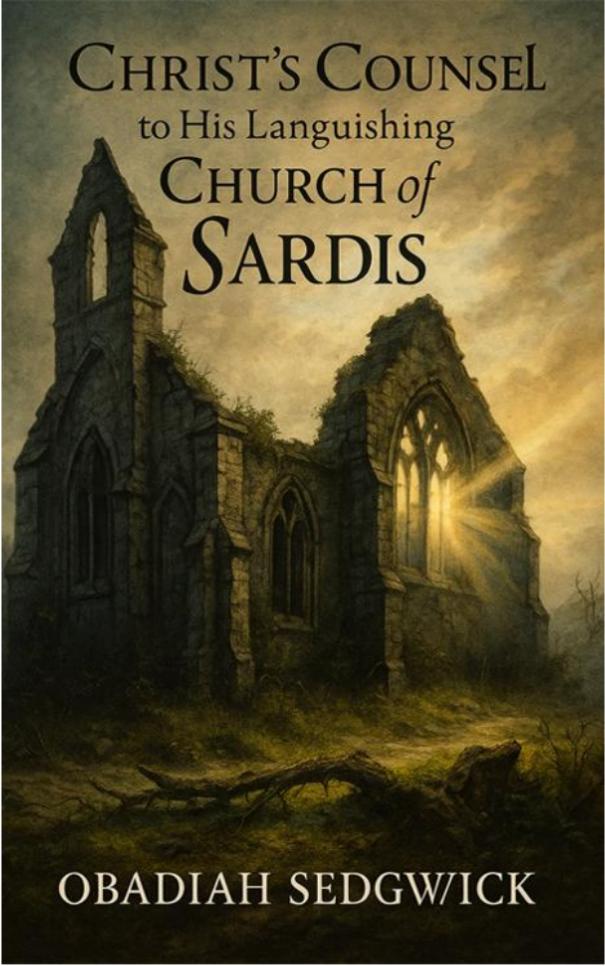


CHRIST'S COUNSEL
to His Languishing
CHURCH *of*
SARDIS

OBADIAH SEDGWICK



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Christ's Counsel to His languishing Church of Sardis.

**OR, The dying or decaying Christian, with the means and
helps of his recovery and strengthening.**

BY OBADIAH SEDGWICK, B. of D. late Preacher to the Inhabitants
of St Mildred's Bredstreet, London

Ὁ ἔχων οὐς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις

2 Tim. 1.6

Frustra velociter currit, qui prius quam ad metas venerit deficit.

Greg. Mor. l. 2. c. 40

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To the Right Worshipful

To the Right Worshipful Captain Nicholas Crisp, Esquire, and Mistress Anne Crisp, his pious consort; to Master Samuel Crisp and Mistress Katharine, his virtuous wife; with all the rest of the parishioners, my loving friends, the inhabitants in Saint Mildred's, Bredstreet.

My dear and worthy friends,

Saint Bernard, with a very apt phrase, answered a special friend of his, challenging him in the strains of affection, thus: *O scrutans renes et corda Deus, &c. quod diligam illum ex dono tuo et suo merito, tu scis et ego sentio, quatenus autem diligam, tu scis, ego nescio*; that is, O Lord, You who know and search the inmost closets of the heart, that I love my friend, You know it, and I know it: how much I love him, You know, but I do not know.

The same I apply to myself and all of you: if suspecting my affection towards you because of my departing from you, Lord, You who know all things, You know that I love them, and I know it; how much, You only know, but I cannot express.

You were a people (of all with whom hitherto I have lived, and of all unto whom I have ever preached) of the most general union among yourselves, and of the most liberal and unwearied affection to your minister. The main scruple many times with me was, lest diverse of you should outstretch your measure.

All the respects which you owed and showed to my ministry, and all the encouragements which you heaped on myself, I do now the second time publicly acknowledge.

As my thankfulness presents itself to you all, so in a special manner to you, much honoured Captain, and your worthy wife, by whose good opinion and affection I was (through God's mercy) brought unto that place. You have so advanced your favours, both to myself and some friends of mine, that I do most gladly embrace this present occasion of public testimony and acknowledgement — not that it is sufficient to clear all accounts, but only that you may know, kindnesses long since given are never lost in a thankful breast.

My desire for you all is, that you may be saved; and my desire to you all is, that you would seriously answer the many precious and heavenly opportunities of God's grace.

It is not only a vanity, but a danger — a danger both extreme and certain — to trifle with our souls. God has sown much seed by many of His servants among you, and believe me, He expects a harvest. We cannot answer great means with great sinfulness or little goodness.

To whom anything is given, of them something is required (even the man with one talent was made accountable); but to whom much is given, of them much shall be required.

My dear friends, if you are wise, be wise for yourselves; be good indeed. You honour our ministry, and provide well for your own eternal good, when you go into a holy way and go on in that way.

The sight is incongruous, and the account will be sad, when ministers' doctrines are very heavenly, and the people's conversations very earthly and sinful. A melting heaven and a hardened earth meet ill.

At length, let us see our sermons and pains in your lives. We preach and die, and men hear and die; we preach out our health, our strength, our lives. O that our hearers would take pity on us, and mend their hearts and ways!

If we boast that our means are greater than others', we must tremble also to think if our accounts before God should prove worse than others'.

Therefore, for your parts, as you have begun, so with all alacrity and industry continue and persevere.

Our life is short, duties many, work daily, and reward sure and sufficient. An eternity with God should make us good, and keep us doing, and hold us faithful, and make us fruitful.

To the everlasting arms of His protection, and to the perpetual influences of His grace and mercy in Christ, He commends you all, who is, to you all,

**Your much obliged and affectionate friend,
Obadiah Sedgwick.**

To the Reader

If you expect in this treatise what is curious and adorned with art, spare your eye any further travel — it is not here. Divine doctrines serve rather for the stomach than for the palate.

In preaching these sermons, I followed Saint Cyprian's direction to Donatus: to make choice not of *diserta* (elegant things), but *fortia* (strong things). I looked very little at harmony, which might take the ear, but most of all at energy, which might reach the conscience.

I know well that there is a lawful and seasonable use of learning. I am not of his mind who would have preachers study no book but the Bible. Only this: ministers (if I mistake not) must consider their auditors, and then and there use their choicer learning, when and where it may not amaze but profit.

When all is summed up, this will be found the most comfortable truth: no preacher is so learned as he who can save souls.

And now, if you please, read the work, and receive this counsel from me. Above all, strive for spiritual life — it is your greatest honour to be good — and when you have obtained it, take heed of dying.

The dead man and the dying Christian are two sad sights. It is woeful either to be a brand falling into hell, or to be a star falling down from heaven.

The rising sun is more and more beautiful, but the waning moon is more full of spots and darkness. Though all may not be lost, yet his shipwrecks are great who has lost much in his jewels, and almost all in his comforts.

No more but this: keep heavenly things as you would keep heaven itself.

**Yours in any spiritual furtherance,
Obadiah Sedgwick**

Christ's Counsel to His Languishing Church

Revelation 3:2–3

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die: for I have not found your works perfect before God.

Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent...”

The author of this book was Jesus Christ. The penman was John the Apostle. The matter of it is generally mysterious. The persons whom it concerns are the seven churches in Asia, but the scope of it extends to all the churches succeeding the apostles to the end of the world.

Ephesus (the first of these churches) is charged with apostasy. Smyrna (the second) is encouraged to constancy. Pergamos and Thyatira (the third and fourth) are charged with permitting idolatry. Sardis (the fifth) is strongly questioned for hypocrisy. Philadelphia (the sixth) is commended for fidelity. Laodicea (the last) is condemned for neutrality or indifference.

In this epistle to Sardis, you have:

1. An inscription

- To whom? To the angel of the church in Sardis.
- From whom? From Him who has the seven Spirits — Christ, who possesses a manifold abundance of spiritual gifts and graces in His own disposal, and imparts them by His Spirit.

2. A description of that angel and church — what they were:

- In appearance: *You have a name that you live* — that is, you boast, and others imagine, that you are furnished with vital strength for doctrine and discipline.

- In reality: *But you are dead* — there is no such matter. Your gold is but tin, and your piety mere formality. The powers of truth and grace were extremely faint and languishing — even expiring.
3. A direction given to them as to what they should do — this direction is:
1. General: *Be watchful* (or, awake). No reformation is possible without diligent and serious consideration.
 2. Special:
 - The subject: *Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.*
 - The reason: *For I have not found your works perfect before God.*
 - The manner of fulfilling this charge is expressed in two particulars:
 1. In remembering the good truths — or rather, the manner in which they were once received and heard — amplified with a special exhortation to hold them fast.
 2. In repenting of all evil, especially their hypocrisy and spiritual lethargy: *And repent.*

The matter is so extensive that I hardly know where to settle. I shall only be able — as reapers do in a full field — to cut down many particulars, leaving the binding of them up to some more skilful harvestman. Take them thus:

1. People living under evangelical teaching may yet be in a decaying and dying condition: *the things that are ready to die.*
2. Spiritual matters must be helped and strengthened when they begin to languish and decline: *strengthen the things that remain.*
3. A state that appears fair to human eyes may yet be truly imperfect in the eyes of God: *I have not found your works perfect before God.*
4. A right remembrance and retention of original truths is the means of reviving a dying Christian — of calling him back to life: *Remember therefore...*
5. Spiritual decay requires spiritual repentance: *...and repent.*

I begin with the first of these, namely:

[Doctrine]

That people living under evangelical teaching may yet be in a dying condition.

For the opening of this assertion, consider with me the following particulars:

1. There are three sorts of people who may live under the preaching of the Word:

(1) Some are manifestly profane, who are utterly dead — there is neither the substance nor even the semblance of any heavenly life in them.

(2) Others are cunningly hypocritical, whose outward leaf of profession seems alive, but whose hidden core of corruption proves they are dead.

(3) A third sort are such as are vitally good — in whom a spiritual life is truly implanted, and whose profession in some measure corresponds with it.

The proposition I understand as even including this latter sort: that even these may be in a dying condition.

This dying disposition properly consists in a manifest decay of spiritual principles. Just as, when a man is dying physically, the vital principles — *calidum* and *humidum* — are notoriously impaired, so too, when a Christian is dying spiritually, the inner principles of heavenly life are greatly diminished, failing, and decaying.

There is neither the same strength, nor activity, nor constancy in the spirit or heart of man as formerly. He functions weakly, like a dying pulse, *cum laesis facultatibus* — as a man goes with lame legs and a sickly body, so he walks with wounded principles and a languishing, pining soul.

But if you would have the point opened more amply, then know that a Christian may be dying in several ways:

1. In profession:

His very leaves may wither. That visible zeal and diligence, that former eagerness to attend the ordinances, may now be overcome with extreme sluggishness and remissness. He may become a stranger to God.

2. In conversation:

His hand may shrivel and lose its former strength. The former association with the people of God may now be no delight. Profitable discourses of heaven and holiness may now be laid aside. There may be no such waters dropping from his fountain, and very little good issuing from his fellowship. His candle may burn dimly, and with a weak, flickering light.

3. In affection:

That former flame of love, that sea of desire, that Eden of delight may now, like a great fire, be reduced to a few coals and ashes. Christ puts the Ephesians in mind that their *first love* was left — not absolutely in nature, but eminently in degree (Revelation 2:4). Likewise, Paul rebukes the Galatians for their cooling affections toward his person and ministry, where once their zeal was so fervent that, as he said, their very eyes (Galatians 4:15) were at his service.

4. In duties:

These may now be interrupted by intermission or distracted by wandering thoughts. They may be neglected altogether, or performed rigidly and formally — coldly, carelessly, and without heart.

Once, no time was too long, no distraction excusable, no prayer satisfying unless it came with lamenting compunctions and groanings of spirit — with fervent wrestling with God.

But now, these and other duties are like a faint pulse — barely felt. Words suffice. An *opus operatum* is almost deemed enough.

5. In judgment:

Whereas formerly the mind and understanding were — like the

needle looking to the pole star — taken up with admiration and delight in meditations of God, Christ, and divine truths, now vain objects are doted upon. Poor, fleeting delights and profits take up the soul's dwelling, leaving it almost a stranger to holy contemplations. It has almost lost the taste for thoughtful study of God, Christ, or salvation.

6. In gifts or spiritual abilities:

Through too much indulgence in carnal ease, a desire for worldly greatness, or lack of appropriate use, these gifts may — like a sharp sword — grow rusty, or — like standing waters — stagnate and dry up.

7. Worst of all, in graces themselves:

Just as bodily health can suffer eclipses, and life itself may admit of fainting, so too the graces in a Christian may be deeply wounded and diminished in strength and operation.

This may arise:

- Partly from neglect of use and exercise,
- Partly by failing to strengthen them through constant use of the ordinances,
- And partly by yielding to sinful temptations.

So now, repentance may seem nearly impossible. Godly sorrow may be scarcely discernible due to extreme hardness of heart. Faith may barely find a way to apply Christ and His promises. The gates of unbelief seem to possess the soul.

Indeed, the fear of God may no longer restrain and awe, and the love of God may no longer motivate and stir as it once did.

[Objection]

But you may ask: *What are the causes of this dying condition?*

[Solution]

I conjecture the following.

1. Some deadly corruption has seized upon their spirits.

Simile: If poison enters the body, it works upon the vital organs and weakens and endangers life.

So it is with the people of God: they sometimes taste of poison — tampering with unsound doctrines, which, as they infect the judgment, so too they weaken spiritual principles and abilities.

The Apostle feared he had laboured in vain for the Galatians, that they were letting go of their hold on Christ. What was the cause of this? Surely, false apostles had leavened them with error concerning circumcision and the observance of the law. When judgment is corrupted by error, truth loses its power in the soul; and where truth loses authority, grace will lose strength and efficacy.

2. Some deadly wound has been inflicted upon them.

Simile: A man may die not only by drinking poison, but also by the cut of a sword, which severs and drains the life-carrying blood.

So too, certain things fight against the soul (1 Peter 2:11), not only afflicting conscience, but also harming our very graces. Sin does not merely trouble the conscience; it wounds, weakens, and can mortally damage the grace within. Sins act like water to a fire.

Even the people of God at times yield to base lusts and vile commissions (as in the case of David and others). When sin is given favour in judgment or affection, it acts as a disease — weakening spiritual health and strength. *Simile*: Sin cripples grace.

3. Some deadly neglect.

Simile: Just as inordinate fasting or the neglect of food brings on physical consumption, so neglect of spiritual food causes decay of the soul.

When God's people, through spiritual pride, grow careless of vital aids — ceasing to cling to the Word of life, to the sacraments, or to earnest prayer — it is no wonder if they begin to spiritually wither.

It is with our souls, in relation to God, as it is with plants in relation to the sun. *Simile*: They live or die depending on their exposure to its warmth. So too, our souls and graces live by their nearness to God. If we draw away from Him, we sever ourselves from the principle of life and preservation.

4. Inconsiderate toleration of particular evils — not purging them in time.

Simile: When corrupt humours are not dealt with in the body, they can develop from mild disorders into deadly diseases.

So it is with particular sins. Even those we charitably call "infirmities," if left unrepented and unreformed, can grow strong and dangerous. One sin can invite another, or grow stronger over time, until the soul languishes and nears spiritual death.

Why? Not only because of inconsiderate admission of sin, but because of delayed correction. The soul should have administered its own remedy:

- First, by rightly grasping the seriousness of the sin from the outset;
- Secondly, by quick humiliation before the Lord;
- Thirdly, by fervent supplication for mercy and strength;
- Fourthly, by resolute abandonment of the sin.

Failure in these brings spiritual languishing — perhaps even a deep consumption of grace.

5. Defect of frequent self-examination.

In our early convictions of sin, we are tender, watchful, and cautious — constantly assessing our spiritual state. This vigilance leads to the growth of grace.

But later, after we have weathered the pangs of new birth and found greater peace and comfort, we often think that grace will thrive on its own. We continue in obedience, but neglect careful self-scrutiny.

What results?

Two great evils:

1. Sins are no longer strictly observed or guarded against.
2. The condition of our graces is not well known or protected from specific temptations.

The outcome? The soul falls into great straits and leanness. The believer cannot pray as before, nor love God and Christ as before. The ordinances bring no joy, fellowship bears no fruit, and the heart lacks tender sorrow.

Why?

Because the soul was left to "run on at hazards." The less heart-searching there is, the less strength grace retains.

6. Defect of solemn humiliations through extraordinary fasting and prayer.

The means that produce grace are also ordained to preserve it. Special means give greater life and power to grace, while neglecting them weakens it — *as if you removed the pillars from a house or withheld rain from the earth.*

Extraordinary times of fasting and prayer have been mightily blessed. They have driven out strong temptations and corruptions, and brought about remarkable spiritual enlargements.

After such seasons — when rightly performed — how cheerful, tender, and fruitful the soul becomes! Yet Christians often neglect these solemn duties, either omitting them altogether or performing them carelessly. Thus they do not receive renewed strength to overcome spiritual corruption, nor do they experience a fruitful supply to their graces. The result is inevitable decay and spiritual languishing.

7. Inactivity in our callings and relationships.

Simile: A lazy Christian will soon become a dying one. Physicians observe that too much exercise can damage health — but so can too much rest. Inactivity prevents the expelling of excess and the stirring of natural heat.

So it is spiritually. When Christians neglect to exercise their graces, those graces soon grow weak. Grace, though implanted by God's

Spirit, is preserved by the activity of our own spirits. Grace is like fire — it must be stirred and fed.

He who will not use grace will soon lose grace.

Many Christians do not use their graces: they do not stir their hearts to believe, to lay hold on God, to pray, to walk in His ways. They do not put their knowledge, zeal, or love to work in their specific callings. They live together, but do no good together; they meet together, but do not provoke one another to greater holiness.

8. Excessive passions and unrestrained affections.

Simile: In nature, extreme fear, grief, anger, joy, or anxiety all weaken the spirit and suppress natural heat — *immarcescere spiritus et calorem* — and so diminish health and strength.

So too in the spiritual life. All inordinate affections damage grace — whether it be worldly desires, love of ease, fear of man, grief over loss, or the like.

But I cannot now enlarge.

[Use]

I now come to the application of this point, which shall be, first, to reflect upon our own hearts — to see in what condition our spiritual state is: whether we are not Sardians, having only a name but being totally dead; or, if we do live, whether that life of ours has not become so weak that we are almost dying.

Reasons to move you to search your hearts in this particular are these:

1. Many among you (who profess and have a name, and I hope the truth also of grace) do not make progress.

You have not advanced yourselves in your spiritual condition.

Though the Lord has given you plentiful and rich means, yet what you were many years ago, the same you are now. A man might say of you, as we say of friends we meet once in ten years, that they look and are just as we found and left them then.

So many of you, after many years of preaching and hearing, are just as you were — you have not attained to any further perfection in holiness.

Now, this is an ill symptom; for a stagnant heart is seldom anything other than a decaying heart. Creation, though perfect at once, is not so with sanctification.

The old saying is, *Non progredi est regredi* — not to go forward is to go backward.

Simile: Grace is either advancing or declining, like a river that either grows fuller or runs lower, or like an oak that is either growing or dying.

2. Many persons exhibit palpable decayings.

All who know them can see and say how strangely they are altered. They are scarcely recognised now as Christians, except by the judgement of the most favourable charity.

Formerly, they were very forward — even exemplary. But now:

- Their judgements have been altered by fond opinions;
- Their strictness of conversation has slackened into what they themselves once called a licentious walk;

- There is a dumbness grown in their families;
- There is a coldness upon their affections.

O, where is your former zeal, love, joy, pity, brokenness of heart, flaming desires for Christ, longing for strength and assurance, and careful circumspection to please your God?

3. Though we be not dead Christians, yet if we are dying Christians, our condition is very evil and very sad.

(1) It is very evil:

- No one can decay in good but by something bad. It is always some sinful evil that makes us wither in spiritual good.
- It is a very evil thing in itself. If it is a sin not to thrive in grace, it must be a greater sin to be dying in grace.
- It occasions much sin. It would be a wonder to see a man dying in grace, and not also living in sin. However, believe this: sins will thrive the more in you, the more weakly grace lives in you.

When natural heat grows low, diseases multiply and grow high. If that which should keep down sin is itself kept down by sinning, how exceedingly sinful may you prove to be?

(2) It is very sad:

The Christian's condition is excessively perplexed and prejudiced by it. For example:

(a) There is an extenuation of our chiefest excellencies.

Simile: Our gold is clipped and washed.

Beloved, we have no greater excellencies on earth than gracious and holy qualities. If the naked soul is worth more than a whole world, how much more the grace that elevates and advances the soul?

Yet, even our graces, in a decaying condition, droop and pine. For a man to have a withering finger is nothing compared to having a withering heart.

Simile:

To see a candle extinguished is nothing compared to seeing the sun grow dim or purblind.

When grace decays:

- That which is as the heart to the body, or as the sun to the earth, or as the soul to the body — the vital spring — decays.
- As was said about the taking away of the Ark, so it may be said of the diminution of grace:

Now the glory is departing from Israel.

Now, your honour lies in the dust. The less good you become, the more vile you are.

It is as if your fair hand became leprous, or your sun set at noon.

(b) There is a depression of our heavenly strength.

When Samson's hair was cut off, he became like other men — he lost his hair, and lost his strength too.

[Simile]

When the fountains are low and roots weak, then the streams become thin, and the branches grow almost fruitless — for these are the principles of being and of nourishment unto them.

Our graces are a kind of spring to our gracious abilities. When we are less good, we shall always do less good and more evil. Your wheels will move slowly, and your feet (like those of a sick man) will move staggeringly and wearily. There will be much ado to accomplish even a little good; your services will be like thin rays of gold, hardly discernible amid the multitude of ashes and dross.

Now this is a sad thing: when at the most, it is the utmost that a man can do to believe, or to grieve for sin, or to love God and fear Him, or to pray unto Him — whereas formerly he was able to believe and rejoice, to mourn and lament, and so forth.

3. A damp upon our communions with God

There is a double communion:

- One is direct — our active communion with God;
- The other is reflexive — God's gracious communion with us.

Now, by a dying in our spiritual condition, there arises a cloud and a damp upon this reciprocal communion. We cannot behave ourselves toward God as before, and God will not behave Himself toward us as in former days.

Note:

1. Regarding our communion with God, it grows more strange, less confident, and more unprofitable — weaker in heart, lesser in trust, and least of all in benefit and success.
2. Regarding God's communion with us, it will be eclipsed both in its effective and assisting aspects, as well as in its affective and comforting parts. He will not give you His hand or His eye as formerly.

David, upon his great decay, found not only a cloud upon God's face, but also a strangeness in God's spirit (Psalm 51:12). By our notorious decaying, we debar ourselves of much help from God and of all manifest expressions of favour for the present.

Desertion is always the consequence of decaying.

4. A vexation and restlessness in the conscience

When we bid farewell to grace, we must bid farewell to peace and comfort. A dead man often rests in peace, but a dying Christian is never without trouble; the remaining grace serves chiefly to trouble us for our decayings in grace.

Spiritual comfort usually accompanies either great griefs for sin or great progress in duties. Spiritual troubles, on the other hand, follow either great adventures into sin or great slackness in holiness. For conscience will trouble us as much for losing what is good as for committing what is evil.

5. A great silence in heaven

The decaying Christian shall either hear much displeasure from God, or little or no good from Him.

The ordinances, to which he now applies himself more perfunctorily, shall either be dumb — speaking no encouragement — or bitter — speaking no strength or peace.

His prayers, which are now more cold and formal, shall either have no answer, or else the answer will be more fear and trouble in spirit. God seems to have no mind to speak unto that man who now scarcely has any mind to speak unto his God.

6. A strange suspicion of the reality of a spiritual condition

If grace is often put into question when a Christian perceives no growth, how much more questionable will it be when the same Christian perceives grace to abate and decay?

Usually, it must be more than mere grace that assures us of grace. For nothing more closely resembles hypocrisy than to be formal in duties while withering in dispositions.

A dying Christian looks very like a dead hypocrite.

7. Other evils

To all these may be added other evils:

- Horrid temptations,

- External miseries,
- Fears of death, and so forth.

But I may not insist upon everything.

[Question]

But here it is demanded: how may we know whether we are in a dying condition or not?

[Answer]

I know no better way to discern this than by a just comparison of things present with things past, as well as by a faithful observation of our own spirits and graces. Thus then:

Look, first, upon:

1. Your judgment and mind;
2. Your will and affections;
3. Your heart and conscience;
4. Your worship and services;
5. Your ways and conversation.

By examining these, you may discern whether you are dying or not.

1. Concerning your judgment and mind:

Formerly there were strong endeavours to know the truths of God, to search out the mysteries of salvation, and to admire holiness and

God's favour. There were sweet meditations on the will of God; the mind was eminently taken up with God, Christ, grace, obedience, and heaven.

Is it so now? Or rather, do worldly things seem great in your eyes? Are not your mindings more for inferior good than for spiritual good?

Divine studies — are they not rare, poor, and fleeting? Where is that study to know God? Where is that longing to see His favour in Christ toward you? Where is that reverent regard for the truths of God? Where is that diligence to know the state of your soul? Where is that sweet delight you once took in knowing Jesus Christ as yours?

2. Concerning your will and affections:

Time was when your will was flexible and easy towards obedience — submissive to the divine will, cheerful in the duties of godliness, eager in closing with divine promises, ravished with love to Christ, fearful to offend, careful to please, desiring nothing more than God's lovingkindness, strictly hating all evil, and joyful only in having God as your portion.

Floods of tears once swelled your grief; heavenly delights once satisfied your soul; mercies were blessed, and threatenings feared.

But if now your will grows weary and stubborn, hard to be persuaded, often contending with the divine will, impatient of strict obedience, indifferent to pleasing God, slow to hearken to His counsels — if God's mercies and threats are of small effect, if sin is not watched against and hated, if God alone is no longer delightful and sufficient to you, if your heart grows more insensible of sin and

hardly mourns, if your delights in heavenly things have waned — ah, how has the mighty fallen! How is the noble plant degenerated!

3. Concerning your heart and conscience:

Compare them now with what they formerly were.

How quick was conscience to direct! How apt was conscience to check! How tender was conscience to offend! How restless was conscience until peace was made! How exact was conscience to obey!

Is it so now? You can sin — and conscience strikes not. God strikes — and conscience feels not. Conscience strikes — and you care not. Conscience has grown sleepy and drowsy, almost dead and seared.

You can omit duties, or perform them carelessly, slip and fall, and lie — and either conscience says nothing, or you reform nothing.

4. Concerning your worship and service of God:

How precious were the ordinances unto you — how delightful! You would rather have spent a day with them than a hundred days in other employments. What secret impressions the power of them once made upon your heart — what griefs, what joys, what persuasions, what hopes, what encouragements unto holy duties, what conflictings with and victories over sin and temptation, what serious care and diligence to walk with God!

O why is it — whence is it — that now it is not as once it was? There is no longer that natural love of ordinances as before.

The Word does not work upon you as formerly; the Sacrament does not affect you as formerly. The Word of threatening reveals wrath, and you tremble not. The Word of promise reveals goodness, and you love it not. The Word of fidelity reveals faithfulness, and you believe it not.

The Sacrament opens the blood of a Saviour, and you thirst not, you rejoice not. You have grown dull under all, and barren after all.

Your dead heart argues that you are a dying soul.

5. Concerning your ways and conversation:

If they are now dead in respect to sinfulness, or dead in respect to unprofitableness — if you have become like the heath that brings forth nothing, or like the briar that brings forth thorns — if you have turned all religion into mere discourse, or censure, or dispute, while you eat and drink and talk and sin — how have the shadows of death covered you! How chill and languishing have your graces become!

Serious Reflections

Seriously consider these things (you who hear me this day) and see to it that you be not a dying people.

Your condition would be more fearful than that of others:

1. You have more enlivening means than any people on the earth. No city is like unto you for public opportunities and private helps. You are exalted unto heaven in the abundance and choice

of spiritual advantages. Therefore your decayings would weigh heavier in God's account.

The more means of strength and life a man has, the deadlier his dying disease becomes.

2. We cannot but approve your frequent resort to the Word and service of God, in season and out of season — as if you would take the kingdom of heaven by force. If now, under so fair a complexion, your vitals of godliness slacken and pine away in your hearts and private walkings, this dissonance would be not only shameful to your profession but also grievous to your conscience.

Further Discernment

Another way to discern whether you are dying and decaying is by observing the acts or operations of your graces:

Simile: You see that the root is less able when but little fruit appears on the tree; and that the spring is dried up when the streams scarcely run, though they once flowed freely.

When graces are scarcely active, or uneven in their operations, surely there is a spiritual languor in you.

O Christian, your faith no longer commits things to God as before; your love is no longer so settled on Christ; your patience no longer bears afflictions as it once did; your sorrow is dry; your zeal is cooled.

Simile: If your eye grows dim, your foot grows lame, and your shoulder grows weak — it is an argument that natural strength is decayed.

The same may be said of our spiritual condition: if our graces do not exert themselves with former vigour, it is a sign of spiritual decline.

[Note]

I pray you to observe that graces are given unto us for three ends and uses:

1. To be inclining principles to gracious or holy acts

The nature of man without grace is like a dead man, who has no disposition to walk. But when grace enters the soul, it enlivens, enables, and inclines or disposes it unto holy operations — to mind, to will, to desire, and to perform heavenly works. You see this in Saint Paul: when converted, renewing grace inclined him entirely to another way and to other acts — to pray, to preach Christ, and so forth.

Now, where is that ancient disposition in you unto good duties? Whence comes that wonderful unwillingness and untowardness of spirit within you? How comes it to pass that, if you serve the Lord, it is as if it were by constraint — with a kind of averseness and reluctance? You do not mind Him in any proper measure, and His law is not in your heart.

2. To be enlarging principles to pious performances

Graces do not only enable a man to good performances in the matter, but also in the manner; they make us a willing people in the day of our offerings, and they cause us to delight in doing the will of God and to rejoice in going to the house of the Lord.

But now, there is not that relish of godliness; there is not that delightfulness of service; there is not that liberty and alacrity of spirit. You have become a dull and heavy Christian — as if there were no longer that suitableness between your heart and holy duties. You have grown very slothful, careless, and negligent in your work.

3. To be cleansing and opposing principles against sinful corruptions

Graces are compared to water, which washes away spots, and to fire, which burns away rust. Just as our corrupt flesh is said to lust against the spirit, so the renewed spirit is said to lust against the flesh. They are contrary to one another — always in opposition and conflict.

There was a time when you found it thus: grace humbled and cleansed your heart from the love of sin, raising a tender fear about it and a singular hatred and opposition to it.

Yes, even the very thoughts of sin were a heavy burden to you. How often — because of the rebellion in your nature — did you cry out with Saint Paul, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Romans 7:24).

Is it thus now? Why is it not thus now?

Is sin quite subdued? Or do you think that grace and sin will ever come to a truce?

No! Why then do you allow those contemplative evils to lodge in your mind? Why do you permit delightful imaginations to tickle and inveigle your affections?

Is it thus now? Why is it not thus now? Is sin quite subdued, or do you think that grace and sin will ever come to a truce?

No — but why do you allow those contemplative evils to lodge in your mind, or those delightful imaginations to tickle and inveigle your affections?

Nay, how do you dare to tamper with actions, if not openly sinful, yet doubtful — and as close to sins as can be, and which occasion sin?

Yes, and sins prevail much upon you — pride, vanity, and the like — and under all this, your heart neither smites you nor restrains you.

The time has been when you would not, for the whole world, have dared to be or to do such things.

[Objection]

But if the case be so (may some tender conscience reply), then I fear my state is not right; for I have never had so much conflict with a sinful nature all my life as in these recent days. And if the greater power of sin shows a more weakened estate of grace, then surely I am the person in a dying condition.

[Solution]

To this I answer briefly:

1. You must distinguish between the **turbulence** of sin and the **prevalence** of sin.

The spiritual condition is not decaying because sin is more disturbing and rebellious, but because sin is more prevailing and leading.

2. You must distinguish between **sin in conflict** and **sin in subjection**.

My grace is weakened when I yield to sin, but it stands in

strength when it stands in defiance and conflict against sin. It argues the violence of sin to break out against grace; but it also argues the potency of grace to keep the soul from serving unruly and boisterous lusts.

3. You must distinguish between **sin in temptation** and **sin in affection**.

Even a strong castle may be assaulted, and a stout Christian may be much tempted. Then the spiritual part is weakened when sin is favoured. But if, as there is much temptation in your sinful flesh, there is also much detestation in your spiritual part, your bow yet abides in strength.

[Objection]

But another Christian replies:

If these signs of decaying are right, which you deliver, then surely I am in a dying frame; for formerly — when, as I thought, God looked upon me in mercy, in quickening me from the dead — I had a very melting heart for sin, and a surpassingly zealous love to God and His glory. But now I find no such heights, flames, and measures.

[Solution]

To this I answer:

1. You must distinguish between **equal sensibleness** and **equal spiritualness**.

Upon the first beginnings of grace, there may be more sensibleness, for grace erects itself much in the affections — of whose acts we are more aware, being nearer to sense.

But upon the advance in grace, there may be more spiritualness: though there may not be such sensible grief in the affections, yet

there is a pure loathing of sin and displeasure with ourselves in the will.

2. You must distinguish between **passionate expressions** and **deliberate or judicious expressions**.

I confess that formerly your zeal and love might have been more passionate and violent. But now they work upon more pure and mixed grounds. And forever know: it argues greater strength of grace when it can act its parts with less turbulence and unquietness.

3. You must distinguish between **grace generally diffused** and **grace particularly employed**.

At the beginning, all the water as it were ran in one channel; grace exerted itself mostly in humbling acts, and therefore seemed abundant because it was highly concentrated in one part.

But upon further knowledge of Christian duties, grace diffuses its strength across all the acts of holiness. It is not less because it is more broadly improved — it is only less perceived, *simile*: like health and strength diffused invisibly through the whole body.

4. You must distinguish between **interruption** and **corruption**.

Spiritual principles may sometimes be interrupted — *simile*: like a river scrambling over a bay — by temptations.

The passages are not always open for operation. The very ineptitude of a man's temper may occasion uneven expressions in visible acts (*actus imperati*), and yet there may be no weakening or decaying of the spiritual condition. For the invisible frame (*actus elicit*) remains sure and full.

The will and desires still act as much as ever, though the tongue or hand cannot readily render it. Besides this, the work is

completed by a secret humbling, though it be hindered from open expression.

5. But lastly, if upon solid grounds — when we are ourselves — we find a manifest inequality between our present and former condition in grace, then **counsel is better for you than comfort.**

And no better advice can be prescribed than that which Christ Himself gave to the Ephesian Church, who were slackening in their first love:

Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works (Revelation 2:5).

[Use 2]

If, upon perusal of these trials, you find yourselves not to be in a dying condition:

1. Then first, bless the arm of the Almighty God, who has given grace and upheld it.
2. Beseech Him forever to preserve and increase your spiritual qualities all your days; it is by His goodness that you are good, and of His strength that you still abide in your strength.
3. Use all the means you can to keep up your graces, that you do not sink into a dying condition.

Means to preserve us from a dying condition are these:

1. Be humble

Simile: The high tide quickly ebbs, and the highest sun is presently declining. Faith is the champion for our graces, fear the watchman, and humility the nurse.

Spiritual pride fills our fancies but impairs our graces. A man who thinks he has enough is sure to lose much. If anything keeps us from being low in grace, it is this: that we still grow low and poor in spirit.

In the rickets, they have large heads but weak feet — so it is here.

2. Strive for further perfection in holiness (2 Peter 3:17)

Most of what we have is but the least of what we lack. He who will not strive to be better will surely become worse.

In temporal things, we should focus more on what we have received, and that will make us thankful; but in spiritual things, we should focus more on what we lack, and that will make us fruitful.

As it is written (2 Peter 1:5–6, 8):

"Add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance..."

"For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful."

3. Quit all formality in holy duties

Take heed of the first coolings. Much impiety may hang upon much indifferency. A cool spirit is always a losing spirit.

He who permits himself to perform duties in a slight manner will, after a while, hardly be able to perform them at all.

As the rule was *Hoc age* ("Do this"), so keep up your spirit with the duty. Stir up your graces in all duties; put out your heart and strength in holy actions — in praying, in hearing — and that will keep you alive in grace.

A conscientious and hearty performing of good is blessed not only with the preservation of grace but also with its addition and increase.

4. Maintain a holy jealousy and fear of decaying

"Blessed is the man who fears always," says Solomon (Proverbs 28).

Three things flow from this:

- Tender watchfulness against all occasions of decay;
- Frequent search and examination of our spirits and estates;
- Quick repairing of all failings.

All these preserve us from notorious decay or dying.

5. Be prudently serious in Christian society

Spend not your hours in vain disputes, lest while you study odd notions, you in the meantime lose precious grace.

There are disputes which end only in division, and there are inquiries which tend to edification. Rather study to make yourself better than to prove another man to be bad.

6. Keep up uprightness and by no means allow hypocrisy

Say not, "The sin is little,"

Simile: For many a man has died from a little wound, and we all know that the small end of the wedge makes way for the greater.

Nor say, "It is secret," for a man may die of a secret stab as well as of an open wound.

When the sons of the prophets tasted of the pottage, they cried out, *Mors in olla* — "*Death is in the pot*" — and so shall we find, by experience, that every sin carries a dying influence with it.

Therefore, take heed of all sinning — especially of sins against knowledge and conscience. These are *peccata vulnerantia et devastantia* — wounding and wasting sins.

The tender heart and the upright heart are the living and lively hearts.

7. Lastly

We must apply ourselves to a living Christ, and to living ordinances, and so forth.

But these rules already alleged shall suffice for this time.

[Objection]

But suppose we are in a dying condition — what means are now to be used?

[Solution]

1. **Find out the special diseases or causes of your decay** — in what grace particularly, and by what means, ways, or acts it has been brought about.
2. **Be lowly humbled** — that you have so abased and defiled your glory.
You should grieve exceedingly that by your great decayings, God has been dishonoured, His Spirit grieved, religion shamed, conscience wounded, and grace impaired.
3. **Then use the means prescribed here in the text:**
"Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die";
whence we come to the next proposition, viz.:

[Doctrine]

That spirituals, if languishing and dying, are to be strengthened.

For the understanding of this assertion, premise with me a few particulars:

1. There is a difference between the:

- Implantation,
- Perfecting, and
- Strengthening

of holy principles.

- **Implantation** of them is nothing but their free and effectual communication unto a person by God's Holy Spirit.
It is His hand alone that plants all these heavenly graces, and it is from His sole goodness and power that all those stars — those shining and beautiful stars — are created in our souls.
- **Perfecting** of holy principles is nothing but a successive addition unto grace already received — a rising or sprouting of those plants, a going on from a weaker to a stronger degree.
- **Strengthening** of them differs from both.
It is not a new creation of holy principles, but a restoration of them — and so it differs from implantation.
Though it is an addition to grace received, yet this addition is not simply to grace as weak, but properly to grace as weakened — and so it differs from perfecting.

2. The strengthening of decaying principles or habits of grace is a spiritual and proportionate restoration of them to their former liberty, ability, and efficacy.

It is not merely a sustaining of them *in genere gratiarum* (in the kind of graces), or in *esse vitali* (in vital being), that they should not quite extinguish.

Simile: As when a house is only so kept that it falls not to the ground — this alone is not sufficient for sustaining.

For graces may be preserved as radical habits, yet still be languishing in their vigour and reduced in their strength and degrees.

Strengthening of grace imports addition as well as sustentation —

Simile: like a recovery, which is health in some measure coming and rising again.

Nor is all regaining sufficient, unless it be proportionate to the estate of grace when it first began to decay and sink.

When the decayed Christian recovers again to that ancient height of heavenly power and inclination, and to his former liberty in holy acts — whether inward, in mind, will, and affection, or outward, in visible duties — then has he rightly strengthened himself.

It is true that, before he fully recovers that former stature, he may be said to strengthen his graces *by way of disposition*, but strictly speaking, *by way of habit*, strengthening implies a new equality — as it were — to the extent and latitude of his former condition.

[Objection]

But suppose we are in a dying condition — what means are now to be used?

[Solution]

1. **Find out the special diseases or causes of your decay** — in which grace most, and by what means, ways, or acts it has come about.
2. **Be lowly humbled** — that you have so humbled and abased your glory.
You should grieve exceedingly that, by your great decayings, God has been dishonoured, His Spirit grieved, religion shamed, conscience wounded, and grace impaired.
3. **Then use the means prescribed here in the text:**
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whence we come to the next proposition, viz.:

[Doctrine]

That spirituals, if languishing and dying, are to be strengthened.

For the understanding of this assertion, premise with me a few particulars:

1. There is a threefold strengthening of decaying principles of holiness:

(1) By way of authority and plain causality

This strengthening is the work of the Spirit of Christ Jesus; for as He alone is life to a dead man, so He alone is medicine to a sick soul.

His blood is the only comforting medicine to a troubled conscience, and His Spirit is the only strengthening medicine to a decayed Christian. It is He who must set us upon our feet again, and who must cause our withered branches to flourish once more.

Now, Christ Jesus strengthens the languished Christian (as I suppose) three ways:

1. *Excitando* — by awakening him out of his drowsy and deadly sleep

Like those to Jonah: "*What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise!*" — so Christ awakens the decaying Christian, partly:

- *Per sermonem sonantem* — by the powerful knockings of the Word, which will not let him rest, but charges upon him all the wrath of God and the withdrawals of His love, if he continues thus;
- Partly *per sermonem tonantem* — by some singular afflictions and near corrections, scourging him in some special outward mercies, so that he may see his spiritual losses reflected in temporal ones;
- Partly *per sermonem pulsanter* — by His own Spirit, enlightening the eyes of his understanding to see, reflect upon, and consider his decayed condition, as well as by stirring up his conscience bitterly to accuse and judge him for his relapse and witherings — with much torment, fear, and shame.

2. *Adjuvando* — by conferring upon him actual and effectual strength

(*Specialem concursum, robur actuale*) — whereby his will resolves to forsake the paths of death and to return into the ways of life; and by this helping grace he is enabled both to bewail his former

decayings and to earnestly and constantly supplicate the throne of grace and mercy for pardon and for strength to recover.

3. *Renovando* — by daily infusing (in the use of means) new measures and degrees of holiness

Until the decayed Christian recovers his former ability and vigour, shaking off his corruptions and attaining once again to that strength of holy understanding, faith, will, love, desire, fear, care, and obedience as before.

(2) By way of ministry and office

This concerns the pastors of the flock, who should consider the estate of their sheep. If they find any wandering, they are to bring them back into the way of truth; if any are weak, to bear them up in their arms with comfort; if any are pining and decaying, to stir them up with holy reproofs and pious counsels and directions for the ways of speedy and safe recovery.

Many interpreters think this the principal strengthening intended in this place.

(3) By way of personal duty

The decaying Christian strengthens himself when, being awakened, excited, and assisted by the Spirit of Christ, he applies himself to and continues in the use of all holy and reviving means — whether private, public, or both — until God strengthens what He has wrought in him.

This strengthening is partly:

- **Privative** — in the expulsion of those diseases and occasions which have impaired the spiritual condition;
- **Positive** — in a continual succouring of the spiritual condition, until it recovers to its former degree and standing.

[Question]

But why must the spiritual condition be thus strengthened?

[Solution]

The reasons are many:

1. Spiritual decays are exceeding losses, therefore they must be repaired and strengthened.

- **A loss in that which is our excellency:**
Holiness is the glory of God and the dignity of a Christian. It is holiness that makes you differ from men more than reason makes you differ from beasts.

If, like the man in the Gospel, you lost your sheep, or like the woman, you lost your silver coin, you would surely seek to recover them. How much more when your crown is being lost?

- **A loss in that which is our safety:**
Graces are not only *ornamenta* (beautiful garments) but also *munimenta* (powerful weapons).

You lose your weapons in the field before your enemies. If you lose your spirituals, you make yourself naked — so that any temptation may insult over you and wound you.

Simile: A broken arm — what can it do, especially when wielding a dull weapon, against strong and skilful adversaries?

- **A loss in that which is our serenity:**

Weakened grace and a wounded conscience still go together; or if not, then it is dying grace and a dead conscience, which is far worse than the other.

- **A loss in that which is our felicity:**

Ah, unhappy Christian! When your bow abode in strength, you could see a loving God, enjoy a gracious Father, speak much to Him, and hear much from Him.

But now, you have changed your confidence into fears, your sun into darkness, your communion into strangeness, your glory into shame.

2. Who knows what the end will be if you do not strengthen your decaying graces?

The Lord knows how far you may fall if you will not think of rising.

You see how poor a crop of duties comes from your decaying graces. You feel your affections almost gone. You sense not only a weakness but a weariness in holy services.

You find your appetite gone from the Word. You know your neglect of many a sacrament.

You cannot but observe a vanity arising in your mind instead of

heavenly purity, and a more delightful association with vain and idle persons than with solid and fruitful Christians.

Yes, and since your graces have been weakened, easy temptations have been very likely (if not altogether) effectual to ensnare you to great transgressions. From many omissions you are now ready for great commissions.

Simile: Like a stone running down a hill, or a man carried further and further into the sea, you endanger — what in you lies — the very soul and salvation of yourself.

And is not the love of God setting? Are not His frowns rising?

And what misery now awaits that soul of yours, which has so far gone from home, and has departed from the Father's house?

3. We are bound to keep our graces in repair — and more than that — we are not to rest in a decaying estate, but to recover, and so forth.

Simile: As a tenant who takes a house is bound to keep it in repair, that it may remain habitable against wind and weather, so must we maintain the graces given to us, and not allow them to sink at all.

Nay, more than that: we are bound not only against decayings but even against mere standings.

We must proceed from faith to faith; we must perfect holiness in the fear of God; we must grow in the love and knowledge of our Lord Jesus; we must abound in all the fruits of righteousness; we must use and increase our talents.

It will not be an answer approved to retain only our naked talent and say, "*Master, here is thine own.*"

The First Use of this Point

The first use of this point shall be to stir us up to the practice of this duty.

I will not spend time to demonstrate that we need strengthening. I may speak my conscience with grief — that generally we are a decaying people, in the powers of godliness and in the flames of holy affections.

Yea, our own consciences secretly testify against us this day that it is so.

Yea, the judgments of God — the fire of His wrath, which again begins to burn and fly abroad in this city — testify as much.

Therefore my exhortation to us all is that we wisely consider our dyings and decayingings.

Ah! if the plague should break into our dwellings and take us away in our decayed estates — a tormenting sore, and a tormenting conscience, a dying spirit and a dying body, both at once — the Lord knows the woefulness of such a condition.

Three Things I Commend unto You

For the application of this, I commend unto you three things:

1. The motives to excite us;

2. The means to perform it;

3. The manner of doing it.

1. The Motives

The motives to excite us to strengthen our spiritual condition shall be drawn from the disadvantages of a weakened, and the advantages of a strengthened condition.

(1) In respect of duties

The Christian is to be God's workman; he is the servant of the Lord, who imposes on him not a few, but many works — not easy, but oftentimes difficult works — not for a while, but constant works.

Such duties that:

- A little knowledge will not suffice,
- Nor a little wisdom,
- Nor a little faith,
- Nor a little patience, and so forth.

Some of these duties are active, some passive; some respecting his general calling, some his particular; some directed toward God, some toward man, some toward himself.

Now, the weakened Christian is nobody compared to the strengthened Christian in the matter of duties, for every man is as his

strength is; and our actions (in their course) are according to the ability of the soul from whence they come.

The weakened Christian falls very short of the strengthened Christian, both in:

His adaptation of spirit unto duty

There is not that connaturality (if I may so speak) of his spirit to spiritual offices.

Duties come hardly from him — *simile*: like a rusty key trying to open a door.

He does his work with a more indisposed spirit — not freely, but like a sick man: he goes but a little and is quickly weary, performing poorly and not fully.

Whereas the strengthened Christian's duties flow from him as from an easy principle, a lively and quick cause.

His adequacy of duty to the rule

He does not mind the rule of holy actions so much, nor does he proportion his works to the commands.

God may command much more than he does, for ordinarily the decayed Christian is guilty of many omissions.

He often fails, passing over the duty of prayer, or reading, or hearing, and so forth.

But the strengthened Christian — he is for all duties, difficult as well as easy, private as well as public. Though he cannot intensively answer the rule for duty, yet extensively he does: knowingly and willingly he omits no duty.

His affective cooperation with duty

The weakened Christian does duty, but without such co-working affections — more formally.

He may pray and hear, but it is coldly and sleepily. It is not *ἐν πνεύματι* (in the spirit), but as if it were some indifferent work.

He acts with a careless and indifferent spirit.

His eye is not so fully fixed on God's glory, nor is his heart so warm in prayer.

His coals of fire burn in a cold hearth.

He is not lively in living works, but performs spiritual works without much spiritualness.

But the strengthened Christian has *workings within his works* — or, as in Ezekiel's vision, a wheel within a wheel.

He serves the Lord with a fervent spirit and with all his soul.

He is exceedingly glad to obey and much grieved that he cannot obey the Lord better.

Acceptation of Duty

The Lord does not regard the offerings of the weakened Christian as He does the duties of the strengthened Christian.

It is true that the Lord does not despise the day of small things — even weak services are graciously respected by Him.

But when Christians weaken their own operations, they also weaken God's acceptations.

For the Lord is pleased to answer His servants differently according to their different dispositions and tempers:

Faint seekers receive faint answers, but resolute petitioners obtain plentiful answers from Him of good.

[Simile]

The ship which goes out in low ebbs falls foulest upon the sands; so Christians who ebb in graces shall always flow with sorrows.

But it is otherwise with the strengthened Christian, for rising graces breed stronger and longer comforts. There is not only no troubling accusation but a most surpassing excusation in conscience.

He has a better heart and therefore finds a more quiet spirit; for conscience speaks peace answerable to our being more good and to our doing of it.

Alas, that you should still walk like a *Benoni*, a child of sorrow, whereas the strengthened Christian lives like a *Barnabas*, a son of consolation!

6. In respect of affliction

The weakened Christian in active graces is ever most weak in passive duties: generally, he has more crosses, and (for himself) less wisdom and strength to bear them.

Because he has grown worse, therefore his afflictions are increased; and because his abilities are sunk, therefore the afflictions crush and prick him much the more.

Samson, who could easily break through many cords and bars, yet when weakened, was overcome even by a few Philistines.

He cannot be so patient, nor so confident, nor so diligent in a suffering condition.

His weakened graces can neither administer strength nor subdue those workings of impatience, so that he is almost sunk and shattered by calamities.

His decayed ship can scarcely endure any foul weather.

But when personal sicknesses come, and the apprehension of death — at which times his conscience is thoroughly awakened — ah, how bitter, how terrible are the thoughts and disputes of his heart at such a time, much like those of a man who apprehends his condition not to be good!

Oh, how the pulses of his disturbed and disturbing conscience work!

What reflections on his former ways!

What comparisons of his former flourishings with his present decayings!

What fears of approaching before the Lord!

What smart sentences upon himself!

What sudden and vehement exclamations!

"Oh Lord!" (says he) "I would not yet die, for I have fallen much from my God: Lord, spare me a little, that I may recover my strength (my decayed strength) before I go hence, and shall be no more seen."

It is not so with the strengthened Christian.

As he is more forward in active duties, so he is more sufficient in passive duties.

In losses, in crosses, yea, in death itself, he is more submissive and confident.

He can (with Job) be as willing to receive evil at the hand of God as

good, and does not only rejoice in His favours but also in His strokes. He is as ready to go to his Father as to serve God, his good Master.

7. In respect of God's manifestation

The Lord is pleased diversely to manifest Himself to His people — sometimes in admirable motions and suggestions of His Spirit; sometimes in more quick excitations of their spirits; sometimes in singular confirmations of them, with assistances for extraordinary works; sometimes by secret impressions of His favour and love upon their consciences, which revive their hearts as wine and satisfy their souls as with marrow, as David speaks (Psalm 63).

But now, the weakened Christian darkens this heaven over his head. He has not that comfortable sight of God, that assurance of His favour, that joy of the Holy Ghost.

David lost the joy of the Spirit and the voice of gladness.

The arm of God is not so revealed in him for the doing of good, nor the face of God so openly shown unto him at all.

Whereas the strengthened Christian finds it otherwise:

- He has a better heart and a fairer day.
- His communion with the Lord is sweet.
- He still seeks the Lord, and often finds Him.
- He enjoys the Lord in His power and in His graciousness.

"The Lord meets him that works righteousness, and remembers him who remembers the Lord in their ways."

Now think on these things, O you fallen and decayed Christian, and rest not in your weakness, but recover and strengthen your spirituals again.

Three Things I Will Let Fall, Which Perhaps May Fetch and Quicken You Again

1. Though you are far sunk, yet you may be raised again.
2. If you do rise again, the Lord will graciously pardon your decays.
3. If you will set upon the strengthening work, the Lord will work in you sufficient strength.

1. You May Be Raised and Strengthened Again

This may appear thus unto you:

(1)

Repentance is possible for any sins which are committed. And if renewed repentance is possible, then a recovery again is possible — forasmuch as our recovery consists very much in a renewed repentance.

(2)

Moreover, we have examples of weakened Christians who were strengthened again — as we know in David, exceedingly wounded, yet recovered; and in Peter, grievously falling, yet graciously rising again.

2. If You Strengthen Your Condition, the Lord Will Mercifully Pardon Your Former Decayings

I confess there may be sore grounds of fear to entangle and depress the spirit of a decayed Christian.

For his sins, by which he has decayed, may perhaps be heinous in kind, and also high in circumstances — being against knowledge, against the workings of conscience, against the operations of his graces, against the tender love of God in Christ shown to him more than to another.

Thus, his heart may strongly misgive him whether the Lord will ever look upon him again and accept him into favour.

But this I say: be your decayings what they will — either for the matter of them, or the causes of them, or the circumstances of them — if you rise again by a renewed repentance, I assure you the Lord will pardon you and accept you in Christ.

Just as the Lord pardons all the sins of your unconverted condition upon your initial repentance, so He will pardon all the sins of your converted condition upon renewed repentance.

Therefore He calls upon backsliding and declining people to return unto Him, and promises both to heal them (Hosea 14:4) and to love them freely (ibid.), which is as much as to pardon them.

See the pardon expressly:

"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" (Micah 7:18).

3. If You Will Set Upon the Strengthening Work, the Lord Will Work in You Sufficient Strength for It

There is a difference between a man in his conversion — there, indeed, he is without all strength and can do nothing — and a Christian in his restoration.

Now there is some living ability in him which can still do a little, act a little, strive a little, at least in bewailings and desires.

If you set yourself, in any sincere degree, upon the right and full means of your recovery, the Lord God will come in with His own strength.

He will strengthen what He has wrought in you and will work the will and the deed in you — His own works in you.

[Objection]

But then you will reply: What means may a decayed Christian use to recover and strengthen himself again?

[Solution]

I conjecture that the best course is this:

1. A Serious Consideration of Your Condition

This is the counsel Christ gave to the Church of Ephesus (decaying in her first love): *"Remember from whence thou art fallen."*

Seriously consider, take to heart, peruse and judge over your estate:

- What it was formerly, and what it is now;
- What strength then, what weakness now;
- How much glory God had then, what dishonour God has now;
- What good you did then, what evil you do now;
- What peace in conscience then, what woundings in conscience now;
- What estimation among the saints then, and what strengthening of the hands and opening of the mouths of the wicked now.

This is an excellent means to work upon your spirit — or rather to work out your spirit.

David considered his ways and turned his feet unto God's testimonies.

2. A Deep Humiliation Which Will Follow Upon This

You must break through all businesses, pleasures, and impediments, and retire yourself in a more solemn manner (more than once or twice), and set yourself before the Lord.

Fall down before His footstool with shame and confusion of face, with bitter weepings and lamentations, with sound judgments and condemnations of yourself.

Ah, how exquisitely you should afflict your soul:

- That you should be so mad and vile as to lose a God;
- To lose anything of the graces of God for the sake of a sin or the sake of the world.

That the Lord should show you more love than to another and entrust you with grace (the least dram whereof is more precious than all the world), and yet you should decline from the Lord.

That you should not answer this trust, not use those talents which, if improved, would have yielded so much profit and comfort — but instead, decay in them and fall behind, even under mighty means of strength continually provided for you.

These things should cut, grieve, afflict, and humble your soul exceedingly.

3. A Solid Resolution

You must, with full purpose of heart, resolve not to rest in your decayed condition, but to shake off all the causes and occasions of your decayings.

If any wickedness has entered into your heart, you must put it far away from your tabernacles; and if the morsels have been sweet, you must cast them out with godly sorrow as bitter as gall and wormwood.

If carelessness and slothfulness of spirit have caused your decayings, you must, with the Church in the Song of Solomon, no longer stand upon excuses — *"How shall I rise and put on my coat?"* — but rise you must, get out of your slothful bed, and thrust from you a neglecting and negligent disposition.

Or if the world has caused your decayings — either in the profits of it and gain, or in the honours of it and respect, or in the friendships of it and acquaintances — you must resolve to bid them all farewell.

Think on it, O Christian:

What gains he in profit who loses in his graces?

Or in honour, who abases himself in his graces?

Or in love, who loses himself in the favour of his God?

Ah, poor soul, you may curse the day that ever you knew what belonged to your drudgings in the world, or your great friends in the world, or your society with such and such persons.

At first, you conversed with them with a regretting spirit; then with a silent spirit; then with a yielding spirit.

Many, many a day have you come home with conscience accusing and smiting you — to which, had you hearkened, you would have been much preserved.

Well, well — if ever you would recover your spiritual strength, you must peremptorily resolve to sever from wicked society.

Better far to be a poor man and a rich Christian, than to thrive any way and be decaying in grace.

4. An Active Reformation

"Remember," said Christ, "from whence thou art fallen, and do thy first works."

So say I now: go to your old works again.

Be trading for your soul.

Set up prayer again, and reading again, and hearing again, and holy meditation and conference again, and solemn humiliations again.

Stir up those coals and cinders of grace — there is life yet in you.

Oh, act your life! Faith can do something for you, though it cannot yet see comfort for you — yet it can see help and strength for you.

Godly sorrow can mourn a little — set it to work; perhaps it may quickly rise to a flood upon particular surveys, and so set repentance on work, yea, and all your soul — your mind, your judgment, your memory, your affections — to work in all the duties of your general and particular condition.

5. Ardent Supplication

It is the Lord who must show His power in your weakness, as it is written, *"O turn unto me and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant"* (Psalm 86).

Beseech Him to pity you; beseech Him to succour and help you; to be your strength and your salvation.

- To beat down and weaken the sins which have so much weakened you;

- To crucify your heart to the world, which has so much crucified your heart unto your God;
- To breathe upon your graces, as He did upon the dry bones;
- To stir them up and revive them by His Almighty Spirit;
- To put His hand of power upon your hand of weakness, as the prophet did upon the king's.

Yea, and never give Him over until then.

Though you have been a backsliding child, yet He is a gracious Father;

Though you have been unfruitful, yet He is faithful;

Though you are weakened, yet He is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who does not faint, and who can give power to the faint, and to those who have no might He can increase strength.

Yea, and yet there is something of His own in you — though very little, yet something; and that holiness which He once implanted by a mighty hand, He is now as able to revive and strengthen by His Almighty power.

6. Careful Application

Now go to the healing and strengthening waters.

You have known the ways of God, and His goings in the sanctuary — how He has wrought wonders for the dead.

Many a cripple has gained strength there; and many a disconsolate soul has found comfort there, in His Word and in His Sacrament. There His arm has been revealed.

David, by his great sinnings, grew into great languishings; but the Lord sent Nathan the prophet unto him, and Nathan's faithful dealing was the means of David's happy renewing.

What we pull down by hearkening to the voice of sin, may be built up again by hearkening to the voice of God's Spirit.

But then, this must you do, if ever you would be strengthened, namely:

Strive for a plain and pliable heart, which may yield subjection to whatsoever law or course the Lord shall direct you unto by His Word.

If the Word offers you a restoring plaster, but you will not apply it, and prescribes you strengthening methods, but you will not follow them, then your heart may grow more hardened — but your graces will never be strengthened.

But this you must do: strive to yield up your soul in humble subjection to the heavenly ordinances.

If they say "*forbear*," let your heart answer "*I will forbear*."

If they say "*do*," let your heart answer "*I desire to do thy will*."

Cooperate with the Word received.

When it has entered into your soul and stirred you in any way — when you perceive any healing virtue gone from Christ by it unto you — oh, bless the Lord!

Then go home, work it again upon your soul by holy meditation, yea, and again by holy petition.

[Simile]

You must even do in this kind as Benhadad's servants did in another: they watched the words which fell from the king of Israel and improved them; so must you watch what motions the Lord puts into your heart in private and cherish them.

Watch what impressions the Lord makes upon your spirit by His Word, and not only excite your heart to embrace them, but work them often and often upon your conscience — and this is the way to make your weak spark grow into a flame.

7. And Lastly, There Must Be Lively Consociation

By a natural instinct, weaker things cling and wind themselves up around the stronger, as the weak ivy around the strong oak.

So you must inwardly and affectionately join yourself with strong and lively Christians — who know the ways of grace and walk in them; who are good, and know how to do good; who have hearts to pity you, heads to direct you, and arms to bear you up.

You may be exceedingly repaired by:

- Their heavenly wisdom in counselling you;
- Their tender watchings over you;
- Their daily exhortations of you;

- Their seasonable comfortings of you;
- Their strict and lively examples;
- Yea, even stirred up by the blessed experiences you perceive in them through careful communion with God;
- And much assisted by the success of their prayers for your particular condition.

Thirdly, The Manner

Now be pleased to hear a little about the manner — how you are to set upon this strengthening work — and then I have done with this proposition.

If you find yourself to be a weakened Christian, then set upon your strengthening work:

1. Presently

"Initia morborum cavenda," say the physicians, and therefore their rule is: *"principiis obsta,"* etc.

We should set upon diseases as soon as diseases set upon us — not trifle away the methods of recovery.

Three things must be looked into in time: tides, seasons, and diseases.

If we presently oppose our decayings:

- **First**, we shall prevent the deadliness of diseases.
Had you opposed your negligent, careless spirit at the first, you

would not now be bleeding under so many wounds;
You would not have stepped down from one sin to another;
You would not have gone so desperately from the Lord.

Therefore, watch your heart and often examine it — weekly, nay, daily.

Your languishings are by this means sooner espied and sooner stayed.

- **Secondly**, our strengthening will hereby become more easy.
It is easier to fetch a man from the brink than from the depth of the channel, and easier for a physician to cure a distemper than to heal a settled disease.

There is usually, in the first impairings, less corruption and more strength of grace to oppose and subdue it.

Believe it — long decayings are the more uncomfortable and more difficult to recover.

Therefore, if you fall suddenly, rise quickly.

Remember one thing: it is a very dangerous thing to suffer the soul to habituate itself to decayings;
All customs are hardly broken.

2. Voluntarily

It is true that though you decay more and more, yet the Lord may awaken you at length and recover you — but do not put the Lord to it.

The physician may perhaps heal a deeply languishing patient — but it will cost the patient dearly and bitterly.

Joab got little by not coming to Absalom, for at length he fetched him by setting his corn on fire.

If you will not come in of your own accord but stand it out, I tell you the Lord will fetch you in indeed — but He will send a whirlwind after you, as to Elijah;

He will send flames into your conscience, if you will needs put Him upon compulsory ways.

No, rather:

- Peruse your decayings yourself;
- Arraign yourself;
- Judge yourself;
- Afflict yourself;
- And hurry yourself to make your peace and to recover strength.

It argues a better heart to fall unwillingly but willingly to rise. Hereby peace is sooner made, and strength sooner restored.

3. Prudently

When a tree is withering, you need not pour buckets on every branch; if you water the roots, it is as if you watered all.

There is a holy art in recovering our graces again: if you can recover the roots, you have hit the way to renew all.

Now there are two radical graces (as it were) — if they be strengthened, all the rest will come to be strengthened — namely:

1. Faith

This is a root grace, and it is a strengthening grace.

It is of singular power with God, and with Christ, and with the Spirit of God.

It is that grace which lays hold on, and applies, all our strengthening helps; so that it deals at the springs of strength and brings away strength from them.

But this is not all.

Faith is no sooner strengthened to lay hold on our strength, but (like those common officials in nature — the stomach, liver, heart, and brain) it imparts this vigour to all the new man.

Every grace gets when faith gets.

The more a man can believe:

- The more he will grieve for sin;
- The more he will fear to sin;
- The more he will hate sin;
- The more he will repent of sin;
- The more careful he will be to walk before God;
- The more tender and conscientious he will grow in duties;
- The more able unto prayer and the ordinances;
- The more successful under them.

Therefore, deal prudently for your strengthening.

[Simile.] When a house is declining, we do not meddle with every rafter and piece of wood; no, but we strengthen the pillars and foundation.

Faith is the pillar (as it were) of our graces.

Strengthen it to:

- More apprehension;
- More application;
- More submission to the will of God;
- More affiance;
- More dependence on God through the blood of Christ.

And faith will both find out your strength and impart it.

"I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me."
(Philippians 4:13)

2. Love

This is another radical grace — not that it brings forth other graces for their habits, but that it urges on other graces to their acts and operations.

For as holy love is a most active quality in itself, so it makes the Christian to be most active; it is a doing thing, and makes the person to be doing.

More fully thus:

(1) There is Activity Flowing from Love

Grace shall never be idle.

Where the love of God is strong, "*the love of Christ constrains me*," says Saint Paul.

It is like the virtuous woman in the last chapter of Proverbs, who set all her handmaids to employment; for love will find duty enough, for it is never quiet except in doing the will of God.

(2) There is Diligence

Love will not set graces to a naked work, but to a diligent work — even carefully and diligently to express their acts:

- To take all the seasons of holy actings;
- Strictly to oppose and resist corruptions;
- Neatly to set out duties so that God may have most glory.

(3) There is Delightfulness

Love makes our communion with God pleasant, and the works of piety easy to the soul.

And the more delightful and easy any acts are, the more frequent they grow.

David, loving the Lord, was glad when they said, "*Let us go unto the house of the Lord,*" and he had a desire even to dwell and rest there, as the birds did (Psalm 84).

Now put all this together, and you shall see that if love be strengthened, all our spiritual estate will be strengthened.

For love makes our graces:

- Active and doing;
- Careful and exact in doing;
- Delightful and cheerful in doing good and in communion with God.

And all these are admirable means to raise and strengthen graces.

Forasmuch as the more any Christian does, the more he may: by using his spiritual strength, he always increases it.

All know that diligence in acting is a thrifty course: "*the diligent hand makes rich,*" says Solomon (Proverbs 10:4).

So the diligent Christian is the gaining Christian.

And that delightful frequency of acting [Simile.] is like the twisting of a cord, which thereby comes to be the stronger.

No Christian is so able in the habits of grace as he who is conscientiously frequent in the practice or exercise of grace.

4. Seriously and In Good Earnest, Not Slightly and Faintly

The recovery of a faint soul will never be effected by faint workings.

[Simile.] Gentle physic is improper for tough diseases.

You fell into your decayed estate by remiss operations or actings — and think you that what was not able to keep up your graces from sinking can now quicken and raise them, being greatly sunk?

If my hands cannot keep a swooning person from falling to the ground, can they lift him up being fallen?

Every heavy body, the farther it descends, the heavier it is.

No, no, Christian, you deceive yourself to think that a few complaints, or a few sighs, or a few tears, or a prayer (once in a quarter of a year) more earnestly pressed will serve the turn.

I tell you:

Your wounds are deep, and your diseases are strong;

You are deeply revolted from the Lord;

The very foundations are shaken and battered within your soul.

What talk you of putting a soft cloth over your stinking and festered wounds of sinful corruption?

You ought to search deeply, and to cut off the dead flesh, lest the whole be gangrened.

Take my advice: even break up the fallow ground — I mean your hollow heart.

Search and try it to the utmost:

- Not by slight, but by deep and full humiliations and supplications;
- Make your peace;
- Not by common, but by extraordinary performances;
- Seek to renew yourself.

Your falls have been great, and therefore your work must not be slight.

Great sinnings require grand sorrowings and low fallings.

The more the industry, the higher the risings.

Therefore act your strengthening part with all your strength, and as it were for your very life.

Remember that David was in fasting, and Peter in bitter tears for their fallings — and so they rose again.

5. Thoroughly and to Some Purpose

Do not begin a strengthening work and then, either upon the motions of a lazy heart, or a fearful heart, or an unbelieving heart, become discouraged and desist.

This inconstancy would keep you in an everlasting infirmity — [Simile.] just as if a patient should follow the prescription of the physician for a day or two, but afterwards, finding it somewhat painful and troublesome, will be bound no longer, and so falls ill again.

So if you set upon the ways of strengthening, and for a while keep close to praying and hearing, humbling and reforming — but, perceiving the works to be painful and offensive to your corrupt heart, and too strict to your licentious heart, or the fruits of them to seem hopeless to your unbelieving heart (“I cannot hold out; all is in vain, or to little purpose”) —

I tell you that you do but play the fool with your soul, setting it forward and backward.

This were to twist and untwist Penelope’s thread; you never will get anything by an inconstant and weary spirit.

But this must you do, if you would recover your strength indeed:

You must never admit of interruptions.

You must never break off your renewing work until you have got to your former station in grace again.

The work must be a daily work — a constant going on in mourning, praying, &c., until you have got your tender conscience again, until you have got your broken heart again, until you have got your more willingly and cheerfully obedient heart again, until you have recovered your first love and can do your first works again.

[Object.]

It is true — you shall meet with many temptations from Satan, with many contrary suggestions from your own spirit, and with many discouragements from the world.

It is true also that your doings may not at every time be equal or alike:

You may feel your physic at one time to work better than at another; Sometimes you may do your strengthening work with more strength, sometimes with less;

Sometimes with more liberty of spirit, sometimes with less;
Sometimes with more comfort, sometimes with less.

[Sol.]

Yet let nothing discourage you or take off your spirit from the work,
but follow on to know the Lord and His strength:

- Against all temptations;
- Against all suggestions;
- Against all discouragements;
- Against all your own fears and feelings;
- Against all inequality of operations.

Yet give not over, but:

- Keep up your services still;
- Retain frequent communion with God still;
- Be begging still for the strength of Jesus Christ to raise you;
- Hear still;
- Use the prescriptions until health comes.

You are in the way, and must not rest until you have obtained.

If you break off before you have regained your strength, you will fall back again, and also lose all your new endeavours for your recovery in grace.

Thus much for the second proposition.

I proceed now to the third, of which I can but give a touch, lest I be hindered in the prosecution of the matter in the next verse:

"I have not found thy works perfect," &c.

That the Estate, Though Visibly Fair to the Eyes of Men, Yet May Be Really Imperfect in the Eyes of God

Amongst the Churches, Sardis had a name that it lived — but with God it had not that name and estimation.

We Christians have the judgment of charity, but God has the judgment of infallibility.

We look only on the skin and surface of actions, but God looks into the hearts and spirits of persons.

We judge of the heart by the actions, but God judges of our estates by the heart.

Now the outward acts (upon several arguments, and for several ends and inducements) may be extremely different from the inward habit and disposition.

Persons, for their credit's sake and for their peculiar advantages, may draw out acts naturally good — when yet their spirits stand not right, either for principles or for ends of those acts.

So that, notwithstanding all their profession, their estate may be imperfect before God: partly,

- For the frame and constitution of soul;

- For the vigour and fullness of acting;
- For the scope and intentions in performing;
- For the mixtures in matters of faith or conversation.

But I cannot now enlarge upon this singular affection.

[Use 1]

Only, it may teach us above all to look unto our spirituals, as they abide in, and flow from, our hearts and souls, upon which principally the Lord looks.

He searches the hearts and reins, and approves the actings of the heart more than of the hand; and therefore we read that He had first respect unto Abel, and then unto his offering.

2

To study God's approbation more than man's.

It is not sufficient nor safe that either we alone judge our estates to be good, or that men judge them to be so, unless the Lord finds them to be so.

Every Christian is that as God judges him to be, and he stands or falls according to this righteous judgment of the all-seeing and all-knowing God.

And so I take leave of that verse and proceed to the next:

"Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent." (Revelation 3:3)

In these words, you have the other branches of the Spirit's special directions to the Church of Sardis, which are three, namely:

1. Remembrance (*"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard,"*)
2. Persistence (*"and hold fast,"*)
3. Renewed repentance (*"and repent."*)

Briefly to open the words:

Remember — Sometimes the word is taken for the act of a particular faculty of the rational soul, which is called by the Philosophers *Reminiscentia*, and then it is the calling back of a thing or object formerly known and laid up in the memory.

Sometimes it is taken for the act of serious consideration, appertaining to the judicious faculty of the soul, wherein apprehended truths are well weighed, thoroughly thought on, or considered of.

In both respects, I conjecture, it may be taken in this place.

How — Some read that word rather thus, *τί, what*, "Remember," i.e., call to mind and consider what thou hast received and heard, as if it were a word declaring the matter.

But rather, in this place, it imports the manner, and therefore it is well translated *πῶς, how*, noting the manner how Christ taught and prescribed to them at the first, and also the manner how they embraced those holy rules of His for doctrine and conversation.

Thou hast received and heard — That is, assented unto, and embraced those truths and directions of Christ.

Here is expressed, first, their ancient subjection or embracing of the

doctrine of Christ (*received*), and secondly, the means or way thereof, namely by hearing (*and heard*).

I cannot possibly with any profit insist on all the observables out of these and the other words, considering that little part of time which remains for me to work amongst you.

Only, I will point at three singular propositions, namely:

1. That holy truths once received are often to be remembered and thought on (*"Remember," &c.*)
2. That acceptance of truths is not enough, but Christians must add thereto a persistence in truths (*"hold fast"*).
3. That renewed repentance is required of Christians as well as initial (*"and repent"*).

You see that all these propositions naturally flow from the text, and are very proper for us, and for the occasion upon which they are handled.

I begin with the first of them, namely:

[Doct.] That Holy Truths Once Received Are Often to Be Remembered and Thought On

There are three things which should fall into frequent consideration:

1. Our former sins — and this will keep us humble.
2. God's former mercies — and this will make us thankful.

3. Received truths — and this will make us dutiful and fruitful.

The Jews were to bind them as frontlets between their eyes (Deut. 6:8), to which Solomon alludes in Proverbs 6:21, “*Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck,*” and in Ecclesiastes 12:11, “*they are to be as nails fastened.*”

Look on David, and this was his practice. In Psalm 119, “*I will meditate in thy statutes,*” — there once; then read verse 23, “*thy servant did meditate in thy statutes,*” — there is the second time; but then read verse 48, “*I will meditate in thy statutes,*” — there is the third time.

What speak I of once or twice, or thrice? See him in verse 97, “*Oh how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day.*”

The Apostles are frequent in their exhortations to this purpose — to remember, to lay up, to keep in mind, not to forget the holy doctrines delivered by them.

Nay, Christ Himself pressed the same also upon many occasions.

But for the clear opening of this proposition, premise with me these particulars:

1. **The frequent remembering of former truths must be a remembrance by way of subjection, and not by way of contradiction.**

We must not remember them and question them, much less abuse and pervert them, least of all oppose and despise them.

2. **The remembrance must be ingenuous, and not prejudicial.**

Though we must stick to, yet not stagnate in the truths received. Our former remembrance must not contract a present or future neglect of any other truths which God shall reveal unto us — as

when many remember the sermons of dead men, and slight the discoveries of the living.

3. **There is a threefold remembrance of former truths:**

- One is *notional*,
[Simile.] which is like the often looking into a glass, or when a person beholds truths as he does pictures — gazing on them, and that is all.
- Another is *verbal*,
when a person renews his acquaintance and compliments with truth only: his memory only loads his tongue — like a naked Astronomer who knows heaven and can only talk of it.
- A third is *practical*,
when the remembrance is like a cloud descending on the plants, [Simile.] or like a fire felt as well as seen.
This kind of remembrance has three degrees in it, for it is partly:
 - **Directive**, when truths remembered are made a compass for us to sail by, or copies for us to write after — still teaching and guiding us how to draw the lines and letters of our conversation.
 - **Affective**, when truths remembered are like the conference of Christ (rising from the dead), burning and inflaming our hearts with most affectionate love unto them.
 - **Effective**, when truths remembered are truths obeyed; we often consider former doctrines, and still better our present conversations.

After this practical form, are we to remember received truths.

4. **There is:**

- A *material remembrance*, which is partly of the things themselves, partly of the revelation of them, partly of the manner and means of revealing them.
- A *formal remembrance* of truths received, which is rather of the manner how we ourselves did receive them. We are often to think on truths received, not only as they stand in proposition or revelation, but also how they stood with us when we did receive them for energy or operation.

Thus I conjecture we are to remember truths received:

1. **With what estimations and admirations we did receive them —**

[Simile.] like those people who have the sun but half the year, they run after it, and are ready to adore it in its approach. So when we did receive holy truths at the first, we received them as the very oracles of God — not as the words of man, but as they are indeed, the words of God.

2. **With what subjection of spirit we did receive them —**

We did not only admire their excellency, but felt their efficacy. The word came not in word only, but in power and authority over our very consciences, and this power was a full power and an easy power.

The truths which we received did command and awe, and order our whole man, and we too were most willing to resign up ourselves to the obedience of the Gospel in all things, and to be cast into that mould of heavenly doctrine.

3. With what affections we did receive them —

Oh then, those conflictings of spirit (Heb. 10:32), those baths of grief and heavenly compunction with them (Acts 2:37), those flames of love with those Christians (Acts 4:32), those raptures of joy with Lydia (Acts 16), yea, those extensions of zeal with the Galatians to Saint Paul (Gal. 4). The word had a surpassing influence upon all our affections — to melt, and convert, to raise, and dispose of them.

4. With what resolute loyalty —

So that we did hate and defy all contrary errors and ways, and so were our hearts sworn to divine truths, and (as it were) espoused to them; we once resolved to live and die in those truths, and for those truths. We could not endure any mixture with them, nor hear of any divorce from them.

5. With what reverence we did embrace the ambassadors of heavenly truths —

They were as the angels of God to us, and we were like (almost) with Cornelius, to adore the Peters and Pauls — I mean the ministers of God revealing His truths unto us. The feet of them who brought unto us the glad tidings of our salvation were beautiful and most acceptable unto us.

Now here are two questions briefly to be resolved.

[Quest.] What truths heard and received are we often to consider and remember?

[Sol.] To this I answer:

- 1. There must be an endeavour to remember all the truths.**

As Christ said of the fragments, “*Gather them up, and let none be lost;*” so it must be said of holy truths (on which the soul hath formerly fed), *gather them up all, let none be lost.*

[Simile.] You see that the Goldsmith does not only look after the massy piece of gold, but he carefully looks after every ray and dust of gold, and preserves it.

Every truth of God is precious — it is more precious than gold. It is excellent, and as it is excellent in itself, so it may be useful to us.

[Simile.] There is not a star in heaven but is of some good to the lower world; so there is not one truth of God but may be of some good use to a Christian.

But if either by the multitude of truths, or the sublimity of truths, or by the obscure manner of discovering these truths, or by the impotency and irretentiveness of an unholding and unclasping memory, or by the space of time since truths were delivered and received, it so falls out that all heard and once received truths will not stand upon record — into which they have been entered, but are in many places defaced and cancelled —

2. There must at least be a faithful remembrance of the most necessary and chief truths, namely those which more immediately and intimately, and unavoidably, concern our salvation.

Of which (for method’s sake) I conjecture there may be three heads, viz.:

1. That vital truth concerning Christ and faith in Him:

This is the great fundamental truth.

2. That vivifical truth concerning repentance and the conversion of the heart from dead works.

3. That practical truth concerning obedience, in ordering the life and course of a converted person.

As the moralists say of fame, or of a man's good name, *“Omnia si perdas, famam servare memento. Qua semel amissâ postea nullus eris,”* that is: *whatsoever commodity you lose, be sure yet to preserve that jewel of a good name. That is so choice a jewel, that whatsoever a man loses, he must yet take heed and care of that.*

The same may be said of these forenamed truths:

Though through some defect, or frailty, or malignity, any other historical or problematical truths may slip from us, yet these must be written in our hearts with the point of a diamond, and as in marble, the characters of them are to be kept fresh and alive, and are never to be blotted out.

[Object.] And why this faithful and frequent remembrance, or renewed consideration, of truths heard and received?

[Sol.] Reasons thereof are many.

- 1. Though sometimes an assent may be sufficient to a particular word of truth for the present, yet the virtue and use of that may be for the future.**

[Simile.] It is with truths as it is with treasures, whereinto much gold or silver is put and kept safe; a little whereof may serve for the time being, but most or all of it may be brought out upon future and several occasions.

[Simile.] Or as it is with friends and garments, which though we do not use every one of them every day, yet ere we die, we may have useful occasion for them all.

The truths which thou hast heard from the word ten years ago may serve thee twenty years hence; that discovery of the mercy of God, of the blood of Christ, of the freeness of grace, &c., these may be of great avail unto thee, and of sweet and proper help unto thee when thou comest to old age or to a dying bed.

[Simile.] It is not with truths heard and received as with our meat eaten and digested, the virtue of which may be gone in a few days, but as it is with a lease for life, which this year brings in our revenue, and so it does the next year, &c.

So divine truths may yield unto thee present comfort and strength; yea, and they can, being rightly embraced, be the staff in thy hand tomorrow to support thee, and the river in thy conscience to refresh thee.

That heavenly truth which was thy star at this time may fitly upon occasions serve to be thy guide at any time, as the star to the wise men, which appeared the second time.

2. Frequent remembrance of divine truths is (as it were) a spur to further obedience, and therefore Saint Peter joins putting in remembrance and stirring up, as if then we should revive our services when we did renew our memories.

Every truth newly and seriously thought on is, as it were, a second sermon or repetition, and inculcating of it upon our hearts.

I am sure it is like a further digestion, which serves for the better health and strength of our bodies.

3. It is a means much to strengthen our graces; the philosophers have a saying, *eodem nutrimur ex quo generamur*, that we are nourished by that of which we are generated; the truths of God begat our graces, and the same truths, well remembered and perused, will increase them.

Those promises which heretofore inclined thy heart and persuaded it to believe, can perpetually bear and raise up thy heart to stronger degrees of belief.

As Christ, when he would help his disciples against a particular infidelity, objected unto them, “*Why do ye not remember?*” intimating that a right remembering of his works would have enabled them much against unbelief.

And so does the remembrance of the words of Christ, of his truths, which are as able to build us up in grace as to communicate it unto us.

4. **It is a revocation from sinnings;** as David said, “*I considered my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies;*” the same may be said of holy truths: a remembering consideration of them is a recovering of an erring and falling soul.

Saint Peter forgot his Master, and then forgot himself; he forgot the words of a Master, and then the duty of a servant.

But Peter recovered himself again: and how did he so?

The text saith that he remembered the words of Jesus, and when he had thought thereon, he went out and wept bitterly.

5. **It is an avocation or withholdment from errors;** why do men so commonly slip into new errors?

One main cause is, they have let slip old truths; they have lost their touchstone to try doctrine by; they do not remember what and how they have heard and received, and therefore they destroy what they themselves have built.

[Simile.] Like a ship which has lost her anchor, tossed with waves and winds every way, so they are hurried and puffed up and down

with every wind of doctrine.

But he who rightly remembers the truth has not only thereby a touchstone to try and discover contrary errors, but likewise a buckler to secure his judgment, and a sword to cut off the corrupt reasonings and fallacies of the gainsayer.

6. Lastly, it is of singular good and concernment to a distressed and deserted soul, and to a debarred person.

The days of famine may befall thee, and then the food which Joseph laid up may preserve thee.

If future means should fail, will not former and remembered truths be of comfort?

And are you sure that seasons will last forever?

Where is Jerusalem, who did not know her day of peace?

And where are the seven Churches of Asia?

Or the days of sickness may befall thee, wherein thou art debarred of the market — I mean, the public assembly of the Saints — and art so weakened, that read at all thou canst not.

If now thy soul can remember God, and remember the truths of God, and can secretly confer with them, they may be of blessed help and peace unto thee. Yea, the days of desertion may befall thee: the Lord may not look on thee as formerly; he may not confer at all with thee in sense and feeling. And what refuge hast thou now, but to fly to the truths of God, through which thou didst heretofore hear him and perceive him?

And this may prove a support and solace to thy heart.

Sure I am, Asaph in his desertions did so; see him in *Psalms 77:10*:

"I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High; I will

remember the works of the Lord, surely I will remember thy wonders of old:" former embraces are new encouragements.

[Use.] Thus for the explication and confirmation of the point; I now come to the application of it to ourselves.

Should received truths be remembered? then:

1. Hearing is not all.

Some there are who hear not at all; they are like the deaf adders which refuse to hear the voice of the charmer. Christ is pleased to speak, but they are not pleased to hearken; how much have these to answer for?

Others do hear, and that is all; the word is but as a natural sound to excite that natural faculty of hearing, but they understand not what they hear.

The word preached is as a book sealed up unto them.

They think it enough to come to church, &c.

Others do hear and understand the truths delivered, but then they mind them no more; they leave all at the church door, as we do our friends at the grave — forgetting that we came to a feast, to carry away, and not to a grave to leave all behind — as if the word were a tale or a dream, it is instantly forgotten.

In comes the world, out goes the word: to secular businesses, or sinful acts, they presently apply themselves, and so is the word [Simile.] squeezed out like water out of a sponge, or the characters of it glide away like the impressions of a seal upon the slippery water.

Perhaps many a thousand sermons they have heard in their days (and would think it a mortal fault not to hear), but for meditating,

pondering, reviewing of delivered truths, calling them to mind, the better to order their hearts and lives — they will not trouble themselves so far; as if truth were a burden, or an unworthy companion.

Now to the forgetful hearer, I would commend these things to be considered:

1. If his forgetfulness be only of good things (when yet in any other matter and business his remembrance is quick enough — he can remember a tale or story twenty years since), it is a very uncomfortable sign.

I confess that every good man's memory is not an equal treasury, nor perhaps a very fruitful soil, but to have a memory like an utterly barren womb, retentive of no spiritual truths, [Simile.] but like sand in a glass, put in at the one part, and instantly running out at the other — this total and absolute falseness in our memories is a shrewd presumption that either we do not at all rightly conceive of, and understand, spiritual truths, or if we do, yet that we do not much care for them and respect them.

2. Forgetfulness of truths heard and received is a kind of very evil ignorance. The Schoolmen distinguish between *ignorantia purae negationis*, wherein a man does not know, and *ignorantia pravae dispositionis*, wherein either a man will not, or unfits himself to know. Thus it is with forgetfulness: truths forgotten are like truths unknown, and the more that the knowledge of former truths wears out, the less capacity there is to apprehend and receive further truths.

Nor is this all: forgetfulness is not only a curtain drawn over knowledge, but it is a bar also to our practice. The forgetful hearer

can be no good practitioner; for no man acceptably practises more than he knows, and no man properly knows more than he remembers.

Nor is that all: forgetfulness keeps us not only in an estate of ignorance and blindness, nor only in an estate of barrenness and undoingness, but further yet, it keeps us in a condition of sadness and uncomfortableness. For all our comforts depend upon divine truths (they are our springs of joy), but with this caution: so far as they are solidly and rightly applied by us.

[Simile.] As strong waters refresh when they are taken, so truths refresh when they are rightly remembered and applied.

Now the forgetting person is an unapplying person; there can be no good using where there is no good remembering of holy truths. So that now, by thy forgetfulness, divine truths are lost, and the operations of them are lost; they can neither guide thee nor help thee, nor preserve or comfort thee at all. And if all these be lost, thou thyself canst not be safe; whatsoever opinion thou wilt have of thyself, Saint James assures thee that thou deceivest thine own self (James 1:22).

2. If the remembering of truths heard and received be necessary, then be pleased to act the point which Christ here chargeth:
Remember how thou hast received and heard.

Thou hast perhaps heard of the doctrine of sin, and knowledge thereof by the law, out of Romans 7:7.

Thou hast heard of the manifold aggravations of sin in several texts — as against knowledge, means of grace, mercies, afflictions, covenants, &c. — and of infidelity (that binding sin) out of John 3.

Thou hast heard many a sermon of the power of the word, for conviction and conversion, and for consolation and conversation and salvation, out of 2 Thessalonians 1.

Thou hast heard of the impediments of the soul from coming to Christ: partly from the love of sin (John 3), partly from the love of the world (Mark 10:22), partly from the perverseness of our wills (Matthew 23:37).

Thou hast heard of the preparations of the soul unto Christ, and much of the new covenant, out of Malachi 3:1.

Thou hast heard much of faith — for the nature of it out of Acts 16, for the degrees of it out of Mark 9, for the use of it in all the promises out of 2 Corinthians 1 — and of our love to God, out of Psalm 31:23.

Thou hast heard the doctrine of repentance from dead works largely opened out of Acts 17:30, and further unfolded in the conversion of the Prodigal out of Luke 15, and of the doctrine of temptations out of Luke 4 — the kinds of them, and methods of defence and conquest.

Thou hast lately heard of that comfortable, ample, perpetual care and goodness of God's providence over his Church and people, out of Psalm 23, all over.

Lastly, thou hast heard something of a languishing and of a recovering soul from this, out of Revelation 3:2.

I call God to record this day, that (according to my knowledge and ability) I have, as Saint Paul says in Acts 20:27, "*not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God requisite to your salvation,*" testifying unto you all, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 21). Yea, in season and out of season, in

strength, in weakness, in public, in private, have I desired and endeavoured your everlasting good.

Now let not these pious truths slip from you, or be as water spilt upon the ground.

Ministers die, but let not truths die.

Ministers depart, but let not truths depart.

Stony hearts are bad, but iron memories are good.

If ye have heard truths and received them, why, still retain the truths for the truths' sake; let them ever abide with you, live with you, die with you. And do not lock up the truths only, but let your memories faithfully serve out those truths, according to your particular occasions and occurrences of your life. Hold them out to keep out errors; bring them out to keep up graces; improve the directions of the word to lead your ways, and the comforts of the word to refresh and encourage your hearts.

And that you may skill the art of heavenly memory, know that—

There are six things which will much avail to help and enable the remembrance of truths heard and received.

1. Ardent affection:

Love is a safe lock, and a ready hand; what we much love, we shall much mind. David was fervent in love, and therefore frequent in thinking of God's law, Psalm 119:

Oh how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

Here was great love and great studying.

[Simile.] A child will not forget his mother.

2. Frequent meditation:

Many earthly things wear out by handling (as characters in gold or

silver), but heavenly characters abide longest where they are most perused. Every new and serious contemplation of them makes a fairer and firmer impression; it is like a second stamping of them.

The memory is like a glass, and the understanding as an eye looking back into it: the more frequent acquaintance and familiarity that the understanding hath by reflecting on the memory, the more strongly are things engraven in our remembrance.

3. Constant operation:

If memory were more used, memory would be more useful.

When thou hast heard a sermon, and art at home, then call thy memory to an account — how it hath played the faithful steward for thee — what truth it hath remembered.

By a daily striving to remember, thou shalt daily perfect the remembrance.

4. A distinct apprehension:

Saul was not easily found in the stuff, and confused minds are seldom linked with exact memories; the more orderly and exact the understanding is, the more easy is the remembrance of things.

Take heed of ignorant minds that know not truths, and of confused minds that can mistake truths.

5. Abundant conference:

This course Moses prescribed to the Israelites, to remember the laws given unto them — namely, that they should often talk of them to their children.

Conference is as the driving in of the nail; one remembers that which the other forgets.

Our memories help our lips, and our lips strengthen our memories.

6. Diligent practice:

The scholar, by a daily writing after the copy, doth thereby mend his

hand, and help his memory.

Truths are ordained for practice.

It cannot be but that truths should remain faithful in the memory, which are made faithful in our walking.

Truths easily take their leave of them who oppose them, or do not act them.

Now to the second assertion, namely:

That acceptance of truths is not sufficient, but there must be persistence in them — (*and hold fast*) — *καὶ τήρει* *serva*, or as Beza translates it, *observa*.

Saint Paul is much in this doctrine:

Hold fast the form of sound words, 2 Timothy 1:13.

So again to Titus 1:9: *Hold fast the faithful word*.

And that this doctrine may not be thought proper and peculiar to the preacher of the truth, but common to all Christians, he therefore enlargeth the precept to all the Romans (and under them to all Christians), to adhere or cleave unto what is good.

The word in the original is *κολλώμενοι*, that they should be glued unto it.

Solomon in effect delivers the same, Proverbs 23:23:

Buy the truth, and sell it not.

A man may lawfully sell his house and lands, as the Apostles did, and followed Christ; and in some sense his wife and children (as Saint Jerome in *Epistola ad Heliodorum* would rather than he would put off Christ); yea, and his own life too, as Saint Paul did — not counting it dear for Christ.

But the truth must not be sold; it must be kept as a thing exceeding all price and bargain. Now, for the fuller understanding of this proposition, premise with me these particulars.

1. That I speak not of human and moral truths, such as are the rules in secular arts, in which there may be, and often is, much infallibility; but of religious and divine truths, which are contained in the Word of God.

2. Religious truths are so, either in the imagination of man, or in the reality of the thing. I am not bound to embrace, much less to persist in, all that every man propounds for truths, or which he conjectures to be so. Only I am to hold fast those truths which the Word (rightly and genuinely expounded) teaches and determines to be so.

3. Again, the truths which seem to own themselves on the Word of God are either immediate and express, or only mediate and deduced. Express truths are to be held fast; but deduced truths, which are thence collected by the medium of a man's ability to judge, are to be tried and examined by the prime and immediate truths, and so far to be held as they are found (upon due search) to have conformity with the immediate and express rules of truth.

4. Express truths (suppose them to be known and received) may be considered either in the latitude of them, or with restriction.

We may not think it sufficient to hold fast some particular truths — either the greater or the lesser — and leave the rest to shift for themselves.

All known truths, even those which are not of that main concernment — not any one of them must be forsaken or left, but retained and maintained: as Athanasius and others of the first

Nicene Fathers would not diminish or add one iota or tittle about the deity of Christ; or as Moses would not leave one hoof behind.

So we must not renounce or forsake any one branch of known truth, seem it never so little in the eyes of men.

5. Though there be a difference of times, yet there ought to be no difference of holy truths. There are times of prosperity for the Gospel, as Constantine's time was to the Church, and there are times of calamity, as Nero's time, and Diocletian's, and others among the persecuting emperors.

Truth must be held fast — yea, all truth at all times.

You see that the stars shine in the coldest night of winter as well as in the calmest night of summer; so truths must be held in the worst as well as the best days.

Josephus reports of the Samaritans, that if any good and favour befell the Jews, then they would pretend affinity and kindred with them — they came from Jacob; but if any calamity, then they were none of the stock of Abraham.

It must not be thus with us, to vary our hearty respect to truths according to the favour or discouragement that the world bestows upon them; but to cleave unto them as Saint Paul did under the sword, as Saint Ignatius among the wild beasts, as Saint Laurence on the gridiron, and Daniel among the lions, and the three children in the fiery furnace.

6. Though there be a difference of persons, yet we must not differ and waver in our respects to holy truths. Perhaps those holy truths which thou hast heard and tried and received may be contradicted

and disputed by some bold, schismatical, heretical brains, who would blear and blur the truth, that so they may bring in damnable doctrines; by these they may be disgraced, derided, and reproached.

These dogs may bark against the moon and its light; yea, perhaps though they have forwardly courted and professed the truths, yet they may fall off with Hymenaeus and Philetus, and turn vile apostates.

But as Peter said of Christ, that thou must say and act too of truth: "Though all men should forsake thee, yet I will never forsake thee."

Against all subtlety of disputes, variety of judgments, schism and malice of evil men, and inconstancy of some men, thou must be rightly balanced.

Hold fast the truth which thou hast heard and received.

[Quest.] But how must truths be held fast?

[Sol.] In four respects:

1. In the judgment and understanding.
2. In the will and affection.
3. In profession.
4. In conversation and practice.

1. In the judgment:

There must be assent and approbation; a firm evidence of them. I confess that there is a latitude in our credence — upon more and more evidence of truth, there may be a further and stronger assent

unto them, and approbation of them. But there must be no wavering in the judgment; we must not admit a staggering and reeling mind, nor a levity in our judgments, to be driven and carried about with every wind of doctrine, as the Apostle speaks, Ephesians 4:14.

Athanasius knew this well, when he held his judgment fast in the truth of the deity of Christ, against the Arians; so Saint Augustine held his judgment fast in the doctrine of grace against the Pelagians; and Cyprian against the Donatists, or Novatians, or Catharists.

It is an honour for a man to recant an error, but a perfidious shame for any Christian to suffer any truth to be supplanted by any error.

2. In the will and affection:

Our love must hold the truth fast; therefore the Apostle bids us to be glued unto it, Romans 12:9. It is with truths [Simile.] as with some plants which live and thrive not, but in warm climates.

That ancient desire after truth, and delight in it — to take counsel from it, and strength from it, and comfort by it — must not decay and die within us, but must remain and abound. Though others hate, disgrace, and endeavour to make void the truth, yet we must cleave unto it, and love it, as David did, Psalm 119.

3. In our profession:

Hence that advice of the Apostle in Philippians 2:16 — to hold forth the word of life, even in the midst of a dark and froward generation. Christ would have us not only believe, but confess him before men.

Remember that it was no small sin in Peter, when he pretended that he knew not the man. Gregory Nazianzen reports, in one of his orations against Julian, that some Christian soldiers, being cunningly circumvented by him to idolatrous sacrifices, perceiving

the error, all ran back unto him, threw him his money again, and protested they were Christians, and that in what they did, they were circumvented by him.

Hebrews 10:23: *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.* The Christian must change neither his Master, nor his service, nor his livery.

4. In our conversation:

We must still practise truths, and keep our lives answerable unto them. Saint John calls this a walking in the truth: then a man walks in the truth, when he holds on his course of holy obedience unto it, against all the encouragements and discouragements of the world, as the three children in Daniel, &c.

Not like the Galatians, beginning in the spirit, and ending in the flesh, nor like those Israelites, whose righteousness was as the morning dew. But we must still run the race set before us, and keep steadfast our feet unto the paths of righteousness and ways of truth.

[Quest.] Why must divine truths heard and received be held fast?

[Sol.] Reasons thereof are many; I will briefly point out some of them.

1. Divine truth is a most precious and excellent thing.

Therefore in Scripture it is compared to gold, which of metals is the most precious. Nay, it is more precious than gold or rubies, and all the things which thou canst desire are not to be compared unto it — see Proverbs 3:14–15.

It is more excellent than the excellencies of the creatures, not just than some of them, but than all of them. A man, if he were to

imagine any excellency, or if the utmost of his desires were enlarged, yet could not find out and pitch upon such an excellency.

Therefore saith Saint John to the Church of Philadelphia, Revelation 3:11: *Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

The crown is the top of royalties; such a thing is truth. Let no man take thy crown.

Beloved, there are two properties which assure us of the excellency of things:

- The more holy they are, the more excellent they are.
All corruptions are diminutions of excellency; the more mixed a thing is, the more it is abased — as if gold and tin be mixed — and the more pure it is, as mere gold, the more glorious it is. Now the truths of God are holy, not as persons are holy (which is with mixture and imperfection), but as the light at noon-day is pure without darkness at all.
- The more that God is in anything, the more excellent it is.
For so much as we partake of him (who is excellency itself), so much more we rise in our excellency.
But the great God is altogether seen in this word of truth: there is his wisdom, there is his power and greatness, there is his love and mercifulness, there is his Christ and faithfulness.
Therefore it is most excellent, and consequently to be held fast by us.

2. Divine truths are (as it were) made over to us under terms of constancy and perpetuity.

I find in Scripture that they are termed sometimes:

- **Our heritage.**

Estates which are personal (if that be the phrase) for possession may be sold, as that which a child buys with his own money; but estates which are natural or hereditary — such as come to be ours by descent — ought to be kept for posterity.

God forbid, said Naboth, that I should sell the inheritance of my fathers.

Divine truths are a heritage to descend from us to our children, and therefore we are neither to dispossess ourselves of them, nor to suffer ourselves by any to be dispossessed of them.

Psalm 119:111: *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever.*

- **God's trust.**

Something we commit to God, something God commits to us — 2 Timothy 1:12: *He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him.*

We trust God with our souls, and God trusts us with his truths, which are therefore called *that good thing committed to us to keep* — 2 Timothy 1:14.

Now in matters of trust, we must be faithful; for we must be responsible for the whole wherewith we are entrusted, as the servants in the Gospel who had talents committed to their trust — they were called to account for them.

So if the Lord trusts any man with graces or with his truths, the man must carefully keep and preserve them; for the Lord will ask him another day for his trust, as Saint John did of the Bishop of Jerusalem for his *depositum*.

They observe that a trust must be, first, redelivered; secondly, wholly; thirdly, only to him who committed it to us for trust.

3. Not to hold fast the truths is an exceeding and fearful injury or wrong.

It is injurious:

- **To God**, for he is the Lord or God of truth.

Truths are ours for the efficacy of them, but they are his for the authority of them.

[Simile.] Should a private person presume of himself to sell the King's jewels? It might be as much as his life is worth.

Truths are God's jewels; he reveals them, he owns them, he has sealed them with the blood of Christ, and therefore thou dost presumptuously wrong the Lord to put off the things which belong to him.

- **To our covenant and vow.**

What was our baptism but a devoting and solemn vowing of ourselves to be faithful to Christ and to his truths?

We solemnly professed that none should be our Lord but God, and that we should be his faithful servants unto our life's end.

Yea, and we have ratified this vow many a time, by coming to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Now if we do not hold fast the truths of Christ, but forsake them — or any of them — we are guilty of extreme perjury; not in a matter betwixt man and man, but betwixt God and man.

Thou art forsworn again and again unto the Lord thy God, and hast (as much as in thee lies) made void the covenant of grace and life for thy poor soul.

4. Consider but the necessary uses of divine truths, and then we will acknowledge that they are to be held fast.

The use of the word, or divine truths, respects the everlasting and happy condition of the soul, from the beginning to the end thereof. Everlasting and true happiness is the end and scope that every Christian looks at; and divine truths serve him fully and effectually to this end — both to discover it, and to bring man unto it.

There are many things required to set us in the true way, to bring a man to heaven, for example:

1. Conviction of his sinful condition;

but the word enlightens the mind, and convinces the conscience.

2. Contrition for sin;

but the word pricks our hearts, as in Acts 2, and humbles them.

3. Conversion of soul;

but the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, Psalm 19:7.

By it comes faith into the soul, which gets Christ, Romans 10:17; by it comes repentance, Acts 3:19.

4. Augmentation of grace;

but by the word we are built up, Acts 20:32, and grow more and more.

5. Perseverance in grace;

but by the word we are kept and established to the end — it is the power of God unto salvation, Romans 1:16.

What should I say more?

Read the Apostle summing up all in 2 Timothy 3:16:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,"

and verse 17:

"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

And verse 15:

"They are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Again, there are many encouragements comforting and supporting us in our way, such as divine consolations of the Spirit of God, peace in conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost — all of which are the myrrh dropping only from divine truths.

"Thy word hath comforted me," said David;

"Thy word hath quickened me."

In the house of his pilgrimage, they were the joys of his heart, and in the days of his calamity they were the stay of his heart.

Now put all together:

If divine truths show us the true happiness;

if they only put us into the true way unto that true happiness;

if they only keep us in that way;

if they only comfort and strengthen us in that way;

if they only bring us to the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls—

will we not, ought we not to hold them fast?

[Use.]

The first use of this point shall be to convince and reprove the wonderful inconstancy of the sons of men — that slipperiness and unsettledness of spirit which is to be found amongst them.

Consider divine truths as they lie:

1. In doctrine;

We may now complain as the Apostle did of the Galatians, chapter 1, verse 6:

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel."

Some revolt from the Protestant doctrine to the Popish leaven; others fall off from the orthodox articles of our Church to Anabaptistical fancies and Socinian blasphemies.

The Lord be merciful unto us!

What daily unsettledness and giddiness possesseth us!

If any novelty of doctrine (though a root of bitterness) start up and be delivered with any confidence or cunning of deceiving wit, how instantly we fly off from our old truths, how greedily and madly we suck in poisonous errors!

And being thus driven with every wind, what tempests of railing and disgrace do we heap upon those who cross our fickleness with constant vindications and assertions of the true doctrines of faith and life.

It makes me pity this great and famous City, whilst I behold a *colluvies* — a very rabble of all opinions — and such a going and coming, such touching at, and sailing off from the land of uprightness.

One week this is a truth and almost an article; the next week it is no such matter, but some other thing is the right.

[Simile.] Thus we often play with great truths, as children do with their babies — one while embracing them, and anon breaking them and throwing them into the dirt.

But are there so many ways to heaven as men would make? Or hast thou power to coin other articles of faith at pleasure? Or will the Lord bear all this wrestling and mocking with his truths?

Two things make me fear the Lord will punish us in the Gospel: one is our general barrenness in life; another is our great fickleness in matters of truth.

2. In conversation;

Many times we hold the truth in unrighteousness: we do not prize the truth and love it, nor live according to it with constancy.

But as the Prophet cried out, *"How is the beautiful city become a heap?"* so may we say of many, *"How are their righteous walkings degenerated into an ungodly living?"* Their wine is soured, and their lamp put out.

But I will tell you the reasons and causes of all this inconstancy and apostasy, for example:

1. Men are very ignorant, and therefore very inconstant.

Ignorance is the great sponge to suck in errors, as pride is the great bawd to vent them.

Chaff may be tossed any way; that which is weak is also light.

2. Though their apprehensions be large, yet their affections are foul.

They know truth, but love sin, which is contrary to truth.

[Simile.] Now a foul stomach ever makes an ill head, and a secret

love of sin works out the strength of truth in the mind: men do the more easily grow erroneous who first grow irreligious.

3. There is an itch of pride.

Eve and Adam would know more than was fit, and therefore lost all that was good.

You never read of a proud person, but either his life was notoriously tainted, or his judgment notably corrupted.

The greatest errors have fallen from those that have been most proud, and have been taken up by those that have been most ignorant.

4. Many have Athenian wits.

They long for novelties: though the old wine be best, yet their palate must be in fashion for the new.

There is a sore vanity in a natural mind, that it cannot long fix on any estate, or on any truth.

5. A colloquing slavishness.

Many give up their souls and faith to the religion of others, and like wax, are still fashioned to the opinions of great persons.

They are afraid of their displeasures, and therefore, even in points of religion, will dance after their pipe.

6. A sordid and eminent love of the world.

For this cause Demas forsook Christ, and Judas sold his Master, and Hymenaeus made shipwreck of faith.

The unsatisfiable slave to the world will never be a faithful servant to truth.

He who hath already pawned his soul, will with as much ease sell off the truth.

Spira, for its sake, abjured the truth — but ventured the loss of it, and himself too.

7. Many men are licentious, and therefore unsteadfast.

Corrupt doctrines give more scope than the true and heavenly: we are apt to believe that soonest which pleaseth us most.

Erroneous points are more for pleasure, and divine truths are more for strictness.

[Simile.] Therefore, as those Grecians (if I forget not the story) gave up their weapons to enjoy their sports, so many give up the truth to enjoy their easy and loose kind of walking.

[Use 2.]

But for you, I hope better things, though I thus speak. Hitherto you have heard the good truths and ways of God, and have held them fast. I have not found you (as other people) of so unsettled and inconstant spirits.

Therefore, as Christ said to the Church of Thyatira, the same I will presume to say unto you, Revelation 2:24–25: *"I will put upon you no other burden but that which ye have already — hold fast."*

What need I urge this with many motives?

1. If it be truth, why should it be left?

Is error better than truth? Then should darkness be better than light?

2. Can you better your estates by leaving off truths?

When the devils fell from truth, they fell from heaven; when Adam fell from truth, he fell from Paradise.

3. Will not the truth keep you?

If you keep the truth, as the ship doth the pilot who keepeth it, truth will keep thy soul and graces together — thy soul and Christ together — thy soul and comfort together — thy soul and

prosperity together.

Therefore, it is called *the girdle of truth*, because, as a girdle, it holds all together.

Thou partest with strength, with joy, with safety, with blessing, with happiness if thou partest with truth.

4. The reward is sure, if thou be faithful.

Not a mean reward, but that of life — even a crown of life, Revelation 2:10.

Now that you may forever hold fast divine truths, take these rules or directions:

1. Lay a solid foundation in distinct knowledge of them.

Confused brains cause unsettled hearts.

Rest not in Pilate's demand, "*What is truth?*" nor in the Israelites' hovering betwixt two opinions, nor in that gross salary of religion — to take up truth upon trust for any man's sake whatsoever, were he the sharpest Jeremiah, or the learnedest Paul, or the comfortablest Barnabas.

Be not satisfied, "*This is truth, because this, that man saith,*" but as the honourable Bereans searched the Scriptures about the things which even Saint Paul himself delivered, so do you.

"Prove all things," saith the Apostle.

Receive truth upon an evidence of truth: if the first truth (which is the word of God) and the rule and compass will not approve it, it is error and not truth.

[Object.]

Yea, but how may we know truths, for there are many religions and many opinions obtruded to the world, the truth of which cannot so easily be discerned?

[Sol.]

I answer that true doctrine may be discerned from false doctrines:

1. By the unity of them:

Unum et verum convertuntur — truth is one or none. There is but one way (as Aristotle says) to hit the mark, but many ways to miss it. Error is manifold and diverse, like the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw, mixed of gold and clay. As Aristotle speaks of vices, they are contrary both to virtues and to themselves; so erroneous doctrines are opposite to truth and to themselves.

There is no error but is like a liar, apt to forget and wound itself, but truth is single, like Christ's garment, undivided. As there is but one Christ, so there is but one faith.

2. The purity of them:

All false doctrine (like treacherous physic) gives ease, or like a whore, beautiful in appearance, but false in honesty. What it lacks in verity, it makes up for in liberty, like ill wares which have larger allowances. The doctrine that is unsound is generally licentious, as is evident in the Mahometan or Popish tenets.

But truth is holy in itself, and to us, teaching it within the heart, and ordering it in the life. It is an adversary to sin, because all sin is an adversary to God.

3. The efficacy of them:

Corrupt doctrines usually add to our notions but do not meddle with our corruptions; they swell us, but do not edify us. They are pills which only work upon the brain; they neither bring true grace nor sound peace with them. Only this, Satan makes the erroneous very violent, so that they may think themselves in the right.

But the doctrine that is true is strong; it is heavenly in its nature and mighty in its operation. It comes from God and brings us to God. It makes the bad good, and the good better. There is no salve to heal a corrupt heart, nor balm to refresh a troubled conscience, like truth.

4. The antiquity of them:

Error is but the shadow and ape of truth. The saying is *idemum verissimum quod antiquissimum* — truth is the firstborn, for God spoke it before the devil spoke the other. Errors may be old, but truth saw the light before them. The whole farrago of corrupt doctrines among the Papists, for transubstantiation, invocation of saints, prayers for the dead, merit, and supremacy; their origins were of yesterday. Though they boast antiquity, they dare not stand the trial of Christ and his apostles, who must decide all truths.

5. The simplicity of them:

Errors came in by the Serpent at first and are much of its nature, full of windings and turnings. All corrupt doctrines are deceivable and subtle. How many arts were feigned by Arius and the Arian bishops to bring in their damnable error? What forging of lies and odious accusations against Athanasius, that he was dishonest with a woman and cut off a man's hand, as Eusebius relates?

And so with the Jesuits about Calvin, Luther, Melanchthon, Beza, and others, and the establishment of the Council of Trent. The Pope's cloak-bags were weekly filled with devices and tricks.

Yea, observe the Papists today, how deceptively confident they are that all antiquity and testimony are on their side, when it is either a pack of their own writers only, or other authors which they have forged, or else antiquity miserably lanced and cut, and interlaced by

their *Index Expurgatorius*.

I pray God that many of the opinions in this City are not bolstered up with high clamours and artificial lies.

But truth is naked and plain. It is neither of a cruel nature like Cain, nor of a subtle spirit like Absalom, nor of a lying spirit like Ahab's false prophets. It flatters no man, nor beguiles any. Being truth, it is not ashamed of light or trial, and it alone can maintain itself against all contrary quarrels. A good cause is like a good conscience, even a bulwark to itself, like the sun in its light and heat against all clouds.

6. The duration of them:

Truth, like the sun, has run down through all ages. Not that all men have embraced it, but that by some it has still been embraced. Someone or more has always been at the bar, bearing witness to it. New men have risen up (and sometimes out of the ashes as it were of the dead) to maintain it, and either by tongue, pen, or blood, to defend the truth.

Erroneous doctrines, as they lack an inward harmony, so also lack outward consent. Like a deceitful brook, they are spent after a while, or like commotions in a state, though strong or long, yet they come to an end at length. Whether it is through special judgments on the ringleaders, the authority of princes (as Alexander against Arius), the prayers of the saints, or the decision of lawful councils, these meteors have been cashiered. But as it is said of divine mercy, that it endures forever, the same is affirmed of divine truth. It runs from one generation to another. Until Christ makes his Church triumphant, the militant Church shall be the pillar of truth.

7. The conformity of them to the rule or word:

Erroneous doctrines, like unsound flesh, cannot abide handling, and like an ill-favoured woman, would have all glasses broken.

But truth, like sound gold, will endure a touchstone. Truth will be found to be truth upon search. Bring it to the conscience, and it will work as truth. Bring it to the deathbed, and it will uphold as truth. Bring it to the Scriptures, and it will hold out as truth.

2. When truths, upon search, are found to be truths, then embrace them for the truth's sake, not upon personal and mutable causes or ends.

3. Firm resolution after trial, by which our knowledge comes to be clear and without doubt: there must now be a plain resolution and purpose of heart in cleaving to such faithfully evidenced truths.

Thou must, by an immovable faith (as it were), root thy very heart in the truths of Christ, as Saint Paul did — though bonds and afflictions, though good report or evil, though death itself abide him for Christ — come what will come: disputes, fancies, errors, troubles, losses.

"I have found the truth, and it will I hold forever."

4. Loyal affection: then it is loyal, when it is inclusive to every truth, and exclusive to nothing but truth. This loyal affection will make us, first, do; secondly, suffer; thirdly, cleave.

Love truth, and then truth will be held:

"I held him, and would not let him go," said the Church, then in love with Christ (Canticles 3).

Love is the easiest key to open the heart to Christ, and the strongest lock to keep sure the truth in our hearts. When thou hast experimentally felt the heavenly strength and comfort of God's truths, then wilt thou certainly stick unto them.

5. Join conscience to science:

O, when people have the truths still sounding in their ears, and

ungodliness still stirring and ruling in their lives, it cannot be that they should have strong hands, who have wicked hearts. Hymenaeus made shipwreck of faith, and of conscience both together (1 Timothy 1:19).

Therefore, strive to obey the truths; add to thy faith virtue; be a doing Christian as well as a knowing Christian.

6. Be watchful in prayer to God, with David, to uphold thee; with Saint Peter, to establish thee; still to keep thee, that thou mayest keep his truths.

Excellent is that speech of Bernard: "*Neque enim quae habemus ab eo, servare aut tenere possumus sine eo;*" — that God, by whose light alone we know the truth, by his strength alone we keep it.

Thus much for the text; and now for the occasion. Here I cannot be long, neither my affections nor yours will admit of large discourse — only a word of you, and a word to you.

Of you: so regardful have you been to my ministry, so loving to my person, so faithful in your maintenance, so cheerfully encouraging — generally from you all, but chiefly from the chiefest — that had it pleased the Lord to have given me health (which I have scarcely enjoyed one whole year together since I have been here), I should not have stirred easily from such a people, for the best preferment that could conveniently have been offered unto me.

I speak my heart freely; I cannot tell on which side the unwillingness is most, whether on your part, who are left, or on my part, who am constrained to leave you.

But to say no more of your goodness, give me leave (for the close of all) to leave a few legacies with you, being all my friends. And hearken to my words, as the words of a dying man; for the Lord knows how short my days may be.

My Legacies are these:

1. Lay out more time for your souls.

The soul is a precious thing; the soul is a corrupted thing. Sins are in it, much guilt is upon it; there is a Christ that it needs, holiness that it must have, heaven that it would have. Thy body is but clay, thy soul a spirit; the world a vanity, thy soul immortal.

All is well if the soul be well; nothing is well if that be evil. I beseech you, pray more, hear more, know more, confer more, do more and more for your souls. When you come to die, you will then find it to be all your work.

O then, whilst health is in you, make it thy chiefest work to seek the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness thereof for your souls. Feed not the slave, and starve the child.

2. Upon good grounds, make sure of a reconciled God.

Live not in an unreconciled condition. No enemy like an ill conscience, and a good God. Study the right of thy sins, and the blood of Christ; repentance from dead works, and faith in the Lord Jesus; so shalt thou behold the face of God and live.

The ways of reconciliation with God, and the settling of thy conscience about it, may cost thee many prayers and tears, and diligent studies, but the love of God and heaven will answer and recompense all.

3. Wisely improve all heavenly seasons.

The Lord hitherto hath continued unto you days of peace and

salvation, heavenly opportunities public and private — and I beseech him forever so to do.

Now, receive not the grace of God in vain; lay hold on these occasions. If there be not wisdom to improve them, there may be sadness for neglecting them.

You see how many worthy and faithful ministers God hath taken away (of late) by death. And shall the present prophets live forever?

O then, in your day and time, hearken, regard, repent, believe, live, and thrive under holy and faithful ministers.

Make more use of their doctrines, of their rules, of their counsels, of their comforts, of their experience and prayers. The night will come when neither we nor you must work any longer.

4. Study the grounds and principles of religion better.

First lay good foundations, and then build on them. Errors in the entrance weaken all in the progress.

Take pains to know what that good and acceptable will of the Lord is. A well-bottomed Christian is like a well-bottomed vessel at sea, which can ride out in all weathers. No Christian stands so fast, or thrives so well, as the well-grounded Christian.

5. Be rather an agent than a disputant in religion.

The vanity of wit is to argue much, but the sincerity of the heart is to do much.

For doubtful points and subtle novelties, let others beat them and serve them; and in the meantime, pray thou much, that thou mayest obey the truths which thou knowest.

In speculatives, be wise to sobriety; in practicals, be as good as thou canst. It is not the wittiest scholar, but the truest Christian, who shall go to heaven.

6. Be less formal and more fruitful.

Know that as we must be brought to account for every word which we speak, so much more for every word that God speaks. Mere godliness is not enough under constant and great means of grace. God expects much when he gives much. If it doth not utterly cast thee, yet it must excessively trouble thee to be thin in bearing when God hath been large in sowing.

7. Let all Christians be of more fruitful hearts and charitable spirits one towards another. There are treacherous and malicious hearts enough in the world; thou needest not help the devil to be an accuser of the brethren. It is a sad thing when one Christian can hardly trust another, and that they who should pity and heal infirmities are yet inventors of lies and obloquies. *"These are the wounds which my friends gave me,"* said the Church in the Canticles. If thy fellow-Christian do fail, rather compassionate and succour him than hate and reproach him. Thou shalt never establish thy graces or name upon the ruins and scandals of another man. If thou be a strong Christian, be more tender; if weak, be more silent. The strong should bear the infirmities of the weak, and the weak should hearken to the directions of the strong. Your graces are stronger, and your safety surer, by love than by division. Therefore, be of one mind, and live in peace. Let brotherly love continue.

8. Mind death often, and prepare for it betimes.

He who is a stranger to dying thoughts is ordinarily a stranger to a godly life. Thou wouldest hasten and better thy work if thou didst more look back on thy life, and more forward on thy death.

9. Be diligent in your particular places.

The idle body can hardly hold a good soul. That man is in danger

who is all for heaven, or all for earth; both our callings must be regarded.

10. Be much in prayer.

The Christian usually gets the greatest blessings on his knees. God is much with him in grace who is most with God in prayer. And pray not for yourselves only, but for others; and as for others, so for me, as Saint Paul desired of the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:19), that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel, that therein (v. 20) I may speak as I ought to speak.

And so, as the same Apostle in his *ultimum vale* said to those Ephesians, the same I say unto you:

Brethren, I commend you unto God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance amongst all them which are sanctified.

FINIS.

MONERGISM BOOKS

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