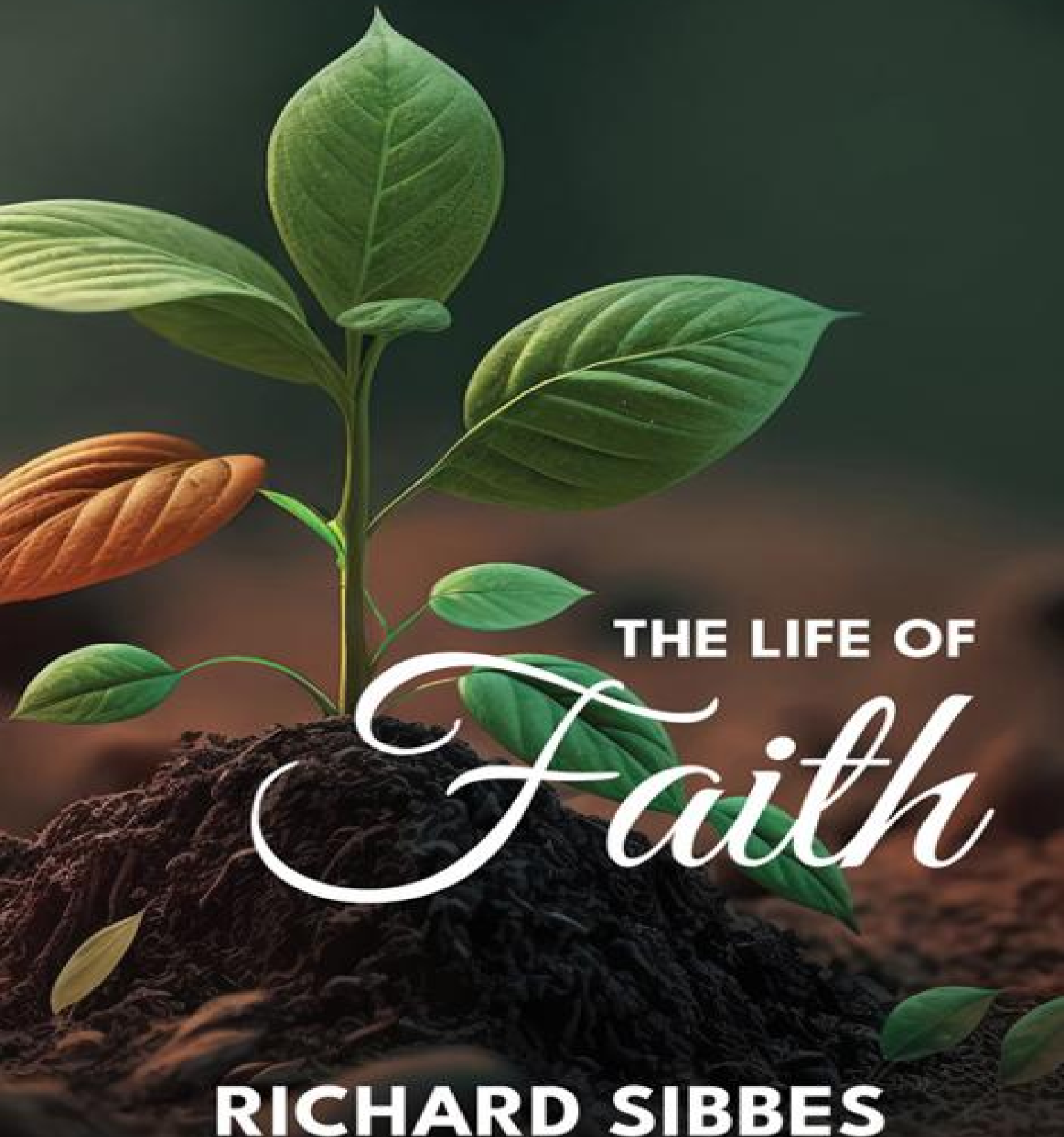


"And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." - Galatians 2:20

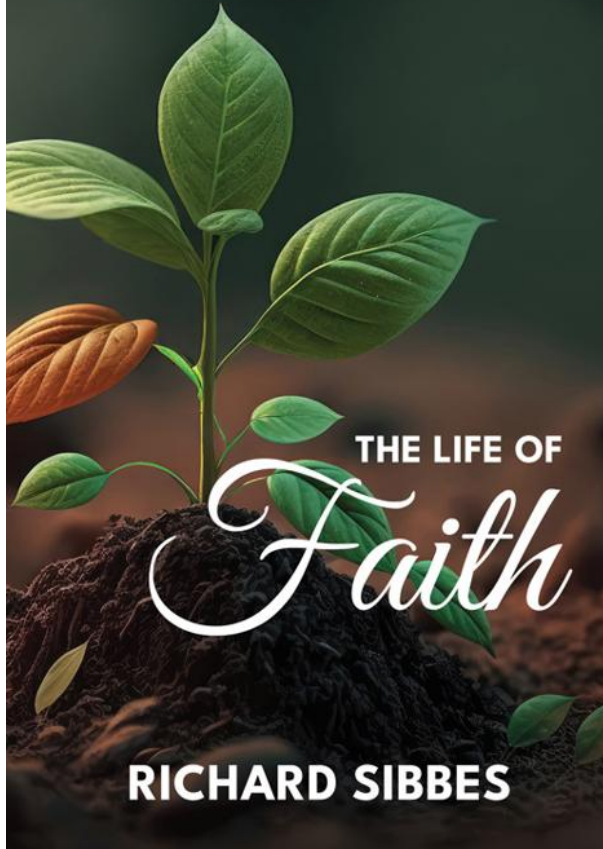


THE LIFE OF

Faith

RICHARD SIBBES

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The Life of Faith

by Richard Sibbes

Lightly Modernized Edited & Reformatted

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THE LIFE OF FAITH

SERMON I

And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.—GAL. 2:20.

THESE are the words of a man pursued by the law to Christ, coming from the Spirit of Christ; whose nature it is to apply general concepts to specific situations. Just like St. Paul here, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." He recognizes his death under the law; therefore, he searches for a better partner. The law finds him dead and leaves him as such. Thus, pursued by the requirements of the law, he turns to Christ and declares, "I am crucified with Christ," yet I live. How? "Yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

There are three categories of individuals in the world, within which all people can be included:

1. The state of nature.
2. The state of individuals under the spirit of bondage.
3. The state of grace under the gospel.

This is the discourse of someone from the third group, someone awakened by the spirit of bondage, who has arrived at a clear and evident perception of their wretchedness and the exceptional remedies. This is a person who has reached a new disposition and temperament of the soul. It is the speech of an individual in the state of grace, now aspiring to a more noble and exceptional existence. In these words, we can examine various aspects.

1. That there exists an alternative way of life beyond the usual course of nature.
2. That it is a superior and more distinguished life compared to the one they lived before; as if they were saying, Now, having seen

the wretchedness of my former natural condition and the excellence of a spiritual life through faith in the Son of God, I regard my former life as miserable, unworthy of being called life, when compared to the life I now live, which is rooted in a superior foundation than that of the 'first Adam.'

3. The source of this life is the Son of God. God possesses life innately, and we possess life solely through Him, who enlivens all things.
4. The transmission of this spiritual life occurs through faith. Water does not spring forth without a channel to carry and distribute it. The sun does not warm without its rays, and blood is not transported through the body without veins. Likewise, faith serves as the vessel that carries this spiritual life, the conduit through which all spiritual graces flow, for the cultivation and operation of spiritual life. It conveys everything, enabling us to focus on the excellences of the Son of God.
5. The subject and foundation of this spiritual life is faith in the Son of God, love for Him, and the surrender of oneself for His sake.

Thus, there exists a life beyond the realm of natural life, and its foundation is Christ, who constitutes our life. Life is the most precious thing in the world, highly valued by us. Just as the devil mentioned about Job, "Skin for skin, and all that a man has will he give for his life" (Job 2:4). Life is the basis of all comforts; it is the energy stemming from the soul and body. Consequently, spiritual life is none other than that exceptional energy and closely interwoven strength of the renewed soul and body, grounded in supernatural reasoning. This causes the soul to follow the guidance of the Word,

overcome the desires of the flesh, and gradually be transformed into the likeness of Christ, characterized by holiness and righteousness.

Doctor: The initial point, then, is that a life superior to the natural one exists, as there is something within a person that strives for and anticipates a loftier state. In a mother's womb, an unborn child possesses life and sensations in that dim abode. However, it is not content with that, but it is agitated, akin to a prisoner, twisting and turning about. For this life it possesses is not meant to be confined there. Rather, it's a life in its early stages, equipping it for existence in the broader and more expansive world, to which it will soon be dispatched. Thus, in our current obscure existence, there resides a divine instinct, potency, and capacity within human beings that nothing here can satisfy. This demonstrates that there is a realm that can fulfill the will and the intellect, and satiate the affections; a condition that can render a person completely content. A better life must exist, and this is the spiritual life. The existence we presently lead in the physical realm is essentially insubstantial. What is the purpose of this brief life we live here? Is it merely to endure for a time, to eat, drink, indulge in pleasures, and then perish like a beast? Absolutely not. It serves as a precursor to a superior life. If this present life is considered a blessing, how much more excellent is that spiritual life we discuss? It surpasses everything. Through this spiritual life, even in severe illness, one can exhibit great vitality and spirituality. When the faculties of sensation, thought, and sight all fail, the person can still find comfort in Christ and the forthcoming glory, drawing upon the resources derived from spiritual life. The apostle reveals that a Christian's purpose is to embrace suffering in this life to magnify the future glory. As he says in 2 Corinthians 4:10, "Always bearing about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." When the body is at its weakest, the spirit is at its strongest. Compare this to a

person devoid of this spirit and hope: they approach death as if it were the end, due to a lack of faith, knowledge, enlivening life, or an understanding or taste for loftier matters. They remain uncertain about the existence of the Holy Spirit. And if they are convinced on a conscience level, they are still overwhelmed by dread and the looming specter of perpetual damnation. How impoverished are we without this life? In such a state, a heathen or an unbeliever could be just as fortunate as we are.

A Christian endowed with this spiritual life can gaze upon Christ and glory, surpassing all the pursuits of this existence. They can reflect on the past, draw lessons from prior experiences, discern the vanity of things that others esteem highly, and relish things that nature alone does not appreciate. Their reasoning capabilities are robust, extending beyond the confines of conventional rationale. They are individuals of formidable exertion. This realization should galvanize us to seek this spiritual life above all else, lest we become like the "living dead" widows referred to by St. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:6. Therefore, to avoid being lifeless beings, we must strive for spiritual life, for there is another death that follows the initial one. Through that subsequent death, we not only forfeit God, Christ, life, glory, and eternal life, along with communion with saints and angels, but we also plummet into eternal torment alongside the devil and his cohorts. Hence, our foremost pursuit should be directed towards Christ, that we might thrive in His presence.

Why is it that we do not pursue this spiritual life more ardently? It's because, when the conscience remains dormant, we believe it does not exist. We tread the path of Judas, proceeding through life in a state of nature, immersed in revelry, hedonism, avarice, and similar pursuits, until we meet our sudden demise. When the conscience awakens, then it becomes easier to engage with someone who

recognizes their misery and seeks the remedy. Just as Jacob could be persuaded to send for corn in Egypt when famine plagued the land of Canaan, so too can someone hungry and thirsty be convinced to eat and drink. Likewise, a burdened and weary individual can readily be persuaded to cast aside their load and rest. This analogy holds true for us. When the conscience is stirred to sense sin and the inexorable wrath and eternal punishment that follows, we should, and indeed would, yearn for this spiritual life.

I implore you, let us embrace the belief in such a life. Refer to 1 Peter 1:3. There, he extols God, "who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." None can attain heaven without being reborn here. The primary assistance comes from engaging with the means. This is akin to the pool of Bethesda – if we position ourselves there, the angel of the covenant will usher us in for healing. So, we must persist until this life resides within us. When we sense a deep aversion between our spirits and sin, comparable to the repulsion between poison and them, that's when the journey commences. Thus, we should detest sinful individuals whose behavior obstructs the advancement and growth of our spiritual life. Those who recklessly venture into all circumstances shouldn't be surprised when they stumble into sinful paths. Their only concern and pursuit is leading one astray. They cater to their desires and seldom consider anything more. A Christian prioritizes nurturing their finest life, aware that good and bad company both exert influence – the former invigorates, while the latter extinguishes.

Christ is referred to as life, the bread of life, and the tree of life. He offers us living water to rejuvenate our souls. This isn't because He intrinsically embodies bread or a tree, but rather due to the effectiveness of His work within us. For God inherently embodies

life. He even swears by it, as seen in Ezekiel 33:11: "As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner." However, we're not focusing on such an exalted form of life here, though this life primarily derives from Him. This is inherent to its nature. The Son serves as the source of life because He is God – the fundamental, underlying, and essential source of life.

Before Christ can serve as life for us, He must first become human, as mentioned in John 6:55: "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." His capacity to invigorate stems from His divine nature. He is the bread that descended from heaven, and as stated, "whoso eateth shall live for ever." In undertaking the colossal task of our salvation, an infinite being such as God, who cannot die, assumed a mortal nature. This paved the way for mercy and justice. Thus, His flesh is truly nourishing. Nonetheless, the flesh is futile without the Spirit that imparts life. This Spirit must seal these truths within our souls, for without the Spirit's seal, we cannot derive comfort from them. As we discuss spiritual life, it is Him that we live for – by Him, in Him, and through Him. This is echoed in 1 Corinthians 15:45: "the last Adam is called a quickening Spirit." This is because through that Spirit, He revitalized Himself and now revitalizes us to lead a life of grace. Eventually, He will rejuvenate our lifeless bodies in the resurrection. He is also referred to as the "Sun of righteousness," signifying light and warmth. Just as the sun illuminates and warms, He serves as the light of the world, as expressed by John: "lighting every man that cometh into the world." He also imparts warmth, nurturing and sustaining creation. Thus, He is called light and life.

To summarise, we've briefly explored the existence of a life beyond our natural state. This life is profoundly exceptional, with its root and source being the Son of God. Now, the channel through which

this life is conveyed is "by faith." A spring isn't enough to distribute water; pipes are needed to channel it for practical use. Similarly, for the sustenance of spiritual life, arteries and veins are necessary, extending from the heart and liver. Christ functions as the heart and liver of all spiritual life. However, a conveyance is required to bring it to us, and this is where faith comes in. But why is faith the means to convey life to us?

(1.) Because we are now saved by someone else, not ourselves. Therefore, the grace leading us to this great blessing must draw us out of ourselves. Faith accomplishes this, serving as the soul's hand to grasp all the virtues, excellences, and elevated perfections of Christ.

(2.) Because faith attributes all glory to the One in whom it trusts, as noted in Romans 3:26. Paul explains why works are excluded and this righteousness is introduced: "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth." He then adds, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith." If our salvation had come through love, humility, patience, or any virtue within us, some boasting could have occurred. However, faith takes a different approach, laying hold of someone else's riches. Faith acknowledges that nothing truly belongs to us; hence, it goes to another to acquire it.

(3.) Because, in returning to God, we must follow a path distinct from the one through which we fell. The same route cannot lead to recovery. We're familiar with how the serpent shook Eve's faith by causing her to doubt the threat. As long as they adhered to the word and revered the commandment, their life was intact. But by losing this reverence, they forfeited communion with the source of love.

Consequently, we fell through unbelief and must now return through faith in another's righteousness.

Please Update the following text into contemporary British English, while maintaining the original wording as closely as possible. Preserve the author's original tone, voice, and style. The translation should not involve paraphrasing, summarising, or adding new information. Modernise sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation, ensuring that any run-on sentences are corrected and simplified. Pay particular attention to preserving the original voice and feel of the text. Please include biblical citations.

By this time we are come to the main thing intended, how we live by the faith of the Son of God. We shall not haply reach the depth of so profound a mystery; only I will endeavour to give you some few heads, wherein faith principally exerciseth her powers and functions.

1. The life of faith is exercised in our effectual calling.
2. In the state of justification, whence comes reconciliation.
3. In a vigorous life, arising on the comfort of our justification.
4. In our sanctification; in those supplies faith finds out to make up the imperfection thereof.
5. The life of faith in glorification.
6. We live by faith in all the several passages of this life, as we shall see when we come to them.

Thus we live continually by the faith of the Son of God, and so we must live till we come to heaven.

1. We live the life of faith in our effectual calling. The Spirit works it, the Spirit is God's hand. This makes, that our eyes are bent upwards to see a better life, to see a calling, to live holily and righteously in all things, to see what a rich means is provided to reconcile God and man, to satisfy justice, and so to draw us in a new way and course of life, to rely on God, and look unto him in all our actions. Then the grace of union is given. God's Spirit works our hearts by this faith, to have first union, and then communion with God. Thus the soul being seasoned, and seeing the excellency and necessity of another new life, touches Christ, and begins to live the life of faith in effectual calling; for at first we are dead and unlovely creatures, estranged from grace and gracious actions, until, in this estate, Christ is discovered by the Spirit, and faith to unite us to him.

2. Secondly, We live the life of faith in justification. This is a life of sentence that the soul lives by, peace being spoken unto it by the pardon of sin; for God by his Spirit doth report so much to the soul, giving us assurance that Christ our surety and peace-maker is raised up again. So Eph. 2:5, it is said, 'Even when we were dead in sins, he hath quickened us together with Christ, and raised us together, and made us sit in heavenly places with him.' And why? Because our Surety hath paid our debt. We say of a man condemned, he is a dead man till he have a pardon, which when he hath obtained, we turn our speech, and say, he lives. So in justification: being united unto Christ, and believing our pardon, we are said to live. Our sins lie on him as our surety; for then, as our husband in charge, he doth pay all our debts. Thus by virtue of our marriage to Christ, he discharges all our debts, and goeth away with them; even as the scapegoat in the wilderness went quite away with all the sins and iniquities of the people, never to return again. Look we therefore to our sins, the curse and wrath due unto them, and all as laid on him. Look at

whatsoever is good in him, that is for us; whatsoever is evil in us, look in him for it, to have it taken away, pardoned, and not imputed.

We commit daily sins, and in line with Zechariah 13:1, 'There is a flowing fountain every day, to cleanse sin and impurity.' Therefore, due to our daily transgressions, we must consistently seek refuge and purify our souls in this blood. We should apply the comforts of His sufferings, intercession, and obedience to us. St. John imparts this wisdom, saying, 'If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,' as found in 1 John 2:1. If we sin daily, He justifies the sinner daily. He came to save sinners; hence, when sin incites us to flee from God, we should instead run towards Him. Faith proclaims, 'There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,' as stated in Romans 8:1. Why? Because my sins were condemned in Christ, and a condemned person lacks a voice. Christ came to eliminate sin and condemned sin in the flesh. Our sins were crucified with Him and are now all condemned sins, if we turn to Christ, who bore all our iniquities, as magnificently portrayed by the prophet Isaiah. Therefore, St. Paul boldly asks the question, 'Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?' Why? 'Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Romans 8:33-34. Hence, you can see that in our daily sins, we require these aspects to have, upon confessing, a daily pardon routinely sought. God does not want us to sink. As long as guilt resides in us, God provides a way to cleanse our souls and renew our comforts. Every day, we accrue new debts, and every day, the Lord's Prayer teaches us to seek forgiveness and run to God, to have our record expunged with His blood. Every day, a Christian must focus

on the brazen serpent—by which I mean the Lord Jesus, symbolized—and must apply the blood of Christ to their hearts, so that the destructive angel might pass by them on the day of wrath, just as the Israelites did then. This is the essence of living by faith: seeking pardon daily, looking to our advocate and surety, who paid our debts and cancelled that obligation against us, contrary to us, as the apostle says, washing daily in that ceaselessly flowing fountain. 'Christ is a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek,' Psalm 110:4. Although the act is in the past, He remains constant. What undermines our courage and fills us with fear but our sins? Yet, why was this brazen serpent lifted up, if not to cleanse our daily weaknesses and shortcomings, so that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life? John 3:14-15.

Hence, justification isn't just a declaration of pardon; it is also, as Romans 5:15 states, a claim to eternal life: 'For if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.' Where God forgives, He also elevates. So, if Satan tries to shake my claim, to undermine this faith, reassure him that Christ came to save sinners. If he objects, claiming your claim is worthless and tainted due to the many sins and corruptions in your mortal body, respond by saying, 'What is the purpose of my faith if not for my comfort, to show that my claim is in Christ? My strength and foundation of comfort is in Him, not in myself.' Take, for example, how David lived this life of faith in justification: 'If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?' Psalm 130:3. There, he pronounces a death sentence on himself before being acquitted, which we must do in a similar circumstance. But then comes the appeal: 'But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.' You can delve deeper into this. If someone is not sound in this matter,

everything they do amounts to nothing. This is everything. Our sanctification is meaningless without this. This is the foundation of it all. Pay heed to this, focusing on Christ's obedience, life, death, and sufferings, along with the comforts stemming from our connection to them.

But to guide you a bit further before we conclude this delightful aspect.

First, Reflect on the events of each day. Examine how you've progressed, acknowledge the sins that have escaped your notice. Then, come to God at night. Confess your wrongdoings, feel remorse for all, make a resolution against all, seek strength to overcome all. Sleeping in sin is a dreadful state; it's better to sleep in a den filled with vipers and venomous creatures. Also, observe and be vigilant every morning; corruption clings to even our best actions. Not a day goes by without us having reason to say, "Lord, forgive us our sins." By adopting this approach, we'll keep our souls free, ready for death. Through our daily reckoning, consistently clearing our accounts, we'll be prepared for our ultimate pardon. When troubles arise, we'll only have that to contend with. I implore you, therefore, to put this into practice. Ensure that each day you account for the sins of that day. This way, you'll lead a contented life and be prepared for all circumstances—life, death, illness, distress, or anything else. Because our ultimate purpose lies in heaven.

Objection: If it's like this, we needn't worry about sinning. We can simply seek a new pardon every day.

Answer: Oh, be cautious. Before our pardon can be granted, there must be confession, sorrow for sin, resolute commitment not to repeat it. There must be an arraignment, conviction, and self-judgment, because whatever we don't want God to do, we must do

ourselves. The time it takes to secure this "quietus est" is generally proportionate to our sin. If someone resolves to sin every day just because sin is pardoned every day, they may well go a long time without pardon, or at least without the comfort of their pardon. Even though the pardon of sins is proclaimed, God holds the key to joy. Just as David had his sin pardoned—by the certainty of faith, he knew this much—yet in Psalm 51:8, he pleads for joy and for God to mend the bones he had broken. He bemoaned all day and felt a pain akin to broken bones. The joy of the Spirit had departed from him. He beseeches its restoration. So, even though sin may be pardoned, the more we sin, the harder it is to repent, and the longer we'll lack joy. It's possible that we may spend our entire lives mourning without comfort in such a situation. Now, let's explore how we can recognize that we're living the life of faith in justification.

Trial 1. First, examine how it enters the soul. As Romans 7:4 states, the apostle says, 'So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.' Once a person is dead according to the law and perceives themselves as dead, they begin to live this life of faith. Christ revives only the dead. Why don't the Catholics attain this grace of justification? They never see themselves entirely dead but attach some life to the natural state of humanity. Therefore, Christ doesn't revive them. Only those are revived by Him who realize they're dead under the law. Then, they experience a holy despair and recognize that life and comfort are found outside of themselves, in another. Justification stems from a holy despair and the reception of life after acknowledging our own death.

Trial 2. Second, the presence of this life of faith is marked by an extraordinary high valuation and appreciation of Christ—His

righteousness, merits, obedience, and the wisdom of God in the forgiveness of our sins through this God-man, the incredible mediator—as seen in Philippians 3:8. Paul considers everything 'a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.' He's willing to part with all to attain Christ. It's the precious pearl worth selling everything for. Paul considers all our own righteousness as insignificant compared to this. There must be a profound appreciation for the richness of Christ's obedience and suffering. For where there isn't this high estimation, justification is compromised. However, you see how Paul disregards and belittles all things in light of this. Similarly, in Romans 4:16, Abraham is cited as justified by grace, so that the promise might be guaranteed to all his descendants. And in Psalm 32:2, he's hailed as the blessed person 'whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.'

Trial 3. Third, the presence of this life of faith is indicated by a zeal against all contradictory doctrines, as demonstrated by St. Paul's reaction to the Galatians, who sought to combine works with faith. 'You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace,' as stated in Galatians 5:4. And in chapter 3, he questions, 'You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?' (Galatians 3:1-2). A person solid in the matter of justification despises popery and all doctrines that diminish the richness of Christ's grace. Death lurks within the Roman Catholic faith. But why are some of them saved? Not because they die in that faith, but because they change their stance on this matter of

justification. So, you see, there's a hatred, a fervor in those who, like St. Paul, oppose opposing doctrines.

Trial 4. Fourth, peace and joy become firmly established in the heart. As Romans 5:1-2 states, 'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.'

Question: Before we move on from this point, let me address one more thing. In the case of relapse, what should we do? Are we completely cut off? Do we need to make a fresh start?

Answer: I'll respond by saying that not every fall is a complete fall. There are degrees of falling, much like in the case of a sick person who is not immediately dead but retains some life and strength that works towards recovery. There is enough grace and life left in justification to bring him back. However, as in other circumstances, even in relapses, one must live by faith. We can see in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that even those who were in a state of grace are urged to be reconciled. Falling doesn't mean falling away completely; rather, it's a call to stir up grace and regain our footing. As stated in Isaiah 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.' Then the reason is given, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' Similarly, Jeremiah 3:1 states, 'They say, 'If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her again?' Would not the land be completely defiled? But

you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers—would you now return to me?' says the Lord. Thus, even when we slip and fall, we must live by faith, not releasing our grip, but instead running to the refuge of the altar's horns or seeking safety in this city of refuge.

Question: But what is the reason that many who are justified don't experience daily comfort?

Answer: It's possible that they merely gloss over their issues and fail to thoroughly examine the depths of their corruption. Just as in Psalm 32:3, David's bones grew old when he kept his sin hidden, and he roared in agony all day long, feeling God's hand heavily upon him day and night. He later explains how he found comfort: 'I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin.' The same might be true in this case. We don't approach God openly, we don't truly explore our sins, and we don't search every corner. Sin is remarkably deceptive. Sometimes, God uses this situation to humble us for a previous sin and withholds comfort until we are further humbled and develop a deep reverence for sin.

Thirdly, this leads to a vibrant life—a life of joyfulness. When a person has sought out their pardon, life and joy emerge, and a solid foundation is laid for holy actions. Who should be joyful if not a triumphant righteous person? Who has more reason to rejoice than kings? Through justification, we become kings and priests, elevated above all sins, desires, the world, and the devil. We possess a rightful claim to heaven. Should a worldly individual rejoice in their titles and privileges more than us? After all, we are God's adopted children and heirs to everything. As Romans 5:1 declares, 'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through

our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.' Once justified, the sting is removed from all troubles. God is with us, and we rejoice in Him. This is everything. The blood of Abel cries out for vengeance, but in this state, the Spirit of God tells me that the blood of Christ speaks better things—mercy, mercy. There's always comfort in His blood, even though we might struggle to apply it due to weakness and inexperience. Bathing in this blood should encourage a Christian to stride forward cheerfully in the comforts of the Holy Spirit. But I'm moving on to the next point, which is:

Fourthly, the life of faith in sanctification. This emerges from these foundations:

(1.) First, faith grasps Christ as God offers Him. How does this work? Consider 1 Corinthians 1:30: 'It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.' God provides Christ not only for justification but also for sanctification, and faith must apprehend Him accordingly.

(2.) Faith receives Christ in His entirety, embracing all His roles—not just as a priest for salvation, but also as a king for governance. Like a wife who accepts her husband's leadership, a Christian receives Christ for guidance and rule.

(3.) Furthermore, Christ's purpose was not only to absolve sin's guilt but also to break its dominion. He came to annihilate the devil's entire work, as indicated in John's words and Ephesians 5:25-26, where Christ gave Himself for the church to sanctify and cleanse it through the washing of water by the word, presenting it as a radiant church without blemish. Christ purges His church not only from sin's

guilt but also from entanglements with corrupting influences in the world. As demonstrated in Romans 8:3, 'For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.' He came by both water and blood. Therefore, faith receives Christ not only for justification but also for sanctification. To elaborate on this:

[1.] Sanctification necessarily follows justification. What hinders God's mercy? His anger at committed sin, which leads to the withholding of His Spirit. However, when reconciliation occurs, the Spirit is also given. Ephesians 1:13 states, 'And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.' Once the Spirit is received, it becomes the seed of all virtues. Whoever is justified possesses the Spirit of Christ, as Romans 8:9 asserts, 'You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.'

[2.] Furthermore, having the Spirit of Christ, faith draws all its strength from Christ. Just as Samson's strength resided in his hair, a Christian's strength is found in Christ. The devil recognises this well and thus strives to weaken faith, leading us away from our source of strength. Christ declares, 'Apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5), and Paul attests that he 'can do all this through him who gives him strength' (Philippians 4:13). The Spirit provides strength.

[3.] As we gain strength through Christ and His Spirit, we are also equipped with compelling reasons to act with that strength. Why does a Christian maintain a holy and upright life that aligns with their profession? The response often hinges on powerful reasoning. For instance, the Christian refrains from indulging in hindrances that might impede their safe and comfortable journey to heaven. They magnify the richness of Christ's love, which secures such an inheritance. When they contemplate the forgiveness of past sins, they develop a greater disdain for those sins and a determination to oppose them in the future. Their love for Christ deepens as they reflect on God's free love in Christ, driving them to admire the boundless grace and express gratitude.

[4.] Christian affections act as winds propelling us toward a life of holiness. Thus, strength, reason, and affections collaborate to prompt action. Love, especially, becomes a driving force: 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). When divine love is poured into our hearts, it ignites our affections and sparks divine love's warmth, which we then reflect back to God. God's interest is primarily in faith that operates through love. This love is a highly effective affection stirred by faith. In truth, all our Christian graces are set into motion by faith in Christ.

This demonstrates how faith grasps Christ in accordance with God's offering. And by embracing the aspects I've mentioned earlier, we transition into living a life of faith in sanctification. An example of this can be seen in the woman who, due to having received forgiveness for many sins, loved deeply. Love is generous and prompts obedience. All acts of obedience spring from love, which itself is the essence of upholding the law. This affection is kindled by faith, indeed by Christ Himself. Through Him, we obtain the promise of the Spirit, the source of all virtues, and the pledges of the new

covenant—a covenant that provides us with hearts of flesh and the indwelling of His Spirit. All promises of both justification and sanctification derive from Christ. They are contained within Him, made on His account, and accomplished through Him, for He embodies the affirmation and fulfillment of all promises. Now, having been led by faith to live in a state of justification, it is essential that we also live by faith in sanctification. A holy life comprises two components: 1. Mortification—dying to sin; 2. Vivification—living in righteousness.

In the realm of mortification, what does this entail? Essentially, it involves examining the reasons that led Christ to endure such immense suffering—namely, my sin. Thus, this affection arouses a similar sentiment, in a sense, to that which Christ experienced, causing us to despise sin with a profound abhorrence. As articulated in Zechariah, 'And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son' (Zech. 12:10, NIV). Secondly, it considers the love of Christ, the love that compelled Him to offer Himself for our sake. This prompts us to abhor sin and motivates us to live for Him who has done so much on our behalf. These two factors, illuminated by Christ's death, ignite our aversion to sin.

Conversely, in the realm of vivification, the same Spirit that infused Christ with life similarly quickens us. As stated in Colossians 3:1, 'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God' (NIV). Thus, the Spirit within us enlivens us to engage in heavenly and elevated thinking. Just as the foot and the little finger, although separated, are animated and move due to the same life force and

spirit circulating throughout the entire body, so does the same Spirit quicken every Christian in this manner. Additionally, this Spirit imparts both strength and reasons derived from Christ's resurrection, enabling us to cultivate a mindset focused on heavenly matters. Therefore, as the soul dies to certain inclinations, it finds life anew in another direction. When Christ, through the Spirit, unveils a superior existence—a life characterised by eternity, immortality, serenity, and glory—the Christian consequently relinquishes attachment to worldly matters and directs their affections towards this divine reality.

In this manner, we ought to guide our lives each day, not only by living the life of faith through justification but also through sanctification. We are to draw grace upon grace from the abundance found in Christ. Thus, in times of need, we should continually turn to Him. He isn't merely a sacrificial atonement for our sins; He is also a reservoir and treasury of all that is good. He has been designated as our sanctification. Therefore, let us seek His favour and request the bestowal of grace that aligns with His own. Furthermore, when we find ourselves lacking, let us not despair. Instead, let us draw upon the expansive reservoir of faith, and we will undoubtedly partake in the generous endowments of grace that reside in Christ, commensurate with the depth of our faith.

Question: Why do so few people find strength and comfort in Christianity?

Answer: The reason is that they often attempt to obtain grace and conquer their flaws solely through their own efforts, which inevitably leaves them lacking. However, if a person places their reliance on God, they will draw fullness from Christ. God has set apart His nature for this very purpose—to provide us with grace upon grace

from His fullness. Therefore, daily approach God and beseech Him for strength against sin, the power to lead a holy life, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to compensate for the deficiencies in our sanctification. In the words of St. Paul, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Philippians 4:13, NKJV). It's an impactful statement, signifying the ability to endure all hardships and triumph over all challenges. This strength is readily available to us. Consider the example in Luke 17:3-4, where Jesus instructs His disciples to forgive their brother seven times whenever he repents. They found this to be a difficult command because human nature often craves revenge. People have a tendency to rely on their own strength, but the disciples pray for increased faith, acknowledging that faith is required to believe in the forgiveness of numerous sins and to be empowered to forgive repeatedly. Similarly, in conquering sin, we need faith to overcome our multitude of sins, and faith can indeed achieve this.

Now, for this great endeavour: 1. Approach God and seek His Spirit while repenting of all forms of sin. 2. Subsequently, request faith. This faith will activate all other virtues, much like blood and spirits coursing through the entire body. In our spiritual journey, faith must permeate all virtues, initiating their action, and it even sets God and all His attributes in motion. It reaches out to Christ and implores, 'Lord, increase my faith,' recognising that without stronger faith, we cannot endure, resist, believe, or trust as we should. Indeed, this must be our sole strength—to see nothing in ourselves but everything in Christ.

Since Adam's fall, it was designated that Christ would be the guardian of our joy, strength, ability, and even our life. After that point, God would not entrust us with these, as we would quickly squander them. This became Christ's role. He has been endowed

with these attributes as a man to equip us with everything essential for a spiritual life. Faith will acquire all these blessings from God in Christ, who has been appointed as the mediator of the New Covenant to convey these blessings to us. Moreover, let us proceed to discern whether we are truly living this life of faith in sanctification.

Trial 1. If this is our reality, we will submit ourselves to Christ's governance in all our duties. Faith will enable us to fulfil all of Christ's commands, relying on Him for strength. When one relies on Christ's strength for one duty, they will do so for others as well. There will be a harmonious relationship between the soul of a Christian and the command of obedience. They will heed the call to duty and also embrace the promises of forgiveness for sins. If such universal obedience is absent, then the life of faith in sanctification is lacking. True faith doesn't distinguish between one duty and another; it expects strength for every task from Christ, who is amply endowed to provide for all His members.

Trial 2. Furthermore, one who lives this way will be exceptionally cautious not to grieve the Holy Spirit. They will reflect, 'I must depend on the Spirit for guidance and assistance in all matters. Should I then grieve the Spirit? Shall my actions drive it away?' They will be committed to letting the Spirit lead, instruct, comfort, and assure them of their happiness. This individual recognises that the Spirit's guidance in sanctification is the most superior form of guidance. A believing heart trembles at anything that obstructs the Spirit's work. They won't take a step forward without the guidance of the Word and the Spirit.

Trial 3. Courage will be evident in approaching any duty and confronting any sin, based on the knowledge that strength is accessible. The thought process here is, 'Don't I possess a reservoir of

strength to draw from? Isn't Christ filled with grace and goodness? Haven't all His works been accomplished for us? Haven't I been granted countless, substantial, rich, and precious promises of assistance? Isn't He the embodiment of truth itself? Doesn't Christ offer sufficient resources to support me in all things? It would be unreasonable to expect us to work without the strength and ability to carry out our tasks. Just as the sun provides light and warmth to guide and nurture, how much more does Christ, our Creator, provide these to us? It is by grace that we are guided through everything. Our justification stems from grace, and we continually receive strength from His grace to empower us in all things. It's all about grace—abundant grace! A sanctified life, lived by faith, will thus eagerly approach every duty.

Trial 4. Moreover, in this state, everything is vibrant and lively. Just as water from a lively fountain sparkles and dances, there will be living joys, expressions, delights, exhortations, awareness of good and evil. Trust in God and reliance on His Word and promises will result in vivacity, because when Christ touches the soul, life and vitality are infused. As exemplified in the story of Elisha's bones, when a man touches them, he is revived (2 Kings 13:21). Likewise, encountering Christ breathes life and vigour into us. Christ's promise in John 4:14 applies: 'but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life' (NKJV).

Let the application of all this be as follows: When faced with these insights, remember to turn to Christ for assistance and strive to live abundantly and fully in this life of faith.

Objection: However, some might ask, how should I continue to pursue and complete this great work of grace? It seems like an enormous task, involving overcoming numerous sins, resisting countless temptations, and making the painful decisions to cut off anything leading astray.

Answer: My response is that faith instructs us to draw everything from Christ—to implore His Spirit to aid us in our journey of sanctification. By relying on His strength, we will triumph. When confronting sins, seek strength from Christ and then confront them, just as the walls of Jericho fell when the Israelites obeyed the promise and encircled it seven times.

So, how can we accomplish this?

We can learn from their example. Just as they believed in the promise that the city would fall after encircling it seven times, we too have numerous promises to subdue the sin within us. Let's confront our sins, look up to Christ, and believe in the promises. Our walls of sin will crumble before us, ceasing to hinder our comfort or salvation. They might cast shadows for a brief period, but the sun will soon shine through, dispelling those clouds and mists.

Therefore, let's boldly confront all our challenges with the support of the Word and the Spirit. Simultaneously, let's direct our will against them, wholeheartedly desiring and striving to eliminate these obstacles. In the end, we'll emerge victorious. When faced with troubles and vexations, as seen in Luke 17:3-4 and subsequent verses, let's join the disciples in praying for an increase in faith. This faith will guide us through storms and tempests, supporting both our faith and our well-being. It will set both heaven and earth into motion for our benefit. Consider how faith is attributed with immense significance in Hebrews 11. While other elements

contribute to the execution of remarkable actions, faith stands out because it sets everything else in motion. Similarly, as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4 and following, love is said to encompass all, not because it performs every task, but because it activates all the other virtues. Therefore, when we lack any grace within us, let's turn to Christ and say, 'Lord, I lack wisdom, counsel, strength, understanding, and prudence in Your holy fear. These are fully present in You. It brings glory to You to help Your humble servant and bestow some measure of these attributes upon me for Your work. Behold, Lord, I am offering myself for Your use. While I may be consumed by anger and turmoil, You are the Prince of Peace, abounding in gentleness. Bless me with a meek and peaceable spirit, so that, learning from You, I may be humble and gentle at heart.' I have provided a few examples; feel free to expand upon them. In all things, as we confess our needs, let's keep our gaze on His fullness, and we will discover an abundance of His blessings, especially when we are not solely relying on our own strength to carry out these duties.

There are two things that oppose this life of faith:

(1.) Despair. This destroys the pillars of hope. Many, including Luther, have been tempted to despair, yet they overcame by continuing to pursue the work. Similarly, the Israelites were frightened after hearing the negative report from the spies about Canaan. However, as they proceeded, they conquered their enemies. In our lives, we might think, 'I will never overcome this sin or corruption, or achieve this duty.' This belief is false. Keep moving forward, look to Christ, unite His strength with your efforts, foster a deep distaste for these challenges, and firmly resolve to confront them. Eventually, they will be conquered.

(2.) The second opposition is presumption. Remember that we cannot be strong in our own strength. To quote St. Paul, 'By the grace of God, I am what I am' (1 Corinthians 15:10). Similarly, he states, 'In Him'—referring to Christ—'we live, and move, and have our being' (Acts 17:28). If we become presumptuous, it is fitting for Christ to withdraw His support, as He did with Peter. Also, beware of spiritual self-sufficiency, which might lead us to rely on ourselves rather than turning to Christ. Our ability to perform any good deed is enabled by Him. A word from Him is sufficient to aid us, whether in matters related to our spiritual or natural life. Therefore, as a conclusion, never depart from Him. In your emptiness, turn to His fullness. If your well has run dry, activate the valve of your faith, and His fountain will replenish it. Keep Him by your side at all times, and you will inevitably lead a life of faith in sanctification.

THE LIFE OF FAITH

SERMON II

And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.—GAL. 2:20.

WE observe here that our esteemed apostle provides an example of living a life beyond the ordinary life of nature, grounded in higher reasons and principles. He declares, 'I live,' indicating that he lives

through the faith in the Son of God. Initially, he acknowledges a life beyond mere rationality, thus correcting the associated misconception. Just as reason corrects our senses, faith guides our reasoning. This transformation renders an individual a new creation. This life's source is Christ, while faith serves as the conduit. Now, it is necessary to draw everything from outside ourselves. Since Adam's fall, entrusting ourselves with such power is perilous. Thus, Christ safeguards it for us, making it accessible through the conveyance of His Spirit, thereby making us all recipients of divine grace. Faith is implanted within us by God's Spirit, and it subsequently operates. As Augustine suggests, faith is action in response to action. Consequently, through effectual calling, when we become united with Christ, faith becomes consecrated as the means through which we live. Just as Christ was conceived in Mary's womb due to her acceptance of the promise, so are we, by embracing the promise, where faith is formed, resulting in Christ residing in our hearts. In our previous discourse, we elaborated on the many facets of the life of faith: its presence in effectual calling, justification and sanctification, glorification, and the significant milestones along this journey. One aspect, however, remains to be explored—namely, the life of faith in glorification.

Question 1: But how does this work? Glory is associated with vision; what relevance does faith, which pertains to the unseen, hold in this context?

Answer 1: To address this, we live by faith in glorification in the following manner: faith seizes hold of the promise. Through the word, we are presented with promises of future glory, accompanied by the initial fruits of the Spirit. Having received these earnest tokens, it follows that God will unquestionably fulfill the promise, since He would not retract the earnest He has provided. As such,

faith synthesizes significant matters, believing all and subsequently enabling us to live with a sense of comfort and anticipation for the fruition of these promises.

Answer 2: Furthermore, faith derives its life from the glorification found in Christ, the head. There exists one life shared between Christ and His followers, as well as one Spirit—unity established at the initial stage of life. Christ's glory becomes our glory. Just as in justification, our debts are attributed to Him, so is His glory as per John 17:1 and onwards. He has embarked on preparing a place for us, intending to bring us to His presence. As Christ conveys, 'The glory which you have given me,' is shared with His believers. Furthermore, Ephesians 1:3 indicates that we are seated in heavenly places alongside Christ. Consequently, due to our union with Christ, we lead lives immersed in His glory.

Answer 3: Thirdly, the nature of faith also contributes. Hebrews 11:1 illustrates faith's capacity to imbue absent things with a sense of reality. Since faith is bestowed by divine power, enabling us to grasp and embrace numerous mysteries, it generates a powerful influence within us. Consequently, it makes distant matters vivid and present. In this context, faith presents the future glory as though it is within arm's reach, thereby allowing us to live in its anticipation.

Methods to determine whether we are indeed living the life of faith in glorification:

1. This state engenders a sense of glory within the believer, infusing them with a spirit that radiates glory, regardless of their circumstances. Every aspect of their being is enflamed by the faith anticipating the forthcoming glory. When reflecting on past experiences, faith endows strength. However, when

contemplating future glory, every grace and virtue becomes active.

- Faith sets hope into motion, granting the soul steadfastness akin to an unyielding anchor during times of assault.
- Hope awakens patience, as the apostle states, 'we wait patiently for it.' Hence, patience is manifested through two forms: enduring hardships and awaiting the passage of time.
- Courage and magnanimity are kindled. Hebrews 11 showcases the unwavering determination of the patriarchs in enduring suffering—a disposition rooted in their anticipation of the impending glory. Abraham's abandonment of his familial home is a result of his hope in the city with eternal foundations. Moses's abandonment of Pharaoh's court stems from his vision of the invisible God. Notably, Christ, motivated by the glory ahead, endured the cross and currently occupies a position of honour and majesty beside the Father, as per Hebrews 12:2. Similarly, 2 Corinthians 4:16 reveals Paul's endurance, attributed to the prospect of eternal glory far outweighing present afflictions. Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 5:9, Paul emphasises his labour's sincerity, motivated by the impending judgment before Christ's throne. This understanding underscores the necessity for sincere endeavour.

In conclusion, living the life of faith in glorification requires placing faith in the promise, resulting in an expectant anticipation of the promised glory. This transformation empowers believers, engendering courage, sincerity, zeal, and fruitfulness. By embodying these characteristics, they exemplify the life of faith in the realm of glorification.

There exists a certain sequence of events. Whoever embraces the life of faith during these significant transitions also lives by faith in all other aspects of life. These pivotal moments will have a ripple effect across the smaller episodes of our existence. Consider, for example, when someone finds themselves trapped in the throes of both external and internal afflictions. During these times, faith seizes hold of a profound truth—God's workings are marvellous, beyond our comprehension. His ways and thoughts transcend our own. In various circumstances, faith makes use of God's actions and promises, such as:

1. In a person's state of grace, during moments of feeling deserted by God.
 - In this scenario, faith initially wrestles with God, as Jacob did, and emerges victorious, securing a blessing. Faith thus recognises this avenue, returning to the precious promises God has given, affirming His pledge to return and not remain angry forever. Faith grasps that God employs contrasting methods. He withholds a sense of His love not out of anger, but to awaken the conscience's awareness of sin, prompting deeper repentance and leading to a more secure assurance of forgiveness. Faith acknowledges God's wonder-working nature, His ability to bring about extraordinary outcomes. When despair grips a person concerning themselves and every other source of comfort, they are closest to God, as aptly noted by Paul: 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead' (2 Corinthians 1:9). Hence, faith examines how God worked with Christ, the beloved Son, despite His harsh trials, demonstrating both roughness and affection. Christ serves as both an example and a cause of goodness for us. When Christ faced abandonment, He

turned to God, exclaiming, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34). Faith juxtaposes God's promise against His current actions, declaring, 'Even if You slay me, I will still place my trust in You' (Job 13:15). Despite appearances, faith clings to the truth that God's love endures, that He is merciful and gracious, and that His anger will not persist indefinitely. In a sense, faith unveils God's true intentions, peering through the dark clouds to perceive Him as an apparent adversary temporarily, only to return with greater comfort later. Faith recognises that, just as Paul says, it is God who comforts the downtrodden, revives the dead, and reveals Himself on the mountaintop amid our deepest distress.

- Consequently, faith reasons: Is this truly the case? Is God indeed extraordinary in His workings? Does He employ contrasting methods? If so, I will mirror His actions—I will believe one opposite amid another. I will anticipate the return of sunshine even when clouds obscure it now. The same principle applies to other extremities. For instance, in the resurrection of our lifeless bodies, faith envisions a spirit infusing vitality into dry bones, assuring us that God can raise the dead as easily as He can rescue us from any dire situation. Saint Paul's argument encourages trust in God, who resurrects the dead and can enact remarkable transformations amidst our most significant trials. Concerning the Church's current predicament of misery, Revelation 18:21 promises Babylon's fall into the sea like a millstone. Faith, in this context, believes in the promises of eventual triumph, where God outmanoeuvres human scheming and ensnares the crafty in their own devices. As surely as day follows night, God will undoubtedly fulfil all His promises, as David confidently states in Psalm 130:6, 'My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more

than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.'

- So, in the midst of any adversity, rely on faith. It pierces through all obstacles. Believe in the primary transitions of calling, justification, and sanctification, and this will instil confidence in God for the rest. Faith shines most brilliantly when operating independently; in such moments, its strength is most potent. It is during these instances that God particularly delights in manifesting His power. When all other avenues fail and faith perseveres through wrestling, God receives all the glory, and all becomes well. Therefore, follow the prophet's counsel in this scenario: 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God' (Isaiah 50:10).
- Faith uplifts individuals, positioning them on an unshakable foundation, ensuring their comfort and joy in God remain impervious to disruption. This is because Christ's name is wondrous, and He intervenes during desperate moments when the timing is opportune. An omnipotent God relishes the chance to demonstrate His power through monumental challenges. Faith, therefore, engages in fervent pleading: 'Help, Lord, or none can help.' As we see in the story of the storm-tossed ship, our Saviour rested until a fierce tempest arose, at which point He calmed the winds and seas. Similarly, it may seem that God is presently asleep concerning the Church's predicament. Why? To stir us to awaken Him through our prayers. Just as Moses promised deliverance when the Israelites' brick-making burden was doubled and their distress grew, Christians often experience

their greatest humility when faced with intensified affliction. They fervently pray, search, believe, and cling to the promises, ultimately leading to deliverance. Therefore, in any crisis, set faith into action. This spurs prayer, prayer stirs God's intervention, and God's intervention mobilises all creation. Thus, the primary culprit for our turmoil is not the trouble itself but our feeble faith. Rather than cry out, 'I am ruined! What will become of me?' place the blame on an unbelieving heart.

(2.) Secondly, during everyday trials, seek to neutralise sin's sting by living the life of faith in justification, just as David did (Psalm 32:5). Confess your sins to God, petition Him to remove their sting, and you will find Him willing to pardon, as David did. In all our vulnerabilities and flaws in sanctification, turn to Christ for additional grace. Say, 'Lord, although I am destitute of goodness, falling short of the exact holiness You demand, Christ's abundance can supply my deficiencies. Let me receive grace upon grace from His fulness, and accept His pure and perfect obedience on my behalf. Lord, impute His righteousness to me, for You have made Him our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.' Similarly, in moments of affliction, keep the vision of glory before your eyes. Recall Paul's perspective: 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen' (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Thus, in any affliction, faith's connection with the life of glorification remains relevant. In all these situations, the use of the life of faith in each aspect is imperative during times of affliction.

(3.) Thirdly, when faced with bodily illness, rely on Jesus. He possesses the same power and willingness to aid us now as He did during His earthly days in helping others. With faith, all things are

achievable. A mere word from Him can calm any storm or tempest. Let's not follow the example of Asa, who relied solely on physicians or subordinate means. Remember that all medicine is ineffective without Him (2 Chronicles 16:12). Thus, alongside these means, turn to Christ, that His influence may work through them. Recognise that all strength and efficacy come from Him, capable of either blessing or thwarting various approaches.

(4.) Fourthly, when encountering disgrace, entrust both your reputation and your life to Him. Recall what Peter writes, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified' (1 Peter 4:14). This refers to a Spirit that will bestow glory upon us. Likewise, Hebrews 12:2 states, 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.' Our suffering obstructs our happiness; direct your gaze to Him. He has now ascended to glory, and so shall we. Human power cannot alter people's perceptions. This authority lies with God, who can bestow honour or infamy upon anyone. Therefore, let us seek no more reputation than what God grants us. Should dogs bark, it matters not. Ultimately, God will vindicate our name, and our righteousness will shine forth as brilliantly as the midday sun. The Church assures herself of this in Micah 7:8: 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: though I fall, I shall arise.' In other words, God's servants are never abandoned permanently. A time will come when God will turn things to my advantage, especially if I respond humbly and appropriately. To achieve this, reflect that God in Christ has already granted me the forgiveness of sin. In light of this, other matters pose no threat to me, and everything will ultimately work together for my benefit. We know from Psalm 6:8 that David initially complained bitterly about

such matters. Yet, once the Lord granted peace to his soul through the life of faith in justification and sanctification, he declared, 'Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.' He thus disregarded the shame.

(5.) Fifthly, in our specific roles and spiritual gifts, we must also live by faith. Christians recognise that they stand within a designated sphere set by Christ for their labours. Therefore, faith concludes, 'Here, I seek understanding, wisdom, success, blessing, and the ability to navigate the tasks I am assigned. He who placed me here will empower me. If I encounter failure, I will turn to Christ, and with His aid, I will ultimately prosper.' This echoes the account of Peter who, despite having laboured all night in vain, obeyed Christ's command to cast his net and enjoyed an abundant catch (Luke 5:5). Similarly, many may strive tirelessly for heaven, aiming to conquer and overcome their flaws, yet achieve no corresponding success. In these cases, they should follow Peter's example, trusting Christ, and eventually achieving victory. For magistrates, ministers, and people, if they placed greater trust in God's strength, their conditions would improve. Moses offers a clear illustration of this. When he hesitated due to his lack of eloquence after being commanded to confront Pharaoh, God responded, 'Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?' (Exodus 4:11). In such deficiencies, faith turns to Him for help. A similar sentiment is expressed in Christ's encouragement to His disciples in Luke 21:15: 'For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.' This assurance was evident in the past troubles of the Church, where humble women silenced learned adversaries with their responses.

Now, faith resembles Moses' perspective, as described in Hebrews 11:24. It directs its gaze to Christ, who is unseen. Just as Micaiah

witnessed the Lord seated on His throne with the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand (1 Kings 22:19), earthly kings like Ahab paled in comparison once he beheld the heavenly King in His glory. Likewise, faith, upon seeing Christ, heaven, and glory above us, actively caring for His Church, standing at God's right hand with the aid of His Spirit, instils us with indomitable courage.

(6.) Sixthly, when it comes to provision and protection, faith turns to Christ and leans on Him for all these needs. Faith understands that it possesses enough encouragements, promises, and examples to fortify its reliance on Him. For instance, consider Luke 12:32: 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' Therefore, the believing soul reasons from the lesser to the greater. If God will provide me with a kingdom in heaven, why would He deny me daily sustenance and not raise me up to eternal life? Faith reflects on and meditates often upon these promises: how a little possessed by the righteous is superior to the abundance of the wicked, for God adds no sorrow to it; how a small portion with love outweighs a well-fed ox with contention (Proverbs 15:17). Moreover, in times of extremity, faith knows that saints will receive extraordinary provision. Sometimes, He will bless a small amount, as seen with the seven loaves and five fish that miraculously fed five thousand people. The multitude was in great need, yet their sustenance multiplied suddenly. It will be the same for us. At times, the widow's oil will increase; in distress, ravens will feed Elijah; Lazarus will receive comfort even from dogs licking his sores. With regard to employing means, there's no need for fear; even in the absence of resources, God will create a way when all else fails. Faith thrives in such circumstances, knowing that God controls all means and can act swiftly as He pleases.

Furthermore, in terms of protection and preservation, faith understands that Christ will serve as our shield and defender, and therefore, it places its reliance on Him. 'Fear not,' God said to Abraham, 'for I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward' (Genesis 15:1). Through the ages, saints have regarded Him as their rock, stronghold, fortress, salvation, helper, deliverer, and refuge. Christ also assured His disciples that He will remain with them until the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). He exercises His royal authority for the benefit of His church. This truth was evident in both Egypt and the wilderness, where He safely led His people into Canaan despite numerous perils. He also provided refuge in the wilderness for the persecuted woman, keeping her secure (Revelation 12:6).

(7.) Seventhly, faith applies to the care of our children.

Objection: Some may say, 'I could be content with little, but I have many children.'

Solution: Here, faith steps in and responds, 'Aren't they Christ's children as well? Shouldn't He provide for His own?' Do what you can, and for the rest, do not despair. Entrust this burden to Him, who has not commanded you to be anxious, but rather to present your requests with prayer and thanksgiving. In this situation, faith, as a dying parent, follows Christ's example. Just as Christ prayed in John 17:6, 11, 'Yours they were, and you gave them to me; and they have kept your word. Holy Father, keep through your name those whom you have given me, that they may be one as we are.' Similarly, a dying father might say, 'Lord, they were Yours, and You entrusted them to me. You are the ultimate Father, the beginning, the best, and the final. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, for You are the refuge of the poor and needy. Your timing is to help when all other

aid falters.' Consider: Is He not the Father of the fatherless? Therefore, entrust them to Him with the conviction and confidence of the prophet David, who declared, 'When my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up' (Psalm 27:10). He did not imply that fathers and mothers tend to forsake, but even if they should, or through death, God wonderfully protects and preserves their descendants. Learn to exercise faith. Even if you leave them with little, trust in God. Recognise that whoever rests in the shadow of the Almighty, as the psalmist states, will be safe (Psalm 91:1). The same God who provided for them in the womb, preparing nourishment before they entered the world, who instilled tender affection in mothers, will certainly care for your children after your time. Therefore, allow faith to firmly anchor your heart in these truths. In the womb, they were nurtured in ways you could not comprehend. Like David, exclaim, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139:14). After your passing, they will also be cared for in ways you may not understand. Many experience generational consequences because they did not trust God, resorting instead to improper means to ensure their legacies through greed and worldly strategies.

(8.) Eighthly, let's consider prosperity.

What's the purpose of living the life of faith in this context? Well, it has significant value because:

[1.] Firstly, what makes prosperity truly fulfilling? It's the assurance that through faith, one's sins are forgiven. Consider this: What comfort could a prisoner at the Tower find in all the external abundance of wealth, gold, and silver, as long as his pardon remained unsigned? The sweetness of prosperity stems from the life

of faith in justification, in knowing that all my sins are crucified with Christ on the cross, and that the indictment against me is obliterated. This leads to becoming part of the assembly of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven (Hebrews 12:23). Such a person rejoices, possessing a double portion, exempt from numerous fears, trials, and sufferings that trouble others. Who are better Christians than those who understand that they enjoy all good things in the light of God's favour and blessing? Here, faith is continuously at work—perceiving God's love in all things—and hence, it leads to profound gratitude for what has been received.

[2.] Secondly, the life of faith steers our prosperity. How? It prevents the misuse of blessings, guards against arrogance, encourages generosity towards others, and prevents excessive attachment. Faith encourages us to see material blessings as they are depicted in Scripture. It dissuades us from excessive attachment to them, reveals superior and enduring riches, true friends, and more. It prompts us to heed Saint Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:29: to rejoice and conduct our affairs with detachment from worldly things, as the present form of this world is transient. Faith also motivates people, as Paul notes elsewhere, to trust not in uncertain wealth, but in the living God, who can accomplish all things. In essence, it compels us to manage our worldly possessions in such a way that they do not distract us from our ultimate goal.

Likewise, in all the comforts of life, faith enables a person to eat, drink, sleep, and engage in all activities through Christ, directing their focus upwards, living by faith, and rejoicing that they possess a title and rightful claim to all creation. Being cleansed, everything becomes clean for them, since they are now united with Christ, who is pure, spotless, and the Lord of all. For the unclean, everything remains unclean. Christ paid a great price to grant us freedom with

regard to creation. Thus, by embracing this freedom, we live the life of faith in prosperity. In this state, we see God at the forefront of every situation, attributing all we have and experience to His love and kindness, humbly offering back to Him the strength and glory, and also extending help to His people in need.

(9.) Ninthly, let's explore God's ordinances—specifically, the preaching of the word and the sacraments. In these, faith empowers us to live out the life of faith. It discourages us from questioning why God has chosen these means, even at the conclusion of the world, for instructing humanity. Faith prompts us to lay aside our doubts and thoughts and declare, 'Whatever God wills shall be the rule and guide for all my thoughts and actions.' He has sanctified and made these ordinances effective for this purpose. Therefore, I believe He will bless His own means—though the world may consider preaching foolishness, it will be effective for my salvation and the salvation of His entire Church. He created the world through His powerful word, used it to restore the decaying world, and will also employ it to call forth and resurrect the dead on the final day. Therefore, I rest upon His ordinance without further contention.

Regarding the sacraments, what significance does a little water have compared to the cleansing of sin? However, it is the blood of Christ that truly purifies; this is the cleansing agent that removes our sins. God's ordinances infuse it with power and efficacy for this purpose, specifically for the believing soul. Similarly, the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper might appear feeble, yet they are ordained to fortify and amplify faith. Here, the Christian soul trusts that God's Spirit can strengthen faith, foster a closer communion with Christ, cultivate a hatred for sin, and bless His ordinances. Just as food and drink refresh, sustain, and nourish the mortal body, His ordinances,

when blessed by Him, are potent in refreshing, fortifying, and nourishing our souls towards eternal life.

(10.) Tenthly, in our battles, we must engage in the good fight of faith in various ways. Firstly, when any trouble befalls a believer, they turn to the life of faith in justification and sanctification. Just as they initially prevailed over God through repentance, prayer, and the seeking of forgiveness, as well as applying promises, they now comprehend how to conquer any adversity that arises. As Jacob was told, 'You have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed as a prince' (Genesis 32:28). Therefore, a Christian, having triumphed over God in their initial birth pangs of new faith, can now, with the same assistance and strategy, conquer all things. Secondly, a Christian fights this noble fight by living the life of faith in glorification. The Apostle Paul instructs, 'Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life' (1 Timothy 6:12). This indicates that the pathway to living the life of faith is to grasp eternal life, maintaining earnest and consistent contemplations of the glory that awaits. Just as Canaan was assigned to the Israelites and divided among them by Jacob before his death, long before they actually arrived, the appeal of fighting for such an inheritance is compelling. Along the way, there were serpents, giants, formidable enemies, and a multitude of challenges; nonetheless, they conquered all adversities. Similarly, between us and heaven, there exist numerous adversaries to overcome: the flesh, the world, the devil, and a multitude of trials that arise from both their malevolence and our frailty. However, in this context, faith holds onto eternal life, countering all objections with the thought that none of these challenges can make us lose eternity. There is no comparison between earth's transient false pleasures and the genuine and lasting joy that awaits us. As Scripture proclaims, 'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith' (1 John

5:4). Why? Because faith makes Christ's victory ours. Christ conquered sin, hell, death, the world, and everything else; and since Christ belongs to us, all that we have done and endured becomes effective for us. Therefore, as Christ overcomes within us through His Spirit, as the Apostle declares, 'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4). Consequently, even a feeble Christian possesses a strong Spirit within them, an invincible force that no power can conquer, despite occasional setbacks.

Quest. But how does faith combat the world through the life of glory?

Sol. The world presents us with trivial and base offerings. Faith, on the other hand, repels and counters with the glory that awaits in the future, esteeming it above all else. Consider Moses, who, because he saw the invisible God, rejected the title of Pharaoh's daughter, valuing the reproaches of Christ more than all the treasures of Egypt. This is because the glory ahead promised him greater things than the world could offer (Hebrews 11:24ff). And if the world threatens troubles, afflictions, persecutions, and the like on one side for doing right and not succumbing to sinful ways, then faith recalls Romans 8:18: 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.' This demonstrates that the life of faith, centred on the forthcoming glory, empowers us to combat all temptations and adversaries. Just as someone with a crown before them would go through obstacles to attain it, faith, with the prospect of glory, immortality, and the joys of heaven, dismisses and disregards all opposition. It envisions all things as conquered by Christ, as though everything were already behind it. As a result, faith gathers the assurance that it will ultimately triumph over all in Him.

(11.) Eleventhly, this is how we persevere until the end,

Engaging in the struggle and living out the life of faith. This becomes a foundation for perseverance. A Christian then lives, in a manner, the life of Christ. Just as it is written in Romans 6:9, 'We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.' Similarly, one who lives by faith does not die again. Christ, the head, continually supplies spiritual strength, allowing the believer to live by faith through all the circumstances of life. As stated in Romans 8:35, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' The answer is nothing. It's an unceasing stream that accompanies us even through death. Whoever drinks from this stream will never thirst again. Christ's promise is, 'Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die,' for when faith ceases, the life of vision begins. Throughout our lives, the experience is consistent, continuing until death. At that point, faith leaves us to enjoy what we believed in. But does faith leave us at the time of death? Certainly not!

(12.) Twelfthly, we also die by faith.

For a Christian recognises that they are already in heaven. Just as they lived by faith, they also die in faith. Faith enables them to surrender their soul to God with comfort, much like Stephen did. They know that Christ will receive the soul He has redeemed with His blood. They die in faith because they witness Christ having conquered death before them, and they look beyond death, seeing all that lies between them and glory. With the Spirit of Christ within them, they become bold and unafraid, echoing David's words, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me' (Psalm 23:4). This blessed faith in the Son of God empowers us to face all things and endure all things with cheerfulness and comfort. Faith turns absent comforts into present realities. It envisions such sweet contentment in the presence of God

that all earthly challenges seem insignificant. It recognises the One it has placed its trust in and anticipates what is stored up for it. A believer sees the unseen. Oh, the glorious things that a faithful soul beholds! They perceive angels prepared to transport them from a fragile body to a heavenly paradise, from the fellowship of suffering sinners here to the delightful company of perfected saints. They themselves experience a taste of this joy as a foretaste and earnest, yearning for its full possession.

Obj. But how can this be, when no eye has seen, and no ear has heard what God has prepared for those who love Him?

Ans. Indeed, to our worldly senses, these things remain beyond our perception. However, to a renewed soul, the Spirit that God has bestowed upon them reveals the excellence of these things, surpassing all earthly contentments. We observe that these heavenly blessings are likened to a kingdom, a feast, a crown – familiar comparisons meant to make even the simplest minds grasp and be captivated by them. What could be more desirable than a kingdom for honour? What splendour is found in a rich diadem? And what delightful refreshment in a feast! Yet, alas, these are mere shadows; the true reality is heaven itself. So speak not of earthly riches, but of thriving in grace, which will indeed make you rich. What good will worldly riches do us on the final day? They take wings and vanish. If we lack true riches, we may die in need despite all our worldly possessions, just as Dives did. Understand this: if earthly kingdoms hold anything good, there is much more goodness in this spiritual kingdom.

Furthermore, the children of God know these heavenly things by their experience. They have the first taste of them even in this life. If the fellowship of saints here is so delightful, how much more glorious

will it be in heaven! God's children get a taste of the eternal Sabbath in heaven by keeping a holy Sabbath to God on earth; they experience a foretaste of the eternal rest and peace they will enjoy in the future through the peace of conscience they have now. The heavenly joy that flows into the soul at present is just a glimpse of the boundless joy we will ultimately receive.

God's love for His children is so great that He doesn't reserve all their comforts for the next world; He grants them a foretaste of sweetness here. But what are all earthly comforts compared to what awaits us in the presence of God? As John says, 'We are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared' (1 John 3:2). What we do know is that when Christ, our head, is revealed, all His members will be like Him. Our life may well be described as hidden with Christ in God because the flesh and blood cannot comprehend the blessings prepared for those who love Him. We live a concealed life. We cannot see God face to face or know Him as perfectly here as we will someday. All that we experience now is a taste of the good things to come – just a taste.

The life we currently lead is a life of faith, and we are meant to walk by faith, not by sight. So, if God were to grant us everything now, why would we need faith? It wouldn't be commendable for a Christian to abstain from the sinful ways of the world if they could see the glory they will enjoy right before them. However, God intends to show the world that His people possess comforts that are loftier and more substantial than what the world can offer, as they live by faith, not by sight.

God doesn't reveal to us all that we will experience in the future because we lack the capacity to digest such delicacies. Just as Peter and John could not fully comprehend Christ's glory during His

transfiguration but were overwhelmed by it, similarly, we may become spiritually overwhelmed if we were to see and comprehend these revelations. Remember the Holy Spirit's words about Peter and John: 'They did not know what to say, for they were terrified' (Mark 9:5). Likewise, when St. Paul was caught up to the third heaven and heard inexpressible words, he couldn't fully comprehend them; they left him in such ecstasy. So, God gave him a 'thorn in the flesh' to prevent him from being overly exalted (2 Corinthians 12:7). Are we stronger than Peter and Paul, able to bear such revelations from above? Isn't it an act of goodness on God's part to reserve them until we are better equipped to appreciate them? When Moses desired to see God's face, he received this response: 'You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live' (Exodus 23:20). Thus, anyone who wishes to conceive rightly of the joys of heaven must die first.

Although we cannot see or fully comprehend these spiritual excellencies, let us frequently contemplate them. A true Christian's life is consumed by thoughts of the future blessings awaiting them in heaven. Every aspect of a Christian's character is directed towards this end. What is faith without this focus? The primary role of faith is to engage with things unseen. It makes distant comforts feel almost present, and in doing so, it triumphs over the world by focusing on these heavenly matters. How is patience strengthened except by considering the relief that the future holds? If there were no better times awaiting the godly in the future, they would be the most wretched of all creatures. However, the anticipation of that future sustains them in patience. What makes a person sensitive in conscience and afraid to sin if not the gaze upon the invisible God?

And do we indeed possess such glorious comforts in another world? Let this truth fill our hearts with joy against all forms of contempt and disregard in this world. The world doesn't know God or us;

neither does it comprehend the blessings prepared for us. Shall we then worry about their misuse and scorn? Even though we may wander unknown here, our condition will one day be revealed in glory before all, and we shall then rightly value earthly matters. Reflecting on this should uplift the spirit of every Christian. What motivates us to do excellent deeds if not our belief in the excellence of these ways and paths? Someone who perceives excellence in God can easily withstand temptation. If Satan entices him to sin, he ponders: 'Shall I forfeit the sweet joys of heaven for a base desire? Shall I surrender my peace of conscience and the joy of the Holy Spirit to satisfy my unruly cravings?' Consider what we lose in committing any sin. The profit and pleasure obtained by following the world – what are they compared to the precious comforts we forfeit? Who would want to owe anything to Satan? Isn't it a belittlement to turn away from God, as if His sufficiency weren't enough to quiet the soul? Doesn't God possess an abundance? Must we turn to the devil, our adversary, for anything?

Oh, then, let us marvel at God's love for His humble creation, in preparing such immense blessings. Let us echo David's words: 'What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?' (Psalm 8:4). How remarkable is your mercy, to have such elevated thoughts towards lost sinners! 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us' (1 Peter 1:3-4). A devout Christian begins their life in heaven even while on earth, praising and glorifying God through a holy and fruitful way of life. This is the ultimate way of expressing gratitude to God. Praise within the heart will naturally manifest in spoken words.

When the apostle describes the state of God's children, he refers to it as a 'heavenly kingdom,' a 'glorious inheritance,' an 'incomparable light,' a state that will never fade away. He cannot fully articulate their happiness; it is so abundantly complete. 'For God so loved the world.' Even so, I am at a loss for words. 'See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!' (1 John 3:1). It is a love so free and abundant that my words cannot fully convey. So, do not envy the wicked in their pleasure and extravagance. Alas, their enjoyment is limited to their earthly life. Instead, take pity on them for finding delight in sinful vanities. Should a Christian envy anyone's earthly pleasures when they themselves are in such an astonishing state? They should not resent the prosperity of others but rather find solace in their future hopes. The anticipation of their coming blessings should uplift them more than any lack or discouragement could bring them down. Even though our comforts are not yet in our possession, we are certain of them. God preserves us for those blessings, and those blessings for us. We are like children who don't think much about the inheritance their parents have left them until they come of age. Many weak Christians do not ponder their Father's inheritance or contemplate the immeasurable joys stored up for them while they are spiritually immature. However, as they grow in grace, they will acquire greater understanding and yearning for it.

If it is a momentous occasion to exit a dark prison and behold the sunlight, how much more magnificent will it be to depart from this dark world and enter the glorious light of heaven? A natural person does not comprehend this, but once we catch a glimpse of the light we will experience in glory, we will stand in awe and exclaim with the apostle, 'Oh, the surpassing love of God in Jesus Christ!' Indeed, these things revealed through the gospel are wondrous, showing that

God's love for flesh and blood is such that He prepares extraordinary blessings for them.

However, we must acknowledge that God qualifies those whom He prepares happiness for in the future. This is because nothing impure can enter heaven. We should not expect to transition immediately from the filth and mire to heaven. No, we must be transformed to a suitable condition for such a state. Those who refuse to live a holy life here will have no place in that sacred realm. If your heart tells you that you would rather possess honour and pleasure than have grace in your soul, the Word of God equally tells you that the excellences of heaven are not meant for you. Just as a pig prefers a mud puddle to a fresh fountain, so wicked individuals take more delight in the world than in heaven, indicating they will never reach that heavenly destination. Only a true change of heart will bring us comfort in the end. Without being a new creation, you will have no share in the New Jerusalem. Therefore, let us not delude ourselves with vain hopes. None of us can deny our desire for heaven, but why do you desire it? Is it merely because it is described as a kingdom, a place of exquisite joy and rest? If that is your only motivation, rest assured, you will never reach it. To genuinely attain heaven, you must desire it for its divine nature, because it is a holy place, and because it is close to God. And 'everyone who has this hope purifies themselves, just as he is pure' (1 John 3:3).

If we want our faith to be ready for our moment of passing, we must diligently exercise it while living, and then it will be as dependable as the good things we hold onto through faith. It will not fail us any more than these blessings until it leads us into heaven, where that aspect of faith is no longer needed. This is where a true Christian surpasses a hypocrite or a materialistic person. When their trust in worldly things crumbles, a true believer's faith remains steadfast.

For everyone's use. So, consider how faith is the essence of our life and the soul of our existence, for through it we are united with Christ Jesus, the sustainer and nourisher of our souls. Therefore, let us make active use of it; let us find refuge and fortify ourselves in Him, as expressed in Psalm 90:1, 'Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.' He is our shield; our adversaries must first breach Christ's defences before reaching us. All things belong to us in Him, and through His strength and power, we will triumph over every opposing force. You can see, then, that faith is not a dormant grace but a potent force in action. It operates in heaven, on earth, and in hell. It opposes Satan, it functions through our love for God, prompting us to love Him and work diligently for Him, as well as to work for the well-being of others. Faith is the root of the tree, and love its branches. Thus, faith operates mightily and dynamically; it is a vivifying and energetic grace. Those who find it inactive should not be surprised if they lack its comfort; they must strive to awaken it and set it into motion to guide their lives. Those who recognize that they possess it should employ it for a higher purpose than many do, instead of merely swearing by it. This exposes our vulnerability in times of trouble, when we are without spiritual armour. Where is our shield of faith when every trivial challenge pierces through our defences? This reveals that our shield is as fragile as paper. We should lament our lack of faith and strive for this grace, which is so active and beneficial. It is even more crucial considering the misery of being caught in a storm without shelter. This faith will sustain us through all adversities and enable us to conquer all things through Christ's love for us. Oh, the remarkable purpose of the life of faith! It looks back and utilises all of God's works, promises, miracles, threats, and judgments, deriving strength, wisdom, courage, and instruction from each. It looks upon the past as if they were currently happening, accomplishing, promising, threatening, and is appropriately affected. By harnessing the power of imagination, it

presents past events as if they were present, thereby restraining us from sinning against God. At times, it perceives the world as engulfed in flames, which leads it to regard worldly enticements as fleeting and condemned to destruction. It is truly the best form of foresight, envisioning distant things as if they were imminent, and magnifying their excellence, magnitude, and glory from a distance. Therefore, above all, let us strive to live this life of faith—indeed, it is worth all our efforts—and avoid unbelief, for it is the sole cause of our misery, burdening us with the guilt of sin and trapping us in God's wrath. It even seals our fate for the day of judgement, corrupting our actions in God's eyes and resulting in the condemnation mentioned by John. Conversely, the believing soul leads a life of comfort, gaining admission into the glorious freedom of God's children, finding refuge from all storms and tempests, and through this life of faith, obtaining assurance of its personal share and portion in the love, merits, obedience, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of the Son of God. In essence, it gains certainty of its individual salvation, just as Saint Paul did, saying, 'who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). But for now, this shall be sufficient. I shall prosecute things more fully in the next discourse.

SALVATION APPLIED

Sermon III

And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who hath loved me, and gave himself for me.—GAL. 2:20.

We have already discussed spiritual life and its excellence, as well as the manner of its transmission through faith, and the source of this spiritual life, which is the Son of God, identified by His love and the result of that love: 'He loved me,' and as a consequence of that love, 'He gave himself for me.' Now, turning to the Apostle's personal application, conveyed through the word 'me,' 'Who loved me and gave himself for me,' several points warrant our consideration:

Firstly, God loves certain individuals with a distinct and exceptional love: 'Who loved me and gave himself for me.'

Secondly, faith responds to God and Christ's distinct love with a particular acceptance: 'Who loved me.'

Thirdly, this specific faith in God's individual love forms the basis of assurance, which blossoms from this unique faith.

Fourthly, the assurance derived from our particular faith in God's specific love is the origin of all spiritual life, fuelling the entire soul into action. After all, what else motivates my life of faith in every aspect, if not the awareness of His love, the One who loved me and gave himself for me? In light of this, can I do anything less than dedicate myself to Him? Now, let's explore these points in order.

1. Christ loves certain individuals with an extraordinary, overflowing, and distinctive love. While Christ suffered on the cross, He had a particular focus on those who would believe in Him, just as He now carries our names on His heart in heaven. As the high priest carried the names of the twelve tribes on his

breastplate adorned with precious stones (Exodus 28:21, 30), so Christ, our high priest, carries the names of all His children in His heart, continuously presenting them to God through His intercession. Consequently, when He appears before God, the church, united with Him, appears before God in His heart. Just as this is true in heaven, so on the cross, the church resided in Christ's heart. A certain number were the recipients of Christ's saving sacrifice (John 17:9). When Christ shed His blood, Paul was present in His heart, saying, 'Who loved me and gave himself for me.' Therefore, Christ loves certain individuals with a distinct, exceptional, and abundant love. Thus, the question arises concerning:

2. General love. 2. General gift.

Question: Did Christ love everyone and give Himself for everyone, considering the apostle's statement, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me'?

Answer: Firstly, Christ's love and self-sacrifice were in harmony with God's love and gift (John 6:37, 39). Christ offered Himself for those whom God had already given to Him. Christ was commissioned to fulfil His Father's will, not His own (John 6:38), and He will save all whom the Father has entrusted to Him, as expressed in John 17:6, 'Yours they were, and you gave them to me.' Those whom the Father elects, Christ redeems and, through redemption, saves. Therefore, the extent of redemption's efficacy matches the scope of God's election. Hence, the apostle combines, 'Christ loved me and gave Himself for me.' His love is exclusively directed towards those given to Him by God, as He views all for whom He died through the lens of His Father's love. While there are individuals whom God detests

(Romans 9:13), love and gift remain intertwined. He offers Himself only for those He loves, and He loves only as much as God loves.

Answer: Secondly, whoever Christ loved and gave Himself for also experiences other accompanying effects. Those who benefit from Christ's redemption are empowered by His Spirit to apply this redemption. Where Christ secures something from God, the means to apply it by His Spirit is also provided. Various factors accompany it. Those redeemed by Christ, as the apostle elaborates in Romans 8:11, are also recipients of His resurrection and His exaltation to the right hand of God. These elements are interconnected, as demonstrated in Romans 8:32, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' God imparts the spirit of application along with Christ, as seen in Matthew 17:13 and 2 Thessalonians 3:2. Yet, we observe that most of the world lacks faith. This faith of the elect is absent in worldlings, as is the grace of application. Consequently, they do not possess the favour of God secured through Christ. Thus, Romans 5:10 confirms this truth: 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.' These aspects are intertwined. However, most individuals are not saved through His life, signifying their lack of reconciliation through His death.

Further verses support this truth, such as Hebrews 9:14, which illustrates that wherever Christ offered Himself, the conscience is cleansed from dead works to serve the living God. As many are not cleansed, they lack any share in Christ's death.

Further proof of this can be found in Christ's own words in John 17:9, where he clearly distinguishes between two groups of people,

stating, 'I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.'

Now, there might be an objection raised here, asserting that Christ's death has a broader scope than his intercession.

To address this objection, Christ explains later in the same chapter, verse 17, 'For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.' In other words, I consecrate and set myself apart as a priestly sacrifice. I make myself holy for their sake, not for the world's. In the context of the Old Testament, there was a bronze altar for sacrifice and a golden altar for incense. However, the efficacy of the golden altar for incense was no greater than that of the bronze altar for sacrifice. Likewise, Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for all those for whom he intercedes. The point is clear. I won't address all possible objections, but I will respond to some of the main ones often raised by those who oppose this truth. Therefore, Saint Paul's intention is not to say that he loved me with the same love with which he loved all of humanity. The apostle is referring to a more specific love, 'He loved me so much that he gave himself for me,' indicating a more distinct love than the one he has for all of mankind. This point upholds God's honour and brings comfort to humanity. God deserves more praise and thanks from his elect and those redeemed through this unique love. The more pronounced this love is, the more they recognise their obligation to God and Christ. These individuals are the chosen ones, the recipients for whom the Scriptures exist, for whom the world endures, and for whom Christ came (Psalm 116:1). They love God and devote themselves to Him, and the more they do this, the more God singles them out to take delight in them. Uniqueness amplifies and elevates favours to greater heights. The fewer individuals who are selected from the world, the more their hearts are aflame with love for God. As the psalmist

declares, 'He hath not dealt so with any nation' (Psalm 147:20). When will a person be most grateful to God and give Him glory? It's when they can say, 'You haven't treated the rest of the world the same way. What sets me apart from them? Only your special love for me.' Consequently, their hearts are drawn closer to Christ out of love. Nevertheless, there is an objection to this line of thinking:

Objection: Why does Christ, through the ministry, persuade all in the church to believe in Christ and the forgiveness of sins if Christ did not die for everyone?

Answer: The reason Christ calls upon everyone in the church is to select His own. The minister addresses both the elect and those who are not, because God does not want to withhold blessings from His children, even though they are intermingled with others who don't share in these blessings. This is akin to rainfall, which falls on both the rocky seashore and the barren heath, just as it falls on fertile ground. However, does it bring any benefit to the rocks? No, it's because, alongside the rocks, it falls upon fertile land, which reaps the benefits. Similarly, God's ordinances shower upon all, but their benefits are exclusively for His chosen ones, not the reprobates. The sun shines upon all, but who finds comfort in its light? Only those who have the sight to see and utilise it, not the blind. However, for those who do not believe, there is another benefit. They gain from Christ's death the offer of mercy and some spiritual gifts. God extends offers and kindles good intentions in them, but they resist them. There are varying degrees and methods of faith. They do not fully utilise the means they should, nor do they attain all the degrees of faith. Thus, they are without excuse, for God bestows more grace, not only the means, but a greater measure of grace than they are willing to accept. Therefore, their rebellion is the cause of their damnation. They are said to resist the Holy Spirit, as illustrated in

the example of reprobates in the church, quenching the Spirit (Acts 7:51), indicating that the Holy Spirit is ready to work more in them than they are willing to acknowledge. This is borne out by experience. Many profane individuals refuse to listen at all due to their wickedness and corrupt upbringing. Others attend, albeit with secondary, worldly motives. Yet, perhaps the Holy Spirit stirs their consciences during the sermon, awakening them. But what does their rebellious heart say? 'Should I abandon my pleasurable and profitable ways?' Consequently, they resist the Holy Spirit's work through the ministry, rebelling against the Spirit's efforts to work effectively in them, even though their hearts acknowledge the Holy Spirit's readiness to impact them. Therefore, they are condemned. The prophet's words resonate, 'You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against me, against your helper' (Hosea 13:9). Their consciences confirm this truth. Therefore, the arguments they raise about Christ's intention and God's election are of little consequence. Each individual should examine their own heart. Does your heart not reveal that you are rebellious, living a life of sinful wickedness while neglecting sacred duties? You carry the sentence of your own damnation in your chest. I appeal to the worst individuals who live in defiance of conscience. The root of your damnation lies in this rebellion. Various stages and degrees lead to saving faith. You resist the initial movements and promptings of the Spirit. If these work upon your heart, leading you away from sin, your prideful heart begins to resist and refuses to yield. The true obedience that submits to Christ and allows itself to be guided and persuaded in all matters as far as human frailty allows, without engaging in evil conduct, is what brings genuine comfort. By failing to do this, they have no excuse.

Objection: If this were not the case, people could object on another day, 'Christ did not die for me, so why should I be damned for not

believing?'

Answer: In response, their consciences will tell them that they did not use all means to believe, nor did they reach all degrees of faith. For God's Spirit works in a certain way among wicked individuals, as seen in the example of the three types of soil. In each case, the word is effective to varying degrees. However, when it comes to the final outcome, they did not hate their sins, they remained fixated on worldly matters, or the plough had not deeply furrowed their hearts, humbling them, instilling an appreciation for mercy and Christ above all else, and causing them to detest sin. This justifies their condemnation. Regardless of how Christ is offered and the command to believe, their hearts remind them that they did not do everything they could. They need to understand that God's hidden purpose in choosing some, redeeming some, and leaving others is concealed from the world, and it doesn't serve as the standard for our obedience. Instead, we must look to God's revealed will and commands. Thus, individuals must focus on what God commands. If their conscience tells them that they did not yield the obedience they should and could have, but instead resisted the Spirit's promptings, then their damnation is just. They are commanded to believe. But to believe in the remission of sins is a subordinate duty, preceding the act of faith. It follows a certain order of obedience. They are commanded to believe that they will benefit from Christ through the obedience of faith to Christ. The act of faith and its outcome are distinct. Everyone is obligated to believe in Christ and entrust themselves to Him for salvation, but they are not obliged to believe in the outcome unless they have already engaged in the act of faith.

Objection: But someone might object that we're not obligated to have the initial act of faith in order to believe. If we were, it would be futile, as we would be believing a lie.

Answer: I disagree. The gospel declares that whoever believes in Christ will reap the fruits of His death and attain eternal life. So, when someone believes and places their trust in Christ, they are performing the necessary act and will experience the corresponding outcome. Let's put an end to fruitless debates. Is the fruit of Christ's death for me? Did He die for me? Focus on the act of faith. If you possess the grace to cast yourself upon Christ and agree when He invites you, that's what matters. Engage in the act of faith and cease questioning matters that are already settled. Don't deliberate on whether God has chosen you or if Christ died for you. These are part of God's hidden will. What matters is the commandment to believe in Christ. This is binding. Therefore, respond to Christ when He calls and invites you to place your trust in Him. By doing so, you will discover the comforting effects of His death.

A Caution: Let no one excuse themselves by arguing against Christ for not offering Himself for everyone. No one is condemned solely for not yielding obedience in the act of faith and for not doing everything they could but refused to do. It's their rebellion that leads to their downfall. Consider a malefactor sentenced to death who is given a book to read but refuses. His refusal to read is as much a reason for his execution as his crimes. Rejecting pardon is equivalent to refusing to read. Both factors contribute to his death because he didn't read and because he's a criminal. Similarly, in this scenario, if someone doesn't yield the act of faith, their other sins may damn them. Yet, if they were to believe and accept the offered mercy, their other sins would not lead to damnation. If people could or would believe, other sins wouldn't harm them. However, because they don't, their other sins will be held against them, along with their rebellion—refusing to believe and accept God's offer of mercy. They decline mercy because it comes with conditions of obedience. This aligns with Christ's rebuke of the Jews in John 3:19, 'This is the

verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.' This is indeed the condemning factor, the main cause of condemnation. They desire heaven if it comes with their lusts, but they refuse the act of faith that accepts Christ on His terms—to be governed by Him, for better or worse. Their rejection of this condemns them. They choose what to extract from Christ.

When Christ sent the seventy disciples to preach and heal the sick, although they would be rejected by many (Luke 10:11), our Saviour instructed them to wipe the dust off their feet and testify that the kingdom of heaven had come near. So, it's in vain that wicked individuals and our adversaries dispute God's justice in this matter. Everyone's conscience will ultimately accuse themselves and vindicate God. They rejected wisdom's counsel, closed their eyes to all teachings, and refused to be corrected. I thought it best to include this to address the objections of wicked, carnal, and profane individuals.

2. The second point is that true faith corresponds to Christ's specific love and gift by applying it to oneself. True faith is an applying faith. It involves a spirit of application. The Scriptures present God offering Christ, and Christ presenting Himself through the ministry to all who believe. Consequently, faith makes Christ one's own. It appropriates Christ on a personal level. Christ becomes a garment that faith puts on, a foundation upon which faith builds, a root into which faith plants. Christ becomes our husband, and faith consents—this consent forms the union. Hence, there is a specific truth that establishes the connection between Christ and us: 'He loved me and gave himself for me.' Faith's nature transforms the general into the particular, refining and restricting the general concept. Christ's

love is universally extended. Before it benefits me, it requires a specific, restraining faith that makes it my own. The papists oppose this particular faith, as it contradicts their doctrines and authorities, except for a few of the more reasonable among them who lean towards our position. They argue that we should possess a universal, catholic faith, believing in the forgiveness of sins for the church, but not 'for me.' Their opposition stems from the fact that they know this specific faith serves as the foundation of assurance, which they oppose. This assurance is also at odds with their false practices, fabrications, and schemes to achieve assurance.

We must understand clearly that a particular faith is demanded of us. A Christian ought to say, 'Christ loved me.' This doesn't require a special revelation. God's Spirit ordinarily testifies to this for all who belong to Him, with a few exceptions. For example, in Romans 8:38, the apostle broadens the comfort to include all: 'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Speaking of a special revelation is pointless unless we consider it in the context of being hidden from the world. Hence, every Christian receives a special revelation from the Spirit. The Spirit, who comprehends the 'hidden things' of God and knows His heart, bears witness to the individual's status as a child of God. Therefore, every true Christian possesses a special revelation. This doesn't differentiate one Christian from another. Every genuine Christian has access to this revelation, thanks to the Spirit of revelation, as the apostle prays in Ephesians 1:17. 'If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ' (Romans 8:9). Thus, we have established that God loves certain individuals with a unique and special love. Additionally,

we've discussed that they possess a particular faith to make this love their own.

3. The third point is that assurance arises from this specific faith, allowing a Christian to be confident in Christ's love. However, we must address and clarify various questions and scenarios to properly discuss this topic. Otherwise, our discourse won't align with the experiences of God's people or the truth itself. Firstly, we need to understand that there are two aspects of faith within the believing soul:
4. An act of faith involving trust and reliance, and
5. An act of assurance based on that act of reliance.

Believing and relying on Christ for the forgiveness of sins is one thing; experiencing assurance and the reality of pardon is another. The former centres primarily on the Word, while the latter builds on both experience and the Word. We should strive for both: confidence and consent in the will to trust Christ for salvation, and after believing, the assurance should be sensed and felt. However, these two aspects are occasionally separate, and sometimes the first occurs without the second. The first brings us into the state of grace. A person can be in a state of grace by consenting to Christ, relying on Him for mercy, and still lack assurance of pardon and reconciliation in the next step.

This frequently happens, especially during the process of spiritual rebirth. In those moments when a small measure of grace contends with corruption, the Spirit of God exercises His role in the act of yielding the obedience of faith—throwing oneself onto Christ's arm and resting in His mercy. Feeling doesn't always play a crucial role

initially; the focus is on the act itself. Assurance comes afterward as a reward, according to God's wisdom.

Conversely, it often occurs during times of temptation that the first act of trust lacks the accompanying feeling of assurance. This requires more experience. In moments of temptation, a Christian might experience the dominance of corruption and God's wrath, without a glimpse of the opposite—yet, they engage in the first act of trust with a specific faith. They cast themselves on Christ's mercy and His redemptive work for comfort.

Question: However, an inquiry arises. Why is it that, even when the first act of faith involves trusting in Christ's mercy through the promises, the sense of pardon and reconciliation, as well as full conviction, is often absent? Why is this frequently postponed?

Answer: There are several reasons for this. Let me mention a few:

1. First, some individuals' physical ailments influence their spiritual state. I'm referring to a melancholic temperament, which tends towards distrust, fear, and temptation. Just as bold individuals' spirits are prone to presumption—fitting the devil's tactics—melancholic temperaments inclined to fear and distrust provide an opportunity for the devil to exploit their disposition. Due to their constitution, they are excessively cautious in performing their duties according to God's revealed will. They rely on God's mercy and renounce themselves. These humble souls, through the combination of their distrust and Satan's manipulation of their disposition, remain in darkness.
2. Furthermore, a lack of proper conviction often stems from a distorted judgment. This occurs when individuals believe they lack faith because their faith isn't as extensive as they think it

should be. Their understanding of the grace covenant isn't accurate either—it requires authenticity, not quantity, for perfection. Christ won't extinguish a smouldering wick. He doesn't disregard small beginnings; He nurtures them. He said to the church in Philadelphia, 'I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word' (Revelation 3:8). Yet, due to their spiritual greed, they mistakenly believe they possess no faith because their faith isn't as substantial as they desire or as robust Christians have. They misunderstand the grace covenant, where authenticity equals perfection. Sincerity is our perfection, evidenced by resistance against the contrary and a desire for growth through the use of all means. Truth lies where this striving against the contrary exists. Even the smallest amount implies this opposition and a desire for growth through the means.

3. Some people might lack this assurance and persuasion of the forgiveness of their sins because they're preoccupied with other concerns. They don't place the value on this matter that they should. Yet, this particular gift is distinct from what most assume. God doesn't readily bestow this sweet glimpse of heaven on earth—the experience of His love in Christ—unless it's sought ardently and held in high esteem. Subsequently, gratitude should follow.
4. Neglecting to engage with those who surpass them spiritually might lead to their deficiency in assurance. Associating with lifeless and spiritually dark companions drags them down, inducing a similar disposition. Many other reasons could be cited for the separation of these acts. Those who, in the spirit of obedience, cast themselves upon Christ, engaging in the first act

of trust, might lack assurance of pardon and forgiveness of sins. This discussion also addresses another question.

Question: Why do some Christians experience more comfort than others, even if they have access to the same means of grace?

Answer: There are several explanations. Firstly, God stirs up a greater appreciation for it in some. They possess a higher sense of spiritual need.

Secondly, the age of Christians varies. Some have more extensive experience in God's ways than others.

Thirdly, temperaments differ. Some have naturally cheerful dispositions, which offer them a clearer insight and, to an extent, influence their outward disposition.

Fourthly, worldly attitudes vary. Some, due to a lack of Christian prudence, overly immerse themselves in worldly pursuits, leaving little time to gather assurance of salvation. Despite being conscientious in general, they lag behind in heavenly-mindedness and concern for their spiritual state. As a result, their assurance and sense of God's love also differ.

Fifthly, God assigns different roles to individuals. Those with a lot to accomplish might be granted greater assurance and a sense of forgiveness to aid their extensive responsibilities. On the other hand, God might withhold this measure of assurance from those with a different calling. This distinction arises from the Spirit's distinct gifts—imparting the spirit of faith to trust Christ and the spirit of assurance. While the Spirit accomplishes both (as seen in 2 Corinthians 2:14 and following), there might be times when the

Spirit emphasizes one over the other due to God's diverse plans for Christians.

Question: Another query that might arise concerns why individuals with greater talents often lack assurance and sometimes pass away without it, while weaker Christians with fewer gifts might possess it. Frequently, Christians of humble status, possessing limited knowledge and talents, find profound comfort as they approach the end of their lives. Meanwhile, individuals with more gifts often pass away in relative obscurity. What's the reason behind this phenomenon?

Answer: Several reasons can be offered. Christians tend to overvalue gifts, and those who possess them are inclined to pride themselves on these abilities. They often assume that grace and gifts are inseparable, but this is not always the case. Individuals with remarkable gifts might lack grace entirely. Their gifts might be meant for the benefit of others rather than themselves, leading them to live barren and prideful lives. They lack the experiential knowledge of what they eloquently discuss, which ultimately detracts from their spiritual progress. God values grace, humility, faith, and contrition more than all other gifts. This is why individuals with exceptional gifts and worldly acclaim might lack assurance.

Question: But, what if these gifted Christians are genuinely good but still struggle with pride and an inflated view of their gifts? After all, the apostle says, 'Knowledge puffs up' (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Answer: Additionally, excessive knowledge often prompts a search for irrelevant matters, overlooking areas that deserve more attention due to their lack of knowledge and experience in these vital areas.

Furthermore, individuals with greater gifts might mistakenly seek comfort more in sanctification and the covenant of works than in faith. A poor Christian might rightfully seek comfort in faith and justification, casting themselves upon Christ when they need solace. However, someone else might believe they'll find comfort primarily in graces and gifts rather than casting themselves upon Christ through justification. This individual might be justly denied that comfort. Honouring God, regardless of our graces, involves casting ourselves upon Christ, finding our final rest in His mercy. While sanctification and exceptional talents benefit others, placing excessive trust in them can lead to a lack of comfort. Properly positioning these elements is essential—using them as indicators and proofs of our comfort, while also correctly relying on our free justification and its fruits as the foundation of our peace. This was what led Saint Paul to count all things 'as rubbish' in comparison to the righteousness of Christ (Philippians 3:8).

Lastly, God sometimes does this to demonstrate His freedom. He bestows greater assurance on those He pleases, showcasing His role as a benevolent giver. Our salvation and the sensation of it align with His good pleasure. Thus, some individuals receive more, and others receive less. God occasionally reveals more comfort and sensation to weaker Christians than to others, just as parents lavish the most attention on their sickest and weakest children. God knows that strong Christians have other resources besides feelings to sustain them; they can rely on past experiences and the Word's promises strongly. Therefore, He allows them to rely on stronger foundations than immediate emotions. Weaker individuals, however, are blessed with the sweet sensation of God's love, akin to how parents indulge and pamper their most delicate children. Nevertheless, we should leave these matters to God, who provides us with the measure and timing He deems fit. Some He chooses to keep from experiencing

assurance for an extended period, humbling them for being too careless about sin. Likewise, some might be kept from this assurance for their entire lives due to their previous overconfidence in petty sins. Nevertheless, during this time, they are supported by sufficient evidence of a blessed state. Despite their frailties, they can remain devout Christians even after a fall, though perhaps they will never again attain the sensation and awareness they once enjoyed. Christ on the cross serves as an example: despite not experiencing the sensation, He still had strong faith. He demonstrated this by saying, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' In this manner, assurance can be acquired.

Question: Now we address a more crucial query: How can we determine whether we've carried out the initial act of yielding obedient faith? This initial act is of utmost significance. Consider a Christian who might pass away in the grip of fever or during childbirth without experiencing strong assurance. Many reach heaven without ever having such certainty.

Answer: Firstly, a person can recognise that they've exercised the act of faith in trust if their soul, in the right state, reflects upon itself. Just as one knows they understand something when they comprehend it, the soul can discern its belief through a reflective act. This is particularly true when the soul is in a balanced condition. When the soul is not troubled, the conscience naturally bears witness to its own act. Furthermore, God's Spirit, in conjunction with the conscience, often reveals it (Romans 8:16).

Secondly, the most prudent approach is to examine the fruit. You can ascertain if you have enacted the act of faith through its outcomes. To illustrate this, I'll mention one example now, as I will elaborate on it in the next point. This act's fruit becomes most evident during the

most intense temptation. If a person possesses a spirit of prayer, enabling them to confidently approach God in times of extremity, it is a certain sign of faith. Faith instigates prayer, while prayer is the life and blaze of faith. Where prayer thrives, faith invariably resides. Where there's boldness in seeking God's presence, the Spirit is undoubtedly present. This confirms our status as adopted children, even if we lack a distinct witness to our sonship. Even if we do not have a clear witness that we're God's children, if we still possess the freedom and boldness to approach God in dire circumstances, it signifies the presence of the spirit of faith. David's experience in Psalm 31:22 demonstrates this: 'For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication when I cried unto thee.' Although David believed he was cut off, he still cried out to God during his times of temptation. Despite his flesh yielding to doubts of abandonment and his status as God's child, a stronger principle within him prompted him to pray, 'nevertheless I cried unto thee.' Similarly, Job proclaimed, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him' (Job 13:15). Although Job lacked assurance and a sense of God's presence, his declaration reveals the act of his faith: 'Though he slay me, I will still trust in him.' When, during trials, we can entrust ourselves to God and boldly approach His throne of grace without succumbing to despair, it's a sign that we're in a state of grace and have carried out the act of faith. Even if we don't experience that delightful sensation, God's mercy will ultimately embrace us. Thus, after enacting the obedience of faith, we'll eventually find assurance.

Question: But when does this assurance specifically manifest?

Answer: Firstly, it becomes especially apparent when a person has enacted the act of faith, cast themselves upon God, and lived by faith for a considerable period. Then, God will confirm this belief with the

spirit of adoption. This confirmation often occurs when we exercise faith against the temptation of doubt, resulting in the sealing of the Spirit.

Secondly, when we've persevered against a particular sin for a prolonged period, God rewards our endurance by crowning our faith and obedience with a sweet sense of His love. After striving for a long time, Job, for instance, finally concluded, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' God then revealed His mercy to him. Similarly, the woman from Canaan, after wrestling with Christ, received a gracious response. Thus, when we conquer our vices and engage in sacred duties with a measure of grace, our diligent efforts and devotion lead to a comforting revelation from the Spirit. In such moments, we taste more than usual of the life to come, and God crowns our perseverance with a sweet awareness of His love.

Additionally, God grants greater evidence of His love and more profound spiritual encounters when He assigns us significant tasks. This encouragement is intended to accompany those He chooses to honour and employ. The disciples, who witnessed Christ's glory on the mountain, later saw Him humbled. Before entrusting individuals with crucial responsibilities, God often offers them enhanced evidence and manifestations of His love, along with greater spiritual ecstasy.

Moreover, sometimes during times of suffering, God rewards our faithfulness with moments of joy. Like Paul, who sang in the dungeon at midnight, our faithfulness might lead us to experience great delight, even amid hardship. This encourages us to persevere, assuring us that our comfort will ultimately surpass our distress. Just as Paul had the spirit of glory that elevated him above his suffering,

we can also anticipate moments when comfort accompanies the act of faith.

This concludes the fourth and final point, which is, in fact, the most pivotal of all. This particular faith, coupled with assurance of Christ's individual love, sustains us throughout our life of faith until our final breath. 'I live,' as Paul declared, 'this life of faith in the Son of God.' But what motivates him to do so? The answer lies in his profound reasons to love and depend on Christ: 'He hath loved me and given himself for me.' Because he feels so deeply comforted in his soul, Paul confidently places his entire reliance on Christ—for life, death, and eternity. Indeed, when special, specific faith is joined with a measure of assurance, it forms the bedrock for a life lived by faith. No one can lead a holy life through faith without first understanding that God loves them and that Christ loves them. Holy deeds emanate from love and are directed by love towards the right goal, which only love compels us to pursue. How can a spirit seek God's glory if it does not first love Him? Without knowing whether Christ loves them or not, can a soul genuinely aim for Christ's glory as it should?

Question: I implore you, if we talk about performing actions or enduring sufferings, displaying gratitude or exhibiting cheerfulness, especially in the face of death, where do all these originate?

Answer: Do they not arise from a taste of God's love? When do we experience love, if not when numerous sins are forgiven? And when are we willing to endure anything for the sake of Christ, if not when we're aware of the great sufferings He endured for us? We consider it an honour to endure hardships for Christ, knowing that He has loved us and given Himself for us.

Question: Furthermore, concerning gratitude, how can a person be thankful for something they lack knowledge of? What causes a

person to be grateful for the significant work of redemption in Christ, if not a specific faith?

Answer: This is what prompted St. Paul and the other apostles to frequently exclaim, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Paul bursts into thanksgiving for having the Spirit, which convinces them of God and Christ's individual love. Similarly, when it comes to expressing gratitude for ordinary blessings, how can one thank God for any regular blessing without being assured that it stems from God's love in Christ? When one is persuaded of this, they can offer thanks both for major and minor favours.

Objection: Others might argue, "How is all this relevant to me? I am destined for slaughter. It is better for me to enjoy my pleasures while I still can, thinking of myself as a prisoner with limited freedom." Such thoughts dampen our gratitude.

Answer: It's the believing soul that expresses gratitude for blessings and approaches duties with cheerfulness. How do Christians become a willing people, eager for good deeds, as mentioned in Titus 2:11? The apostle positions zeal between faith and works, looking in both directions, stating, 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.' This grace is manifested through Christ's first coming and His sacrificial death. It teaches us to renounce ungodliness and worldly lusts. Faith looks back in this context. Then, anticipating Christ's glorious return, the apostle adds, 'Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.'

Question: From where does the zeal for good works arise, if not from contemplating the grace that brings salvation and redemption from

our sins, along with the anticipated glorious return of Christ?

Answer: When faith looks in both directions, as in Hebrews 9:14, it becomes ignited and spurs us to zeal. When our hearts are cleansed through Christ's blood, resulting in the forgiveness of sins, we then serve the living God and approach good works willingly and cheerfully, our hearts expanding with assurance.

Question: Moreover, what causes a person to feel shame for their sinful life? What triggers those emotions of repentance, sorrow, and shame, as mentioned in Ezekiel 36:31-32?

Answer: After God pardons their sins and bestows numerous favours, they become ashamed of having served Him in the wrong ways and grieve over their departure from Him. Christians then experience the two crucial emotions of shame and grief, which are integral to genuine repentance. Why? 'Christ has loved me and given himself for me.' It's as if someone were to say, "Has He truly done this? Were my sins the cause of His death? Did His love drive Him? I am ashamed to have offended such a gracious and kind Saviour. I weep over Christ. It was my sins that led to His torment and death." This specific faith fills the soul with divine virtues, causing it to follow Christ and perceive that all His actions were for us. We see that Christ was born for us, as in Isaiah 9:6: 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.' We trace Christ's life and understand that everything He did was for us. His death—'He died for me'; His agony in the garden resulted from my sins. When He was pierced through the side, when He cried out on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'—my sins were active forces there. He rose again for me, and He is now in heaven for me, carrying me within His embrace. Reflecting on this reality draws the soul back to Christ in repentance for sins and in every holy duty. This is why

those Christians who have been snatched from the jaws of the fire, often through a radical conversion, tend to be the most fruitful and affectionate believers. People like St. Paul and others—since they recognize that Christ has forgiven them a substantial debt, as though a thousand talents—realize the depth of their indebtedness to God. Consequently, they're compelled to offer themselves as sacrifices to Jesus Christ, who has absolved them of such an immense debt.

When they contemplate His remarkable love towards people like them, it ignites a reciprocal affection within them. As illustrated in the Gospel, the woman who had numerous sins forgiven felt immense love in return. Likewise, the prodigal young spendthrift, for whom the fatted calf was prepared, without a doubt couldn't contain his expressions of gratitude. On occasions, God supplies prodigals with rich blessings and great measures of comfort, and these individuals, above all, manifest the most intense love. They are earnest in their efforts, striving to please Him. As Paul affirms, 'The love of Christ constrains me, a holy urgency propels me, despite being a persecutor and blasphemer,' 2 Corinthians 5:14. Similarly, the awareness of Christ's love in the forgiveness of sins compels one towards a holy urgency in fulfilling all duties. So, when base motives infiltrate a person's thoughts—seeking personal ease, honour, or pleasure—the Christian is not to focus on these. Instead, the knowledge of Christ's particular love for them directs them in the opposite direction. Christ died for me. Should I not then live for Christ? Should I not dedicate my life to the One who sacrificed Himself for me? Should I not seek to honour the One who humbled Himself for me? This thought quells any selfish objectives; the contemplation of Christ's specific love has this effect.

Moreover, it spurs us to expend ourselves for Christ and His church, at any cost, even to the point of offering our Isaacs—our most

cherished possessions. He loved me and gave Himself for me. Is there anything that I can give that would be enough? Since He gave Himself for me, I will similarly offer myself for Him. This disposition can make an individual even lavish with their own blood, all for the sake of Christ. When discontentment with one's circumstances arises, along with doubts about God's providence in specific matters, the understanding of Christ's love for us proves to be a remedy. Christ has loved me and given Himself for me. Will He not provide me with all that I require, having already given Himself? This insight encourages trust in God's providence and extinguishes any selfish intentions. It urges me to seek Him for all graces and blessings. Since He has already given Himself, He will certainly grant me His Spirit and grace. I already possess the field; therefore, I will acquire the pearl. He has given Himself to me, and consequently, He will provide me with all that He possesses—His Spirit, His grace, and His privileges; everything will be mine.

This principle is used as a compelling argument in all of Paul's epistles—for instance, 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship,' Romans 12:1. This argument, grounded in election and the mercies of God, moves believers towards spiritual duties based on God's love in Christ. Therefore, dear friends, you are beloved and treasured; the love Christ holds for you was indeed costly. It serves as a powerful motivation. Saint Peter also presents a potent argument on this matter: 'For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect,' 1 Peter 1:18. These are but a few glimpses of the compelling reasons to lead a holy life, all stemming from a specific assurance—Christ loved me and gave

Himself for me. By the way, this serves as a robust counter-argument against the papists, who claim that we cannot possess personal assurance. For an argument that motivates us towards spiritual duties must be known by us. We don't convince others to perform a duty using arguments they are ignorant of. In this case, Paul addresses Christians, assuming they already know that they have been chosen by God and dearly loved in Christ. An argument that motivates duty must be known better than the duty itself, since it's such an argument that prompts us to all kinds of duties. Therefore, we can indeed have assurance. However, a question might arise.

Question: Can't a holy life and good actions sometimes stem from a soul that isn't fully assured? In that case, how should we view the good works that arise from a Christian without strong assurance? If all pleasing obedience in actions and endurance originates from faith and assurance, what should we make of actions that don't arise from these? If you were to ask many devout Christians whether they're assured that Christ gave Himself for them, they might falter. A humble and contrite Christian tends to speak more harshly of themselves than warranted, even though they engage diligently in good deeds. What should be made of such actions then, when they lack the assurance of Christ's love for them?

Answer: I reply, no holy life can stem from anything other than faith—the initial act of it. It must be present. However, sometimes we're unaware of our faith due to a hindrance in the reflective process. We may not realize we're believing when we are. Holy duties can proceed from a person even when they're uncertain about their grace and standing. During such times, they should introspect and consider why they engage in these duties. Is it out of love for God? Indeed. Can they tolerate God being spoken of negatively? No. Do they permit themselves to indulge in known sin? No. In such instances,

even though they may not dare to claim assurance, their actions emanate from a desire to honour and glorify God. Often, Christians are unaware of their condition in such circumstances. They perform actions out of a secret conviction of God's love, even if they aren't conscious of it. They possess that which they believe they lack, and they act based on that which they believe they're not acting upon. They act out of love for God, even when they believe they don't, because they think they lack what they truly desire. They act from grace even when they think they possess none. Similar to a child who doesn't know it's alive but is observed by others, the believer doesn't recognize they're living a life of grace, though others do, given the spiritual hunger they exhibit and their attendance to spiritual means. The believer may not see it themselves due to factors like spiritual covetousness, temptation, or periods of desertion they're undergoing. Nevertheless, actions arising from such periods are genuinely gracious actions, emerging from a soul that possesses faith, even though they may lack assurance of their condition due to temporary suspension through ignorance or other causes. However, these actions do indeed involve faith in the initial act of obedience and a measure of assurance, especially when they embody actions of spiritual vitality, even though they lack the fullness they covet to have.

The most effective approach is to strive for both—assurance and the actual act of faith. While those who possess the act alone may indeed exhibit good obedience, it won't be as extensive, wholehearted, or joyful as it could be. Our aspiration should encompass both: praying that God grants us a spirit of faith and reveals that our sins are forgiven, ensuring that we are accepted into eternal life. By securing strong assurance, we can engage more fervently in the Lord's work. Although much good can still be accomplished without assurance, it pales in comparison to the abundance achieved with full assurance.

When assurance is present, the soul is driven with fervour to obey God; at that point, both actions and endurance become paramount.

Application 1. Now, turning to the practical implications of this, since the belief in Christ's special love for us serves as the foundation of all holy living, it's crucial to clarify that assurance doesn't breed presumption or carelessness. These harmful attitudes don't stem from particular faith; in fact, the opposite is true. No one can lead a holy life without a specific faith. Anyone who believes in the forgiveness of their sins will naturally live a sanctified life, avoiding former bondage. If an individual continues in their former ways, showing no inclination towards reform, it indicates they aren't the recipient for whom Christ gave Himself—unless they repent. As seen among the Israelites, those who desired to return to Egypt perished in the wilderness; similarly, those in Babylonian captivity who refused to leave when called also perished. It's regrettable that those who are enamoured with enslavement should ever be set free. Those who choose to serve and remain as slaves are perhaps better off having their ears pierced, signifying a lifetime of servitude. Some persist in their sins while believing that Christ died for them. However, those whom Christ specifically loves are endowed with the grace necessary to live a holy life and to break free from the chains of former corruptions. Those who remain bound to their former ways and desires haven't been liberated from hell and damnation, unless God grants repentance. The two must go hand in hand. Thus, this can also serve as a criterion for assessing and discerning whether we genuinely believe that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us—our commitment to living for Him and returning ourselves to Him through a sanctified life. Where one exists, the other does too. This criterion can challenge and convict many individuals, even on the Day of Judgment, despite their boasts of God's mercy and Christ's sacrifice. Their hearts will bear witness against them, as they realise,

"I never truly sought the fruit of Christ's death—the governing influence of His Spirit. I refused His kingship over me. Though warned by ministers, I prioritised base lusts and desires above Christ. I rejected reform and instead clung to a baseless hope of mercy. As a result, I gained nothing from Him."

Application 2. To move on, if specific faith and assurance underpin a holy life, we must pursue them earnestly. Those already in a state of grace should approach this fire to ignite their spirits. If we find ourselves lacking enthusiasm for holy duties, we should draw near to this fire. Are we spiritually lifeless? Do we lack the vigour we should possess? In such cases, meditate on the infinite love of God in giving His Son for you and the sweet love of Christ in offering Himself for you. Dwell upon the depth of this love. Don't let your heart stray from reflecting on Christ's gracious love, displayed through His humble descent—becoming man and lowering Himself in ways barely imaginable—all driven by love. Should this not kindle love within us? The more lowly Christ became for our sake, the more precious He should be to us. Once you have warmed your chilled heart with thoughts of His special love towards you, your zeal for holy duties will surge. Just as warm iron is receptive to any impression, your initially cold and inflexible heart, when warmed and ignited by the love of Christ, becomes receptive to any influence, and you'll be prepared to endure and accomplish anything.

If you find yourself hesitant to suffer for Christ, remind yourself that Christ gave Himself; or if you feel ungrateful and unfruitful, recall the purpose behind Christ's self-sacrifice. He gave Himself so that you would serve Him in holiness and righteousness without fear throughout your life, liberated from dread of death and damnation, serving Him with the joy of adoption and love. In all instances of spiritual inertia, turn to this truth and come to Jesus Christ.

Experience teaches us that when we're most suited for suffering, for fulfilling any duty, or for resisting the temptation of discontent or murmuring, we're actually assured of Christ's love, able to read our own evidence that we are God's children and Christ's followers. It's during these times that we're equipped for anything. Therefore, let's heed the exhortation of the apostle Peter, to 'make your calling and election sure,' 2 Peter 1:10. This task requires utmost diligence. The reason we lack assurance to a greater extent is that we don't exert our full efforts to attain it. It demands our most intense endeavour due to its profound significance, resulting in maximum glory to God and maximum comfort for us, enabling us to live the most fruitful lives.

Objection: But you might ask, what about those who cannot specifically declare that Christ loved them and gave Himself for them? What should they do if they lack this particular assurance and faith? How can they approach Christ if they're willing to do so?

Answer: To those who lack it, I say that they should strive by every possible means to attain it.

Objection: But what basis do I, a wretched and unworthy sinner, have to approach Christ and believe that He loved me and gave Himself for me?

Solution 1: First, even the most wretched among us have the gospel extended to them. Additionally, reflect on the fact that Christ assumed your nature. Numerous reasons arise from this to encourage you to cultivate specific faith, drawing you to come and experience this state, for the purpose of glorifying God and finding comfort.

Solution 2: Consider that Christ took on human nature, not the nature of angels. Shouldn't you then think that He loves humanity,

including you, if you choose to approach Him and place your trust in Him? He is Jesus, the Saviour; Christ, anointed by God; and Immanuel, bridging the gap between God and humanity.

Solution 3: Furthermore, you acknowledge your sinfulness. However, consider this—how do your sins compare to His righteousness? His righteousness surpasses them all. It is the righteousness of God-man, of a mediator who is both God and thus far superior to your sins. Given the excellence of His person, have faith that the blood of Christ is entirely capable of cleansing you.

Solution 4: As an additional foundation for specific faith, remember that the invitation is extended to all, even the unworthy: 'Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely,' Revelation 22:17. Yes, even those who feel far from God are invited: 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden,' Matthew 11:28. If you find sin to be a burden, Christ is inviting you and sending His ministers to plead with you to reconcile. Even those who feel distant are urged to lay down their weapons and enter.

Solution 5: If this still doesn't resonate, understand that Christ charges and commands you to believe. If you refuse to believe, you compound your sins. His command is for you to believe, and to disregard it is to rebel against Him. Indeed, He deems it a more grievous sin than that of Sodom and Gomorrah—a sin of defiance not to respond to the gospel's proclamation. Therefore, don't use the excuse of your great or numerous sins, but consider His offer, His call, and His command, open to all, regardless of person, sin, or time. If you don't come and entrust yourself to Christ, submitting to His authority from now on, you have no legitimate excuse. It's not the magnitude of your sins that prevents you; rather, it's your willingness to remain in your sins. The greater your sins, the more

glorious His act of forgiveness becomes: 'Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,' Romans 5:20. Isn't it an honour for a physician or surgeon to cure significant illnesses and severe wounds? A mighty God and Saviour delights in performing great acts: 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' If Paul received mercy despite his sins, who should despair when those like him receive mercy? He had sinned against God through blasphemy and against fellow humans through oppression and persecution. If such individuals can obtain mercy, then who should lose hope? Therefore, come without hesitation and consider how much greater glory Christ will attain through your decision. Don't deceive yourself by believing that your sins and unworthiness are so great that God cannot show mercy to someone as unworthy as you, or at the very least, will not. No, do not fall into that trap. Examine your own deceitful heart, and you'll realise that you're infatuated with your sins and unwilling to part from them. Your conscience will bring this accusation against you on the Day of Judgment—that you valued your sins more than God's mercies in Christ and willingly persisted in disbelief. In truth, this is the root cause of your reluctance, not the extent of your sins. So, you see, there's sufficient reason for any sinner to come forward and endeavour to attain this specific assurance.

Objection: But consider the scenario where I'm not someone Christ redeemed, and God elected.

Solution: Enough of debates; start obeying. Dismiss this question by believing and obeying. Come and humble yourself before Christ, and then you'll realise that you are one for whom Christ died. He offers Himself to all who believe in Him. Do your duty; let your heart rest upon Christ and be governed by Him. Through this, you'll resolve the uncertainty of being among God's elect. The devil uses this delusion to keep many in darkness.

Objection: If only I knew I was elected or that Christ died for me, then I could believe.

'Secret things belong to God, revealed things to us,' Moses says. When you're invited, entreated, and commanded to be reconciled, your duty is to respond with belief and obedience. In doing so, you'll experience the result of Christ's redemption, and you'll know that He died for you. This advice is for those who lack this specific assurance.

So, to conclude, for those claiming to possess a specific faith and assurance of salvation, the following signs will indicate it.

1. You'll be diligent in living by faith in the Son of God daily, in all situations and circumstances. When this faith and assurance are genuine, you'll be consistently conscientious about your duty. This is what sets it apart from false notions. If there's no sense of duty, there's no assurance of specific faith. This specific assurance originates from the general, from God's Word. Scripture says Christ gave Himself for all believers. Now, I know I believe, and He loves those who love Him. Thus, I'm loved by Him. True faith aligns with the conditions in the Word. Those living contrary to the Word lack this faith. 'Do not be deceived,' Scripture warns, 'neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the sexually immoral will inherit the kingdom of God,' 1 Corinthians 6:9. Yet, some sinners might think they'll enter heaven while continuing in sin, relying on God's mercy. However, in such a case, God's mercy won't prevail because it's a wrongful conclusion, contrary to the Word.
2. Furthermore, genuine faith involves conflict. You can recognise specific application through its conflicts against temptations. One never fully enjoys the assurance of Christ's particular love

without intense struggle. There are two foundations on which faith rests:

- (1.) The general truth that whoever turns to Christ will be saved.
- (2.) The specific application of this truth—I am turning to Christ, so I will be saved.

This particular application, a product of faith, faces more attacks than the general truth. The devil doesn't mind if you believe the former, but he opposes us in applying it specifically: 'but I believe.' He seeks to hinder the reflective act where we assert, 'I know I believe.' He strives to obstruct the application, recognising that particular faith brings Christ near, making it all-encompassing. False believers continue in a smooth path without daily conflict. They remain at peace while the strong man retains control. In contrast, no Christian fails to experience the strong assaults on their particular faith, surpassing those on their general faith. That's why these two equally true beliefs aren't equally embraced—Satan impedes the application, causing the minor premise to seem more substantial. Those without conflict may fear they lack faith altogether, as God, in His wrath and justice, allows them to remain in undisturbed self-deception. Those who've tasted this spiritual conflict with an unbelieving heart understand its nature when application is at hand.

3. Moreover, a true believer may be known by their willingness to examine themselves and be examined by others. Someone with genuine, secure faith is often open to self-examination, striving to improve. They consistently assess themselves and allow others to do the same. Those who choose a tranquil path to avoid disrupting the illusion of their false, peaceful hearts, assuming all is well rather than submitting to scrutiny, are guilty of presumption. With true application, there's always a

readiness to examine one's own evidence. Indeed, a true believer is even willing to seek help from fellow Christians to assess their condition and inquire about their state. They seek such assistance, particularly from those skilled in these matters.

4. Lastly, genuine faith is characterised by a profound appreciation and admiration for God's love in Christ—'who loved me, and gave himself for me.' It signifies that a person without an interest in this love values other things more highly. If they truly had assurance of it, they would esteem it above all else in the world. They recognise that while Christ may grant riches, kingdoms, and honours even to those He will cast away, He gives Himself only to His beloved children. Consequently, someone who is assured of Christ's love values Him above all worldly possessions. They would part with everything rather than forfeit their relationship with Him. Others, however, maintain a general notion that Christ died for them and loves them, yet persist in pursuing pleasures and profits, despite their hearts revealing something more significant—the surpassing worth of Christ and His love. Thus, all are welcome to come forward if they dare. Sufficient grounds exist to draw them, provided they don't deceive themselves and are open to their own comfort. This also helps us determine whether we truly possess assurance.

Exhortation: I urge you, therefore, in the pursuit of pleasing God, to strive for specific faith and assurance. If we desire our entire life to be pleasing before God, let's seek this faith. Without it, pleasing God is impossible. If we wish for a fruitful life and a clear conscience when facing death, let us pray for an increase in faith. Above all, strive for specific faith and assurance, as this is where Satan most fiercely opposes us. This state is a blessed condition, akin to heaven

on earth. Though Satan vehemently resists it and its pursuit presents challenges, the effort is entirely worthwhile.

Especially those who have legitimate reasons for assurance, humble and contrite Christians, should resist the temptation to obscure the beauty of a Christian life and to dampen the spiritual fervour in others. It's not fitting for them to appear gloomy and downtrodden, as if Christianity were an existence of perpetual sorrow, contrary to the truth that it is marked by perpetual rejoicing (Psalm 32:10-11). While it is true that Jesus pronounced blessings upon mourners, it is mainly because this mourning leads to eventual joy. Yes, there is a command to 'rejoice always,' but nowhere is it stated, 'mourn continually.' Hence, every Christian must express this assurance through the beauty of a holy life. Those who are conscientious about their holy duties and conduct should resist temptations of this nature. If we find ourselves in spiritual darkness, we should not rely solely on our own judgement. Instead, we should trust the judgement of others. Often, others can perceive more about us than we can about ourselves. It is wise to heed the discernment of fellow Christians in this regard. While it's simple to find comfort when things are going well and emotions are positive, it's quite different when faced with moments of darkness and temptation. In such times, it's not as straightforward. Just as a tree laden with leaves and fruit is easily recognized as fruitful, in the same way, a Christian's authenticity may necessitate the insights of others. In such circumstances, we must remember past experiences; God's love remains constant, always consistent with His nature.

Also, consider the hidden workings of grace. When external signs are few, focus on the spiritual pulse. Just as one checks the pulse of a person in a faint to determine if there's life, similarly, during times of desertion or apparent spiritual lethargy, examine the direction of

your desires. Do you desire to please God? Do you strive and yearn for this? Are these desires persistent, and does your soul remain unsatisfied? If you are dissatisfied with your current level of faith and desire more, this is a sign of a living soul. Do not yield to Satan's lie that there's no foundation for assurance in your condition. Whenever you find these signs of a living soul, trust that true life is present there. I speak this to those who doubt their condition without cause.

Objection: But don't impose conditions on Christ. I could believe and be joyful if I had feelings and joy. If only God would send a messenger from heaven, an interpreter, someone exceptional to me. Or if I experienced the supernatural sweetness that others have encountered, along with those joys. And if my corruption didn't hinder me so much, and I weren't prone to succumb to it.

Solution: However, know this for your consolation: as long as you are in human flesh, there will be two streams from two different sources. That which comes from the flesh will be flesh, and that which comes from the Spirit will be spirit. Be mindful not to misjudge or conclude that you can't be comforted unless you completely eradicate your corruption. Don't forget that St. Paul, the chosen vessel, cried out, 'O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' (Romans 7:24). Do you think you can be free from such struggles?

Answer: No, don't deceive yourself. Here's your comfort: like St. Paul, refuse to allow the evil that you do. Sin shall not dominate you, as the apostle says. You are not under the law but under grace. He also adds, 'For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish' (Galatians 5:17). Seek comfort from this

inner conflict. Rejoice that you and sin are not one; the light of heaven has revealed this darkness to you. Only make sure that sin does not possess you in peace. Confess your sins and corruptions to Christ as soon as they arise; place the burden upon the strongest, and then do not fear the outcome. What you disapprove of, complain about, and repent for will not and cannot undo you. Ultimately, the Spirit will achieve final victory. This addresses your corruptions.

As for your joy and feelings, do not restrict your Saviour to your circumstances. Focus on your desires and consistent walk, rather than occasional lapses and weaknesses. Remember that Christian perfection involves abstaining from gross sins and refraining from smaller ones. For your imperfections, look up to the boundless sufficiency of your Saviour and the treasure trove of grace. Receive grace upon grace from Him, for 'of God He has become for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30). Then, no matter how empty you may feel, the application of a portion of His riches through the hand of faith will make you complete with the best. Remember that while in the state of innocence under the first Adam, his comfort depended on his obedience or disobedience, whereas under the second Adam, the foundation of your comfort lies outside of yourself, in your justification, and in the application of His all-sufficient merits and righteousness to your trembling soul.

Therefore, continue walking in obedient faith, holding God's commandments in high regard. By doing so, you can be assured that the promise holds true, and you will not be ashamed. Strive to increase your sanctification and mortification, as this will fortify your justification. However, observe these cautions.

Caution 1: Do not be discouraged by your limited progress, if it's genuine and if it leads you to refrain from applying the riches of your Saviour and gracious spouse to yourself. If you are united with Him, you are complete and rich in the best possible way. The weaker you are, the more you need a stronger helper to sustain you. This is the law of marriage: once married to Him, you possess all the riches of your husband, who covers your debts, regardless of your circumstances.

Caution 2: Regardless of the level of sanctification or mortification you attain, do not rest solely in that, but rather in the all-sufficiency of your blessed Lord Jesus. He is yours, and you possess all His obedience, righteousness, and merits from His life, death, and resurrection. Nothing in you is so perfect that the devil won't exploit it during times of temptation, using it to discourage you. Remember, 'the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me' (John 14:30).

Caution 3: During times of spiritual darkness caused by abandonment, affliction, or any other challenge, be aware that precious faith must be tested to shine more brightly. Thus, turn necessity into virtue and dedicate yourself to this paramount task. Strive to obey despite discouraging circumstances. Believe in your happiness in Christ even when feeling your misery. Trust in God's love and His eventual removal of anger. Faith, when present, possesses a triumphant nature. Therefore, when contrary conditions attempt to prove the goodness within you, combat them with opposites. In moments when you are filled with discouragement, remember that the command is to believe, and your duty is to obey. No service can be performed with true comfort without some conviction. So, make use of every argument you can find for a good condition. When you can't find them yourself, let others read and

interpret your evidence for you. Believe the judgement of those who can discern that these qualities in you do not arise from a corrupt and deceitful heart.

Furthermore, pray for the spirit of revelation, just as St. Paul did (Ephesians 2:17). Beseech God to grant you His Spirit, revealing His love for you and the riches you possess in Christ. Ask for an understanding of the vast dimensions of His love in Christ, that your growing sense and feeling of His love will ignite deeper love for Him in return. For we cannot love Him until we first perceive His love for us. Beg for the spirit of revelation to be granted to you. Engage with the means that nurture faith, especially the Word, referred to as the 'word of faith.' Look to examples of others, witnessing how God has transformed them from wickedness to a state of grace. Benefit from the example of those around you. Strive earnestly to be aware of Christ's particular love. This should be our primary pursuit in this world. We cannot predict how long we will live, but knowing that Christ cares for our souls will make us willing to die. What better reason to die contentedly than knowing that Christ will watch over our souls? What gave David the confidence to commend his soul to God but the knowledge, 'You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth' (Psalm 31:5)? When facing death, we can confidently entrust our souls to Christ, saying, 'Take my soul, blessed Saviour. You have redeemed me, loved me, and given Yourself for me.' In those last moments, strive for this specific faith. It's what will allow you to surrender your soul to Christ with comfort.

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