been a ministration of death and condemnation, in the great day of Jesus Christ. Yet this the

Lord knows, is the too common effect of the most plain and powerful preaching of the gospel. "The waters of the sanctuary" do not always *heal* where they come, for there are "miry and marshy places that shall be given to salt." The same word is elsewhere in Scripture rendered "barrenness;" He "turns a fruitful land into barrenness;"—so that the judgment denounced upon these miry and marshy places is, that the curse of barrenness shall rest upon them, notwithstanding the "waters of the sanctuary overflow them."

It is said, with certainty, that the *gospel* inflicts a death of its own, as well as the *law*; or else how are those trees in Jude said to be "twice dead, and plucked up by the roots." Yes, that which in itself is the greatest mercy, through the interposition of men's lusts, and the efficacy of this cursed sin of unbelief, turns to the greatest judgment, as the richest and most generous wine makes the sharpest vinegar. Our Lord Christ himself, the choicest mercy with which the affections of God could bless a perishing world; whose coming, himself bearing witness, was on no less an errand than that of eternal life and blessedness to the lost and cursed sons of Adam; yet to how many was he a "stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence;" yes, "a trap, and a snare;" and that to both the houses of Israel, the only professing people of God at that day in the world? And is he not a stone of stumbling in the ministry of the gospel to many *professors* to this very day, upon which they fall and are broken? When he says, "Blessed is he who shall not be offended by me," he therein plainly supposes, that both in his person and doctrine, the generality of men would be offended in him. Not that this is the *design* of Christ and the gospel—but it comes so to pass through the corruptions of the hearts of men, whereby they make *light* of Christ, and stand out against that life and grace which the Lord Jesus by his blood so dearly purchased, and is by the preaching of the gospel so freely offered—the willful refusal whereof, will as surely *double our damnation*, as the acceptance thereof will secure our eternal salvation.

O consider, it is a thing of the most serious concern in the world—how we carry ourselves under the gospel, and with what *dispositions* and *affections* of heart, soul-seasons of grace are entertained. This being taken into the consideration to give it weight, that we are the nearer to

heaven or hell, to salvation or damnation, by every ordinance we sit under. Boast not therefore of privileges enjoyed, with neglect of the important duties thereby required. Remember *Capernaum's* case—and tremble!

As many go to heaven by the very gates of hell—so more go to hell by the gates of heaven! The number of those who profess Christ—is greater than the number of those who truly are saved by Christ. Beloved, I know the preaching of the gospel has encouraged many of you into a profession; but I fear that but few of you are brought by it to a true saving union with the Lord Christ for salvation. I beseech you bear with my jealousy, for it is the fruit of a tender love for your precious souls.

Most men are *good Christians* in the verdict of their own opinion; but you know the law allows no man to be a witness in his own case, because their affection usually overreaches conscience, and self-love deceives truth for its own interest. *The heart of man is the greatest impostor and cheat in the world!* God himself states it—"The heart is deceitful above all things." Some of the deceits thereof you will find discovered in this Treatise, which shows you, that *every grace has its counterfeit*; and that there may be the *highest profession*, where there is no true conversion.

The design of it is not to "break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoking flax." The design of it is not to discourage the weakest believer—but to awaken *formal professors*. I would not sadden the hearts of any "whom God would not have made sad;" though I know it is hard to expose the dangerous state and condition of a professing hypocrite—but that the *weak Christian* will think himself concerned in the discovery. And therefore, as I preached a sermon on sincerity among you, for the support and encouragement of such, so I purposed to have printed it with this. But who can be master of his own purposes? That is, as I am under such daily variety of providences, your kindly acceptance of this, will make me a debtor for that.

The dedication of this book belongs to you on a double account; for as it had not been *preached*—but that love to your souls caused it, so it had much less been *printed*—but that your importunate desire procured it. And therefore whatever entertainment it finds in the world, yet I hope I

may expect *you* will welcome it, especially considering it was born under your roof, and therefore hopes to find favor in your eyes, and room in your hearts. Accept it, I beseech you, as a public acknowledgment of the engagements which your great, and, I think I may say, unparalleled respects have laid me under, which I can no way compensate but by my prayers; and if you will take them for satisfaction, I promise to be your remembrancer at the throne of grace,

Matthew Mead.

To the Reader.

Reader, You have here one of the saddest considerations imaginable presented to you, and that is, "How far it is possible a man may go in a profession of religion—and yet, after all, fall short of salvation; how far he may run—and yet not so run as to obtain." This, I say, is *sad*—but not so sad as *true*; for our Lord Christ does plainly attest it, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for *many*, I say unto you, will seek to enter in—and shall not be able!" My design herein is, that the formal, sleepy professor may be awakened, and the hidden hypocrite discovered; but my fear is, that *weak* believers may be hereby discouraged; for, as it is hard to show how low a child of God may fall into sin—and yet have true grace—but that the unconverted sinner will be apt thereupon to presume; so it is as hard to show how high a hypocrite may rise in a profession—and yet have no grace—but that the true believer will be apt thereupon to despond. The prevention whereof, I have carefully endeavored, by showing, that though a man may go thus far, and yet be but almost a Christian—yet a man may fall short of this, and be a true Christian notwithstanding.

Judge not, therefore, your state by any *one character* you find laid down of a false professor; but read the whole, and then make a judgment; for I have cared, as not to "give children's bread to dogs," so not to use the *dog's whip to scare the children!* Yet I could wish that this book might fall into the hands of such only whom it chiefly concerns, who "have a *name* to live—and yet are dead;" being busy with the "*form* of godliness," but strangers to the "*power* of it." These are the proper subjects of this treatise. May the Lord follow it with his blessing wherever it comes, that

it may be an awakening word to all such, and especially to that generation of *profligate professors* with which this age abounds; who, if they keep to their church, bow the knee, talk over a few prayers—think they do enough for heaven, and hereupon judge their condition safe, and their salvation sure—though there be a *hell of sin* in their *hearts*, "and the poison of asps is under their *lips*;" their *minds* being as yet carnal and unconverted, and their *conversations* filthy and unsanctified.

If eternal life be of so easy attainment, and to be had at so cheap a rate—why did our Lord Christ tell us, "*Strait* is the gate and *narrow* is the way which leads unto life—and *few* there are who find it?" And why should the apostle perplex us with such a needless injunction, "to give *diligence* to make our calling and election *sure*?" Certainly, therefore, it is no such easy thing to be saved—as many make it; and that you will see plainly in the following discourse.

I have been somewhat short in the *application* of it; and therefore let me here be your remembrancer in **five important duties**:

First, "Take heed of resting in a *form* of godliness; as if *duties* could confer grace. A lifeless formality is advanced to a very high esteem in the world, as a "piece of dove's dung" was sold in the famine of Samaria at a very high rate. Alas! the *profession* of godliness is but a sandy foundation to build the hope of an immortal soul upon for eternity! Remember, the Lord Jesus Christ called him a foolish builder, "who founded his house upon the sand," and the sad event proved so for him, "for it fell, and great was the fall of it!" O therefore lay your foundation by faith upon the *rock Christ Jesus*; look to Christ through all, and rest upon Christ in all.

Secondly, "Labor to see an excellency in the power of godliness," and a beauty in the life of Christ! If the *means* of grace have a loveliness in them, surely grace *itself* has much more; for, "the goodness of the means lies in its suitableness and serviceableness to the end." The *form* of godliness has no goodness in it any farther than it becomes useful to the soul in the power and practice of godliness! The life of holiness is the only excellent life; it is the life of saints and angels in heaven; yes, it is the life of God in himself! As it is a great proof of the baseness and filthiness of sin—that unconverted sinners seek to cover it; so it is a great proof of the

excellency of godliness—that so many *pretend* to it. The *hypocrite's fair profession* pleads the very cause of true religion; although the hypocrite is then really worst—when he is seemingly best.

Thirdly, "Look upon eternal things to come, as the greatest realities;" for things that are not sincerely believed, work no more upon the affections than if they had no being! This is the grand reason why the generality of men allow their affections to go after the *world*, setting the creature in the place of God in their hearts. Most men judge of the *reality* of things by their *visibility* and *proximity* to *sense*; and, therefore, the choice of that wretched cardinal becomes their option—who would not leave his part in *Paris*—for a part in *Paradise*. Surely, whatever his interest might be in the former, he had little enough in the latter.

Well may covetousness be called idolatry, when it thus chooses the *world* for its god! O! consider—eternity is no dream! Hell and the worm that never dies, is no melancholy dream! Heaven is no imagined Elysium! There is the greatest reality imaginable in these things; though they are spiritual, and out of the view of *sense*, yet they are real, and within the view of *faith*. "Look not therefore at the things which are seen—but look at the things which are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal—but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Fourthly, "Set a high value upon your soul." What we lightly prize—we easily part with. Many men sell their souls at the rate of profane Esau's birth-right, "for a morsel of bread;" nay, for that which is not bread—but which is sinful. O consider your soul is the most precious and invaluable jewel in the world; it is the most beautiful piece of God's workmanship in the whole creation; it is that which bears the image of God, and which was bought with the blood of the Son of God; and shall we not set a value upon it, and count it precious?

The apostle Peter speaks of three very precious things:

1. A precious *Christ*.
2. Precious *Promises*.

3. Precious *Faith*.

The preciousness of all these lies in their usefulness to the soul. Christ is precious—as being the redeemer of precious souls. The Promises are precious—as making over this precious Christ to precious souls. Faith is precious—as bringing a precious soul to close with a precious Christ, as he is held forth in the precious promises. O take heed that you are not found overvaluing earthly things—and undervaluing your soul. Shall your flesh, nay your beast, be loved—and shall your soul be slighted! Will you clothe and pamper your body—and yet take no care of your soul! This is, as if a man should feed his dog—and starve his child! "Food for the belly, and the belly for food; but God will destroy both it and them!" O let not a *tottering, perishing carcass* have all your time and care—as if the life and salvation of your soul were not worth the while!

Lastly, Meditate much on the strictness and suddenness of that judgment-day, through which you must pass, into your everlasting state; wherein God, the impartial judge, will require an exact account at our hands of all our talents and blessings. We must then account for *time*—how we have spent that; for *estate*—how we have employed that; for *strength*—how we have laid out that; for *afflictions* and *mercies*—how they have been improved; for the *relations* we stood in here—how they have been discharged; and for seasons and *means of grace*—how they have been improved. Look! how we have sowed here on earth—we shall reap for eternity! "God has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness!" Acts 17:31. "Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows he will also reap!" Galatians 6:7. "Remember, each of us will stand personally before the judgment seat of God!" Romans 14:10

Reader, these are things which above all others, deserve most of, and call loudest for—our utmost care and endeavors, though they are least minded, by most people. Consider what a *spirit of atheism* (if we may judge the tree by the fruits—and the *principle* by the *practice*) the hearts of most men are filled with, who live, as if *God* were not to be served, nor *Christ* to be sought, nor *lust* to be mortified, nor *self* to be denied, nor the *Scripture* to be believed, nor the *judgment-day* to be minded, nor *hell* to be feared, nor *heaven* to be desired, nor the *soul* to be valued; but give up

themselves to a worse than brutish sensuality, "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more," Ephesians 4:19; living without God in the world—this is a reflection fit enough to break our hearts, if at least we were of holy David's temper, who "beheld the transgressors and was grieved," and had "rivers of waters running down his eyes, because men kept not God's laws."

The prevention and correction of this soul-destroying distemper, is not the least design of this Treatise now put into your hand. Though the chief virtue of this receipt lies in its sovereign use to assuage and cure the swelling cancer of hypocrisy, yet it may serve also, with God's blessing, as a plaster for the plague-sore of profaneness, if timely applied by serious meditation, and carefully kept on by constant prayer.

Reader, expect nothing of curiosity or quaintness, for then I shall let you down; but if you would have a touch-stone for the trial of your state, possibly this may serve you. If you are either a stranger to a profession, or a hypocrite under a profession, then read and tremble, for you are the man here pointed at. But if the kingdom of God has come with power into your soul; if Christ is formed in you; if your heart be upright and sincere with God—then read and rejoice.

May the mighty God, whose prerogative it is to teach to profit, whether by the tongue or the pen, by speaking or writing—bless this tract, that it may be to you as a cloud of rain to the dry ground, dropping fatness to your soul, that so your fleece being watered with the "dew of heaven," you may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In whom I am your Friend and Servant,
Matthew Mead, London, October, 1661.

Introduction.

"You almost persuade me to be a Christian." Acts 26:28

In this chapter you have the apostle Paul's apology and defensive plea,

which he makes for himself against those blind Jews who so maliciously prosecuted him before Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the council. In which plea he chiefly insists upon three things.

1. The manner of his life before conversion. How he lived before conversion, he tells you, ver. 4-13.
2. The manner of his conversion. How God wrought on him to conversion, he tells you, ver. 13-18.
3. The manner of his life after conversion. How he lived after conversion, he tells you, ver. 19-23.

Before conversion he was very pharisaical. The manner of his conversion was very astonishing. The fruit of his conversion was very remarkable. Before conversion he persecuted the gospel which others preached; after conversion, he preached the gospel which himself had persecuted. While he was a persecutor of the gospel, the Jews loved him; but now that, by the grace of God, he was become a preacher of the gospel—now the Jews hate him, and sought to kill him. He was once against Christ, and then many were for him; but now that he was for Christ—all were against him; his being an enemy to Jesus, made others his friends; but when he came to own Jesus, then they became his enemies. And this was the great charge they had against him, that of a great opposer he was become a great professor. Because God had changed him—therefore this enraged them! As if they would be the worse—because God had made him better. God had wrought on him by grace—and they seem to envy him the grace of God. He preached no treason, nor sowed no sedition; he only preached repentance, and faith in Christ, and the resurrection, and for this he was "called into question."

This is the sum of Paul's defense and plea for himself, which, you find in the sequel of the chapter, had a different effect upon his judges. Festus seems to censure him, ver. 24. Agrippa seems to be convinced by him, ver. 28. The whole bench seem to acquit him, ver. 30, 31. Festus thinks Paul was *beside himself*. Agrippa is *almost persuaded* to be such a one as himself. Festus thinks him mad, because he did not understand the doctrine of Christ and the resurrection, "much learning has made you

mad!" Agrippa is so affected with his plea, that he is almost convinced of Paul's message. Paul pleads so effectually for his religion, that Agrippa seems to be upon the turning point to his profession.

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, you almost persuade me to be a Christian."

"Almost!" I take the words as we read them, and they show what an efficacy Paul's doctrine had upon Agrippa's conscience. Though he would not be *converted*, yet he could not but be *convinced*; his *conscience* was touched, though his *heart* was not renewed.

Observation: There is that in true religion, which carries its own evidence along with it, even to the consciences of ungodly men.

"You persuade me." The word signifies, *to prevail by the arguments used*. This shows the influence of Paul's argument upon Agrippa, which had almost proselyted him to the profession of Christianity. "You almost persuade me to be a Christian."

"A Christian." I hope I need not tell you what a Christian is, though I am persuaded many who are called Christians, do not know what a Christian *is*; or if they do, yet they do not know what it is to *live* as a Christian. A *Christian* is a *disciple of Jesus Christ*, one who believes in, and follows Christ. As one who embraces the doctrine of Arminius, is called an Arminian; and he who owns the doctrine and way of Luther, is called a Lutheran; so he who embraces, and owns, and follows the doctrine of Jesus Christ—he is a true Christian.

The word is taken more *largely*, and more *strictly*.

More *largely*—so all who *profess* that Christ has come in the flesh, are called Christians, in opposition to heathens who do not know Christ; and to the poor blind Jews, who will not own Christ; and to the Mohammedan, who prefers Mahomet, above Christ.

But in Scripture, the word is of a more *strict* and *narrow* acceptance, it is used only to denominate the true disciples and followers of Christ; "the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch." "If any man suffers as a

Christian, let him not be ashamed;" that is, if he suffers as a member and disciple of Christ. And so in the text, "You almost persuade me to be a Christian." The word "Christian" is used but in these three places, in all the New Testament, and in each of them it is used in this same sense.

The Italians make the name of "Christian" to be a name of reproach among them, and usually abuse the word "Christian" to signify a *fool*. But if, as the apostle says, "the preaching of Christ is to the world foolishness," then it is no wonder that the disciples of Christ are to the world, *fools*. Yet it is true, in a certain sense, that so they are; for the whole of godliness is a mystery. A man must die—who would live; he must be empty—who would be full; he must be lost—who would be found; he must have nothing—who would have all things; he must be blind—who would have illumination; he must be condemned—who would have redemption; just so—he must be a fool—who would be a Christian. "If any man among you seems to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." He is the true Christian who is the world's fool—but wise to salvation.

I desire that you may not be only *almost*—but *altogether* Christians. This is God's work to *effect* it—but is our duty to *persuade* to it; and O that God would help me to manage this subject so, that you may say, in the conclusion, "You persuade me, not *almost*—but *altogether* to be a Christian!"

The observation that I shall propound to handle is this:

Doctrine—There are very many in the world who are almost—and yet but almost Christians; many who are near heaven—and yet are never the nearer; many who are within a little of salvation—and yet shall never enjoy the least salvation; they are within sight of heaven—and yet shall never have a sight of God.

There are two sad expressions in Scripture, which I cannot but take notice of in this place. The one is concerning the *truly* righteous. The other is concerning the *seemingly* righteous. It is said of the truly righteous, that he shall "*scarcely* be saved;" and it is said of the seemingly righteous, he shall be *almost* saved, "You are not far from the kingdom of

God." The righteous shall be saved with a *scarcely*, that is, through much *difficulty*; he shall go to heaven through many sad fears of hell. The hypocrite shall be saved with an *almost*, that is, he shall go to hell through many fair hopes of heaven.

There are two things which arise from hence of very serious meditation. The one is, how often a believer may miscarry, how low he may fall—and yet have true grace. The other is, how far a hypocrite may go in the way to heaven, how high he may attain—and yet have no grace. The saint may be cast down very near to hell—and yet shall never come there; and the hypocrite may be lifted up very near to heaven—and yet never come there. The saint may almost perish—and yet be saved eternally; the hypocrite may almost be saved—and yet perish finally. For the saint at worst—is really a believer; and the hypocrite at best—is really an unconverted sinner.

Before I handle the doctrine, I must premise three things, which are of great use for the **establishing of weak believers**, that they may not be shaken and discouraged by this doctrine.

First, There is nothing in the doctrine that should be matter of stumbling or discouragement to weak Christians. The gospel does not speak these things to wound true believers—but to awaken unconverted sinners and formal professors. As there are none more averse than weak believers, to apply the promises and comforts of the gospel to themselves—for whom they are properly designed; so there are none more ready than they to apply the threats and severest things of the Word to themselves—for whom they were never intended. As the disciples, when Christ told them, "One of you shall betray me;" they those who were innocent suspected themselves most—and therefore cry out, "*Master, is it I?*" So weak Christians, when they hear unconverted sinners reproved, or the hypocrite laid open, in the ministry of the Word, they presently cry out, "*Is it I?*"

It is the hypocrite's fault to sit under the trials and discoveries of the Word—and yet not to mind them: and it is the weak Christian's fault to draw sad conclusions of their own state from premises which do not concern them.

There is indeed great use of such doctrine as this is, to all believers:

1. To make them look to their standing, upon what foundation they are—and to see that the foundation of their hope be well laid, that they build not upon the sand—but upon a rock.
2. It helps to raise our admiration of the sovereign love of God, in bringing us into the everlasting way—when so many perish from the way—and in overpowering our souls into a true conversion, when so many take up with a *graceless profession*.
3. It incites to that excellent duty of heart-searching, that so we approve ourselves to God in sincerity.
4. It engages the soul in double diligence, that it may be found not only *believing*—but *persevering* in faith to the end. These duties—and such as these, make this doctrine of use to all believers; but they ought not to make use of it as a stumbling-block in the way of their peace and comfort.

My design in preaching on this subject, is not to make sad the souls of those whom Christ will not have made sad. I would bring water—not to "to quench the flax that is smoking," but to put out that false fire that is of the unconverted sinner's own kindling, lest walking all his days by the light thereof, he shall at last "lie down in sorrow." My aim is to level the mountain of the unconverted sinner's confidence, not to weaken the hand of the true believer's faith and dependence. My aim is to awaken and bring in secure formal sinners—not to discourage weak believers.

Secondly, I would premise this; though *many may go far, very far in the way to heaven—and yet fall short*, yet that soul that has the least true grace shall never fall short; "the righteous shall hold on his way." Though some may do very much in a way of duty, as I shall show hereafter—and yet miscarry; yet that soul that does duty with the least sincerity, shall never miscarry; "for he saves the upright in heart." The least measure of true grace is as saving as the greatest measure; it saves as *surely*, though not so *comfortably*. The least grace gives a full interest in the blood of Christ, whereby we are thoroughly *purged*; and it gives a full interest in the strength and power of Christ, whereby we shall be certainly

preserved. Christ keeps faith in the soul—and faith keeps the soul in Christ; and so "we are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

Thirdly, I would premise this; those who can hear such truths as this, without serious reflection and self-examination, I must suspect the goodness of their condition. You will suspect that man to be next door to a bankrupt, who never casts up his accounts, nor looks over his book; and I as truly think that man a hypocrite, who never searches nor deals with his own heart. He who goes on in a road of duties without any uneasiness or doubting of his state—I doubt no man's state more than his! When we see a man sick—and yet not sensible, we conclude the *tokens of death* are upon him. So when sinners have no sense of their spiritual condition—it is plain that they are dead in sin; the tokens of eternal death are upon them!

These things being premised, which I desire you would carry along in your mind while we travel through this subject, I come to speak to the proposition more distinctly and closely.

Doctrine: That there are very many in the world, who are almost—and yet but almost Christians. I shall *demonstrate* the truth of the proposition, and then proceed to a more distinct prosecution.

I. I shall demonstrate the truth of the proposition; and I shall do it by scripture-evidence, which speaks plainly and fully to the case.

First, The rich young man in the gospel is an eminent proof of this truth; there you read of one who came to Christ to learn of him the way to heaven, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do—that I may have eternal life?" Our Lord Christ tells him, "If you will enter into life—keep the commandments." And when Christ tells him this, he answers, "Lord, all these I have kept from my youth up; what do I still lack?"

Now do but see how far this man went.

1. He *obeyed*—he did not only *hear* the commands of God—but he *kept* them; now the Scripture says, "Blessed is he who hears the Word of God

—and *keeps* it."

2. He obeyed *universally*—not this *or* that command—but *both* this and that; he did not halve it with God, or pick and choose which were easiest to be done—and leave the rest. No—but he obeys all, "All these things have I kept."

3. He obeyed *constantly*—not in a fit of zeal only—but in a continual series of duty; his goodness was not, as Ephraim's, "like the morning dew which passes away." No, "All these things have I kept *from my youth up*."

4. He professes his desire to know and do more—to perfect that which was lacking of his obedience: and therefore he goes to Christ to instruct him in his duty; "Master, what do I yet lack?"

Now would you not think this a good man? Alas! how few go this far! And yet as far as he went—he did not go far enough! He was almost—and yet but almost a Christian! He was an unsound hypocrite; he forsakes Christ at last—and cleaves to his lusts! This then is a full proof of the truth of the doctrine.

A second proof of this doctrine, is that of the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. See what a progress they make, how far they go in a profession of Christ.

1. They are called "virgins." This is a name given in the Scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New—to the saints of Christ, "The virgins love you!" So in the revelation, the "one hundred forty and four thousand" who stood with the Lamb on Mount Zion, are called "virgins." They are called virgins, because they are not defiled with the "corruptions which are in the world through lust." Now these here seem to be of that sort, for they are called virgins.

2. They take their "lamps"—that is, they make a profession of Christ.

3. They had "some oil" in their lamps. They had some *convictions* and some *faith*, though not the faith of God's elect, to keep their profession alive, to keep the lamp burning.

4. They "went"—their profession was not an idle profession; they did perform duties, frequented ordinances—and did many things commanded. They made a progress—they went.
5. They "went forth"—they left many behind them; this speaks of their separation from the world.
6. They went with the "wise virgins"—they joined themselves to those who had joined themselves to the Lord—and were companions of those who were companions of Christ.
7. They "went forth to meet the bridegroom"—this speaks out their owning and seeking after Christ.
8. When they heard the cry of the bridegroom coming, "they arose and trimmed their lamps;" they here profess Christ more highly, hoping now to go in with the bridegroom.
9. They sought for true grace. Now do not we say, the *desires* for grace *are* grace? and so they are, if true and timely; if sound and seasonable. See here a *desire for grace* in these virgins, "*Give us some of your oil!*" It was a desire for true grace—but it was not a true desire for grace. It was not true, because not timely; it was unsound, as being unseasonable; it was *too late*. Their folly was in not taking oil when they took their lamps; their time of seeking grace was when they came to Christ; it was too late to seek it when Christ came to them. They should have sought for grace when they took up their profession: it was too late to seek it at the coming of the bridegroom! And therefore "they were shut out!" And though they cry for entrance, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" yet the Lord Christ tells them, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you!"

You see how far these virgins go in a profession of Jesus Christ—and how long they continue in it, even until the bridegroom came; they go to the very door of heaven—and there, like the Sodomites, perish with their hands upon the very threshold of glory! They were almost Christians—and yet but almost; almost saved—and yet perish!

You who are professors of the gospel of Christ, stand and tremble! If

those who have gone beyond us fall short of heaven, what shall become of us who fall short of them? If those who are virgins, who profess Christ, who have some faith in their profession, such as it is, who have some fruit in their faith, who outstrip others who seek Christ, who improve their profession, and suit themselves to their profession; nay, who seek grace; if such as these be but *almost Christians*, Lord, what are we!

Third, If these two witnesses are not sufficient to prove the truth, and confirm the credit of the proposition, take a third, which shall be from the Old Testament. Isaiah 58:2, "*They seek Me day after day and delight to know My ways, like a nation that does what is right and does not abandon the justice of their God. They ask Me for righteous judgments; they delight in the nearness of God.*" See what God says of that people; he gives them a very high character for a choice people, one would think! See how far these went! If God had not said they were rotten and unsound, we would have ranked them among the worthies. Observe,

1. They seek God. Now this is the proper character of a true saint—to seek God. True saints are called, "seekers of God." "This is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face." There a generation of those who seek God; and are not these the saints of God? Nay, farther,
 2. They seek him daily. Here is diligence backed with continuance, day by day; that is, every day, from day to day. They did not seek him by fits and starts, nor in a time of trouble and affliction only, as many do. "Lord, in trouble have they sought you; they poured out a prayer when your chastening was upon them." Many, when God visits them—then they visit him—but not until then! When God pours out his *afflictions*—then they pour out their *supplications*. This is *seamen's devotion!* When the storms have brought them to "their wits' end—then they cry to the Lord in their trouble." Many never cry to God, until they are at their wits' end; they never come to God for help, so long as they can help themselves.

But these here, whom God speaks of, are more zealous in their devotion; the others make a virtue of necessity—but these seem to make conscience of duty; for, says God, "they seek me day after day." Sure this is, one would think, a note of sincerity! Job says of the hypocrite, "Will he *always* call upon God?" Surely not! But this people call upon God always,

"they seek him day after day;" certainly *these* are no hypocrites!

3. Says God, "They delight to know my ways." Sure this frees them from the suspicion of hypocrisy! They do not say unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of your ways."

4. They are "as a nation that *does* what is right." Not only as a nation that *spoke* righteousness, or *knew* righteousness, or *professed* righteousness; but as a nation that *does* righteousness, that practiced nothing but what was just and right. They appeared, to the judgment of the world, as good as the best.

5. They forsook not the ordinances of their God. They seem true to their principles, constant to their profession. They seem better than many among us, who cast off duties—and forsake the ordinances of God. But these hold out in their profession; "they forsook not the ordinances of God."

6. "They ask of me," says God, "the ordinances of justice." They will not make their own will the rule of right and wrong—but the law and will of God: and therefore, in all their dealings with men, they desire to be guided and counseled by God, "They ask of me the ordinances of justice."

7. They take delight in approaching to God. Sure *this* cannot be the guise of a hypocrite. "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" says Job. No—he will not! Though God should be the chief delight of man, (having everything in him to render him lovely,) yet the hypocrites will not delight in God. Until the affections are made spiritual, there is no affection to things that are spiritual. God is a spiritual good—and therefore hypocrites cannot delight in God. But these are a people who delight in approaching to God!

8. They were a people who were much in fasting, "Why have we fasted?" Now this is a duty which does not suppose and require *truth* of grace only in the heart—but *strength* of grace. "No man," says our Lord Christ, "puts new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles break and the wine run out." New wine is strong—and old bottles weak; and the strong wine breaks the weak vessel: this is a reason Christ gives, why his disciples, who were

newly converted—and but weak as yet, were not exercised with this austere discipline. But this people here mentioned, were a people who fasted often, afflicted their souls much, wore themselves out by frequent practices of humiliation. Sure therefore this was "new wine in new bottles;" this must needs be a people strong in grace; there seems to be grace not only in *truth*—but also in *growth*.

And yet, for all this, they were no better than a generation of hypocrites; they made a goodly progress—and went far—but yet they went not far enough; they were cast off by God after all. I hope by this time the truth of the point is sufficiently confirmed; "that a man may be, yes, very many are, *almost*—and yet no more than but almost Christians."

Now for the more distinct prosecution of the point.

1. I shall show you, step by step, how far he may go, to what attainments he may reach, how specious and singular a progress he may make in religion—and yet be but almost a Christian when all is done.
2. I will show why it is, that many men go so far as that they are almost Christians.
3. Why they are but almost Christians when they have gone thus far.
4. What the reason is, why men who go thus far as to be almost Christians, yet go no farther than to be almost Christians.

QUESTION I. How far may a man go in the way to heaven—and yet be but *almost* a Christian?

ANSWER. This I will show you in twenty several steps.

Section I. A man may have much KNOWLEDGE, much light; he may know much of God and his will, much of Christ and his

ways—and yet be but almost a Christian. For though there can be no grace without knowledge—yet there may be much knowledge where there is no grace; illumination often goes before—when conversion never follows after. The subject of knowledge is the *understanding*; the subject of holiness is the *will*. Now a man may have his *understanding* enlightened—and yet his *will* not at all sanctified. He may have an understanding to know God—and yet lack a will to obey God. The apostle tells us of some, that, "when they *knew* God, they glorified him not as God."

To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the head—and heat in the heart; knowledge in the understanding—and zeal in the affections. Some have zeal and no knowledge; that is, blind devotion. Some have knowledge and no zeal; that is, fruitless speculation. But where knowledge is joined with zeal, that makes a true Christian.

Objection. But is it not said, "This is eternal life--to know you, the only true God—and Jesus Christ whom you have sent?"

Answer. It is not every knowledge of God and Christ, which interests the soul in eternal life. For why then do the *devils* perish; they have more knowledge of God than all the men in the world; for though, by their fall, they lost their *holiness*, yet they lost not their *knowledge*. They are called *daimones*, from their knowledge—and yet they are *diaboli*, from their malice, devils still. Knowledge may fill the head—but it will never better the heart, if there is not somewhat else. The Pharisees had much knowledge, "Behold, you are called a Jew—and rest in the law—and make your boast of God—and know his will," etc.—and yet they were a generation of hypocrites! *Alas! how many have gone loaded with knowledge to hell!* Though it is true, that it is eternal life to know God and Jesus Christ; yet it is as true, that many do know God and Jesus Christ, who shall never see eternal life.

There is, you must know, a twofold knowledge; the one is *common*—but not saving; the other is not common—but saving. Common knowledge is that which floats in the head—but does not influence the heart. This knowledge, reprobates may have.

Naturalists say, that there is a pearl in the toad's head—and yet her belly is full of poison. The French have a berry which they call *the grape of a thorn*. The common knowledge of Christ is the pearl in the toad's head—the grape which grows upon thorns; it may be found in unsanctified men. And then there is a saving knowledge of God and Christ, which includes the assent of the mind—and the consent of the will; this is a knowledge which implies faith; "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." And this is that knowledge which leads to life eternal. Now whatever that measure of knowledge is, which a man may have of God—and of Jesus Christ, yet if it is not this saving knowledge—knowledge joined with affection and application—he is but almost a Christian.

He only knows God aright, who knows how to obey him—and obeys according to his knowledge of him. "A good understanding have all those who do his commandments." All knowledge without this, makes a man but like Nebuchadnezzar's image, with "a head of gold—and feet of clay." Some know—but only to *know*. Some know—but only to *be known*. Some know—to *practice* what they know. Now, to know—but to know—that is merely curiosity. To know, to be known—that is merely vain-glory. But to know, to *practice* what we know—that is gospel duty. This makes a man a complete Christian; the other, without this, makes a man *almost*—and yet but *almost* a Christian.

Section II. A man may have great and eminent GIFTS, yes, spiritual gifts

—and yet be but almost a Christian.

The gift of **prayer** is a spiritual gift. Now this a man may have—and yet be but almost a Christian—for the *gift* of prayer is one thing; the *grace* of prayer is another. The gift of **preaching** and prophesying is a spiritual gift; now this a man may have—and yet be but almost a Christian. Judas was a great preacher; so were those who came to Christ—and said, "Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in your name—and in your name have cast out devils," etc. You must know that it is not gifts—but grace, which makes a Christian! For,

1. Gifts are from a common work of the Spirit. Now a man may partake of all the common gifts of the Spirit—and yet be a reprobate. They are called common, because they are indifferently dispensed by the Spirit to those who are believers—and to those who are not. Those who have grace have gifts; and those who have no grace, may have the same gifts; for the Spirit works in both. Nay, in this sense he who has no grace, may be under a greater work of the Spirit as to gifts, than he who has most grace. A graceless professor may have greater gifts than the most holy believer! He may out-pray, and out-preach, and out-do them! But true believers, in sincerity an integrity, out-go the mere professor.

2. Gifts are for the use and good of others, they are given for the profiting and edifying of others. So says the apostle, "A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church." Now a man may edify another by his gifts—and yet be unedified himself; he may be profitable to another—and yet unprofitable to himself.

The *raven* was an unclean bird: God makes use of her to feed Elijah; though she was not good meat, yet it was good meat she brought. A lame man may with his crutch point to the right way—and yet not be able to walk in it himself. A deformed tailor may make a suit to fit a straight body, though it does not fit him who made it, because of his deformity. The church (Christ's garden enclosed) may be watered through a wooden gutter; the sun may give light through a dusky window; and the field may be well sowed with a dirty hand.

The efficacy of the Word does not depend upon the authority of him who speaks it—but upon the authority of God who blesses it. So that another may be converted by my preaching—and yet I may be cast away notwithstanding. Balaam makes a clear and rare prophecy of Christ—and yet he has no benefit by Christ, "There shall come a star out of Jacob—and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." But yet Balaam shall have no benefit by it, "I shall see him—but not now; I shall behold him—but not near." God may use a man's gifts to bring another to Christ, when he himself, whose gifts God uses, may be a stranger unto Christ.

One man may confirm another in the faith—and yet himself may be a stranger to the faith. Pendleton strengthens and confirms Sanders, in

Queen Mary's days, to stand in the truth he had preached—and to seal it with his blood—and yet afterwards plays the apostate himself. Johannes Speiserus, a famous preacher of Augsburg in Germany, in the year 1523, preached the gospel so powerfully that many common harlots were converted—and became godly Christians; and yet himself afterwards turned papist and came to a miserable end. Thus the candle may burn bright to light others in their work—and yet afterwards go out in a stink.

3. It is beyond the power of the greatest gifts to change the heart. A man may preach like an apostle, pray like an angel—and yet may have the heart of a devil! It is grace alone which can change the heart; the greatest gifts cannot change it—but the least grace can; gifts may make a man a scholar—but grace makes a man a believer. Now if gifts cannot change the heart, then a man may have the greatest gifts—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

4. Many have gone to hell, laden with gifts. No doubt *Judas* had great gifts, for he was a preacher of the gospel; and our Lord Jesus Christ would not set him to work—and not fit him for the work; yet "Judas is gone to his own place!"

The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* were men of great gifts—and yet, "where is the wise? where is the scribe?" "The preaching of the cross is to those who perish foolishness." Those who perish, who are they? Who! the wise and the learned, both among Jews and Greeks; these are called "those who perish." A great bishop said, when he saw a poor shepherd weeping over his sin, "The poor illiterate world attain to heaven, while we with all our learning fall into hell."

There are three things which must be done for us, if ever we would avoid eternally perishing.

We must be thoroughly convinced of sin.

We must be really united to Christ.

We must be instated in the covenant of grace.

Now, the greatest gifts cannot stead us in any of these. They cannot work thorough convictions. They cannot effect our union. They cannot bring us into covenant-relation. And consequently, they cannot preserve us from eternally perishing; and if so, then a man may have the greatest gifts—and yet be but almost a Christian.

5. Gifts may decay and perish. They do not lie beyond the reach of corruption; indeed grace shall never perish—but gifts will. Grace is incorruptible, though gifts are not. Grace is "a spring, whose waters fail not," but the streams of gifts may be dried up. If grace be corruptible in its own nature, as being but a creature, yet it is incorruptible in regard of its *preserver*, as being the new creature; he who did create it in us—will *preserve* it in us; he who did *begin* it—will also finish it. Gifts have their root in nature—but grace has its roots in Christ; and therefore though gifts may die and wither, yet grace shall abide forever.

Now if gifts are perishing, then, though he who has the least grace is a Christian, he who has the greatest gifts may be but almost a Christian.

Objection. But does not the apostle bid us "covet earnestly the best gifts?" Why must we covet them—and covet them earnestly, if they avail not to salvation?

Answer. Gifts are good—though they are not the best good; they are excellent—but there is something more excellent, so it follows in the same verse, "Yet I show unto you a more excellent way," and that is the way of grace. *One grain of grace—is more worth than a ton of gifts!* Gifts may make us rich towards men—but it is grace which makes us "rich towards God." Our gifts profit others—but grace profits ourselves. That whereby I profit another is good—but that by which I am profited myself is better. Now because gifts are good, therefore we ought to covet them; but because they are not the *best* good, therefore we ought not to *rest* in them. We must covet *gifts* for the good of others, that they may be edified; and we must covet *grace* for the good of our own souls, that they may be saved. No matter how many are bettered by our *gifts*—yet we shall miscarry without *grace*.

Section III. A man may have a high PROFESSION of religion, be much in EXTERNAL DUTIES of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Mark what our Lord tells them, "Not everyone who *says* unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." That is, not everyone who makes a profession of Christ, shall therefore be owned for a true disciple of Christ. "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel;" nor are all Christians, who make a profession of religion. What a good profession Judas had! He followed Christ, left all for Christ, he preached the gospel of Christ, he cast out devils in the name of Christ, he ate and drank at the table of Christ—and yet Judas was but a hypocrite.

Most professors are like lilies, fair in show—but foul in scent; or like pepper, hot in the mouth—but cold in the stomach. The finest lace may be upon the coarsest cloth. It is a great deceit to measure the reality of our religion—by the bulk of our profession—and to judge of the strength of our graces by the length of our duties.

The Scriptures speak of some who having "a form of godliness, yet deny the power thereof." Deny the power; that is, they do not live in the practice of those graces to which they pretend to profess. He who pretends to godliness by a specious profession—and yet does not practice godliness by a holy life, "he has a form—but denies the power." Grotius compares such to the ostrich, which has great wings—but yet does not fly. Many have the wings of a fair profession—but yet use them not to mount upward in spiritual affections—and a heavenly life.

But to clear the truth of this, that a man may make a high profession of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian, take a fourfold evidence.

1. If a man may profess religion—and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state bettered; then he may be a great professor—and yet be but almost a Christian. But a man may profess religion—and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state

renewed. He may be a constant hearer of the word—and yet be an unconverted sinner still; he may come often to the Lord's table—and yet go away as foul a sinner as he came! We must not think that duties can confer grace. Many a soul has been converted by Christ *in* an ordinance—but never was any soul converted *by* an ordinance without Christ. And does Christ convert all who sit under the ordinances? Surely not; for to some, "the Word is a savor of death unto death." And if so, then it is plain, that a man may profess religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

2. A man may profess religion—and live in a form of godliness in hypocrisy. "Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the Lord and make mention of the God of Israel—but not in truth, nor in righteousness." What do you think of these people? "They make mention of the name of the Lord," there is their profession; "but not in truth; nor in righteousness," there is their dissimulation. And indeed there could be no *hypocrisy* in a religious sense, were it not for a *profession* of religion; for he who is wicked and carnal, and vile inwardly, and appears to be so outwardly, he is no hypocrite—but is what he appears, and appears what he is. But he who is one thing *really*, and another thing *seemingly*—he who is carnal and unholy, and yet seems to be good and holy—he is a hypocrite.

Thus they define hypocrisy to be a counterfeiting of holiness; and this fits exactly with the Greek word, which is, to counterfeit. And to this purpose, the Hebrews have two words for hypocrites; one which signifies *faces*; and another which signifies *counterfeits*. So that he is a hypocrite who *counterfeits* piety, and wears the face of holiness—and yet is without the grace of holiness. He appears to be in semblance, what he is not in substance. He wears a *form* of godliness without, only as a cover of a profane heart within. He has a profession that he may not be thought wicked; but it is but a profession, and therefore he is wicked. He is the religious hypocrite; religious, because he pretends to it; and yet a hypocrite, because he does but pretend to it. He is like many men in a consumption, who have fresh looks—and yet rotten lungs; or like an apple that has a fair skin—but a rotten core. Many appear righteous, who are only righteous in appearance. And if so, then a man may profess

religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

3. Custom and fashion may make a man a professor. As you have many who wear this or that garb, not because it keeps them warmer, or has any excellency in it more than another—but merely for fashion. Many must have powdered hair, painted faces, feathers in their caps, etc. for no other end—but because they would be *fools in fashion*. So, many profess Christianity—not because the means of grace warm the heart, or who they see any excellencies in the ways of God above the world—but merely to follow the fashion! Because religion has been uppermost, therefore many have professed it. Religion in fashion makes many professors—but few proselytes; but when religion suffers, then its confessors are no more than its converts; for custom makes the former—but conscience the latter. He who is a professor of religion merely for custom sake, when it prospers, will never be a martyr for Christ's sake, when religion suffers.

They say, that when a house is decaying or falling, all the rats and mice will forsake it. While the house is firm, and they may shelter in the roof, they will stay—but no longer; lest, in the decay, the fall should be upon them, and those who lived at top should die at bottom. My brethren, may I not say, we have many who are the vermin, the rats and mice of religion, who would live under the roof of it, while they might have shelter in it; but when it suffers, they forsake it, lest it should fall, and the fall should be upon them!

I am persuaded this is not the least reason why God has brought persecution; namely to rid it of the vermin. He shakes the foundations of the house, that these rats and mice may leave it—to rid them of it; as the farmer fans the wheat, that he may get rid of the chaff. The halcyon days of the gospel provoke *hypocrisy*—but the sufferings for religion prove *sincerity*. Now, then, if custom and fashion make many men professors, then a man may profess religion—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

4. If many may perish under a profession of godliness, then a man may profess religion and yet be but almost a Christian. Now, the Scripture is clear, that a man may perish under the highest profession of religion. Christ cursed the fig-tree, which had *leaves* and *no fruit*. It is said, that "the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into

outer darkness." Who were these—but those who were then the only people of God by profession—and yet these were cast out.

In Matthew's gospel, you read of some who came and made boast of their profession to Christ, hoping that might save them. "Lord," say they, "have we not prophesied in your name, cast out devils in your name, done many wonderful works in your name?" Now what says our Lord Christ to this? "Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me!" Mark, here are those who prophesy in his name—and yet perish in his wrath! In his name cast out devils—and then are cast out themselves! In his name do many wonderful works—and yet perish as workers of iniquity. The profession of religion will no more keep a man from perishing—than calling a ship *the Safe-guard*, or *the Good-speed*, will keep it from sinking. *As many go to heaven with the fear of hell in their hearts—so many go to hell with the name of Christ in their mouths.*

Now then, if many may perish under a profession of godliness, then may a man be a high professor of religion—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Objection. But is it not said by the Lord Christ himself, "He who confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven?" Now, for Christ to say, he will confess us before the Father, is equivalent to a promise of eternal life: for if Jesus Christ confesses us, God the Father will never disown us. True, those who confess Christ, shall be confessed by him; and it is as true, that this confession is equivalent to a promise of salvation. But you must know, that *professing* Christ, is not *confessing* him: for to profess Christ is one thing—to confess Christ is another. Confession is a living testimony for Christ, in a time when religion suffers. Profession may be only a lifeless formality, in a time when religion prospers. To confess Christ, is to choose his ways, and own them. To profess Christ, is to plead for his ways—and yet not live in them. Profession may be from a feigned love to the ways of Christ; but confession is from a rooted love to the person of Christ. To profess Christ, is to own him when none deny him; to confess Christ, is to plead for him, and suffer for him, when others oppose him. Hypocrites may be professors; but the martyrs are the true confessors. Profession is a swimming down the stream. Confession is a swimming against the stream. Now many may swim with the stream, like the dead fish—which

cannot swim against the stream, with the living fish. Many may profess Christ, who cannot confess Christ; and so, notwithstanding their profession, yet are but almost Christians.

Section IV. To come yet nearer; a man may go far in opposing his SIN

—and yet be but almost a Christian.

How far a man may go in this work, I shall show you in seven gradual instances.

First, A man may be CONVINCED of sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. For,

1. Conviction of sin may be merely rational, as well as spiritual; it may be from a natural conscience enlightened by the Word, without the effectual work of the Spirit, applying sin to the heart.
2. Conviction of sin may be worn out—and often does not end in sound conversion. Says the church, "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have brought forth wind." This is the complaint of the church, in reference to the unprofitableness of their afflictions; and it may be the complaint in most, in reference to the unprofitableness of their convictions.
3. Many take conviction of sin, to be conversion from sin; and then sit down and rest in their convictions.

Now then, if convictions may be only from natural conscience; if they may be worn out, or may be mistaken, and rested in for conversion, then a man may have convictions, and be but almost a Christian.

Secondly, A man may MOURN for sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. So did Saul; so did Esau, for the loss of his birthright, which was his sin, and therefore he is called, by the Spirit of God, "*profane*

Esau;" yet, "he sought it again carefully with tears."

Objection. But does not Christ pronounce them blessed, who mourn? "Blessed are those who mourn." Surely then, if a man mourns for sin, he is in a good condition. "You see," says Nazianzen, "that salvation is joined with sorrow."

Solution. I answer, it is true, that those who mourn for sin, in the sense Christ there speaks of, are blessed; but *all* mourning for sin, does not therefore render us blessed.

1. True mourning for sin must flow from spiritual convictions of the evil, and vileness, and damnable nature of sin. Now, all who mourn for sin, do not do it from a thorough work of spiritual conviction upon the soul; they have not a right sense of the evil and vileness of sin.
2. True mourning for sin, is more for the evil which is in sin, than the evil that comes as a result of sin. It is more because it dishonors God, and wounds Christ, and grieves the Spirit, and makes the soul unlike God, than because it damns the soul. Now there are many who mourn for sin, not so much for the evil that is in it—as for the evil that it brings with it. There is mourning for sin in hell; you read of "weeping and wailing" there. The damned are weeping and mourning for all eternity. In hell, there is all sorrow, and no comfort. As in heaven there is peace without trouble, joy without mourning; so in hell there is trouble without peace, mourning without joy, weeping and wailing incessantly; but it is for the evil which they feel as a result of sin, and not for the evil which is in sin. A man may mourn for sin—and yet be but *almost* a Christian: it may grieve him to think of *perishing* for sin, when it does not grieve him that he is *defiled* and *polluted* by sin.

Thirdly, A man may make large CONFESSION of sin, to God, to others—and yet be but *almost* a Christian. How innocently does *Saul* confess his sin to David? "I have sinned!" says he, "you are more righteous than I! Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly!" So *Judas* makes a full confession, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!" Yet Saul and Judas were both rejected by God; so that a man may confess sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Objection. But is not a confession of sin a character of a child of God? Does not the apostle say, "If we confess our sins, God is just and faithful to forgive them." No man was ever kept out of heaven for his confessed badness, though many are kept out of heaven for their supposed goodness. True confession of sin is the way to the kingdom of heaven. There are some who confess sin, and are saved; there are others who confess sin, and perish.

1. Many confess sin merely out of custom, and not out of conscience. Many who will never pray--but they will make a long confession of sin—and yet never feel the weight or burden of sin upon their consciences.
2. Many will confess lesser sins—and yet conceal greater; like the patient who complained to his physician of his sore finger, when his liver was rotten.
3. Many will confess sin in the general, or confess themselves sinners; and yet see little, and say less of their particular sins. Where confession is right, it will be distinct, especially of those sins that were our chief sins. So David confesses his blood-guiltiness and adultery; so Paul his blasphemy, persecution, and injury against the saints. It is bad to hear men confess that they are great sinners—and yet cannot confess their particular sins. Though the least sin be too bad to be committed, yet there is no sin too bad to be confessed.
4. Many will confess sin—but it is only under extremity, that is, not free and voluntary. Pharaoh confesses his sin—but it was when judgment compelled him. "I have sinned against the Lord!" says he; but it was when he had eight plagues upon him.
5. Many do by their sins as mariners do by their goods, cast them out in a *storm*, wishing for them again in a calm. Confession should come like water out of a spring, which runs freely; not like water out of a still, which is forced by fire.
6. Many confess their sins—but with no intent to *forsake* sin. They confess the sins they have committed—but do not *leave* the sins they have confessed. Many men use their confession as Lewis the eleventh of

France did his crucifix; he would swear an oath, and then kiss it; and swear again, and then kiss it again. So many sin, and then confess they do not well—but yet never strive to do better.

Torsel tells a story of a minister he knew, who would be often drunk, and when he came into the pulpit, would confess it very lamentingly; and yet no sooner was he out of the pulpit—but he would be drunk again; and this would he do as constantly as men follow their trades.

Now then, if a man may confess sin merely out of custom; if he may confess lesser sins—and yet conceal greater; if he may confess sin only in the general, or only under extremity, or if he may confess sin without any intent to forsake sin—then surely a man may confess sin—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Fourthly, A man may FORSAKE sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. He may leave his lusts, and his wicked ways, which he sometimes lived in, and in the judgment of the world become a new man—and yet not be a new creature. Simon Magus, when he hears Philip preaching concerning the kingdom of God, leaves his sorcery and witchcraft, and *believes*.

Objection. But you will say, this seems contrary to Scripture; for that says, "He who confesses and forsakes sin, shall have mercy;" but I confess sin, yes, not only so—but also I forsake sin; surely therefore this mercy is my portion, it belongs to me.

Answer. It is true, that where a soul forsakes sin from a right principle, after a right manner, to a right end; where he forsakes sin as sin, as being contrary to God, and the purity of his nature—this declares that soul to be right with God, and the promise shall be made good to it, "He shall find mercy." But there is a forsaking sin that is not right—but unsound.

1. Open sins may be deserted—and yet secret sins may be retained. Now this is not a right forsaking; such a soul shall never find mercy. A man may be cured of a wound in his flesh—and yet may die of an infection in his heart.

2. A man may forsake sin—but not as sin; for he who forsakes sin as sin, forsakes *all* sin. It is impossible for a man to forsake sin as sin, unless he forsakes all that he knows to be sin.

3. A man may let *one* sin go—to hold another the faster; as a man who goes to sea, would willingly save all his goods; but if the storm arises that he cannot—then he throws some overboard to lighten the vessel, and save the rest. So did they, Acts 27:38. So the unrepentant sinner chooses to keep all his sins; but if a storm arises in his conscience, why then he will heave one lust overboard, to save the life of another!

4. A man may let all sin go—and yet be an unsaved sinner still; for there is the *root* of all sin in the heart, though the *fruit* is not seen in the life; the tree lives, though the boughs be lopped off. As a man is a sinner, before ever he acts sin—so (until grace renews him) he is a sinner, though he leaves sin; for there is original sin in him enough to damn and destroy him!

5. Sin may be left—and yet be loved; a man may forsake the *practice* of sin—and yet retain the *love* of sin. Now, though *leaving* sin makes him almost a Christian, yet *loving* sin shows he is but *almost* a Christian. It is a less evil to do sin, and not love it—than to love sin and not do it; for to do sin may argue only weakness of grace—but to love sin argues strength of lust. "What I hate—that I do." Sin is bad in any part of man—but sin in the heart is worse than sin in the life; for sin in the life may be only from infirmity—but sin in the heart is the fruit of choice and unregeneracy.

6. All sin may be chained—and yet the heart not changed; and so the *nature* of the sinner is the same as ever. A lion chained up, is a lion still—as much as if he was let loose to devour. There may be a cessation of combat between enemies—and yet the quarrel may remain still; there may be a making truce, where there is no making peace. A sinner may lay the weapons of sin out of his *hand*—and yet the enmity against God still remain in his *heart*. There may be a truce—he may not sin against God; but there can be no peace until he is united to God. *Restraining* grace restricts the sinner—but it is *renewing* grace which changes his nature.

Many are *restrained* by common grace from being open sinners, who are

not *renewed* by saving grace, and made true believers.

Now then, if a man may forsake open sins, and retain secret sins; if he may forsake sin—but not as sin; if he may let one sin go, to hold another the faster; if a man may let all sin go—and yet be a sinner still; if sin may be left—and yet be loved; if all sin may be chained, and yet the heart not changed—then a man may forsake sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section 5. A man may HATE sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. Absalom hated Amnon's immorality with his sister Tamar. Yes, his hatred was so great, that he slew him for it; and yet Absalom was but a wicked man.

Objection. But the Scripture makes it a sign of a gracious heart, to hate sin. Yes, though a man does, through infirmities, fall into sin, yet if he hates it, this is a proof of grace. Paul proves the sincerity of his heart, and the truth of his grace, by this hatred of sin, though he committed it, "What I hate—that I do." Nay, what is grace but a conformity of the soul to God; to love as God loves, to hate as God hates? Now God hates sin—it is one part of his holiness to hate all sin. And if I hate sin, then am I conformed to God—and if I am conformed to God, then am I altogether a Christian.

Answer. It is true, that there is a hatred of sin, which is a sign of grace, and which flows from a principle of grace, and is grace. As for instance: To hate sin, as it is an offence to God, a wrong to his majesty; to hate sin, as it is a breach of the command, and so a wicked disobeying of God's will, which is the only rule of goodness; to hate sin, as being a wicked transgression of that law of love established in the blood and death of Christ, and so, in a degree, a crucifying of Christ afresh. To hate sin, as being a grieving and quenching the Spirit of God, as all sin in its nature is. Thus to hate sin, is grace; and thus every true Christian hates sin.

But, though every man who has grace hates sin, yet every man who hates sin has not saving grace. For a man may hate sin from other principles, not as it is a wrong done to God, or a wounding Christ, or a grieving the Spirit; for then he would hate all sin; for there is no sin but has this in the nature of it. But,

1. A man may hate sin for the shame which attends it, more than for the evil which is in it. There are some sinners, "who declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not." They sit down in the seat of the scornful; "they glory in their shame." But there are other sinners who are *ashamed* of sin, and therefore hate it, not for the sin's sake—but for the shame's sake. This made Absalom hate Amnon's immorality, because it brought shame upon him and his sister.

2. A man may hate sin more in others, than in himself. So does the drunkard—he hates drunkenness in another—and yet practices it himself! The liar hates falsehood in another—but likes it himself. Now he who hates sin from a principle of grace, hates sin most in himself; he hates sin in others—but he loathes most the sins of his own heart! 3. A man may hate one sin—as being contrary to another. There is a great contrariety between one sin and another sin, between one lust and another lust. It is the excellency of the life of grace, that it is a uniform life; there is no one grace contrary to another. The graces of God's Spirit are different—but not contrary to one another. Faith, and love, and holiness, are all one. They consist together at the same time, in the same subject; nay, they cannot be parted. There can be no faith without love, no love without holiness; and so, on the other hand, no holiness without love; no love without faith. So that this makes the life of grace an easy and excellent life.

But the life of sin is a distracting contradictory life, wherein a man is a servant to contrary lusts. The lust of pride and extravagance, is contrary to the lust of covetousness, etc. Now, where one lust gets to be the master-lust of the soul, then that works a hatred of its contrary. Where covetousness gets the heart, there the heart hates pride; and where pride gets uppermost in the heart, there the heart hates covetousness. Thus a man may hate sin, not from a principle of grace—but from the contrariety of lusts. He does not hate any sin, as it is sin; but he hates it, as being contrary to his beloved sin.

Now then, if a man may hate sin for the shame which attends it; if he may hate sin more in others than himself; if he may hate one sin as being contrary to another—then he may hate sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section VI. A man may make great vows and promises—he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Thus did *Saul*; he promises and resolves against his sin, "Return, my son David," says he, "for I will no more do you harm." What promises and resolves did *Pharaoh* make against that sin of detaining God's people? Says he, "I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice to the Lord." And again, "I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." And yet Saul and Pharaoh both perished in their sins. The greatest *purposes* and *promises* against sin, will not make a man a Christian. For,

1. Purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin. We say, "threatened folks live long;" and truly so do threatened sins. It is not new purposes—but a new nature, which must help us against sin. Purposes may bring to the birth—but without a new nature, there is no strength to bring forth. The new nature is the best soil for holy purposes to grow in; otherwise, they wither and die, like plants in an improper soil.
2. Troubles and afflictions may provoke us to large purposes and promises against sin for the future. What is more common, than to vow—and not to pay? to make vows in the day of trouble—which we make no conscience to pay in the day of favor? Many covenant against sin, when trouble is upon them; and then sin against their covenant, when it is removed from them! It was a brave rule that Pliny, in one of his epistles, gave his friend to live by, "That we should continue to be such when we are well—as we promise to be when we are sick." Many are our sick-bed promises—but we are no sooner well, than we grow sick of our promises.
3. Purposes and resolves against sin for the *future*, may be only a temptation to put off repentance for the *present*. Satan may put a man on to good purposes for the future—to keep him from present attempts. He knows whatever we purpose, yet the strength of performance is not in ourselves. He knows, that purposes for the future are a putting God off

for the present; they are a secret disobedience, to a present duty. That is a notable passage, "Follow me," says Christ, to the two men. Now see what answers they gave to Christ, "Allow me first to go and bury my father," says one. This man purposes to follow Christ, only he would stay to bury his father. Says the other, "Lord, I will follow you—but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at my house." I will follow you—but only I would first go and take my leave of my friends, or set my house in order. And yet we do not find that they ever followed Christ, notwithstanding their fair purposes.

4. Nature unsanctified, may be so far wrought on, as to make great promises and purposes against sin.

1st, A natural man may have great convictions of sin, from the workings of an enlightened conscience.

2d, He may approve of the law of God.

3d, He may have a desire to be saved.

Now these three together—the workings of conscience; the sight of the goodness of the law; a desire to be saved—may bring forth in a man great purposes against sin—and yet he may have no heart to perform his own purposes.

This was much like the case of those who said to Moses, "Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey." This is a fair promise, and so God takes it, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good." So *said*, and so *done*, had been well. But it was better said than done! For though they had a *tongue* to promise, yet they had no *heart* to perform! And this God saw; therefore he said, "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them!" They promised to fear God, and keep his commandments; but they lacked a *new* heart to perform what an *unsanctified* heart had promised. It fares with men in this case, as it did with that son in the gospel, who said that "He would go into the vineyard—but went not."

Now then, if purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin; if present afflictions may draw out large promises; if they may be the resolves against sin for the future; or from nature unsanctified; surely then a man may promise and purpose much against sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section VII. A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin in himself—and yet be but almost a Christian.

So did *Balaam*; when he went to curse the people of God, he had a great strife within himself. "How shall I curse," says he, "those whom God has not cursed? or how shall I defy those whom the Lord has not defied?" And did not *Pilate* strive against his sin, when he said to the Jews, "Shall I crucify your king? what evil has he done. I am innocent of the blood of this just man."

Objection. But you will say, "Is not this an argument of grace, when there is a striving in the soul against sin? for what should oppose sin in the heart, but grace? The apostle makes "the lusting of the flesh against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh," to be an argument of grace in the heart. Now I find this strife in my heart, though the remainders of corruption sometimes break out into actual sins, yet I find a striving in my soul against sin.

Answer. It is true, there is a striving against sin, which is only from grace, and is proper to believers. But there is also a striving against sin, which is not from grace, and therefore may be in those who are not true believers. There is a strife against sin in one and the same faculty; the will against the will—the affection against the affection; and this is that which the apostle calls "the lusting of the flesh against the spirit;" that is, the striving of the unregenerate part against the regenerate; and this is ever in the same faculty, and is proper to believers only.

An unbeliever never finds this strife in himself. This strife cannot be in him; it is impossible while he not a state of grace. But then there is a

striving against sin in divers faculties; and this is the strife that is in those who are not believers. There, the strife is between the will and the conscience; conscience enlightened and terrified with the fear of hell and damnation, then the conscience is against sin; but the will and affections, not being renewed, they are for sin. And this causes great tugging and combats many times in the sinner's heart.

Thus it was with the Scribes and Pharisees. *Conscience* convinced them of the divinity of Christ, and of the truth of his being the Son of God. And yet a perverse will, and carnal affections, cry out, "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*" *Conscience* pleaded for him—it had a *witness* in their bosoms; and yet their *wills* were bent against him. Therefore they are said "to have resisted the Spirit;" namely, the workings and convictions of the Spirit in their consciences. And this is the case of many unconverted sinners: when the will and affections are for sin, and plead for it—and conscience is against it, and many times fights the soul away from the doing of it. And hence men take that which opposes sin in them, to be *grace*—when it is only the work of a *natural conscience*. They conclude the strife is between grace and sin—the regenerate and unregenerate part; when, alas! it is no other than the contention of a natural *conscience* against a corrupt *will* and *affections!* And if so then, a man may have great strifes and combats against sin in him; and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

A man may desire grace—and yet be but *almost* a Christian. So did the five foolish virgins, "Give us of your oil." What was that but true grace? It was that oil which lighted the wise virgins into the bridegroom's chamber. They do not only desire to enter in—but they desire oil to light them in. Wicked men may desire heaven—desire a Christ to save them; there is none so wicked upon earth—but desire to be happy in heaven. But here are those who desire *grace* as well as *glory*—and yet these are but almost Christians.

Objection. But is it not commonly taught that desires for grace, are grace? Nay, does not our Lord Christ make it so? "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

Answer. It is true, that there are some desires of grace which are grace—as,

1. When a man desires grace from a right sense of his natural state; when he sees the vileness of sin, and the woeful, defiled, and loathsome condition he is in by reason of sin; and therefore desires the grace of Christ to renew and change him—this is true grace. This some make to be the lowest degree of saving faith.

2. When a man joins proportionable *endeavors* to his desires; does not only *wish* for grace—but *work* for grace; such desires are grace.

3. When a man's desires are *constant* and *incessant*, which cease not but in the attainment of their object; such desires are true grace. They are a part of the special work of the Spirit. They do really partake of the nature of grace. Now it is a known maxim, "that which partakes of the nature of the whole, is a part of the whole;" the filings of gold are gold. The sea is not more really water, than the least drop; the flame is not more really fire than the least spark. But though all true desires for grace, are grace; yet all desires for grace, are not true. For,

1. A man may desire grace—but not for itself—but for somewhat else; not for grace's sake—but for heaven's sake. He does not desire grace, that his nature may be changed, his heart renewed, the image of God stamped upon him, and his lusts subdued in him. These are blessed desires, found only in true believers. The *true* Christian only can desire grace for grace's sake; but the *almost* Christian may desire grace for heaven's sake.

2. A man may desire grace, without proportionable *endeavors* after grace. Many are good at *wishing*—but bad at *working*; like him who reposed in the grass on a summer's day, crying out, "O that this were to work!" Solomon says, "The desire of the slothful kills him." How so? "For his hands refuse to labor!" He perishes with all his good desires. The believer joins *desires* and *endeavors* together, "One thing have I *desired* of the Lord—and that will I *seek* after."

3. A man's desires of grace may be unseasonable. Thus the foolish virgins desired oil when it was too late. The believer's desires are seasonable; he desires grace in the season of grace, and seeks grace in a time when it may be found. "The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure." He knows his season, and has wisdom to improve it. The silly sinner does

all his works out of season; he sends away the seasons of grace—and then desires grace when the season is over! The sinner does all *too late*; as Esau desired the blessing when it was too late, and therefore he lost it; whereas, had he come sooner, he would have obtained it. Most men are wise too late—they come when the market is closed; when the shop is closed, then they have their oil to get. When they lie upon their death-beds, then they desire holy hearts.

4. Desires of grace in many, are very inconstant and fleeting, like the "morning dew, which quickly passes away;" or like Jonah's gourd, which springs up in a night—and withers in a night. They have no root in the heart—and therefore quickly perish.

Now, if a man may desire grace—but not for grace's sake; if desires may be without endeavors; if a man may desire grace when it is too late; if these desires may be but fleeting and inconstant; then may a man desire grace—and yet be but almost a Christian.

A man may tremble at the Word of God—and yet be but almost a Christian, as Belshazzar trembled at the handwriting upon the wall.

Objection. But is not that a note of *sincerity* and *truth* of grace—to tremble at the Word? Does not God say, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My Word."

Answer. There is a two-fold trembling.

1. One is, when the Word discovers the guilt of sin—and the wrath of God which that guilt brings; this, where conscience is awake, causes trembling and astonishment. Thus, when Paul preached of *righteousness* and *judgment*, it is said that *Felix trembled*.

2. There is a trembling which arises from a holy dread and reverence of the majesty of God, speaking in his Word. This is only found in true believers, and is that which keeps the soul low in its own eyes. Therefore mark how the words run, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My Word."

God does not make the promise, merely to him who trembles at the Word; for the devils believe and tremble; the Word of God can make the proudest, stoutest sinner in the world to shake and tremble. But it is "to the one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My Word." Where trembling is the fruit of a spirit broken for sin, and humble in its own eyes; there will God look.

Now many tremble at the word—but not from poverty of spirit, not from a heart broken for sin, and low in its own eyes; not from a sense of the majesty and holiness of God: and therefore, notwithstanding they tremble at the Word, yet they are but *almost* Christians.

3. A man may delight in the Word and ordinances of God—and yet be but almost a Christian. "They take delight in approaching to God." And it is said of that ground, that it "received the Word with joy," and yet it was but "stony ground."

Objection. But is it not made a character of a godly man, to delight in the Word of God? Does not David say, "He is a blessed man—who delights in the law of the Lord."

Answer. There is a delighting in the Word—which flows from grace, and is a proof of blessedness.

1. He who delights in the Word, because of its spirituality—he is a Christian indeed. The more spiritual the ordinances are, the more does a gracious heart delight in them.

2. When the Word comes close to the conscience, rips up the heart, and discovers sin—and yet the soul delights in it notwithstanding; this is a sign of grace.

3. When delight arises from communion with God—this is from a principle of grace in the soul.

But there may be a delight in the Word—where there is **no** grace.

1. There are many who delight in the Word because of the eloquence of the preacher. They delight not so much in the *truths* delivered, as in the

dress in which they are delivered. Thus it is said of the prophet Ezekiel, "You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings love songs with a beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument. They hear what you say, but they don't do it!"

2. There are very many who delight to *hear* the Word, that yet take no delight to *do* it. So says God of them, "They delight to *hear* my words—but they *do* them not."

Now then, if a man may delight in the Word, more because of the eloquence of the preacher, than because of the spirituality of the matter; if he may delight to hear the word—and yet not delight to do it—then he may delight in the word—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section VIII. A man may be a MEMBER of a Christian church, he may join himself to the people of God, partake with them in all ordinances, and share of all church privileges—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

So the five foolish virgins joined themselves to the wise, and walked together. Many may be members of the church of Christ—and yet not members of Christ, the head of the church. There was a *mixed multitude* which came up with the church of Israel out of Egypt. They joined themselves to the Israelites, owned their God, left their own country—and yet were *Egyptians in heart* notwithstanding; "All are not Israel, that are of Israel."

The church in all ages has had unsound members: *Cain* had communion with *Abel*; *Ishmael* dwelt in the same house with *Isaac*; *Judas* was in fellowship with the apostles; and so was *Demas* with the rest of the disciples. There will be some tares in the finest wheat—and it will be so until the harvest. The dragnet of the Gospel catches bad fish as well as good. God has a church where there are no members but such as are true members of Christ—but it is in heaven, it is the "church of the first-born;"

there are no hypocrites, nor rotten, unsound professors, none but the "spirits of just men made perfect;" all is pure wheat that God lays up in that garner; there the chaff is separated to unquenchable fire.

But in the *church on earth* the wheat and the chaff lie in the same heap together; the Samaritans will be near of kin to the Jews when they are in prosperity: so while the church of God flourishes in the world, many will join to it; they will seem *Jews*, though they are *Samaritans*; and seem *saints*, though yet they are no better than *almost Christians*.

Section IX. A man may have great HOPES of heaven, great hopes of being saved—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Indeed there is a hope of heaven which is "the anchor of the soul sure and steadfast," it never miscarries, and it is known by four properties.

First, It is a hope which purifies the heart, and purges out sin, "He who has this hope, purifies himself even as God is pure." That soul that truly hopes to enjoy God, truly endeavors to be like God.

Secondly, It is a hope which fills the heart with gladness, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Thirdly, It is a hope that is founded upon the promise: as there can be no true faith without a promise, so, nor any true hope. Faith applies the promise, and hope expects the fulfilling the promise. Faith relies upon the truth of it, and hope waits for the good of it.

Fourthly, It is a hope that is wrought by God himself in the soul; who is therefore called, "the God of hope," as being the *Author* as well as the *Object* of hope. Now, he who has this hope shall never miscarry. This is a right hope; the hope of the true believer, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

But then, as there is a true and sound hope, so there is a *false* and *rotten* hope; and this is much more common, as bastard-pears are more

frequently worn than true pearls. There is nothing more common, than to see men big with groundless hopes of heaven, as,

1. A man may have great hope of heaven—who has no true grace. You read of the "hope of hypocrites." The performance of duties is a proof of their hope; the foolish virgins would never have done what they did, had they thought they should have been shut out after all. Many professors would not be at such pains in duties as they are, if they did not hope for heaven. Hope is the great motive to action: despair cuts the sinews of all endeavors. That is one reason why the damned in hell cease acting toward an alteration of their state, because despair has taken hold of them: if there were any hope in hell, they would up and be doing there.

So that there may be great hope where there is no grace; experience proves this; formal professors are men of no grace—but yet men of great hopes. Nay, many times you shall find that none fear more about their eternal condition—than those who have most cause of hope. And none hope more—than those who have most cause of fear!

2. A man may hope in the mercy, and goodness, and power of God, without eyeing the promise; and this is the hope of most. God is full of mercy and goodness, and therefore *willing* to save; and he is infinite in power, and therefore *able* to save; why therefore should I not rest on him? Now it is presumption, and therefore sin, to hope in the mercy of God, otherwise than by eyeing the promise; for the promise is the channel of mercy, through which it is conveyed. All the blessedness the saints enjoy in heaven, is no other than what is the fruit of promise relied on, and hoped for here on earth. A man has no warrant to hope in God—but by virtue of the promise.

3. A man may hope for heaven—and yet not cleanse his heart, nor depart from his secret sins. That hope of salvation that is not accompanied with heart-purification, is a vain hope.

4. A man may hope for heaven—and yet be doing the work of hell; he may hope for salvation—and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences. This is the case of many, like the tower who looks one way, and rows another; many have their eyes on heaven whose

hearts are in the earth; they hope in God—but choose him not for a portion; they hope in God—but do not love him as the best good, and therefore are will have no portion in him, nor good by him; but will perish without him, notwithstanding all their hopes. "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul?"

Now then, if a man may have great hope of heaven, who has no grace; if he may hope in mercy, without eyeing the promise; if he may hope without heart-purifying; if he may hope for heaven—and yet do the work of hell; surely then a man may have great hopes of heaven—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section X. A man may be under great and visible CHANGES, and these wrought by the ministry of the word—and yet be but *almost* a Christian,

as Herod was. It is said, "when he heard John the Baptist, he did many things, and heard him gladly." Saul was under a great change when he met the Lord's prophets; he turned prophet too. Nay, it is said that "God gave him another heart." Now, was not this a work of grace? and was not Saul here truly converted? One would think he was; but yet indeed he was not. For though it is said, God gave him another heart, yet it is not said, that God gave him a *new* heart. There is a great difference between *another* heart, and a new heart; God gave him *another* heart to fit him for a ruler—but gave him not a *new* heart to make him a believer. *Another* heart may make another man—but it is a *new* heart that makes a new man. Again Simon Magus is a great proof of this truth: he was under a great and visible change; of a sorcerer he was turned to be a believer; he left his witchcrafts and sorceries, and embraced the gospel; was not this a great change? If the drunkard does but leave his drunkenness, the swearer his oaths, the profane person his profaneness—they think this is a gracious change, and their state is now good. Alas! Simon Magus did not only leave his sins—but had a kind of conversion; for, "he believed, and was baptized."

Objection. But is not that man who is changed, a true Christian?

Answer. Not every change makes a man a Christian: indeed there is a change, that whoever is under it is a true Christian. When a man's *heart* is so changed, as that it is renewed: when old things "are done away, and all is become new;" when the new creature is wrought in the soul, when a man is "turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God;" when the mind is enlightened, the will renewed, the affections made heavenly—then a man is a Christian indeed.

But you must know that every change is not this change. For,

1. There is a civil change, a moral change, as well as a spiritual and supernatural change. Many men are changed in a moral sense, and one may say, they are become new men; but they are in heart and nature the same men still. They are not changed in a spiritual and supernatural sense, and therefore it cannot be said of them, that they have become new creatures. *Restraining* grace may cause a moral change; but it is *renewing* grace which must cause a saving change. Now, many are under restraining grace, and so changed morally, that are not under the power of saving grace, and so changed savingly.
2. There is an outward change, as well as an inward change. The outward change is often without the inward; though the inward change is never without the outward. A man's heart cannot be sanctified—but it will influence the life; but a man's life may be reformed—and yet never affect or influence the heart.
3. A man may be converted from a course of profaneness—to a form of godliness; from a filthy lifestyle—to a fair profession; and yet the heart be the same in one and the other. A rotten post may be painted without—and yet unsound within. It is common to have the "outside of the cup and platter" made clean—and yet the inside foul and filthy.

Now then, if a man may be changed morally—and yet not spiritually; outwardly—and yet not inwardly, from a course of profaneness to a lifeless form of godliness; then a man may be under great and visible changes—and yet be no more than *almost* a Christian. I do not speak this

to discountenance any change, short of that which is spiritual; but to awaken you to seek after that change which is more than moral. It is good to be outwardly renewed—but it is better to be savingly renewed.

I know how natural it is for men to take up with anything *like* a work of conversion, though it be not conversion; and resting in that, they eternally perish. Beloved, let me tell you, there is no change, no conversion, can stead your souls in the day of judgment, on this side that saving work, which is wrought on the soul by the Spirit of God, renewing you throughout! The sober man, without this change, shall as surely go to hell—as the foolish drunkard. Morality and civility may commend us to men—but not to God. They are of no value in the procurement of eternal salvation. A man may go far in an outward change—and yet be not one step nearer heaven, than he who was never under any change. Nay, he may be, in some sense, further off; as Christ says, the Scribes and Pharisees were further from heaven, with all their show of godliness, than publicans and harlots, in all their sin and immorality. Because, resting in a false work, a partial change, we neglect to seek after a true and saving change.

There is nothing more common than to mistake our state, and by proud thoughts, misjudge our condition, and so perish in our own delusions. The world is full of these foolish builders, who lay the foundation of their hopes of eternal salvation upon the *sand*. Now, my brethren, would you not mistake the way to heaven, and perish in a delusion? Would you not be found fools at last? for none are such fools as the spiritual fool, who is a fool in the great business of salvation. Would you not be fools for your souls, and for eternity? O then labor after, and pray for, a thorough work of conversion! Beg of God that he would make a saving change in your souls, that you may be altogether Christians! All other changes below this saving change, this heart change, make us but *almost* Christians.

Section XI. A man may be very ZEALOUS in the matters of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Jehu did not only serve God, and do what he commanded him—but was very zealous in his service, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord Almighty!" and yet in all this Jehu was a base hypocrite. Joash was a great reformer in Jehoiada's time; it is said, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada the priest." But when Jehoiada died, Joash's zeal for God died with him, and he becomes a base wretch.

Objection. But the apostle makes zeal to be a note of sound Christianity, "It is good to be zealously affected in good things;" nay, it seems to be the qualification for obtaining eternal life; "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

Answer. It is true, there is a zeal which is good, and which renders the soul highly acceptable to God—a zeal which never misses of heaven and salvation. Now this is a zeal which is a celestial fire; the true temper and heat of all the affections to God and Christ. It is a zeal wrought and kindled in the soul by the Spirit of God, who first works it, and then sets it on work. It is a zeal which has the Word of God for its guide, directing it in working, both in regard of its object and end, manner and measure. It is a zeal which checks sin, and forwards the heavenly life. It is a zeal which makes the glory of God its chief end; which swallows up all by-ends, "Zeal for your house has eaten me up."

But all zeal is not this kind of zeal. There is a false zeal, as well as a true. Every grace has its counterfeit. As there is fire, which is true heavenly fire, on the altar, so there is strange fire: Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire upon God's altar. There are several kinds of zeal, none of which are true and sound—but false and counterfeit. I shall instance in eight particulars:

First, There is a **blind** zeal, a zeal without knowledge. "They have a zeal," says the apostle, "but not according to knowledge." Now as knowledge without zeal is fruitless; so zeal without knowledge is dangerous. It is like wild-fire in the hand of a fool; or, like the devil in the man possessed, that threw him sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water. The eye is the light of the body, and the understanding is the light of the soul. Now, as the body, without the light of the eye, cannot go without stumbling; so the soul, without the light of the mind, cannot act without erring. Zeal without knowledge, is like a false light in a dark night, which leads a traveler out of his way, into the bogs and mire. This was the zeal of Paul, while he was a Pharisee: I was zealous towards God, as you are all this day; and I persecuted this way unto the death." And again, "I truly thought with myself, I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And, "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church." "They shall put you out of the synagogue; yes, the time comes, that whoever kills you, will think that he does God service." This is great zeal—but yet it is blind zeal; and that God abhors!

Secondly, There is a **partial** zeal: in one thing, fire-hot; in another stone-cold; zealous in this thing—and yet careless in another. Many are *first-table Christians*, zealous in the duties of the first-table—and yet neglect the second. Thus the Pharisees were zealous in their *Corban*—and yet unnatural to their parents, allowing them to starve and perish. Others are *second-table Christians*, zealous in the duties of the second-table—but neglect the first; more for righteousness among men, than for holiness towards God. But he whose religion ends with the first-table, or begins with the second—he is a fool in his profession; for he is but *almost* a Christian.

The woman who was for the dividing the child, was not the true mother; and he who is for dividing the commands, is not a true believer. Jehu was zealous against Ahab's *house*—but not so against Jeroboam's *calves*. Many are zealous against sin of *opinion*, that yet use no zeal against the sins of their *life*. Now, as we know that the sweat of the whole body is a sign of health—but the sweat of some one part only, shows a distemper, and therefore physicians do reckon such a heat to be symptomatic. So where zeal reaches to every command of God alike, that is a sign of a

sound constitution of soul; but where it is partial, where a man is hot in one part, and cold in another, that is symptomatic of some inward spiritual distemper.

Thirdly, There is a **misplaced** zeal; fixed upon unsuitable and disproportional objects. Many are very zealous in *trifling* things that are not worth it; and trifling in the things which most require it; like the Pharisees, who were diligent tithers of mint, anise, and cummin—but neglected the "weightier matters of the law; judgment, mercy, and faith." They had no zeal for these, though very hot for the other! Many are more zealous for a ceremony, than for the substance of religion; more zealous for bowing at the name of Jesus, than for conformity to the life of Jesus; more zealous for a holy vestments, than for a holy life; more zealous for the inventions of men, than for the institutions of Christ. This is a superstitious zeal, and usually found in men unconverted, in whom grace never was wrought! Against such men, heathen will rise up in judgment.

When was it that Paul was so "exceeding zealous of the *traditions* of his fathers," as he says—but only when he was in his wretched and unconverted state? as you may see in the next verses, "But when it pleased God to call me by his grace, then I conferred not with flesh and blood." Paul had another kind of zeal then, actuated by other kind of principles.

Fourthly, There is a **selfish** zeal, which has a man's own end for its motive; Jehu was very zealous—but it was not so much for *God*, as for the *kingdom*; not so much in obedience to the command, as in design to step into the throne; and therefore God threatens to punish him for that very thing he commands him to do! "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu;" because he shed that blood, to gratify his lust—not to obey God. So Simeon and Levi pretend great zeal for circumcision, seem very zealous for the honor of God's ordinances, when in truth their zeal was covetousness, and revenge upon the Shechemites.

Fifthly, There is an **external** zeal: such was that of the Scribes and Pharisees. They would not eat with unwashed hands—but yet would live in unseen sins. They would wash the cup often—but the heart seldom. They would paint the outside—but neglect the inside. Jehu was a mighty

external reformer—but he reformed nothing within, for he had a base heart under all. "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart." Though his coat was fair, his liver was rotten. Our Lord Christ observes of the Pharisees, "They pray, to be seen of men;" and fast, so "that they may appear to men to fast."

Sixthly, There is a zeal which runs out upon **others**; like the candle in the lantern, which sends all the heat out at the top; or as the lewd woman Solomon mentions, whose "feet abide not in her own house." Many are hot and high against the sins of others—and yet cannot see the same in themselves. It is easy to see faults in others—and as hard to see them in ourselves! Jehu was zealous against Baal and his priests, because that was Ahab's sin; but not against the calves of Bethel, because that was his own sin. This zeal is the true character of a hypocrite; his own garden is overrun with weeds, while he is busy in looking over his neighbor's garden.

Seventhly, There is a **sinful** zeal: all the former may be called sinful from some defect; but this I call sinful in a more special notion, because against the life of religion. It is a zeal against true religion, which flies not at profaneness—but at the very power of godliness; not at error—but at truth; and is most hot against the most spiritual and important truths of the times. Whence else are the sufferings of men for the truth—but from the spirit of zeal against the truth? This may be called a *devilish* zeal; for as there is the faith of devils, so there is the zeal of devils, "Therefore his rage is great, because he knows his time is short."

Eighthly, there is a **scriptureless** zeal, that is not butted and bounded by the Word—but by some base and low end. Such was Saul's zeal, when God bids him destroy Amalek, "and spare neither man nor beast;" when contrary to God's command, he spares the best of the sheep and oxen, under pretense of zeal for God's sacrifice. Another time, when he had no such command, then he slew the Gibeonites "in zeal to the children of Israel and Judah." Many a man's zeal is greater then and there, when and where he has the least warrant from God. The true spirit of zeal is bounded by Scripture; for it is for God and the concerns of his glory: God has no glory from that zeal that has no scripture-warrant.

Now then, if the zeal of a man in the things of God may be only a blind zeal, or a partial zeal, or a misplaced zeal, or a selfish zeal, or an external zeal, or a zeal regarding others, or a sinful zeal, or a scriptureless zeal—then it is evident, that a man may be very zealous in the matters of religion—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section XII. A man may be much in PRAYER—he may pray often, and pray much; and yet be but almost a Christian.

So did the Pharisees, whom yet our Lord Christ rejects for hypocrites.

Objection. But is not a praying-frame an argument of a sincere heart? Are not the saints of God called "the generation of those who seek the face of God?"

Answer. A man is not therefore a Christian, because he is much in prayer. I grant that those prayers that are from the workings and sighings of God's Spirit in us; from sincere hearts lifted up to God; from a sense of our own emptiness, and God's infinite fullness; that are suited to God's will, the great rule of prayer; that are for spiritual things, more than temporal; that are accompanied with faith and dependence—such prayers speak a man to be altogether a Christian.

But a man may be much in prayer—and yet be a stranger to such prayer. As,

1. *Nature* may put a man upon prayer; for it is a part of natural worship. It may put a child of God upon prayer—so did Christ, "He went and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." This was a prayer of Christ which flowed from the sinless struggles of nature, seeking its own preservation.

2. A man may pray in *pretense*, for a covering to some sin—so did those devout Pharisees, "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore

you shall receive the greater damnation!" So the Papists seem very devout to pray a rich man's soul out of purgatory; but it is to cheat the heir of much of his estate, under pretense of praying for his father's soul.

3. A man may pray—and yet love sin; as Augustine before conversion prayed against his sin—but was afraid God would hear him, and take him at his word. Now, God hears not such prayers, "If I regard iniquity in my heart—God will not hear my prayer."

4. A man may pray much for temporal things, and little for spiritual things; and such are the prayers of most men, crying out most for temporal things. More for, "Who will show us any good?" than for, "Lord, lift upon us the light of your countenance upon me." David copies out the prayer of such, "That our sons may be as plants, and that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: that our garners may be full, etc." This is the carnal prayer; and this David calls vanity, "They are strange children, whose mouth speaks vanity."

5. A man may pray—and yet be far from God in prayer, "This people draw near to me with their mouths, and honor me with their lips—but their heart is far from me." A man may pray—and yet have no *heart* in prayer; and that God chiefly looks at, "My son, give me your *heart*." The Jews have this sentence written upon the walls of their synagogues, "Prayer, without the intention of the mind, is but a body without a soul." Many are so conscientious that they dare not but pray; and yet so irreligious, that they have no heart in prayer. A common work of God may make a man conscientiable to do duties—but nothing less than giving grace in the heart, will make a man conscientiable in the doing of them.

6. A man's prayer may be a lie. As a profession without sanctity is a lie to the world—so prayer without sincerity is a lie to God. It is said of Israel, that they "sought God, and inquired early after him." They were much in prayer, and God calls all but a lie. "Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouths, and they lied to him with their tongues, for their heart was not with him." "Hearken to my prayer, that goes not out of feigned lips," says David.

7. Affliction and the pressure of outward evils, will make a man pray, and

pray much. "When he slew them—then they sought Him, and returned, and inquired early after God." The heathen mariners called every man upon his god when in a storm: when they fear drowning, then they fall to praying, Jonah 1:5. Mariners are for the most part none of the devoutest, nor much addicted to prayer. They will swear twice, where they pray once; and yet it is said, "They cry to the Lord in their trouble;" and hence you have a proverb, "He who cannot pray let him go-to sea." "They poured out a prayer when your chastening was upon them."

Now then, if nature may put a man upon prayer; if a man may pray in pretense, and design; if a man may pray—and yet love sin; if a man may pray mostly for temporal things; if a man may pray—and yet be far from God in prayer; if prayer may be a lie, or it may be only the cry of the soul under affliction—surely then, a man may be much in prayer—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Objection. But suppose a man prays, and prevails with God in prayer, surely that is a witness from heaven of a man's sincerity in prayer. Now, I pray—and prevail; I ask—and am answered.

Answer. A man may pray, and be answered; for God many times answers prayers in judgment. As God is sometimes silent in mercy, so he speaks in wrath; and as he sometimes denies prayer in mercy, so he sometimes answers in judgment. When men are over-importunate in something their lusts are upon, and will take no nay, then God answers in judgment. "He gave them their own desire." They had desired quails, and God sent them. But now mark the judgment, "While the meat was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew them!"

Objection. But suppose a man's affections are much stirred in prayer—what then? Is not that a true note of Christianity?

Answer. So was Esau's, when he sought the blessing. "He sought it carefully with tears." A man may be affected with his own parts in a duty, while good notions pass through his head, and good words through his lips: some good motions also may stir in his heart—but they are but sparks which fly out at the tunnel of the chimney, which suddenly vanish; so that it is possible a man may pray, and prevail in prayer; pray, and be

affected in prayer—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section XIII. A man may SUFFER for Christ in his goods, in his name, in his person—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Every man who bears Christ's cross on his shoulders, does not, therefore, bear Christ's *image* in his soul.

Objection. But does not our Lord Christ make great promises to those who suffer, or lose anything for him? Does he not say, "Everyone who has forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life"? Surely they are true Christians to whom Christ makes this promise.

Answer. There is a suffering for Christ, that is a note of sincerity, and shall have its reward. That is, when a man suffers for a good cause, upon a good call, and with a good conscience, for Christ's sake, and in Christ's strength; when his sufferings are a filling up "that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ;" when a man suffers as a Christian, as the apostle has it, "If a man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed;" when a man thrusts not himself into sufferings—but stays God's call—such suffering is a proof of integrity. But, every suffering for Christ is not suffering as a Christian. For,

1. A man may suffer for Christ, for that profession of religion that is upon him; the world hates the show of religion. Times may come, that it may cost a man as dear to wear the livery of Christ, as to wear Christ himself. Alexander had like to have lost his life for the gospel's sake, yet he was that Alexander, as is generally judged, that afterwards made shipwreck of faith, and greatly opposed Paul's ministry.
2. A man may suffer for Christ—and yet have no true love to Christ. This is supposed, "Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits nothing." Love to Christ is the only noble ground of suffering;

but a man may suffer much upon other ends.

- * Out of opinion of meriting by our sufferings, as the Papists; or,
- * Out of vain glory, or for applause among professors; some have died, that their names might live; or,
- * Out of a Roman resolution, or stoutness of spirit.
- * Out of a design of profit, as Judas forsook all for Christ, hoping to mend his market by closing with him; or,
- * Rather to maintain an opinion, than for truth's propagation.

Socrates died for maintaining that there was but one God; but he died rather for his own opinion, than for God's sake. Thus, a man may suffer for professing Christ—and yet suffer upon *wrong principles*. Now then, if a man may suffer for Christ, from the profession that is upon him, or suffer for Christ—and yet not truly love him; then a man may suffer for Christ—and yet be but almost a Christian.

XIV. A man may be CALLED by God, and embrace this call—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Judas is a famous instance of this truth: he was called by Christ himself, and came at the call of Christ; and yet Judas was but *almost* a Christian.

Objection. But is not the being under the call of God, a proof of our interest in the predestinating love of God? Does not the apostle say, "Whom he *predestinated*, those he *called*?" Nay, does he not say, in the next verse, "Whom he *called*, those he *justified*?" Nay, does not God call all whom he intends to save?

Answer. Though God calls all those who shall be saved, yet all shall not be saved whom God calls. Every man under the gospel is called of God in one sense or other—but yet every man under the gospel shall not

therefore be saved, "For many are called—but few chosen." There is a twofold call of God--internal, and external.

1. There is an INTERNAL call of God. Now, this call is a special work of the Spirit, by the ministry of the Word, whereby a man is brought out of a state of nature, into a state of grace; "out of darkness into light, from being vessels of wrath, to be made heirs of life." I grant, that whoever is under this call of God, is called *effectually* and *savingly*, to be a Christian indeed. "Every man who has heard and learned of the Father, comes to me."
2. There is a call of God which a man may have—and yet not be this call. There is an EXTERNAL call of God, which is by the ministry of the Word. Now every man who lives under the preaching of the gospel, is thus called. God calls every person to repent, and lay a sure foundation for heaven and salvation, by the Word you hear this day. But every man who is thus called, is not therefore a Christian. For,

- a. Many under the call of God, come to Christ—but are not converted to Christ—they have nothing of the grace and life of Christ; such as he, who, when Christ sent out his servants to bid guests unto the marriage, came in at the call of Christ—but yet "had not on the wedding garment;" that is, had none of the grace and righteousness of Jesus Christ.
- b. Many that are under the call of the gospel, come to Christ—and yet afterwards fall away from Christ; as Judas and Demas did. It is said, when Christ preached a doctrine that his disciples did not like, that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Now then, if many are only under this external call of God; if many that come to Christ are not converted to Christ—but fall away from Christ; then a man may be called of God—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section XV. A man may have the SPIRIT of God—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Balaam had the Spirit of God given him when he blessed Israel, "Balaam

saw Israel abiding in tents, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him." Judas had; for by the Spirit he cast out devils; he was one of those who came to Christ, and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us!" Saul had, " Behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them."

Objection. But you will say, "Can a man have the Spirit of God—and yet not be a Christian?" Indeed, the Scripture says, "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" but surely if any man have the Spirit of Christ, he is his!

Answer. There is a having of the Spirit, which is a sure mark of saintship. Where the Spirit is—an effectual prevailing principle of grace and sanctification, renewing and regenerating the heart: where the Spirit is a potent worker, "helping the soul's infirmities: where the Spirit is so as to "abide forever." But every man who has the Spirit, has not the Spirit in this manner. For,

1. A man may have the Spirit only transiently, not abidingly. The Spirit may *be* in a man—and yet not *dwell* in a man. The Spirit is wherever he *dwells*—but he does not dwell wherever he *is*; he is *in* all—but *dwells* in saints only. The hypocrite may have the Spirit for a season—but not to *abide* in him forever.
2. A man may have the Spirit—and yet not be *born* of the Spirit. Every true Christian is born of the Spirit. A hypocrite may have the *gifts* of the Spirit—but not the *graces*. The Spirit may be in him by the way of *illumination*—but not by way of *sanctification*; by way of *conviction*—but not by way of *conversion*. Though he may have much *common* grace for the good of others, yet he may have no *special* grace for the good of himself; though his *profession* is spiritual, yet his state and *condition* may be carnal.
3. A man may have the Spirit—only as a Spirit of bondage. Thus, many have the Spirit working only to bondage. "The Spirit of bondage is an operation of the Holy Spirit by the law, convincing the conscience of sin, and of the curse of the law, and working in the soul such an apprehension of the wrath of God, as makes the thoughts of God a terror to him." This

Spirit may be, and often is, without saving grace: this operation of the Spirit was in Cain and Judas. There are none who receive the Spirit of adoption—but they first receive the Spirit of bondage: yet many receive the Spirit of bondage—who never receive the Spirit of adoption.

4. A man may have the Spirit of God working in him—and yet the Spirit may be *resisted* by him. It is said of the Jews, "They rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit." And the same sin is charged upon their children, "You stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart, you have always resisted the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you." The hypocrite retains not the Spirit so long as to come up to regeneration and adoption—but quenches the motions of the Spirit, and thereby miscarries eternally.

5. A man may have the Spirit—and yet sin that unpardonable sin. He may have the Holy Spirit—and yet sin the sin against the Holy Spirit. Nay, no man can sin this sin against the Spirit—but he who has some degree of the Spirit. The true believer has so much of the Spirit, such a work of it in him, that he cannot sin that sin, "He who is born of God, sins not;" to wit, that "sin unto death," for that is meant. The ungodly sinner, he cannot sin that sin, because he is carnal and sensual, having not the Spirit. A man must have some measure of the Spirit—who sins this sin. So has the hypocrite—he is said to be "partaker of the Holy Spirit," and he alone is capable of sinning the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Now then, if a man may have the Spirit transiently only, not abidingly; if a man may have the Spirit—and yet not be born of the Spirit; if he may have the Spirit only as a Spirit of bondage; if a man may have the Spirit working in him—and yet may be resisted by him; if a man may have the Spirit and yet sin that unpardonable sin against Him; then surely a man may have the Spirit of God—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section XVI. A man may have FAITH—and yet be but almost a Christian.

The stony ground, that is, those hearers set out by the stony ground, "for a *while* believed." It is said, that many believed in the name of Christ, yet

Christ dared not "commit himself to them." Though they trusted in Christ, yet Christ would not trust them; and why? "because he knew all men." He knew they were rotten at root, notwithstanding their *faith*. A man may have all faith, to the removing of mountains—and yet be a mere hypocrite.

Objection. But how can this be, that a man may have faith—and yet be but *almost* a Christian? Does not our Lord Christ promise eternal life and salvation to all who believe? Is not this the Gospel that is to be preached to every creature, "He who believes shall be saved"?

Answer. Though it is true what our Lord Christ says, that "he who believes shall be saved," yet it is as true, that many believe that shall never be saved; for Simon Magus believed. Yes, James says, "The devils believe and tremble;" now none will say devils shall be saved. As it is true, what the apostle says, "All men have not faith," so it is as true, that there are some men have faith, who are no whit the better for their faith. You must know therefore there is a two-fold faith, 1. Special and saving. 2. Common and not saving.

1. There is a **saving** faith. This is called "faith of the operation of God." It is a work of God's own Spirit in the soul. It is such a faith as rests and casts the soul wholly upon Christ for grace and glory, pardon and peace, sanctification and salvation. It is a united act of the whole soul—the understanding, will and affections, all concurring to unite the soul to an all-sufficient Redeemer. It is such a faith as "purifies the heart," and makes it clean; it influences and gives strength and life to all other graces. Now, whoever has this faith, is a Christian indeed; this is the "faith of God's elect."

2. But then, there is a **common** faith, not saving, a fading and temporary faith; there is the faith of Simon *Magus*, as well as the faith of Simon *Peter*. Simon *Magus* believed—and yet he was in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Now Simon Magus had more followers than Simon Peter. The faith of most men will at last be found to be no better than the faith of Simon Magus. For,

First, The faith of most is but a temporary faith, endures for a while, and

then dies and perishes. True and saving faith, such as is the faith of God's elect, cannot die: it may fail in the individual acts—but not in the habit; the sap may not be in the branch—but it is always in the root. That faith which perishes, that faith a man may have and perish.

Secondly, there is a faith which lies only in generals, not in particulars. As there is a general and particular object of faith, so there is a general and particular faith. The general *object* of faith is the whole Scripture; the *particular* object of faith is Christ in the promise. Now many have a general faith to believe all the Scripture—and yet have no faith to make particular application of Jesus Christ in the promise. Devils and reprobates may believe the truth of the Scripture, and what is written of the dying and suffering of Christ for sinners; but there are but few that can close up themselves in the wounds of Christ, and by his stripes fetch in healing to their own souls.

Thirdly, There is a faith that is seated in the *understanding*—but not in the *will*. This is a very common faith. Many *assent* to the truth. They believe all the attributes of *God*—that he is just, holy, wise, faithful, good, merciful, etc. But notwithstanding, they do not rest on him. They believe the *commands* are true—but yet do not obey them. They believe the *promises* are true—but yet do not embrace and apply them. They believe the *threatenings* are true—but yet do not flee from them. Thus their faith lies in assent—but not consent; they have faith in their judgment—but none to take execution. By assent they lay a foundation—but never build upon it by application. They believe that Christ died to save those who believe—and yet they believe not in Christ, that they may be saved.

O my brethren, it is not a believing head—but a believing heart—which makes a Christian! "With the *heart*, man believes to righteousness." Without this our "faith is vain—and we are yet in our sins."

Fourthly, There is a faith without *experience*; many believe the Word upon hearsay, to be the Word of God; but they never felt the power and virtue of it upon their hearts and consciences. Now what good is it to believe the truth of the Word—if a man's conscience never felt the power of the Word? What is it to believe the truth of the promise—if we never tasted the sweetness of the promise? We are in this case like a man who

believes the description others make of strange countries—but never traveled them to know the truth; or as a patient who believes all the physician says—but yet never takes his remedies. We believe the Word, because we cannot gainsay it; but yet we have no experience of any saving good wrought by the word, and so are but *almost* Christians.

Fifthly, There is a faith which is without brokenness of heart, which does not avail to melt or soften the heart, and therefore is not true faith. For the least true faith is ever joined with a bending will, and broken heart.

Sixthly, There is a faith which does not transform the heart; faith without fruit, which does not bring forth the new creature in the soul—but leaves it in a state of sin and death. This is a faith which makes a man a sound professor—but not a sound believer. He believes the truth—but not as it is in Jesus; for then it would change and transform him into the likeness of Jesus. He believes that a man must be changed, who would be saved—but yet is not savingly changed by believing. Thus, while others believe to salvation, he believes to damnation: for "his web shall not become a garment; neither shall he cover himself with his work."

Now then, if a man's faith may be but temporary, or may lie only in generals, or may be seated in the understanding only, or may be without experience, or may be without a broken heart, or without a new heart; surely then a man may have faith, he may taste of this "heavenly gift," and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section XVII. A man may go further yet—he may possibly have a LOVE to the people of God—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Every kind of love to those who are saints, is not a proof of our saintship. Pharaoh loved Joseph, and advanced him to the second place in the kingdom—and yet Pharaoh was but a wicked man: Ahab loved Jehoshaphat and made a league with him, and married his daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son—and yet Ahab was a wicked wretch.

But you will say this seems to contradict the testimony of the Scriptures; for that makes love to the saints and people of God, a sure proof of our regeneration, and interest in life eternal, "We know that we have passed from death to life—because we love the brethren." Nay, the Spirit of God puts this as a characteristic distinction between saints and unconverted sinners, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoever does not righteousness, is not of God, neither he who loves not his brother." By *brethren* we do not understand brethren by place, those who are of the same country or nation, such as are called brethren in Romans 9:3, Acts 7:23, 25. Nor do we understand brethren by race, those who are descended of the same parents; such are called brethren in James 1:2. But by brethren we understand brethren by grace, and supernatural regeneration, such as are the children of God; and these are the brethren whom to love is a sure sign that we are the children of God.

Answer. To this I answer, that there is a love to the children of God, which is a proof of our being the children of God. As for instance, when we love them as such, for that very reason, as being the saints of God, when we love them for the image of God, which appears in them, because of that grace and holiness which shines forth in their conversations; this is truly commendable, to love the godly for godliness sake, the saints for saintship sake—this is a sure testimony of our Christianity. The *love of grace* in another, is a good proof of the *life of grace* in ourselves. There can be no better evidence of the Spirit of Christ in us, than to love the image of Christ in others. For this is a certain truth—that a sinner cannot love a saint as such; "an *Israelite* is an abomination to an *Egyptian*." There is a contrariety and natural enmity between the two seeds; between the children of the world, and those whom the Father in his eternal love has "chosen out of the world."

It is *likeness* which is the great ground of love. There is the highest dissimilitude and unlikeness between an unregenerate sinner, and a child of God, and therefore a child of God cannot love a sinner as a sinner, "In whose eyes a vile person is despised." He may love him as a creature; he may love his soul, or he may love him under some relation which he stands in to him. Thus God loves the damned spirits, as they are his creatures—but as fallen creatures, he hates them with an infinite hatred.

So to love a sinner, as a sinner, this a child of God cannot do; so neither can a sinner love a child of God as a child of God. That he may love a child of God, that I grant—but it is upon some other consideration; he may love a person that is holy, not the person for his holiness—but for some other respect. As,

1. A man may love a child of God for his loving, peaceable, courteous deportment to all with whom he converses. Religion beautifies the life of a man and sets him off to the eye of the world. The grace of God is no friend to morose, churlish, unmannerly behavior among men; it promotes an affable demeanor and sweetness to all; and where this is found, it wins respect and love from all.
2. A man may love a saint for his outward greatness and splendor in the world; men are very apt to honor worldly greatness, and therefore the rich saint shall be loved and honored, while the poor saint is hated and despised. This is as if a man should value the goodness of his sword by the embroidery of his belt; or his horse for the beauty of his trappings, rather than for his strength and swiftness. True love to the children of God, reaches to *all* the children of God, poor as well as rich, slave as well as free, ignoble as well as noble, for the image of Christ is alike amiable and lovely in all.
3. A man may love a child of God for his fidelity and usefulness in his place: where the power of religion takes hold of a man's heart, it makes him true to all his trusts, diligent in his business, faithful in all his relations; and this obliges respect. A carnal master may prize a godly apprentice or servant, who makes conscience of pleasing his master, and is diligent in promoting his interest. I might instance in many things of the like nature, as charity, beauty, wit, learning, parts, etc., which may procure love to the people of God from the men of the world. But this love is no proof of true Christian love. For,

First, It is but a *natural* love arising from some carnal respect, or self-ends. That love which is made by the Scripture an evidence of our regeneration, is a *spiritual* love, the principal loadstone and attraction whereof is grace and holiness; it is a love which embraces a "righteous man in the name of a righteous man."

2. A carnal man's love to saints, is a *limited* and *bounded* love; it is not universal "to the seed." Now as in sin, he who does not make conscience of every sin, makes conscience of no sin as sin; so he who does not love all in whom the image of Christ is found, loves none for that of the image of Christ which is found in them.

Now then, if the love we bear to the people of God may possibly arise from natural love only, or from some carnal respect; or if it is a limited love, not extended to all the people of God—then it is possible that a man may love the people of God—and yet be no better than *almost* a Christian.

Section XVIII. A man may OBEY the commands of God, yes, many of the commands of God—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Balaam seems very conscientious of steering his course by the compass of God's command. When Balak sent to him to come and curse the people of God, says Balaam, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the Word of the Lord my God!" And so says he, "The word that God puts in my mouth, that shall I speak!"

The rich young ruler also went far in obedience, "All these have I observed from my youth up;" and yet he was but a hypocrite, for he forsook Christ after all.

Objection. But is it not said, "He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he who loves me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him?" And does not our Lord Christ tell us expressly, "You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you?" And can a man be a friend of Christ and be but almost a Christian?

Answer. There is an obedience to the commands of Christ, which is a sure proof of our Christianity and friendship to Christ. This obedience has a threefold property. It is,

1. Evangelical.

2. Universal.

3. Continual.

First, It is **evangelical** obedience, and that both in matter and manner, ground and end. In the *matter* of it; and that is what God requires, "You are my friends, if you do whatever *I* command you." In the *manner* of it; and that is according as God requires, "God is a Spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." In the *ground* of it; and that is, "a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith." In the *end* of it; and that is, the honor and glory of God, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Secondly, It is a **universal** obedience, which extends itself to all the commands of God alike: it respects the duties of both tables. Such was the obedience of Caleb, "who followed the Lord *fully*;" and of David, who had "respect to *all* his commands."

Thirdly, It is a **continual** obedience, a putting the hand to God's plough, without looking back, "I have inclined my heart to perform your statutes always, even to the end." He who thus obeys the command of God, is a Christian indeed; a friend of Christ indeed. But all obedience to the commands of God, is not this obedience. For,

1. There is a **partial** obedience—a piece-meal religion, when a man obeys God in one command, and not in another; owns him in one duty, and not in another; when a man seems to make conscience of the duties of one table, and not of the duties of another. This is the religion of most people. Now this obedience is no true obedience; for as he who does not love God above all, does not love God at all; so he who does not obey all the commands universally, cannot be said to obey any command truly.

It is said of those in Samaria that they "feared the Lord—and served their own gods after their own manner." And yet in the very next verse it is said, "They feared not the Lord;" so that their fear of the Lord was no fear. In like manner, that obedience to God is no obedience, which is but

a partial and piecemeal obedience.

2. A man may obey much—and yet be in his old nature; and if so, then all his obedience in that estate is but a *painted* sin, "He who offers an oblation, is as if he offered swine's blood; and he who burns incense, as if he blessed an idol." The nature must be renewed, before the command can be rightly obeyed; for "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." Whatever a man's performances are, they cannot be called obedience, while the heart remains unregenerate, because the principle is false and unsound. Every duty done by a believer, is accepted of God, as part of his obedience to the will of God, though it be done in much weakness; because, though the believer's *hand* is weak, yet "*his heart is right.*" The hypocrite may have the most active hand—but the believer has the most faithful and sincere heart.

3. A man may obey the law—and yet have no love to the Lawgiver. A carnal heart may do the command of God—but he cannot love God, and therefore cannot do it aright; for love to God is the foundation and spring of all true obedience. Every command of God is to be done in love: this is the "*fulfilling of the law.*" The apostle says, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, (these seem to be acts of the highest obedience), yet if I have not love, it profits me nothing."

4. I might add, that a man may be much in obedience from sinister and base selfish ends: as the Pharisees prayed much, gave much alms, fasted much. But our Lord Christ tells us, that it was "that they might be seen of men, and have glory of men." Most of the *hypocrite's piety* empties itself into vain-glory; and therefore he is but an empty vine in all he does, because "*he brings forth fruit to himself.*"

It is the end which justifies the action: indeed, a good end cannot make a bad action good—but yet the lack of a good end makes a good action bad.

Now then, if a man may obey the commands of God partially, and by halves; if he may do it—and yet be in his natural state; if he may obey the commands of God—and yet not love God; if the ends of his obedience may be sinful and unwarrantable—then a man may be much in obeying

the commands of God—and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Section XIX. A man may be SANCTIFIED— and yet be but *almost* a Christian.

Every kind of sanctification does not make a man a new creature; for many are *sanctified* that are never *renewed*. You read of those who "count the blood of the covenant, with which they were sanctified, an unholy thing."

Objection. But does not the Scripture tell us, that "both he who sanctifies, and those who are sanctified, are all one: for which cause, he is not ashamed to call them brethren." And can a man be one with Christ—and yet be but *almost* a Christian?

Answer. To this I answer—You must know there is a twofold work of sanctification spoken of in Scripture. The one, common and ineffectual. The other, *special* and *effectual*. That work of sanctification which is true and effectual, is the working of the Spirit of God in the soul, enabling it to the mortifying of all sin, to the obeying of every command, to "walking with God in all well-pleasing." Now, whoever is thus sanctified, is one with him who sanctifies. Christ will not be ashamed to call such brethren; for they are "flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone."

But then there is a more *common* work of sanctification which is ineffectual as to the two great works of dying to sin, and living to God. This kind of sanctification may help to *restrain* sin—but not to *mortify* sin; it may lop off the boughs—but it lays not the axe to the root of the tree; it sweeps and garnishes the room with *common virtues*—but does not adorn it with *saving graces*; so that a man is but *almost* a Christian, notwithstanding this common type of sanctification.

Or thus, there is an inward and outward sanctification. *Inward* sanctification is that which deals with the soul and its faculties, understanding, conscience, will, memory, and affections. *Outward* sanctification is that which deals with the life and conversation. Both these must concur to make a man a Christian indeed. Therefore the

apostle puts them together in his prayer for the Thessalonians, "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and, I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." A man is then sanctified wholly when he is sanctified both inwardly and outwardly—both in heart and affections, and in life and conversation. Outward sanctification is not enough without inward, nor inward without outward: we must have both "*clean hands, and a pure heart.*" The *heart* must be pure, that we may not incur blame from within; and the *hands* must be clean, that we may not incur shame from without. We must have hearts "*sprinkled from an evil conscience, and bodies washed with pure water.*" "*We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.*" Inward purity is the most excellent—but, without the outward, it is not sufficient; the true Christian is made up of both.

Now many have clean hands—but unclean hearts. They wash the *outside* of the cup and platter, when all is filthy *within*. Now, the former without the latter, profits a man no more than it profited Pilate, who condemned Christ, to wash his hands in the presence of the people: he washed his hands of the blood of Christ—and yet had a hand in the death of Christ. The Egyptian temples were beautiful on the outside—but within you shall find nothing but serpents or reptiles. "*He is not a Jew which is one outwardly.*" Judas was a saint without—but a sinner within; openly he was a disciple—but secretly, he was a devil.

Some pretend to *inward* sanctity without outward. This is the pretense of the open sinner, "*Though I sometimes drop an idle, foolish word,*" says he, "*or though I sometimes swear an oath, yet I think no hurt—I thank God my heart is as good as the best!*" Such are like the sinner Moses mentions, that "*blessed himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.*"

Some pretend to *outward* sanctity without inward. Such are like the Scribes and Pharisees, "*who outwardly appear righteous unto men—but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*" They are fair professors—but foul sinners. Inward sanctity without outward, is impossible; for true sanctity will reform the life. Outward sanctity without inward, is

unprofitable; for true sanctity will reform reform the heart. A man is not a true Christian without both. The *body* does not make a man without the *soul*, nor the soul without the body; both are essential to the being of man. Just so—the sanctification of both the outward and the inward, are essential to the being of the new man. True sanctification *begins* at the heart—but *works out* into the life and conversation; and if so, then man may attain to an outward sanctification—and yet, for lack of an inward, be no better than *almost* a Christian.

And so I shall end this long pursuit of the almost Christian, in his progress heavenward, with this one general conclusion:

Section XX. A man may do all, as to external duties and worship, that a true Christian can; and, when he has done all, be but *almost* a Christian.

You must know, all the commands of God have both internal and the external—both the *body* and the *soul* of the command. And accordingly, there is an internal and an external worship of God.

Now the **internal** acts of worshiping of God, are—to love God, to fear God, to delight in God, to trust in God, etc.

The **external** acts of worshiping of God, are by praying, teaching, hearing, etc. Now there is a vast difference between these internal and external acts of worship; and such a difference there is, that they distinguish the *altogether* Christian, from the *almost* Christian; the *sincere* believer from the *unsound* professor. And, indeed, in this very thing the main difference between them does lie.

1. Internal acts of worship are good—the goodness does adhere intrinsically to the thing done. A man cannot love God, nor fear God—but it will be imputed to him for a gracious act, and a great part of his holiness. But, external acts of worship are not denominated good, so much from the *matter* done—as from the *manner* of doing them. A man

cannot sin in loving and delighting in God—but he may sin in praying and hearing, etc., for lack of a due manner.

2. Internal acts of worship put a goodness into external acts of worship. It is our faith, our love, our fear of God—which makes our duties good.

3. Internal acts of worship better the heart, and magnify the degrees of a man's holiness. External duties do not always do this. A man may pray—and yet his heart never the holier; he may hear the Word, and yet his heart never the softer. But now, the more a man fears God, the wiser he is. The more a man loves God, the holier he is. Love is the perfection of holiness: we shall never be perfect in holiness, until we come to be perfect in love.

4. There is such an excellency in this internal worship, that he who mixes it with his external duties, is a *true* Christian when he does least; but without this mixture, he is but *almost* a Christian who does most. Internal acts of worship, joined with outward, sanctify them, and make them accepted of God, though few. External acts of worship, without inward, make them abhorred of God, though they are ever so many. So that, although the almost Christian may do all those duties in hypocrisy, which a true Christian does in sincerity; nay, though in doing external duties, he may out-do the true Christian, as the comet makes a greater blaze than the true star: if Elijah *fasts and mourns*, Baal's priests will *cut their flesh*; yet he cannot do those internal duties, which the lowest true Christian can.

The *almost* Christian can pray—but he cannot love God; he can teach or hear, etc.—but he cannot take delight in God. Mark Job's query concerning the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" He will pray to the Almighty—but will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he take pleasure in God? Ah, no! he will not—he cannot! Delight in God arises from a suitableness between the faculty, and the object; now, none are more unsuitable, than God and a carnal heart! Delight arises from the *having* what we desire, and from *enjoying* what we have. How then can he delight in God, who neither enjoys God, nor has, nor truly desires God? Delight in God is one of the highest exercises of grace: and therefore, how can he delight in God, who has no grace?

Why, then, should any saint of God be discouraged, when he hears how far the *almost* Christian may go in the way to heaven? Whereas, he who is the weakest true believer, who has the least true grace, goes farther than he; for he delights in, and loves God. Should the almost Christian do less, as to matter of external duties, yet, if he had but the least true faith, the least sincerity of love to Christ, he would surely be saved; and should the true Christian do ten times more duties than he does, yet, had he not faith in Christ, and love to Christ, he would surely be rejected. O, therefore, let not any weak believer be discouraged, though hypocrites may out-do them, and go beyond them in duty; for all their duties are done in *hypocrisy*—but your faith and love to God in duties, is a proof of your *sincerity*.

1. I do not speak this to discourage any soul in the doing of duties, or to beat down outward performances—but to rectify the soul in the doing of them. As the apostle says, "Covet earnestly the best gifts: but yet I show you a more excellent way." So I say, covet the best gifts; covet much to be in duties, much in prayer, much in hearing, etc. "But I will show you a more excellent way;" and that is, the way of faith and love. Pray much—but then believe much too. Hear much; read much; but then love God much too. Delight in the Word and ordinances of God much—but then delight in the God of ordinances more. And when you are most in duties, as to your use of them, O then be sure to be above duties, as to your resting and dependence upon them.

Would you be Christians, indeed—altogether Christians? O then, be much in the use and exercise of ordinances—but be much more in faith and dependence upon Christ and his righteousness. When your obedience is most to the command, then let your faith be most upon the promise.

The mere professor rests in duties, and so is but almost a Christian; but you must be sure to rest upon the Lord Christ. This is the way to be altogether Christians; for, if you believe, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

And thus I have answered the first query; to wit, how far a man may go in the way to heaven—and yet be but almost a Christian.

1. He may have much knowledge.
2. He may have great gifts.
3. He may have a high profession.
4. He may do much against sin.
5. He may desire grace.
6. He may tremble at the Word.
7. He may delight in the Word.
8. He may be a member of a Christian church.
9. He may have great hopes of heaven.
10. He may be under great and visible changes.
11. He may be very zealous in the matters of religion.
12. He may be much in prayer.
13. He may suffer for Christ.
14. He may be called by God.
15. He may, in some sense, have the Spirit of God.
16. He may have some kind of faith.
17. He may love the people of God.
18. He may go far in obeying the commands of God.
19. He may be, in some sense, sanctified.
20. He may do all, as to external duties, that a true Christian can—and yet be no better than almost a Christian.

QUESTION II. Why is it, that many men go so far, as that they come to be but *almost* Christians?

First, It may be to answer the call of CONSCIENCE. Though few men have grace, yet all men have conscience. Now do but observe, and, you shall see how far conscience may go in this work.

1. Conscience owns a God, and that this God must be worshiped and served by the creature. Atheists in practice, we have many; such as the apostle speaks of, "They profess to know God—but in works they deny him." But atheists in judgment none can be. Now there being such a light in conscience, as to discover that there is a God, and that he must be worshiped by the help of farther light—the light of the Word—a man may be enabled to do much in the ways of God—and yet his heart without a grain of grace.

2. Know this—that natural conscience is capable of great improvements from the means of grace. Sitting under the ordinances may exceedingly heighten the endowments of conscience. It may be much *regulated*, though it be not at all *renewed*. It may be *enlightened*, *convinced*—and yet never savingly *converted* and changed. You read in Hebrews 6:4, of some that were "once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit." What work shall we call this? It could not be a *saving* work, a true change and *conversion* of state; for, notwithstanding this enlightening, and tasting, and partaking, yet they are here said to *fall away*, verse 6. Had it been a true work of grace—they could never have fallen away from that. A believer may fall—but he cannot fall away. He may fall foully—but he cannot fall finally; for, "underneath are the everlasting arms." His faith is established in the strength of that prayer of Christ, that our faith fail not. Nay, he tells us expressly, that it is eternal life which he gives—from which we shall never perish. This work, then, here spoken of, cannot be any *saving* work, because it is not an *abiding* work; for those who are

under it, are said to fall away from it.

But though it be not a *saving* work—yet it is a *supernatural* work. It is an improvement made by the Word upon the consciences of men, through the power of the Spirit; and therefore they are said to "taste the good Word of God," and to be made "partakers of the Holy Spirit." They have not the Spirit abiding in them savingly—but striving with them, and working upon them convincingly, to the awakening and setting conscience on work. And conscience, thus stirred, may carry a man very far in religion, and in the duties of the gospel—and yet be but a *natural* conscience.

A common work of the Spirit, may stead a man very much in the duties of religion, though it must be a *special work of the Spirit* which gives a man salvation. A man may have the assisting presence of the Spirit, enabling him to preach and pray—and yet he may perish for lack of the renewing presence of the Spirit, enabling him to believe. Judas had the former—and yet perished for lack of the latter. He had the Spirit assisting him to cast out devils; but yet he had not the Spirit renewing him; for he was cast out himself. Thus a man may have an *improved* conscience—and yet be a stranger to a *renewed* conscience; and conscience, thus improved, may put a man very much upon duty. I pray God, none of us mistake a conscience, thus *improved* by the Word, for a conscience *renewed* by the Spirit. The mistake is very easy, especially when a life of duties is the fruit of it.

3. The conscience of a natural man is subject to distress and trouble. Though a natural conscience is not *sanctified with grace*, yet it is often *troubled at sin*. Trouble of conscience is not incident to believers only—but sometimes to unbelievers also. A believer's conscience is sometimes troubled, when his sin is truly pardoned; and a natural man's conscience is *troubled for sin*—though it is never *freed from sin*. God sometimes sets the Word home upon the sinner's conscience, and applies the terrors of the law to it; and this fills the soul with fear and horror of death and hell. Now, in this case, the soul usually betakes itself to a life of duties, merely to fence trouble out of conscience. When Absalom sets on fire Joab's cornfields, then Joab runs to him, though he refused before. Just so, when God lets a spark of hell, as it were, fall upon the sinner's

conscience in applying the terrors of the Word, this drives the sinner to a life of duties which he never minded before.

The ground of many a man's engaging in religion, is the *trouble* of his conscience; and the end of his continuing in religion, is the *quieting* of conscience. If conscience would never check him, God would never hear from him. Natural conscience has a voice, and speaks aloud many times in the sinner's ears, and tells him, "This ought not to be done! God must not be forgotten. The commands of God ought not to be slighted; living in sin will be the ruin of the soul!" And hence it is, that a natural man runs to duties, and takes up a lifeless and graceless profession, that he may thereby silence conscience.

As a man sick with a stomach, whatever sweet morsel he has eaten, he vomits it all up; and although it was sweet in the eating, yet it is bitter in the vomiting; so it fares with the sinner, when he is sermon-sick, or conscience-sick. Though his sin was sweet in the practice, yet the thought of it rises bitter upon the conscience: and then his profession of religion is the pill he rolls about in his mouth, to take away the bitterness of sin's taste!

4. Natural conscience, enlightened by the Word—may discover to a man much of the misery of a natural state; though not effectually to bring him out of it; yet so as to make him restless and weary in it. It may show a sinner his nakedness; and hereupon, the soul runs to a life of duties; thinking hereby to halt the misery of his case, and to make a covering for his nakedness. It is said, "that when Adam and Eve saw they were naked, they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves a covering." So when once the sinner sees his nakedness and vileness by reason of sin, whereas he should run to Christ, and close with him, and beg his righteousness for a covering, "that the shame of his nakedness does not appear;" he rather runs to a life of duties and performances, and thus makes himself a covering with the fig-leaves of a profession, without Christ truly embraced, and conscience at all renewed.

Natural man would gladly be his own Savior; and supposes a change of state to be a thing within his own power; and that the true work of grace lies in leaving off the practice of sin, and taking up a life of religious

duties: and, therefore, upon this principle, does many a graceless professor outstrip a sound believer; for he rests on his own performances, and hopes these will commend him to God.

Question III. If a natural conscience may go thus far, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites, and a renewed conscience in believers?

Or, how may I know whether the working of *my* conscience is the working of nature only, or else of grace wrought in it?

Answer. I grant that it is difficult to distinguish between the one and the other; and the difficulty has a twofold cause.

1. It arises from that hypocrisy that is in the best saints. The weakest believer is no hypocrite—but yet there is some hypocrisy in the strongest believer. Where there is most grace, there is some sin; and where there is most sincerity, yet there is some hypocrisy. Now it is very incident to a tender conscience to misgive and mistrust its state, upon the sight of any sin. When he sees hypocrisy break out in any duty or performance, then he complains, "Surely my aims are not sincere! my conscience is not renewed—it is but natural conscience enlightened, not by grace purged and changed." Pygmalion made an image so life-like that he deceived himself; and, taking the picture for a person, he fell in love with the picture!

2. It arises from that resemblance which there is between grace and hypocrisy; for hypocrisy is a resemblance of grace, without the substance. Hypocrisy is the *likeness* of grace, without the *life* of grace. There is no grace but a hypocrite may have something like it; and there is no duty done by a Christian—but a hypocrite may outstrip him in it. Now, when one who has not true grace shall go further than one who has, this may

well make the believer question whether his grace is true or not; or whether the workings of his conscience are not the workings of nature only, rather than of grace wrought in it.

But to answer the question—You may make a judgment of this in these seven particulars:

1. If a natural man's conscience puts him upon duty, he does usually *limit* himself in the work of God. His duties are limited; his obedience is a limited obedience. He does one duty—and neglects another. He picks and chooses among the commands of God; obeys one—and slighted another. Thus much is enough; what need any more? If I do thus and thus, I shall go to heaven at last. But where conscience is renewed by grace, there it is otherwise. Though there may be many weaknesses which accompany its duties, yet that soul never bounds itself in working after God: it never *loves* God so much—but still it would love him more; nor *seeks* him so much—but still it would seek him more; nor does it *serve* God so well at any time—but it still makes conscience of serving him better.

A renewed conscience is a spring of *universal* obedience: for it sees an infinite excellency, and goodness, and holiness in God; and therefore would gladly have its service rise up towards some proportionableness to the object. "A God of infinite excellency and goodness, should have infinite love," says conscience. "A holy God should have service from a holy heart," says conscience.

Now then, if I set bounds to my love to God, or to my service to God; if I limit myself in my obedience to the holy God; love one command, and slight another; obey in one point—and yet ignore another; then is all I do but the workings of a natural conscience. But on the other hand, if I love the Lord with my whole heart, and whole soul, and serve him with all my might and strength; if "I esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and have respect to all his commands," then is my love and service from a renewed conscience.

2. If a natural man's conscience checks or accuses for sin—then he seeks to stop the mouth of it—but not to satisfy it. Most of the

natural man's duties are to still and stifle conscience. But, the believer chooses rather to let conscience cry, than to stop the mouth of it, until he can do it upon good terms, and until he can fetch in satisfaction to it from the blood of Jesus Christ, by fresh acts of faith apprehended and applied. The natural man seeks to still the noise of conscience, rather than to remove the guilt. The believer seeks the removal of guilt by the application of Christ's blood; and then conscience is quiet of itself.

As a foolish man, having a mote fallen into his eye, and making it water, he wipes away the water, and labors to keep it dry—but never searches his eye to get out the mote; but a wise man minds not so much the wiping, as the searching his eye; something has got into the eye, and that causes the watering, and therefore the cause must be removed. Now then, if when conscience accuses for sin, I take up a life of duties, a form of godliness, to stop the mouth of conscience; and if hereupon conscience be still and quiet; then is this but a natural conscience. But if, when conscience checks, it will not be satisfied with anything but the blood of Christ, and therefore I use duties to bring me to Christ; and if I beg the sprinkling of his blood upon conscience, and labor not so much to stop the mouth of it, as to remove guilt from it—then is this a renewed conscience.

3. There is no natural man, let him go ever so far, let him do ever so much in the matters of religion—but still he has his Delilah, his bosom-lust. *Judas* went far—but he carried his covetousness along with him. *Herod* went far; he did many things under the force of John's ministry; but yet there was one thing he did not; he did not put away his brother's wife—his Herodias lay in his bosom still. Nay, commonly, all the natural man's duties are to hide some sin; his profession is only made use of for a cover shame.

But the renewed conscience hates all sin, as David did, "I hate every false way!" He regards no iniquity in his heart: he uses duties, not to cover sin—but to help work down, and work out sin. Now then, if I profess religion; if I make mention of the name of the Lord, and make my "boast of the law—and yet through breaking the law dishonor God;" if I live in the love of any sin, and make use of my profession to cover it—then am I a hypocrite, and my duties flow but from a natural conscience. But, on the other hand, if I "name the name of the Lord Jesus, and withal depart

from iniquity;" if I use duties, not to *cover* sin—but to discover and *mortify* sin—then am I upright before God, and my duties flow from a renewed conscience.

4. A natural man prides himself in his duties. If he is much in duty, then he is much lifted up in pride, under duty. So did the Pharisee, "God, I thank you that I am not as other men are;" and why? where lay the difference? why, "I fast twice in the week: I give tithes of all," etc. But take a gracious heart, a renewed conscience, and when his duties are at highest, then is his heart at lowest. Thus it was with the apostle Paul; he was much in service, "in season, and out of season;" preaching up the Lord Jesus with all boldness and earnestness—and yet very humble, in a sense of his own unworthiness, under all, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle. To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." And again, "Of sinners, I am chief."

Thus a believer, when he is highest in duties, then is he lowest in Humility. Duty puffs up the hypocrite—but a believer comes away humbled; and why? because the hypocrite has had no visions of God: he has seen only his own gifts and abilities—and this exalts him. But the believer has seen God, and enjoyed communion with God—and this humbles him. Communion with God, though it be very refreshing, yet it is also very abasing and humbling to the creature.

From the Word of the Lord, comes a sight of greatness of the Lord; and from a sight of the greatness of the Lord, comes humility. Now then, if I pride myself in any duty, and am puffed up under any performances; then have I not seen nor met with God in any duty. But on the other hand, if when my gifts are at highest—my heart is at lowest; if when my spirit is most raised—my heart is the most humbled; if, in the midst of all my services—I can maintain a sense of my own unworthiness; then have I seen and had communion with God in duty, and my performances are from a renewed conscience.

5. Look what that is, to which the heart does secretly render the glory of a duty—and that is the principle of the duty. In Hab. 1:16, we read of those who sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their

dragnet." Where the glory of an action is rendered to a man's self—the principle of that action is self. When all a man's duties terminate in self, then is self the principle of all. Now all the natural man's duties run into himself. He was never, by a thorough work of grace, truly cast out of himself, and brought to deny himself; and therefore he can rise no higher than himself in all he does. He was never brought to be poor in spirit, and so to live upon Christ; to be carried out of all duties to Jesus Christ.

But the true believer gives the glory of all his services to God; whatever strength or life there is in duty, God has all the glory; for he is by grace, humbled out of himself, and therefore sees no excellence or worthiness in self. "I labored more abundantly than they all," says the apostle; but to whom does he ascribe the glory of this? to self? No! "Yet not I," says he, "but the grace of God which was with me." Whenever the grace of Christ is wrought in the heart as a principle of duty, you shall find the soul when it is most carried out, with a "Yet not I," in the mouth of it. "I live—yet not I; I labored more abundantly than all—yet not I." Self is disclaimed, and Christ most advanced, when it is from grace, that the heart is quickened.

The twenty-four elders cast their crowns at Christ's feet. There are two very hard things: one is, to take the shame of our sins to ourselves; the other is, to give the glory of our services to Christ. Now then, if I sacrifice to my own net: if I aim at my own credit or profit, and give the glory of all I do to self; then do I "sow to the flesh," and was never yet cast out of self—but act only from a natural conscience. But if I give the glory of all my strength and life in duty only to God; if I magnify grace in all, and can truly say in all I do, "Yet not I," then am I truly cast out of self, and do what I do with a renewed conscience.

6. Though a natural conscience may put a man much upon service, yet it never presses to the attainment of holiness. So that he carries an unsanctified heart under all. How long was Judas a professor—and yet not one grain of grace had he. The foolish virgins, you know, "took their lamps—but took *no oil* in their vessels;" that is, they looked more after a profession, than after a sanctification. But, when a renewed conscience puts a man upon duty—it is followed with the growth of holiness. As grace helps to the doing of duty, so duty helps to the growing of grace; a believer is the more holy and the more heavenly, by

his being much in duties.

Now then, if I am much in a life of duties—and yet a stranger to a life of holiness; if I maintain a high profession—and yet have not a true work of sanctification; if, like children in the rickets, I grow big in the head—but weak in the feet; then have I gifts and abilities—but no grace; and though I am much in service—yet have I but a natural conscience. But, on the other hand, if the holiness of my life carries a proportion to my profession; if I am not "*a hearer* of the Word only—but *a doer* of it;" if grace grows in seasons of duty, then do I act in the things of God, from a renewed conscience.

7. And lastly, If a natural conscience is the spring of duty—then this spring runs fastest at first, and so abates, and at last dries up. But if a renewed conscience, a sanctified heart, is the spring of duty, then this spring will never dry up. It will run always, from first to last, and run quicker at last than first, "I know your works, and the last to be more than the first." "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he who has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

Question. But you will say—Why does that man abate and languish in his duties, who does them from a natural conscience, more than he who does them from a renewed conscience?

Answer. The reason is, because they grow upon a *fallible* root, a *decaying* root, and that is *nature*. Nature is a fading root, and so are all its fruits fading; but the duties done by a renewed conscience, are fruits that grow upon a lasting root; and that is Christ. "Gifts have their root in nature—but grace has its root in Christ!" And therefore the weakest grace shall outlive the greatest gifts and abilities; because there is life in the root of the one, and not in that of the other.

Gifts and *grace* differ like the leather of your shoe, and the skin of your foot. Make a pair of shoes that have the thickest soles, and if you go much in them, the leather wears out, and in a little time a man's foot comes to the ground. But a man who goes barefoot all his days, the skin of his feet does not wear out. Why should not the sole of his foot sooner wear out than the sole of his shoe; for the leather is much thicker than the skin?

The reason is, because there is life in the one, and not in the other; there is life in the skin of the foot, and therefore that holds out, and grows thicker and thicker, harder and harder; but there is no life in the sole of his shoe, and therefore that wears out, and waxes thinner and thinner. So it is with gifts and grace.

Now then, if I decay and abate, and grow weary of a profession, and fall away at last; if I begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh—then was all I did from a natural conscience. But if I grow and hold out, if I persevere to the end, and my "last works are more than my first," then I act from a renewed conscience.

And thus I have, in seven things, answered that question, namely, If conscience may go thus far in putting a man upon duties, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and renewed conscience in believers? And that is the first answer to the main query, namely, "Whence is it that many men go so far—as those who come to be almost Christians?" It is to answer the call of conscience.

Secondly, It is from the power of the WORD under which they live. Though the Word does not work effectually upon all, yet it has a great power upon the hearts of sinners to *reform* them, though not to *renew* them.

1. It has a discerning, discovering power. "The Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Word is the looking-glass wherein everyone may see what he really is. As the light of the sun reveals the little motes, so the light of the Word, shining into conscience, discovers little sins.

2. The Word has the power of a law. It gives law to the whole soul; and binds conscience. Scripture, therefore, is frequently called *the law*, "Unless your law had been my delight," etc. "To the law and to the testimony." This is spoken of the whole Word of God, which is therefore called a law, because of its binding power upon the conscience.

3. The Word has a judging power. "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day." The sentence that God will pass upon unconverted sinners hereafter, is no other than what the Word passes upon him here. The judgment of God, is not a day wherein God will pass any new sentence; but it is such a day wherein God will make a solemn, public ratification of the judgment passed by the ministry of the Word upon souls here. This I gather clearly from Matthew 18:18, "Whatever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." So that, by bringing a man's heart to the word, and trying it by that, he may quickly know what that sentence is that God will pass upon his soul in the last day—for as the judgment of the Word is now, such will the judgment of God be concerning him in the last day.

Indeed, there is a twofold power, farther than this, in the Word. It has a *begetting* and *saving* power. But this is put forth only upon some. But the other is more extensive, and has a great causality upon a profession of goodness, even among those who have no grace.

A man who is under this threefold power of *discerning*, *law* and *judgment*, who has his heart ransacked and unveiled, his conscience awakened and awed, his state and sinful condition judged and condemned; may take up a resolution of a new life, and convert himself to great profession of religion.

Thirdly, A man may go far in this course of profession—from a desire for applause and honor, and to get a name in the world. As it is said of the Pharisees, they "love to pray in the marketplaces, and in the corners of the streets—to be seen of men." Many a man does that for *credit*—which he will not do for *conscience*; and owns religion more for the sake of the lust for honor—than for the sake of Christ: thus making God's stream to turn the devil's mill.

Fourthly, It is from a desire of salvation. There is in all men a desire of salvation: it is natural to every being—to love and seek its own preservation. "Who will show us any good?" This is the language of nature, seeking happiness to itself. Many a man may be carried so far out in the desires of salvation, as to do many things to obtain it. So did the

young man, "Good Master, what good things shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" He went far, and did much, obeying many commands—and all out of a desire of salvation.

So, then, put these together, and there is an answer to that question. "The call of conscience—the power of the word—the affectation of credit—and the desire of salvation." These may carry a man so far—as to be *almost* a Christian.

QUESTION IV. Why is it that many are but almost Christians when they have gone thus far?

What is the cause of this?

Answer. I might multiply answers to this question—but I shall instance in two only, which I judge the most material.

First, It is for lack of right and sound conviction. If a man is not thoroughly convinced of sin, and his heart truly broken, whatever his profession of godliness may be—yet he will be sure to miscarry. Every work of conviction is not a thorough work. There are convictions which are not only natural and rational—but not from the powerful work of the Spirit of God. Rational conviction is "that which proceeds from the working of a natural conscience, charging guilt from the light of nature, by the help of those common principles of reason which are in all men." This is the conviction you read of, Romans 2:14, 15. It is said that the Gentiles who had not the law, yet had their consciences bearing witness, and accusing or excusing one another. Though they had not the light of Scripture, yet they had convictions from the *light of nature*. Now, by the help of the Gospel light, these convictions may be much improved—and yet the heart not renewed.

But then there is a spiritual conviction; and this is that work of the Spirit of God upon the sinner's heart by the Word, whereby the guilt and filth of

sin is fully discovered, and the woe and misery of a natural state distinctly set home upon the conscience, to the dread and terror of the sinner while he abides in that state and condition! And this is the conviction that is a sound and thorough work. Many have their convictions—but not this spiritual conviction.

Query. Now you will say, "Suppose I am at any time under conviction, how shall I know whether my convictions are only from a natural conscience, or whether they are from the Spirit of God?"

Answer. I would digress too much to draw out the solution of this question to its just length. I shall, therefore, in five things only, lay down the most considerable difference between the one and the other.

1. Natural convictions reach chiefly to open and scandalous sins. Sins against the light of nature; for natural conviction can reach no farther than natural light. But spiritual conviction reaches to secret, inward, and hidden sins; such as hypocrisy, formality, lukewarmness, deadness, and hardness of heart, etc. Observe, then, whether your trouble for sin looks inward as well as outward, and reaches not only to open sins—but to secret lusts, to inward and spiritual sins. If so, this is a sure sign of the work of the Spirit, because the trouble occasioned by these sins, bears a more immediate relation to the holiness of God, who alone is offended by them; they being such sins, as no one else can see or know.

2. Natural convictions deals only with a man's outward life—not with his state and condition. Natural convictions deal with *actual* sins—not *original* sin. But spiritual conviction reaches to all sins; to sins of heart—as well as sins of life; to the sin of our nature—as well as the sins of practice; to the sin that is born in us—as well as the sin which is done by us. Where the Spirit of the Lord comes to work effectually in any soul, he holds the looking-glass of the law before the sinner's eyes, and opens his eyes to look into the looking-glass, and to see all that deformity and filthiness which is in his heart and nature! The apostle Paul said, "I would not have known what sin was except through the law." Romans 7:7. How can this be true—that he had not known sin but by the law—if the light of nature reveals sin? It is said of the Gentiles, that having not the law, they had a law to themselves. This sin, therefore, that

the apostle speaks of, is not to be understood of *actual* sin—but of *original* sin, "I had not known the pollution of nature, that fountain of sin that is within—this I would not have known but by the law." And, indeed, this is a discovery that *natural light* cannot make.

It is true, the philosopher could say, "That lust is the first and chief of all sins." But I cannot think he meant it of original sin—but of the inordinacy of appetite and desire, at most; for I find that the wisest of the philosophers understood nothing of original sin. Hear Seneca, "Sin is not born with you—but brought in since." Quintilian says, "It is more marvel that any one man sins, than that all men should live honestly; sin is so against the nature of men." How blind were they in this point! And so was Paul—until the Spirit of the Lord revealed it to him by the *Word*; and indeed, this is a discovery proper to the *Spirit*. It is he who makes the sinner see all the deformity and filthiness which is within! It is he who pulls off all the sinner's rags, and makes him see his naked and wretched condition! It is he who shows us the blindness of the mind, the stubbornness of the will, the disorderedness of the affections, the searedness of the conscience, the plague of our hearts, and the sin of our natures—and therein the desperateness of our state. "When He comes, He will convict the world about sin." John 16:8

3. Natural convictions carry the soul out to look more on the evil which comes as a result of sin, than on the evil which is in sin. So that the soul under this conviction is more troubled at the dread of hell, and wrath, and damnation—than at the vileness and heinous nature of sin! But spiritual convictions work the soul into a greater sensibleness of the evil which is in sin, than of the evil which comes as a result of sin. The dishonor done to God by walking contrary to His will; the wounds which are made in the heart of Christ; the grief which the Holy Spirit is put to—this wounds the soul more than a thousand hells!

4. Natural convictions are not durable, they quickly die out. They are like a slight cut in the skin, which bleeds a little, and is sore for the present—but is soon healed again, and in a few days not so much as a scar to be seen. But spiritual convictions are durable, they cannot be worn out, they abide in the soul until they have reached their end, which is the change of the sinner. The convictions of the Spirit are like a deep wound

in the flesh, which goes to the vital organs, and seems to endanger the life of the patient, and is only healed with great skill, and when it is healed leaves a scar behind it, that when the patient is well, yet he can say, "Here is the mark of my wound, which will never wear out." So a soul that is under spiritual conviction—his wound is deep, and not to be healed, but by the great skill of the heavenly Physician: and when it is healed, there are the tokens of it remaining in the soul, which can never be worn out! So that the soul may say, "Here are the marks and signs of my conviction still in my soul."

5. Natural convictions make the soul shy of God. Guilt works fear, and fear causes estrangement from God. Thus it was with Adam, when he saw his nakedness, he ran away and hid himself from God. Now spiritual convictions do not drive the soul *from* God—but *unto* God. Ephraim's conviction was spiritual, and he runs to God, "Turn me, and I shall be turned."

So that there is, you see, a great difference between natural conviction and conversion: between that which is natural and that which is spiritual; that which is common, and that which is saving. Yes, such is the difference, that though a man has ever so much of the former, yet if he be without the latter, he is but *almost* a Christian, and therefore we have great reason to inquire more after this spiritual conviction. For,

1. Spiritual conviction is an essential part of sound conversion. Conversion begins here; true conversion begins in convictions, and true convictions end in conversion. Until the sinner is convinced of sin—he can never be converted from sin. Christ's coming was as a Savior to die for sinners. The Spirit's coming is to convince us of sin--that we may close with Christ as our Savior. Until sin is thoroughly revealed to us, interest in the blood of Christ cannot rightly be claimed by us; nay, so long as sin is unseen, Christ will be unsought. "Those who are whole need not the physician—but those who are sick."

2. Slight and common convictions, when they are but skin-deep, are the cause of much hypocrisy. Slight convictions may bring the soul to clasp about Christ—but not to close with Christ; and this is the guise of a hypocrite. I know no other rise and spring of hypocrisy, like this of *slight*

convictions: this has filled the church of Christ with hypocrites. Nay, it is not only the spring of *hypocrisy*—but it is also the spring of *apostasy*. What was the cause that the seed was said to wither away? It was because it had no deepness of earth. Where there is thorough conviction, there is a depth of earth in the heart, and there the seed of the Word grows. But where convictions are slight and common, there the seed withers for lack of depth!

So that you see clearly, in this one instance, whence it is that many are but almost Christians, when they have gone so far in religion, to wit, for lack of sound convictions.

Secondly, and this has a near relation to the former: **It is for lack of a thorough work of grace, first wrought in the heart.** Where this is not, all a man's following profession comes to nothing. That person is never likely to read well, who never masters his *Primer*. Cloth which is not wrought well in the loom, will never wear well, nor wear long—it will do little service. Just so, that professor who does not come well off the loom, who has not a thorough work of grace in his heart—will never wear well; he will shrink in the wetting, and never do much service for God. It is not the pruning of a *bad* tree which will make it bring forth good fruit; but the tree must be made good, before the fruit can be good.

He who takes up a profession of religion with an *unbroken* heart, will never serve Christ in that profession with his *whole* heart. A man may not have this true and deep change in his heart—and yet he may go far, and do much in the ways of God—but he will be sure to either die a *hypocrite* or an *apostate*. Look! if a man is born crooked or misshapen in the birth—he will remain crooked as long as he lives! You may bolster or stuff out his clothes to conceal it—but the crookedness, the deformity remains still; you may *hide* it—but you cannot *help* it; it may be *covered*—but it cannot be *cured*. So it is in this case. If a man come into a profession of religion—but is not rightly born; if he be not "begotten of God, and born of the Spirit;" if there is not a thorough work of grace in his heart—all his profession of religion will never mend him! He may be bolstered out by a life of duties—but he will be but a hypocrite at last, for lack of a thorough work at first! A form of godliness may *cover* his crookedness—but will never *cure* it! A man can never be a true Christian, nor accepted by God,

though in the highest profession of religion, without a work of grace in the heart! For,

. Those duties which find acceptance with God, must have an answerableness in the frame of that man's heart—to the duties done by him. The affections within, must bear a proportion to his profession without. God abhors prayer without faith; and obedience without fear and holy reverence of the lawgiver! Acts of *internal* worship must answer the duties of *external* worship. Now where there is no grace wrought in the heart, there can never be any proportion or answerableness in the frame of that man's heart, to the duties done by him.

2. Those duties which find acceptance with God, must be done in sincerity. God does not receive our duties because of their *volume*, nor judge of us according to the *frequency* of our performances—but according to the *sincerity* of our hearts in the performance. It is this which commends both the *doer* and the *duty* to God. With sincerity of heart, God accepts the least we do. Without sincerity, God rejects all we do. This is that temper of spirit which God highly delights in, "Fear the Lord and worship Him in *sincerity* and truth." The apostle gives it a great epithet; he calls it, in 2 Cor. 1:12, the *sincerity* of God; that is, such a sincerity as is his special work upon the soul, setting the heart right and upright before him in all his ways.

Sincerity is the crown of all our graces; lack of sincerity is the condemnation of all our duties. Thousands perish, and go to hell in the midst of all their performances and duties, merely for lack of sincerity of heart to God! "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart." Hebrews 10:22

Now where there is not a change of state, a work of grace in the heart, there can be no sincerity to God. Sincerity of heart, is not a herb which grows in nature's garden, "The heart of man is naturally deceitful and desperately wicked," more opposite to sincerity than to anything; as things corrupted carry a greater dissimilitude to what they were than to anything else which they never were. "God made man upright." Now man voluntarily losing this, has become more unlike himself than anything

below himself; he is more like a lion, a wolf, a bear, a serpent, a toad—than to a man in innocence. So that it is impossible to find sincerity in any soul, until there is a work of grace wrought there by the Spirit of God; and hence it is, that a man is but *almost* a Christian, because none of his religious duties are done sincerely.

QUESTION V. What is the reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion, than to be *almost* Christians?

Reason 1. One reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is because they deceive themselves, as to the truth of their own condition. They mistake their state, and think it good and safe, when it is bad and dangerous. A man may look upon himself as a child of God—and yet God may look upon him as a vessel of wrath. A true child of God—by looking more upon his sins than his graces, more upon his failings than his faith, more upon indwelling lusts than renewing grace—may think his case very bad when yet it is very good! "I am black!" says the spouse; "and yet," says Christ, "O you fairest among women!" So the sinner, by looking more upon his duties than his sins, may think that his name is written in the book of life—and yet in the account of God—be a very reprobate! There is nothing more common than for a man to "think himself something when he is nothing;" and so he "deceives himself." Many a man blesses himself in his interest in Christ, when he is indeed a stranger to him. Many a man thinks his sin pardoned, when alas! "he is still in the gall of bitterness, and bondage of iniquity!"

Many a man thinks he has grace, when he has none, "There is," says Solomon, "one who pretends to be rich, yet has nothing." This was the very temper of Laodicea, "You say, '*I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!*' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked!" Revelation 3:17. "You don't realize!" As bad as she was, she thought her state good. As poor as she

was in grace, she thought she was rich! As wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked as she was—yet she thought she had need of nothing.

Now there are several grounds of this mistake. I will name five to you.

First, The desperate deceitfulness of the heart of every natural man. "The heart is *deceitful* above all things." The Hebrew word is the same with *Jacob's* name. He was a *deceiver* of his brother Esau, "He is rightly called Jacob," says he, "for he has *deceived* me these two times." The word signifies, to be fraudulent, subtle, deceitful, and supplanting. Thus is the heart of every natural man "deceitful above all things." You read of the deceitfulness of the tongue. And of the deceitfulness of riches. And of the deceitfulness of beauty. And of the deceitfulness of friends. But yet the heart is deceitful above them all. Nay, you read of the deceitfulness of Satan, yet truly a man's heart is a greater deceiver than he; for Satan could never deceive a man, if his own heart did not deceive him.

Now it is from the desperate treachery of his own heart—that a man presumes upon the goodness of his case! How common is it for men to boast of the goodness of their hearts! "I thank God, though I do not make such a show and pretense as some do, yet I have as good a heart as the best!" O do but hear Solomon in this case, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool." Proverbs 28:26. Will any wise man commit his money to a thief? Will he trust a cheat? It was Augustine who said, "That man who trusts to his own heart, shall be sure to find himself deceived at last!"

Secondly, This mistake arises from the pride of a man's heart! There is a proud heart in every natural man. There was much of this pride in Adam's sin, and there is much of it in all Adam's sons. It is a radical sin, and from hence arises this over inflated opinion of a man's state and condition. Solomon says, "Be not righteous overmuch." Augustine, speaking occasionally of these words, says, it is "not meant of the righteousness of the wise man—but the pride of the presumptuous man." Now in this sense every carnal man is righteous overmuch; though he has none of that righteousness which commends him to God, namely, the righteousness of Christ—yet he has too much of that righteousness which

commends him to himself, and that is self-righteousness.

A proud man has an eye to see his beauty—but not his deformity; his abilities—but not his spots; his seeming righteousness—but not his real wretchedness. "It must be a work of grace that must show a man the lack of grace." The haughty eye looks upward—but the humble eye looks downward, and therefore this is the believer's motto, "I am the least of saints—and the greatest of sinners!" "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: *God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers.*" Luke 18:11. This is the unsaved man's motto.

Thirdly, Many deceive themselves with common grace instead of saving grace; through that resemblance which is between them. As many take counterfeit money for current coin—so do too many take common grace for true grace. Saul took the devil for Samuel, because he appeared in the mantle of Samuel: so many take common grace for saving, because it is like saving grace. A man may be under a *supernatural* work—and yet fall short of a *saving* work; the first raises nature, the second only renews nature: though every saving work of the Spirit is supernatural, yet every supernatural work of the Spirit is not saving; and hence many deceive their own souls, by taking a supernatural work for a saving work.

Fourthly, Many mistake a profession of religion for a work of conversion; and outside reformation for a sure sign of inward regeneration. If the outside of the cup is washed, then they think all is clean, though it is ever so foul within. This is the common rock that so many souls split upon, to their eternal hazard—taking up a form of godliness—but denying the power thereof.

Fifthly, Lack of a home application of the law of God to the heart and conscience, to discover to a man the true state and condition he is in. Where this is lacking, a man will sit down short of a true work of grace, and will reckon his case better than it is. That is a notable passage which the apostle hints concerning himself, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Here you have an account of the different apprehensions Paul had of his condition *with* and *without* the Word.

1. Here is his apprehension of his condition **without** the Word, "I was alive," says he, "without the law." Paul had the law—for he was a Pharisee; and they had the "form of knowledge, and of the truth of the law;" therefore, when he says he was "without the law," you must not take him literally—but spiritually; he was without the power and efficacy of it upon his heart and conscience, convincing, and awaking, and discovering sin; and so long as this was the case, he doubted not of his state—he was confident of the goodness of his condition. This he hinted when he says, "I was alive," but then,

2. Here is his apprehension of his condition **with** the word, and that is quite contrary to what it was before, "when the commandment came," says he, "then sin revived—and I died." When the Word of the Lord came with power upon his soul, when the Spirit of God set it home effectually upon his conscience, that is meant by the coming of the commandment. "Then sin revived—and I died;" that is, I saw the desperateness of my case, and the filthiness of all my self-righteousness. Then, my hope ceased, and my confidence failed; and, as before, I thought myself alive, and my sin dead; so when God had awakened conscience by the Word—then I saw my sin alive and powerful, and myself dead and miserable.

So that this is the first reason why men go no further in the profession of religion, than to be almost Christians. It is because they mistake their state, and think it good when it is not; which mistake is five-fold.

1. A deceitful heart.
2. A proud spirit.
3. Taking common grace for saving grace.
4. Taking outward reformation, for true regeneration.
5. Lack of home application of the law of God to the heart and conscience.

Reason 2. Another reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is from Satan's cunning, who, if he cannot keep sinners in their open profaneness, then he labors

to persuade them to take up with a *form of godliness*. If he cannot entice them on in their lusts, with a total neglect of heaven—then he entices them into such a profession as is sure to fall short of heaven. He will consent to the leaving some sin—just so long as we do but keep the rest; and to the doing of some duties—just so long as we neglect the rest. Nay, rather than part with his interest in the soul, he will yield far to our profession of religion, and consent to anything *but* our conversion, and closing with Christ for salvation. *Satan does not care which way we come to hell—so as he gets us but there at last!*

Reason 3. Another reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is from worldly and carnal policy. This is a great hindrance to many; policy many times enters caveats against piety. Jehu will not part with his calves lest he hazard his kingdom. Among many men there would be more zeal and honesty, were there less design and policy. There is an honest policy which helps religion—but carnal policy hinders it. We are commanded "to be wise as serpents;" now, "the serpent is the subtlest of creatures." But then we must be as "innocent as doves." If piety is without policy, it lacks security; if policy is without piety, it lacks integrity. Piety without policy is too simple to be safe; and policy without piety is too subtle to be good. Let men be as wise, as prudent, as subtle, as watchful as they will—but then let it be in the way of God; let it be joined with holiness and integrity. That is a cursed wisdom which forbids a man to launch any further out in the depths of religion, than he can see the land, lest he be taken in a storm before he can make safe to shore again.

Reason 4. Another reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is because there are some lusts espoused in the heart, which hinder a hearty close with Christ. Though they bid fair—yet they come not to God's terms. The rich young ruler would have eternal life—and he bid fair for it. He had a willing obedience to every command but one—but only one; and will not God abate him one? Is God so severe? Will he not come down a little in his terms, when man rises so high? Must man yield all? Will God yield nothing? No, my brethren, he who *underbids* for heaven, shall as surely lose it—just as he who will give nothing for it. He who will not give all he

has—part with all for that "pearl of great price"—shall as surely go without it, as much as he who has no interest in Christ. The *not coming up to God's terms* is the ruin of thousands of souls; nay, it is that upon which all who perish, do perish. A naked sinner to a naked Christ; a bleeding, broken sinner, to a bleeding, broken Christ—these are God's terms.

Most professors are like iron between two equal loadstones. God draws—and they incline towards God; and the world draws—and they incline to the world. They are between both. They would not leave God for the world—if they must leave the world for God. If they must part with all—with every lust, every darling sin, every beloved sin—why, then, the spirit of Demas possesses them, and God is forsaken by them. My brethren, this is the great reason why many who come to be *almost* Christians, go no farther. Some one beloved lust or other hinders them, and after a long and high profession, parts them and Christ forever! They did run well—but here it is that they give out, and after all fall short, and perish to all eternity!

I have thus answered these four questions—

1. How far a man may go in the way to heaven—and yet be but almost a Christian?
2. Why it is that a man goes so far, as to be almost a Christian?
3. When it is that a man is but almost a Christian, when he has gone thus far?
4. What is the reason men go no farther in religion, than to be almost Christians?

I proceed now to the **APPLICATION.**

Inference 1. Salvation is not so easy a thing as it is imagined to be. This is attested by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there are who find it." The gate of conversion is a very narrow gate—and yet every man who

would be saved eternally, must enter in at this narrow gate; for salvation is impossible without it. "Except a man is born again," born from above, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." Not that this gate is narrow simply, and in respect of itself. No; for converting grace is free. The *gate of mercy* stands open all the day long. In the offers of gospel grace, none are excluded, unless they exclude themselves. Christ does not say, "If such and such will come to me, I will not cast them out;" but "*whoever* comes unto me," be he who or what he will, if he has a heart to close with me, "I will never cast him out." He says not, "If this or that man will come—here is water of life for him;" but, "If any man will, let him take the water of life freely."

Christ grudges mercy to none; though salvation was dearly purchased for us, yet it is freely offered to us. So that the gate which leads to life is not narrow on Christ's part, or in respect of itself—but it is narrow in respect of us, because of our lusts and corruptions, which make the entrance difficult. A needle's eye is big enough for a *thread* to pass through—but it is a narrow passage for a *rope*: either the needle's eye must be enlarged, or the rope must be untwisted, or the entrance is impossible. So it is in this case—the gate of conversion is a very narrow passage for a carnal, corrupt sinner to go in at. The soul can never pass through with any one lust beloved and espoused; and, therefore, the sinner must be untwisted from every lust—he must lay aside the love of every sin, or he can never enter in at this gate, for it is a narrow gate.

And when he is in at this narrow gate, he meets with a *narrow way* to walk in—so our Lord Christ says, "Narrow is the way which leads to life." And what way is this—but the way of sanctification? "For without holiness, no man shall ever see the Lord." Now this way of sanctification is a very narrow way, for it lies over the neck of every lust, and in the exercise of every grace, subduing the one, and improving the other; dying daily—and yet living daily; dying to sin and living to God. This is the way of sanctification! And O, how few are there who walk in this way! The broad way has many travelers in it—but this narrow way is like the ways of Canaan in the days of Shamgar. It is said, "In the days of Shamgar, the travelers walked through by-ways." In the Hebrew, it is, "through *crooked* ways."

The *way of holiness* is for the most part, an unoccupied way—so says the prophet. "A way shall there be, and it shall be called the way of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it; no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beasts shall go up thereon; but the redeemed shall walk there." The unclean, and the lion, and the ravenous beast, they are in the crooked ways: none but the redeemed of the Lord walk in the way of the Lord. It is no wonder, then, that our Lord Christ says of life, that "few there are who find it," when the gate is strait, and the way narrow, which leads to it. Many pretend to walk in the narrow way—but they never entered in at the narrow gate; and many pretend to have entered in at the narrow gate—but they walk not in the narrow way.

It is a very common thing for a man to perish upon a mistake of his way. They go on in those paths which lead to hell—and yet hope to find heaven at last! Those twenty parts, fore-mentioned, run into destruction—and yet many choose them, and walk in them—yet think to arrive in heaven! As many profane and open sinners perish by choosing the way of death, so many formal professors perish by mistaking the way of life. This I gather from what our Lord Christ says, "Few there are who find it;" which does clearly imply what in Luke 12:24, he does plainly express, namely, that many seek it; many seek to enter in—and yet are not able; many run far—and yet do not "so run as to obtain." Many bid fair for the Pearl of great price—and yet go without it. Hell is had with ease—but the "kingdom of heaven suffers violence."

Inference 2. If many go thus far in the way to heaven—and yet miscarry—O then, what shall be the end of those who fall short of these! If he shall perish who is *almost* a Christian, what shall he do who is not at all a Christian! If he who owns Christ, and professes Christ, and leaves many sins for Christ, may be damned notwithstanding; what then shall his doom be that disowns Christ, and refuses to part with one sin, one lust, for Christ; nay, who openly blasphemes the precious name of Christ! If he who is outwardly sanctified shall yet be eternally rejected, what will the case be of such as are openly unsanctified, who have not only the plague of a hard heart within—but also the plague-sore of a profane life without? If the *formal professor* must be shut out—surely then the filthy adulterer, swinish drunkard, the foul-mouthed scoffer, yes,

and every carnal sinner much more! If there is a woe to him who falls short of heaven, then how sad is the woe to him who falls short of those who fall short of heaven! Ah, that God would make this an awakening word to sinners who are asleep in sin, without the least fear of death, or dread of damnation!

Use of EXAMINATION. Are there many in the world who are *almost*, and yet but *almost* Christians? Why, then, "it is time for us to call our condition into question, and to make a more narrow scrutiny into the truth of our spiritual estate;" what it is, whether it be right or not; whether we are sound and sincere in our profession of religion, or not. When our Lord Christ told his disciples, "One of you shall betray me," everyone began presently to reflect upon himself; "Master, *is it I?* Master, *is it I?*" So should we do, when the Lord reveals to us from his Word, how many there are under the profession of religion, who are but almost Christians, we should straightway reflect upon our hearts, "Lord, *is it I?* Is my heart unsound. Am I but almost a Christian? Am I one of those who shall miscarry at last? Am I a hypocrite under the profession of religion? Have I a form of godliness without the power?"

There are two questions of very great importance, which everyone of us should often put to ourselves: *What am I? Where am I?*

1. **What** am I? Am I a child of God or not? Am I sincere in religion, or am I only a hypocrite under a profession?

2. **Where** am I? Am I yet in a natural state, or a state of grace? Am I yet in the old root, in old Adam; or am I in the root Christ Jesus? Am I in the covenant of works, which ministers only wrath and death? or am I in the covenant of grace, which ministers life and peace?

Indeed, this is the first thing a man should look at. There must be a change of *state*, before there can be a change of *heart*. We must come under a change of covenant, before we can be under a change of condition; for the new heart and the new spirit is promised in the new covenant. There is nothing of that to be heard of in the old covenant: now a man must be under the new covenant, before he can receive the blessing promised in the new covenant; he must be in a new covenant

state, before he can receive a new covenant heart. No mercy, no pardon, no change, no conversion, no grace—is dispensed out of covenant. Therefore this should be our great inquiry; for if we know not where we are, we cannot know what we are; and if we know not what we are, we cannot be what we should be; namely, altogether Christians.

Let me then, I beseech you, press this duty upon you who are *professors*. Try your own hearts; "examine yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove your own selves." I urge this upon most cogent arguments.

1. Because many rest in a notion of godliness and outward shows of religion—and yet remain in their natural condition. Many "are *hearers* of the Word," but "not *doers* of it," "and so deceive their own souls." James 1:22 Some neither hear nor do—these are profane sinners. Some both hear and do—these are true believers. Some hear, but they do not do—these are hypocritical professors. He who slighted the ordinances cannot be a true Christian; but yet it is possible a man may own them, and profess them—and yet be no true Christian. Who would trust to a mere profession, that shall see Judas a disciple, an apostle, a preacher of the gospel, one who cast out devils, to be cast out himself? "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men—but of God."

2. Because errors in the foundation are very dangerous. If we are not right in the main, in the fundamental work; if the foundation is not laid in grace in the heart—all our following profession comes to nothing. The house is built upon a *sandy foundation*, and though it may stand for awhile, yet "when the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon it—great will be the fall of it."

3. Because many are the deceits that our souls are liable to in this case. There are many things like grace—which are not grace. It is the likeness and similitude of things, which deceives—and makes one thing to be taken for another. Many take *gifts* for *grace*; and common knowledge for saving knowledge. But a man may have great gifts—and yet no grace. He may have great knowledge—and yet not Jesus Christ. Some

take *common* grace for *saving* grace; whereas, a man may believe all the truths of the gospel, all the promises, all the threatenings, all the articles of the creed, to be true—and yet perish for lack of saving grace!

Some take morality and restraining grace—for piety and renewing grace; whereas it is common to have sin much restrained, where the heart is not renewed. Some are deceived with a half-work, taking *conviction* for *conversion*, and *reformation* for *regeneration*; we have many mermaid-Christians. They are like Nebuchadnezzar's image—with a head of gold, and feet of clay. The devil cheats most men by a *synecdoche*, putting a *part* for the *whole*. They put partial obedience to some commands, for universal obedience to all commands.

Endless are the delusions that Satan fastens upon souls, for lack of this self-search. It is necessary, therefore, that we try our state, lest we take the *shadow* for the *substance*.

4. Satan will try us at one time or other. He will winnow us and sift us to the bottom; and if we now rest in a groundless confidence, it will then end in a comfortless despair. Nay, God himself will search and try us at the day of judgment especially; and who can abide that trial, that never tries his own heart?

5. Whatever a man's state be, whether he is altogether a Christian or not, whether his principle is sound or not—yet it is good to examine his own heart. If he finds his heart good, his principles right and sound—this will be matter of rejoicing. If he finds his heart rotten, his principles false and unsound—the discovery is in order to a renewing. If a man has a disease upon him, and knows it, he may send to the physician in time; but what a sad vexation will it be, not to see a disease until it is past cure? So for a man to be graceless, and not see it until it is too late—to think himself a Christian when he is not, and that he is in the right way to heaven, when he is in the ready way to hell—and yet not know it, until the judgment-day confounds his confidence—this is the most irrecoverable misery!

These are the grounds upon which I press this duty, of examining our state. O that God would help us in the doing this necessary duty!

Question. You say, "But how shall I come to know whether I am *almost*, or *altogether*, a Christian? If a man may go so far—and yet miscarry, how shall I know when my foundation is right—when I am a Christian indeed?"

Answer 1. The altogether Christian closes with, and accepts of Christ upon Gospel terms. True union makes a true Christian. Many close with Christ—but it is upon their own terms; they take him and own him—but not as God offers him. The terms upon which God in the gospel offers Christ, are, that we shall accept of a broken Christ with a broken heart—and yet a whole Christ with the whole heart. A broken Christ with a broken heart—as a witness of our humility. A whole Christ with a whole heart—as a witness of our sincerity. A broken Christ respects his suffering for sin; a broken heart respects our sense of sin. A whole Christ includes all his offices. A whole heart includes all our faculties. Christ is a King, Priest, and Prophet, and all as Mediator. Without any one of these offices, the work of salvation could not have been completed. As a Priest—he redeems us. As a Prophet—he instructs us. As a King—he sanctifies and saves us. Therefore, the apostle says, "He is made to us a God of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Righteousness and redemption flow from him—as a Priest. Wisdom flows from him—as a Prophet. Sanctification flows from him—as a King.

Many embrace Christ as a Priest—but yet they own him not as a King and Prophet. They like to share in his righteousness—but not to partake of his holiness. They would be redeemed by him—but they would not submit to him. They would be saved by his blood—but not submit to his power. Many love the *privileges* of the gospel—but not the *duties* of the gospel. Now these are but almost Christians, notwithstanding their close with Christ; for it is upon their own terms—but not upon God's.

The offices of Christ may be *distinguished*—but they can never be *divided*. But the true Christian owns Christ in all his offices: he does not only close with him as *Jesus*—but as *Lord Jesus*. He says with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God." He does not only believe in the merit of his death—but also conforms to the manner of his life. As he believes in him, so he lives to him. He takes him for his wisdom, as well as for his righteousness; for his sanctification, as well as his redemption.

Answer 2. The altogether Christian has a thorough work of grace and sanctification wrought in the heart, as a spring of duties. Regeneration is a whole change; "all old things are done away, and all things become new." It is a perfect work, as to *parts*, though not as to *degrees*. Carnal men do duties—but they are from an unsanctified heart, and that spoils all. A *new* piece of cloth never does well in an *old* garment, for the rip is but made worse. When a man's *heart* is thoroughly renewed by grace, the *mind* savingly enlightened, the *conscience* thoroughly convinced, the *will* truly humbled and subdued, the *affections* spiritually raised and sanctified; and when mind, and will, and conscience, and affections, all join issue to help on with the performance of the duties commanded; then is a man *altogether* a Christian!

Answer 3. He who is altogether a Christian, looks to the manner, as well as to the matter of his duties. Not only *that* they are done—but *how* they are done. He knows the Christian's *privileges* lie in pronouns—but his *duty* in adverbs. It must not be only good—but that good must be *rightly done*. Here the almost Christian fails, he does the same duties that others do for the *matter*—but he does them not in the same *manner*; while he minds the substance, he regards not the circumstance. If he *prays*—he regards not faith and fervency in prayer. If he *hears*—he does not mind Christ's rule, "Take heed *how* you hear." If he *obeys*—he looks not to the frame of his heart in obeying, and therefore miscarries in all he does. Any of these defects spoil the good of every duty.

Answer 4. The altogether Christian is known by his sincerity in all his performances. Whatever a man does in the duties of the gospel, he cannot be a Christian without sincerity. Now, the *almost* Christian fails in this; for though he does much, prays much, hears much, obeys much—yet he is a hypocrite under all.

Answer 5. He who is altogether a Christian, has an "answerableness within to the law without." There is an affinity between the Word of God—and the will of the Christian. His heart is, as it were—the transcript of the Word. The same *holiness* that is commanded in his Word—is implanted in the heart. The same *conformity to Christ*, that is enjoined by the Word of God—is wrought in the soul by the Spirit

of God. The same *obedience* which the Word requires of him, the Lord enables him to perform, by his grace bestowed on him. This is that which is promised in the new covenant, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Now the writing his law in us, is nothing else but his working that grace and holiness in us, which the law commands and requires of us.

In the old-covenant administration, God wrote his laws only upon tables of stone—but not upon the heart; and therefore, though God wrote them, yet they broke them. But in the new-covenant administration, God provides new tables: not tables of stone—but "the fleshly tables of the heart," and writes his laws there, that there might be a law within, answerable to the law without. And this every true Christian has. So that he may say in his measure, as our Lord Christ did, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

Every believer has a light within him, not guiding him to despise and slight the Word—but to prize and walk by the light of the Word—which commands him to walk in the light, and the light directs him to walk according to the Word. Moreover, from this impression of the law upon the heart, obedience and conformity to God becomes the choice and delight of the soul; for holiness is the very nature of the new creature. So that if there were no Scripture, no Bible to guide him—yet he would be holy, for he has received "grace for grace;" there is grace within—to answer to the Word of grace without. Now, the almost Christian is a stranger to this law of God within; he may have some conformity to the Word in outward life—but he cannot have this answerableness to the Word in inward constitution.

Answer 6. The altogether Christian is much *in* duty—and yet much *above* duty. Much *in* duty, in regard of performances; much *above* duty, in regard of dependence. Much *in* duty by obeying; but much *above* duty by believing. He lives *in* his obedience—but he does not live *upon* his obedience—but upon Christ and his righteousness. The almost Christian fails in this. He is much in duty—but not above it—but rests in it; he works for rest, and he rests in his works. He cannot come to believe and obey too. If he believes, then he thinks there is no need of obedience, and so casts off that. If he is much in obedience, then he casts off

believing, and thinks there is no need of that. He cannot say with David, "I have hoped for your salvation, and obeyed your commandments." The more a man is *in* duty, and the more *above* it; the more in doing, and more in believing—the more a Christian.

Answer 7. He who is altogether a Christian is universal in his obedience. He does not obey one command and neglect another. He does not do one duty and cast off another. He has respect to all the commands—he endeavors to leave every sin, and love every duty. The almost Christian fails in this, his obedience is partial and piece-meal. If he obeys one command, he breaks another. The duties which least cross his lusts—he is much in. But those duties which do cross his lusts—he lays aside. The Pharisees "fasted, prayed, paid tithes," etc.—but they did not lay aside their covetousness, their oppression; they "devoured widows' houses," they were unnatural to parents.

Answer 8. The altogether Christian makes God's glory the chief end of all his performances. If he prays, or hears, or gives, or fasts, or repents, or obeys, etc., God's glory is the main end of all. It is true, he may have somewhat else at the back end of his work—but God is at the front end. As Moses' rod swallowed up the magicians' rods, so God's glory is the ultimate end, which swallows up all his other ends. Now the almost Christian fails in this, his ends are corrupt and selfish. *God* may possibly be at the back end of his work—but *self* is at the front end. For he who was never truly cast out of himself, can have no higher end than himself.

Now then, examine yourself by these characters, put the question to your own soul. Do you close with Christ upon gospel terms? Is grace in the heart, the principle of your performances? Do you look to the *manner*, as well as the *matter* of your duties? Do you do all in sincerity? Is there an answerableness within, to the Word without? Are you much *above* duty, when much *in* duty? Is your obedience universal? Lastly, is God's glory the end of all? If so, then you are not only *almost*—but *altogether* a Christian!

Second Use—of CAUTION. O take heed of being *almost*—and yet but *almost* a Christian! It is a great complaint of God against Ephraim, that "he is a cake not turned;" that is, half-baked, neither raw nor roasted,

neither cold nor hot, as Laodicea, "Because you are neither hot nor cold, therefore I will spue you out of my mouth." This is a condition that of all others, is *greatly unprofitable*, *exceedingly uncomfortable*, and *desperately dangerous!*

First, It is *greatly unprofitable* to be but almost a Christian—for failing in any *one* point, will ruin us as surely as if we had never made *any* attempts for heaven. It is no advantage to the soul to be *almost* converted; for the little that we lack, spoils the good of all our attainments. There is no profit in leaving this or that sin, unless we leave all sin. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things—but he kept his Herodias, and that ruined him! Judas did many things, prayed much, preached much, professed much—but yet his covetousness spoiled all! One sin ruined the rich young ruler—who had kept all the commands but one. Thus "the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws." That is, he who lives willfully and allowedly in any one sin, brings the guilt of the violation of the whole law of God upon his soul, and that upon a twofold account.

1. Because he manifests the same contempt of the authority of God, in the wilful breach of one, as of all.

2. By allowing himself in the breach of any one command, he shows he kept none in obedience and conscience to God; for he who hates sin as sin, hates all sin, and he who obeys the command as the express will of God, obeys every command. And for this cause the least sin, willfully, and with allowance lived in, spoils the good of all our obedience, and lays the soul under the whole wrath of God!

One leak in a ship will sink it. "Gideon had seventy sons," and but one bastard son—and yet that one bastard destroyed all his other sons! Just so, may one sin spoil all our services; one lust beloved may spoil all our profession—as that one bastard slew all the sons of Gideon.

Secondly, It is *exceedingly uncomfortable* to be but almost a Christian. This appears in three ways.

1. In that such a one is hated both by God and men. The world hates him

because of his profession; and God abhors him because of his dissimulation! The world hates him because he seems to be pious, and God hates him because he is not really pious. There is no person which God hates more, than the *almost* Christian! "I would that you were either cold or hot;" either all a Christian, or not at all a Christian. "Because you are neither cold nor hot, therefore I will spew you out of my mouth!" What a loathsome expression does God here use, to show what an utter abhorrency there is in him, against lukewarm Christians! How uncomfortable then must that condition needs be, wherein a man is abhorred both by God and man?

2. It is uncomfortable in regard of sufferings. For being almost a Christian, will bring us *into* suffering. But being but almost a Christian, will never carry us *through* suffering. In Matt. 13:20, 21, it is said, "The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." There are four things observable in these words.

1. That the stony ground may receive the Word with joy.
2. That it may for some time abide in a profession of it—he lasts only a short time.
3. That his profession will expose to suffering; for, mark, persecution is said to arise because of the Word.
4. This suffering will cause an apostatizing from profession.

I gather hence, that a *profession* may expose a man as much to suffering, as the power of *godliness*. But without the power of godliness, there is no holding out in a profession under suffering. The world hates the show of godliness, and therefore persecutes it; the almost Christian lacks the substance, and therefore cannot hold out in it. Now this must needs be very uncomfortable; if I profess religion, I am likely to *suffer* persecution. But if I do but profess it, I will never *endure* persecution.

3. It is uncomfortable, in regard of that deceit it lays our hopes under. To be deceived of our hopes, causes sorrow as well as shame. He who is but *almost* a Christian, hopes for heaven; but unless he is *altogether* a Christian, he shall never come there! Now to perish with hopes of heaven—to go to hell by the gates of glory—to come to the very door, and then be shut out, as the five virgins were—to die in the wilderness, within the sight of the promised land, at the very brink of Jordan; this must needs be sad! To come within a stride of the goal—and yet miss it; to sink within sight of harbor; O how uncomfortable is this!

Thirdly, It is *desperately dangerous* to be but almost a Christian. For,

1. This hinders the true work. A man lies in a fairer capacity for conversion, who lies in open enmity and rebellion, than he who soothes up himself in the formalities of religion. This I gather from the parable of the two sons, which our Lord Christ urged to the professing Scribes and Pharisees. "There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go." The first son represents the carnal, open sinner, who is called by the word, but refuses—yet afterwards repents, and believes. The second represents the hypocritical professor, who pretends much—but performs little. Now mark how Christ applies this parable, "Truly I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you!"

And upon this account—it is better not to be at all, than to be *almost* a Christian; for the *almost* hinders the *altogether*. It is better, in this regard, to be a sinner without a profession, than to be a professor without conversion—for the one lies fairer for an inward change, when the other rests in an outward. Our Lord Christ tells the Scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God," yet never likely to come there. None are farther from the kingdom of God—than such as are not far from the kingdom of God. As for instance, when there lies but one lust, one sin between a soul and Christ—that soul is not far from Christ. But now, when the soul rests in this *nearness* to Christ—and yet will not part with that one lust for Christ—but thinks his condition secured, though that

lust be not subdued; who is farther from the kingdom of God than he!

So our Lord Christ tells the rich young ruler, "One thing you lack!" He was very near heaven, near being a Christian altogether, he was very near being saved; he tells Christ he had kept all the commands. He lacked but one thing; I say—but *one thing*. But it was a great thing. That one thing he lacked was more than all things he had, for it was the one thing necessary; it was a new heart, a work of grace in his soul, a change of state, a heart weaned from the world. This was the one thing, and he who lacks this one thing perishes, notwithstanding all his other things besides.

2. This condition is so like a state of grace, that to mistake of it for grace is easy and common. And it is very dangerous to mistake anything for grace—which is not grace; for in that a man contents himself—as if it were grace. *Formality* does often dwell next door to *sincerity*, and one sign serves both; and so the house may be easily mistaken, and by that means a man may take up his lodging there, and never find the way out again. Many a formal professor might have been a sincere believer, had he not mistook his *profession* for *conversion*, his *duties* for *grace*—and so rested in that for *sincerity* which is but *hypocrisy*.

3. It is a degree of blasphemy to pretend to grace—and yet have no grace. I gather this from Rev. 2:9, "I know the *blasphemy* of those who *say* they are Jews—and are not." A *Jew* here, is not to be taken literally and strictly only, for one of the lineage of Abraham—but it is to be taken metonymically for a *true believer*, one of the spiritual seed of Abraham, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly;" so that for a man to say he is a Jew when he is not, to profess an interest in Christ when he has none, to say he has grace when he has none—this Christ calls blasphemy. But why should Christ call this blasphemy? This is *hypocrisy*; but how may it be said to be *blasphemy*? Why, he blasphemers the great attribute of God's omniscience—he implicitly denies that God sees and knows our hearts and thoughts. For if a man did believe the omniscience of God, that he searches the heart and sees and knows all within—he would not dare to rest in a *graceless profession of godliness*. This, therefore, is blasphemy in the account of Christ.

4. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in that this stills and

serves to quiet conscience. Now it is very dangerous to quiet conscience with anything but the blood of Christ. It is bad being at peace—until Christ speak peace. Nothing can truly pacify conscience, less than that which pacifies God—and that is the blood of the Lord Christ. Now the almost Christian quiets conscience—but not with the blood of Christ—it is not a peace flowing from Christ's propitiation—but a peace rising from a formal profession; not a peace of Christ's giving—but a peace of his own making. He silences and bridles conscience with a form of godliness, and so makes it give way to an undoing, soul-destroying peace! He rocks his conscience asleep in the *cradle of duties*, and then it is a thousand to one, that it never awakens until judgment! Ah, my brethren, it is better to have conscience never quiet, than quieted any way but by "the blood of sprinkling." A good conscience unquiet—is the greatest affliction to saints! An evil conscience quiet—is the greatest judgment to unconverted sinners!

5. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in respect of the unpardonable sin. The sin which the Scripture says, "can never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come;" I mean the sin against the Holy Spirit. Now such are only capable of sinning that sin—as are but *almost* Christians. A true believer cannot; the work of grace in his heart, that seed of God which abides in him, secures him against it. The profane, ignorant, open sinner cannot; though he lives daily and hourly in sin, yet he cannot commit this sin, for it must be from an enlightened mind. Every sinner, under the gospel, especially sins sadly against the Holy Spirit, against the strivings and motions of the Spirit—he "always resists the Holy Spirit;" but yet this is not the sin against the Holy Spirit. There must be three ingredients to make up that sin.

1st, It must be willful—"If we sin *willfully* after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin."

2nd, It must be against light and conviction—"after we have received the knowledge of the truth."

3rd, It must be in resolved malice.

Now you shall find all these ingredients in the sin of the Pharisees, Matt.

12:22. Christ heals one who was "possessed of the devil;" a great work, which amazed all the people, verse 23. But what say the Pharisees? see verse 24. "This man casts out devils—by the prince of devils!" Now that this was the sin against the Holy Spirit, is clear; for it was both willful and malicious, and against clear convictions. They could not but see that he was the Son of God, and that this work was a special work of the Spirit of God in him; and yet they say, that he wrought this miracle by the devil! Whereupon Christ charges them with this "sin against the Holy Spirit," verse 31, 32, 33. Now the Pharisees were a sort of great religious professors; whence I gather this conclusion, that it is the professor of religion, who is the subject of this unpardonable sin; not the open carnal sinner, not the true believer—but the formal professor. Not the profane sinner—for he has neither light nor grace. Not the believer—for he has both light and grace. Therefore the formal professor, for he has light but no grace.

Here, then, is the great danger of being *almost* a Christian—he is liable to this dreadful unpardonable sin.

6. The being but almost a Christian, subjects us to apostasy. He who gets no good by walking in the ways of God, will quickly leave them and walk no more in them. This I gather from Hosea 14:9. "Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the *rebellious* stumble in them." "The righteous walk in them." He whose heart is renewed and made right with God, he shall keep close to God in his ways. "But the *rebellious* stumble in them." The word in the Hebrew signifies to prevaricate; so that we may read the words thus, "The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but he who prevaricates (that is, a hypocrite,) in the ways of God, he shall stumble in them."

An unsound heart will never hold out long in the ways of God, "He was a burning and a shining light, and you were willing *for a season* to rejoice in that light." "For a season;" For a short space—and then they left him.

It is a notable question Job puts concerning the hypocrite, "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, when God takes away his soul? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he *always* call upon God?" Job 27:8, 10. He

may do much—but those two things he cannot do:

1. He cannot make God his delight.
2. He cannot persevere in duties at all times, and in all conditions. He will be an apostate at last. The scab of *hypocrisy* usually breaks out in the plague-sore of *apostasy*. Conversion ground is standing ground; it is terra firma; but a graceless profession of religion is a slippery ground, and falling ground. Julian the *apostate*, was first Julian the *professor*. I know it is possible that a believer may fall—but yet "he rises again, the everlasting arms are underneath him." But when the hypocrite falls, who shall help him up? Solomon says, "Woe to him who is alone when he falls!" that is without interest in Christ. Why woe to him? "For he has none to help him up." If Jesus Christ does not recover him, who can? *David* fell and was restored—for he had one to help him up. But *Judas* fell and perished—for he was alone.

7. This being but *almost* a Christian, provokes God to bring dreadful spiritual judgments upon a man. Barrenness is a spiritual judgment: now this provokes God to give us up to barrenness. When Christ found the fig-tree which had leaves but no fruit, he pronounces the curse of barrenness upon it, "Fruit will never grow on you again." And so Ezek. 47:11, "The miry places thereof, and the marshy places thereof, shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt." A *spirit of delusion* is a sad judgment. Why, this is the *almost* Christian's judgment—that receives the truth—but not in the love of it, "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send them strong delusions." To lose either light or sight, either ordinances or eyes—is a great spiritual judgment. Why, this is the *almost* Christian's judgment—he who profits not under the means of God, provokes God to take away either light or sight; either the ordinances from before his eyes, or else to blind his eyes under the ordinances.

To have a hard heart, is a dreadful judgment, and there is no hypocrite, but he has a hard heart. My brethren, it is a dreadful thing for God to give a man up to spiritual judgments! Now this being *almost* a Christian, provokes God to give a man up to spiritual judgments: surely, therefore, it is a very dangerous thing to be *almost* a Christian!

8. Being *almost* and but *almost* Christians—will exceedingly aggravate our damnation. The higher a man rises under the means, the lower he falls if he miscarries. He who falls but a little short of heaven—will fall deepest into hell! He who has been nearest to conversion, yet remain unconverted—shall have the deepest damnation when he is judged. Capernaum's sentence shall exceed Sodom's for severity; because she exceeded Sodom in the enjoyment of mercy—she received more from God, she knew more of God, she professed much for God—and yet was not right with God; therefore, she shall be punished more by God! The higher the rise—the greater the fall; the higher the profession—the greater the damnation. He miscarries with a *light* in his hand; he perishes under many convictions. Convictions never end but in a sound conversion, as in all saints; or in a sad damnation, as in all hypocrites. Praying-ground, hearing-ground, professing-ground, and conviction-ground, is, of all, the worst ground to perish upon!

Now, then, to *sum* up all under this head. If to be *almost* a Christian hinders the true work of conversion; if it is easily mistaken for conversion; if it is a degree of blasphemy; if this is that which quiets conscience; if this subjects a man to commit the unpardonable sin; if it lays us liable to apostasy; if it provokes God to give us up to spiritual judgments; and if it is that which exceedingly aggravates our damnation; surely then it is a very dangerous thing to be *almost* and but *almost* a Christian!

O labor to be altogether Christians, to go farther than they who have gone farthest—and yet fall short! This is the great counsel of the Holy Spirit, "So run that you may obtain." "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."

Use—of EXHORTATION. Do you need any MOTIVES to quicken you up to this important duty?

Consideration 1. This is that which is not only commanded by God—but that whereunto all the commands of God tend. A perfect conformity of heart and life to God—is the sum and substance of all the commands both of the Old and the New Testament. As the *harlot* was for the dividing of the child, so *Satan* is for dividing the heart. He

would have our love and affections shared between Christ and our lusts; for he knows that Christ reckons we love him not *at all*, unless we love him *above* all. But God will have all or none, "My son, give me your heart!" "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might!"

Look into the Scripture, and see what foundation that salvation stands upon—and you shall find that God has fixed it upon those great duties which alone tend to the perfection of your state as Christians. God has fixed your all upon believing; only believe. God has fixed your all upon obedience, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." "Only let your life be such as befits the gospel of Christ." So that your all is fixed by God upon these two great duties of *believing* and *obeying*; both which tend to the perfection of your state as Christians. Now, shall God command—and shall not we obey? Can there be a higher motive to duty than the authority of the great God, whose will is the eternal rule of righteousness? "O let us fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man!"

Consideration 2. The Lord Christ is a thorough Savior—a perfect and complete Mediator. He has not shed his blood by halves, nor satisfied the justice of God, and redeemed sinners by halves. No—but he went through with his undertaking; he bore all our *sins*, and shed all his *blood!* He *died* to the utmost, *satisfied* the justice of God to the utmost, *redeemed* sinners to the utmost, and now that he is in heaven he *intercedes* to the utmost, and *saves* to the utmost. It is observed, that our Lord Christ, when he was upon the earth, in the days of his flesh, he wrought no half-cures; but whoever they brought to him for healing—he healed them thoroughly. "People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed." Matthew 14:35-36.

O what an excellent physician is here! There is none like him! He cures infallibly, immediately, and perfectly! He cures **infallibly**. None ever came to him for healing—who went away without it. He never practiced upon any who miscarried under his hand. He cures **immediately**. No sooner is his garment touched—but his patient is healed! The leper, Matt. 8:3, is no sooner touched—but immediately cured! The two blind men,

Matt. 20:34, are no sooner touched—but their eyes were immediately opened! He cures **perfectly**, "As many as were touched—were made perfectly whole." Now all this was to show what a perfect and complete Savior Jesus Christ would be, to all sinners who would come to him. They would find healing in his blood, virtue in his righteousness, and pardon for all their sins—whatever they were. Look! as Christ healed all the diseases of all who came to him, when he was on earth—so he pardons all the sins, and heals all the wounds of all those souls that come to him, now that he is in heaven. He is a complete Savior—and shall not we be complete saints? Shall he be altogether a Redeemer; and shall not we be altogether believers? O, what a shame is this!

Consideration 3. There is enough in true religion to engage us to be altogether Christians; and that whether we respect profit or comfort, for grace brings both.

First, Godliness is a GAINFUL thing; and this is a compelling motive that becomes effectual upon all. *Gain* is the god which the world worships. What will not men do—what will they not suffer—for gain? What journeys do men take by land, what voyages by sea, through hot and cold, through fair and foul, through storm and shine, through day and night—and all for gain! Now there is no calling so gainful as godliness; it is the most profitable employment we can take up. "Godliness is profitable unto all things." 1 Timothy 4:8. "Godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Timothy 6:6. It is a great revenue. If it is closely followed, it brings in the greatest income.

Indeed, some men are religious for the *world's* sake; such shall be sure *not* to gain. But those who are religious for piety's sake, shall be sure not to lose, if heaven and earth can recompense them; for "godliness has the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Ah, who would not be a Christian, when the gain of godliness is so great! Many gain much in their worldly calling—but the profit which the true believer has from one hour's communion with God in Christ, weighs down all the gain of the world. "Cursed is that man who counts all the gain of the world worth one hour's communion with Jesus Christ," says that noble Marquis, Galeaceus Caracciola.

It is nowhere said in Scripture, "Happy is the man who finds silver, and the man who gets fine gold." These are of no weight in the balance of the sanctuary; but it is said, "Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. For the profit of wisdom is better than silver, and her wages are better than gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. She offers you life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying." Proverbs 3:13-17. By wisdom and understanding here, we are to understand the grace of Christ; and so the spirit of God interprets it. "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Now of all merchants, he who trades in this wisdom and understanding will prove the richest man—one grain of godliness outweighs all the gold of Ophir. There are no riches like being rich in grace. For,

1. Godliness is the most **necessary** gain. The things of this world are not so. Silver and gold are not so—we may be happy without them. There is but one thing necessary, and that is the grace of Jesus Christ in the heart. Have this—and have all. Lack this—and lack all.
2. Godliness is the most **substantial** gain. The things of this world are more *shadow* than *substance*. *Pleasure*, *honor*, and *profit* comprehend all things in this world, and therefore are *the carnal man's trinity*. The apostle John calls them, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." This, (says he,) is all that is in the world: and truly, if this be all, all is nothing. For what is *pleasure*—but a dream and conceit? What is *honor*—but fancy and opinion? And what is *profit*—but a thing of naught? "Why will you set your eyes upon that which is not?" The things of the world have in them no sound substance, though foolish, carnal men call them substance. But grace is a substantial good; so our Lord Christ calls it, "That I may cause those who love me to inherit *substance*," to inherit that which is. Grace is a reality: other things are but show and fancy.
3. Godliness is the **safest** gain. The gain of worldly things is always with difficulty—but seldom with safety. The soul is often hazarded in the over-eager pursuit of worldly things. Nay, thousands do pawn, and lose, and damn their precious souls eternally—for a little silver and gold, which are but *the guts and garbage of the earth!* "For what shall it profit a man, if

he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36. But the gain of godliness is ever with safety to the soul; nay, the soul is lost and undone without it, and not saved but by the attainment of it. A soul without grace is in a lost and perishing condition. The hazard of eternity is never over with us—until the grace of Christ Jesus is sought by us, and wrought in us.

4. Godliness is the **surest** gain. As it is safe—so it is sure. Men make great ventures for the world—but all runs upon uncertainty. Many venture much, and wait long—and yet find no return—but only disappointment. They sow much—and yet reap nothing. But the gain of godliness is sure; "to him who sows righteousness, shall be a sure reward." And as the things of this world are uncertain in the *getting*, so they are uncertain in the *keeping*. If *men* do not undo us, *moths* may; if *robbery* does not, *rust* may; if rust does not, *fire* may; to which all earthly treasures are incident, as our Lord Christ teaches us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." Matthew 6:19. Solomon pictures the world with wings, "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle!" Proverbs 23:4-5. A man may be rich as Dives today—and yet poor as Lazarus tomorrow. O how uncertain are all worldly things! But the true treasure of grace is in the heart—that can never be lost. It is out of the reach both of rust and robber. He who gets the world—gets a good he can never keep! He who gets grace—gets a good he shall never lose!

5. The profit of godliness lies not only in this world—but in the world to come. All other profit, lies in this world only. Riches and honor, etc., are called this world's goods. But the riches of godliness are chiefly in heaven—in the enjoyment of God, and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, among saints and angels in glory. Lo, this is the gain of godliness; "such honor have all his saints!"

6. The gain of godliness is a **durable** and **eternal** gain. All this world's goods are perishing; perishing *pleasures*, perishing *honors*, perishing *profits*, and perishing *comforts*. "Riches are not forever!" Says Job, "Have you entered into the *treasures of the snow?*" Gregory upon these words

observes, that earthly treasures are treasures of snow. What pains do children take to scrape and roll the snow together to make a snow-ball, which is no sooner done but the heat of the sun dissolves it, and it comes to nothing. Why, the treasures of worldly men are but treasures of snow. When death and judgment come, they melt away, and come to nothing. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath—but righteousness delivers from death." You see here the great advantage of godliness; so that if we look at profit, we shall find enough in godliness, to engage us to be altogether Christians.

Second, Godliness is the most COMFORTABLE profession. There are no comforts which can compare to the comforts of grace and godliness.

1. Worldly comfort is only **external**. It is but skin-deep, "In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful." But the comfort which flows from godliness is an inward comfort, a spiritual joy; therefore it is called gladness of heart. "You have put gladness in my heart;" other joy smooths the brow—but this fills the heart.
2. Worldly comfort is always **mixed**. The spring of worldly comfort is in the creature, in some earthly enjoyment; and, therefore, the comfort of worldly men must needs be *mixed* and *muddy*, "an unclean fountain cannot send forth pure water." But spiritual comfort has an *upper* spring. The comfort which accompanies godliness, flows from the manifestations of the love of God in Christ, from the workings of the blessed Spirit in the heart—who is first a Counselor, and then a comforter. Therefore the comforts of the saints must needs be pure and unmixed comforts; for they flow from a pure spring.
3. Worldly comfort is very fading and **transitory**. "The triumphing of the wicked is but short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment." Solomon compares it to the "crackling of thorns under a pot," which is but a blaze, and soon out. So is the comfort of carnal hearts. But the comfort of godliness is a *durable* and *abiding* comfort; "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you." The comfort of godliness is lasting—yes everlasting; it abides by us in life, in death, and after death.

First, "It abides by us in LIFE." Grace and peace go together. Godliness naturally brings forth comfort and peace: "The effect of righteousness, shall be peace." It is said of the primitive Christians, "They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit." Acts 9:31. Every duty done in uprightness and sincerity, reflects some comfort upon the soul. "In keeping the commands, there is great reward;" not only *for* keeping of them—but *in* keeping of them. As every flower, so every duty carries sweetness and refreshing with it.

Objection. "But who more dejected and disconsolate than believers? Whose lives are more uncomfortable? Whose mouths are more filled with complaints, than theirs? If a condition of godliness and Christianity is a condition of so much comfort—then why are they thus?"

Solution. That the people of God are oftentimes without comfort, I grant, "They may walk in the dark—and have no light." But this is not the products of godliness; grace brings forth no such fruit as this. There is a threefold rise and spring of it: Sin within, Deserion and Temptation without.

1. SIN within. The saints of God are not all spirit, and no flesh; all grace, and no sin. They are made up of contrary principles. There is light and darkness in the same mind; sin and grace in the same will; carnal and spiritual in the same affections; there is "the flesh lusting against the Spirit." In all these, and too oft the Lord knows, is the believer led away captive by these warring lusts. So was the holy apostle himself, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." This was that which broke his spiritual peace, and filled his soul with trouble and complaints, as you see, "O wretched man who I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" So that it is sin which interrupts the peace of God's people. Indwelling lust, stirring and breaking forth, must needs cause trouble and grief in the soul of a believer; for it is as natural for sin to bring forth trouble, as it is for grace to bring forth peace. Every sin contracts a new guilt upon the soul, and guilt provokes God; and where there is a sense of guilt contracted, and God provoked—there can be po peace, no quiet in that soul, until faith procures fresh sprinklings of the blood of Jesus

Christ upon the conscience.

2. Another spring of the believer's trouble and disconsolateness of spirit, is the DESERTIONS of God. This follows upon the former. God sometimes disappears, and hides himself from his people, "Truly, you are a God who hides yourself." But the cause of God's hiding himself, is the believer's sinning, "Your *iniquities* have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." In heaven, where there is no sinning, there is no losing the light of God's countenance for a moment; and if saints here could serve God without corruption, they would enjoy God without desertion; but this cannot be. While we are in this state, remaining lusts will stir and break forth, and then God will hide his face, and this must needs be trouble, "You did hide your face—and I was troubled." The light of God's countenance, shining upon the soul, is the Christian's heaven on this side heaven; and therefore it is no wonder if the hiding of his face is looked upon by the soul, as one of the days of hell. So it was by David, "The sorrows of death compassed me, the pains of hell got hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow."

3. A third spring of the believer's trouble and disconsolateness of spirit, is the TEMPTATIONS of Satan. He is the great enemy of saints, and he envies the quiet and comfort that their hearts are filled with—when his own conscience is brimmed with horror and terror. Therefore, though he knows that he cannot *destroy* their peace, yet he labors to *disturb* their peace. As the blessed Spirit of God is first a *sanctifier*, and then a *comforter*, working grace in order to peace; so this cursed spirit of hell is first a *tempter*, and then a *troubler*; first persuading to act sin, and then accusing for sin. This is his constant practice upon the spirits of God's people. He cannot endure that they should live in the light of God's countenance, when himself is doomed to eternal, intolerable darkness!

And thus you see whence it is that the people of God are often under trouble and complaint. All arises from these three springs of Sin within, Desertions and Temptations without. If the saints could serve God without sinning, and enjoy God without withdrawing, and resist Satan without yielding—they would enjoy peace and comfort without sorrowing. This must be *endeavored* constantly here—but it will never be *attained* fully but in heaven. But yet so far as grace is the prevailing

principle in the heart, and so far as the power of godliness is exercised in this life—so far the condition of a child of God is a condition of peace. For it is an undoubted truth, that the fruit of righteousness shall be peace. But suppose the people of God experience little of this comfort in this life, yet,

Secondly, They find it in the day of DEATH. Grace and holiness will minister unto us then, and that ministration will be peace. A believer has a twofold spring of comfort, each one emptying itself into his soul in a dying season; one is from above him, the other is from within him. The spring which runs comfort from above him, is the blood of Christ sprinkled upon the conscience; the spring that runs comfort from within him, is the sincerity of his heart in God's service. When we lie upon a death-bed, and can reflect upon our principles and performances in the service of God, and there find uprightness and sincerity of heart running through all—this must needs be comfort. It was so to Hezekiah, "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart; and have done who which is good in your sight." Nothing makes a death-bed so uneasy and hard—as a life spent in the service of sin and lust. Nothing makes a death-bed so soft and sweet—as a life spent in the service of God and Christ. Or perhaps the people of God should not meet with this comfort at the time of death; yet,

Thirdly, They shall be sure to find it AFTER DEATH. If time brings none of this fruit to ripeness, yet eternity shall! Grace in time—will be glory in eternity! Holiness now—will be happiness then! "Whatever a man sows he will also reap; because the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit." When sin shall end in sorrow and misery—holiness shall end in joy and glory! "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter you into the joy of your Lord!" Whoever shares in the grace of Christ in this world, shall share in the joys of Christ in the world to come; which is "joy unspeakable, and full of glory!"

Lo, here is the fruit of godliness. Say now, if there is not enough in true religion, whether we respect profit or comfort, to engage us to be Christians throughout?

Consideration 4. What an entire resignation wicked men make

of themselves to their lusts—and shall not we do so to the Lord Christ! They give up themselves *without reserve* to the pleasures of sin; and shall we have our *reserves* in the service of God! They are altogether sinners; and shall not we be altogether saints! They run, and faint not, in the service of their lusts; and shall we faint, and not run, in the service of Christ! Shall the servants of corruption have their ears bored to the door-posts of sin, in token of an entire and perpetual service, and shall we not give up ourselves to the Lord Christ, to be his forever! Shall others make a "covenant with hell and death," and shall not we "join ourselves to God in an everlasting covenant that cannot be forgotten!" Shall they take more pains to damn their souls—than we do to save ours! Shall they make more speed to a place of punishment, than we do to a crown of righteousness! Which do you judge best, to be saved everlasting, or to perish everlasting? Which do you count the best master—God or the devil? Christ or your lusts? I know you will determine it on Christ's side.

O then! when others serve their lusts with all their hearts—you must serve Christ with all your hearts. If the hearts of others are fully set to do evil—then much more let the hearts of believers be fully set to do good.

Consideration 5. If you are not altogether Christians, you will never be able to appear with comfort before God, nor to stand in the judgment of the last and great day. For this sad dilemma will silence every hypocrite: "If my commands were not holy, just, and good—why do you not obey them? If Jesus Christ was not worth the having—why did you profess him? If he was, then why did you not cleave to him, and close with him? If my ordinances were not appointed to convert and save souls—why did you sit under them, and rest in the performance of them? Or if they were—then why did you not submit to the power of them? If religion is not good—why did you profess it? If it is good—why do you not practice it?"

"Friend, how did you get in here, without having on a wedding-garment?" If it was not a wedding-feast, why did you come at the invitation? If it was, then why did you come without a wedding-garment? I would but ask a hypocritical professor of the Gospel, what he will answer in that day? Truly you deprive yourselves of all possibility of an answer in "the day of the righteous judgment of God." It is said of the man who had no

wedding-garment on, that when Christ came and examined him, he was *speechless*. He who is *graceless* in a day of grace, will be *speechless* in a day of judgment! Professing Christ without a heart to close with Christ, will leave our souls *inexcusable*, and make our damnation *unavoidable* and more *intolerable*.

These are the motives to enforce the duty; and O that God would set them home upon your hearts and consciences, that you might not dare to rest a moment longer in a half-work, or in being *almost* Christians—but that you might be *altogether* Christians!

Question. But you will say possibly, "How shall I do this? What means shall I use, that I may attain to a thorough work in my heart; that I may be no longer *almost*—but *altogether* a Christian?"

Answer. Now I shall lay down three rules of direction—to further and help you in this important duty.

Direction 1. Break off all false peace of conscience. This is the devil's bond to hold the soul from seeking after Christ. As there is the peace of *God*—so there is the peace of *Satan*; but they are easily known, for they are as contrary as heaven and hell, as light and darkness. The peace of *God*, flows from a work of grace in the soul, and is the peace of a regenerate state; but the peace of *Satan* is the peace of an unregenerate state, it is the peace of death. In the grave Job says there is peace, "There the wicked cease from troubling;" so a soul dead in sin is full of peace, the wicked one troubles him not.

The peace of *God* in the soul is a peace flowing from removal of guilt, by justifying grace, "Being justified by faith in his blood, we have peace with *God*." But the peace of *Satan* in the soul arises and is maintained by a stupidity of spirit, and insensibility of guilt upon the conscience. The peace of *God* is a peace from sin that fortifies tile heart against it, "The peace of *God* which passes all men's understanding, shall, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The more of this peace there is in the soul, the more is the soul fortified against sin. But the peace of *Satan*—is *peace in sin*, "The strong man armed keeps the house, and there is all at peace." The saint's peace is a peace with *God*—but not with

sin. The sinner's peace is a peace with sin—but not with God. This is a peace better broken than kept. It is a false, a dangerous, an undoing peace.

My brethren, death and judgment will break all peace of conscience—but not that which is wrought by Christ in the soul, and is the fruit of the "blood of sprinkling." "When he gives quietness, who can make trouble?" Now that peace which *death* will break—why should *you* keep? Who would be fond of that peace—which the flames of hell will burn up! And yet how many travel to hell through the fool's paradise of a false peace? O break off this peace! for we can have no peace with God in Christ, while this peace remains in our hearts!

The Lord Christ gives no peace to those who will not seek it; and that man will never seek it, who does not see his need of it—he who is at peace in his lusts, sees no need of the peace of Christ. The sinner must be wounded for sin, and troubled under it, before Christ will heal his wounds, and give him peace from it.

Direction 2. Labor after a thorough work of conviction. Every conviction will not do it. The *almost* Christian has his convictions, as well as the *true* Christian, or else he had never gone so far; but they are not sound and right convictions, or else he would have gone farther. God will have the soul truly sensible of the *bitterness of sin*, before it shall taste the *sweetness of mercy*. The plough of conviction must go deep, and make deep furrows in the heart, before God will sow the precious seed of grace and comfort there—that so it may have *depth* of earth to grow in. This is the constant method of God: first to show man his sin—then his Savior; first his danger—then his Redeemer; first his wound—then his cure; first his own vileness—then Christ's righteousness. We must see the leprosy of our sinfulness, and be brought to cry out, "Unclean, unclean!" We must mourn for Him whom we have pierced—and then he sets open for us a "fountain to cleanse them from all sin and impurity."

The sinner must see the vileness and unprofitableness of his unrighteousness, before he profit by Christ's righteousness. The Israelites are first stung with the fiery serpents—and then the brazen serpent is set up to heal them. Ephraim is first thoroughly convinced, and then God's

affections of mercy worked toward him. Thus it was with Paul, Manasseh, the jailer, etc. So that this is the unchangeable method of God in bestowing grace—to begin with conviction of sin. O therefore labor for thorough conviction! There are three things we should especially be convinced of.

First, be convinced of the evil of sin—the filthy and heinous nature of it. Sin is the greatest evil in the world—it wrongs God; it wounds Christ; it grieves the Holy Spirit; it damns a precious soul. All other evils cannot be compared with this. Though to DO sin is the worst work—yet to SEE sin is the best sight! Sin *discovered* in its vileness—makes Christ to be *desired* in his fullness.

But above all, labor to be convinced of the mischief of an unsound heart; what an abhorrence it is to God, what certain ruin it brings upon the soul. O think often upon the hypocrite's hell. "For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them."

Secondly, be convinced of the misery and desperate danger of a natural condition. Until we see the plague of our hearts and the misery of our state by nature—we shall never be brought off ourselves to seek help in another.

Thirdly, be convinced of the utter insufficiency and inability of anything below Christ Jesus to minister relief to your soul in this case. All things besides Jesus Christ are "physicians of no value." Religious duties, performances, prayers, tears, self-righteousness, avail nothing in this case. They make us like the troops of Tema, to return "ashamed at our disappointment" from such "failing brooks." Alas! it is Christ's infinite righteousness which must atone for our sins--for it is an infinite God whom we have sinned against! If ever your sin is pardoned--it is Christ's infinite mercy which must pardon it! If ever you are reconciled to God--it is Christ's infinite merit which must do it! If ever your heart is changed--it is Christ's infinite power which must effect it! If ever your soul escapes hell, and is saved at last--it is Christ's infinite grace which must save it!

In these three things, right and sound conviction lies. Wherever the Spirit of God works these thorough convictions, it is in order to a true and sound conversion: for by this means the soul is brought under a right qualification for the receiving of Christ.

A sinner can never come to Christ—for he is dead in sin, in enmity against Christ, an enemy to God and the grace of God. But there are certain qualifications which come between the soul dead state in sin, and the work of conversion and closing with Christ—whereby the soul is put into a capacity of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. No man is brought immediately out of his dead state and made to believe in Jesus Christ; there are some qualifications coming in between. Sound convictions are the right qualifications for the sinner's receiving Christ.

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:32. That is, such as see themselves sinners, and thereby in a lost condition. So Luke exemplifies it, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save those who are lost." "He is anointed, and sent to bind up the *brokenhearted*, to comfort all who *mourn*." O therefore, if you would be sound Christians, get sound convictions. Ask those who are believers indeed, and they will tell you, had it not been for their convictions, they would have never sought after Christ for sanctification and salvation! They will tell you they would have perished—if they had not perished; they would have been in eternal bondage—but for their spiritual bondage!

Direction 3. Never rest in convictions—until they end in conversion. This is that wherein most men miscarry. They rest in their *convictions*, and take them for *conversion*—as if *sin seen* were therefore *sin forgiven*—as if a sight of the lack of grace were the truth of the work of grace. That is a notable place in Hosea 13:12-13, "Ephraim's guilt is preserved; his sin is stored up. Labor pains come on him. When the time comes, he will not be born." As the child comes out of the womb, so is conversion born out of the womb of conviction. Now when the child sticks between the womb and the world, it is dangerous, it hazards the life both of mother and child. So when a sinner rests in conviction, and goes no farther—but sticks in the womb—this is very dangerous, and hazards the life of the soul. You who are at any time under convictions, O take heed of resting in them—do not stick in the womb!

Though it is true, that conviction is the first step to conversion—yet it is not conversion. A man may carry his convictions along with him into hell. What is that which troubles poor creatures, when they come to die, but this—I have not improved my convictions; at such a time I was convinced of sin—but yet I went on in sin in the face of my convictions; in such a sermon I was convinced of such a duty—but I slighted the conviction; I was convinced of my lack of Christ, and of the readiness of Christ to pardon and save; but alas! I followed not the conviction.

Remember this; *slighted convictions* are the worst death-bed companions. There are two things especially, which above all others make a death-bed very uncomfortable:

1. Purposes and promises not performed.
2. Convictions slighted and not improved. When a man takes up purposes to close with Christ—and yet puts them not into execution; and when he is convinced of sin and duty—and yet improves not his convictions—O this will sting and wound at last! Now therefore, has the Spirit of the Lord been at work in your souls? Have you ever been convinced of the evil of sin, of the misery of a natural state, of the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help, of the fullness and righteousness of Jesus Christ, of the necessity of resting upon him for pardon and peace, for sanctification and salvation? Have you ever been really convinced of these things? O then, as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last, and enjoy God forever—improve these convictions, and be sure that you do not rest in them until they rise up to a thorough close with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so end in a sound and perfect conversion! Thus shall you be not only *almost*—but *altogether* a Christian!

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