

**The sincere believing reception
Of the
Promises of the holy Gospel**

*To the conviction of temporary and imagined believers and to the confirmation of true
believers*

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Law and Gospel must receive the same attention in the preaching

When we consider the approach and the manner of preaching of the two Scottish ministers Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, then we shall discover that the entire contents of their doctrine and instruction, as well as all their warnings, exhortations, convictions, directions, comforts etc. rest entirely upon the balance of Law and Gospel. With great earnestness and with equally great skill, ability, charm and with an abundant variety and strength of matter and arguments, they labour firstly to bring people to a thorough knowledge and feeling of their spiritual misery; and then to bring them to a knowledge of the rich grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, revealed in the Gospel.

Truly, this is the correct approach or method, with the blessing of heaven, to preach the crucified Christ effectually. On one hand, the preacher's goal is to labour with all seriousness by use of the Law to thoroughly convince people of their sins, curse and condemnation; and of their blindness, powerlessness and their deadly enmity against Christ, until by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, they feel the burden of the fatal misery of their souls, so that they are thoroughly humbled before God and their hearts are deeply wounded and contrite.

On the other hand, the preacher after this should seek to affect these broken hearts with the healing promises of the Gospel. The promises should be applied with a skilful hand like precious, healing plasters, and properly secured to the bleeding wounds of poor contrite sinners. Also, God's children are to be dealt with in a similar manner. Both the Law and the Gospel must be continually preached to them in all seriousness, each in their own order and in their own manner. When the Holy Spirit, Who works all in all, is pleased to accompany this preaching, then there is a broad pathway opened for Him to 'ride prosperously in His glory, upon the Word of His

truth' (Ps. 45:5).

The whole power and wisdom of the preaching will be found to consist particularly in the correct combination of these two great means unto salvation, the Law and the Gospel. These means must certainly not be mixed together too much nor separated too far from each other, if we desire, under the blessing of God to affect the hearts of men effectually. Just to the extent that we depart from the true mean, by combining or separating Law and Gospel, or in dealing completely incorrectly with them, to this extent the preaching of Christ loses her light and power.

We must always place equal weight on both Law and Gospel. We must continually use each one according to its own character and function for the same great purpose: unto man's repentance and to salvation in Christ. If we mix the Law too much with the Gospel, then it cannot be otherwise but that we shall change and corrupt the nature of both completely. On the other side, if we separate them too far from each other, we make both completely powerless to bring the souls of men to salvation. We know that the so-called half-Pelagians have always sought to mix Law and Gospel together. But what have they achieved by this, other than they in their erroneous religion, have corrupted forever both Law and Gospel? The Law cannot convict with power anymore, and the Gospel cannot comfort anymore. And here they leave poor men completely miserable, in the middle between a powerless Law and a powerless Gospel, not rightly wounded for his sins, nor rightly comforted by Christ's grace. How satan could have ever invented a more powerful device to both corrupt religion and to destroy the poor souls of men. For, so to speak, by melting Moses and Christ together, one completely loses his curse and the other his grace.

But on the other hand, if the Law is too far separated from the Gospel and the Gospel from the Law, what can the consequences be otherwise than that

both are given a deadly wound at the same time? For where the Law stands alone, completely separated from the Gospel, she has lost all her strength, by binding everything forever under the curse and without remedy. Without the Gospel and the grace and the Spirit of Christ which is promised therein, the Law cannot savingly convict man, humble him before God, lead or drive him to Christ nor raise up and direct to salvation. Thus also: if the Gospel stands alone and is not assisted by the Law, what power shall the Gospel retain to bring anyone to repentance and salvation? For then it will not find in the whole wide world a single poor sinner who is truly in need because of his sins and wounded in his heart, and who needs Christ as a Physician for his wounded and sick soul. The Gospel may shine freely like the weak light of the moon upon the hearts of men, but it shall never be able to force its way into the soul as a clear, life-giving and warming light of the sun. Although the understanding can be enlightened by it, without the Law, the inward depth of the heart can never be truly enlightened. Even though the outside of the cup be washed so clean as it can be, it can never come to the hidden inner chambers of the heart, to purify from the foul corruption of sin. Yes, without the Law, the Gospel can plaster a blind and careless conscience with a loose joy, with an ungrounded hope and with a vain imagination of salvation, but it cannot kill the gnawing worm of a defiled conscience. It is not able to give true peace with God through Christ in man's spirit even for a moment. To summarize all in one word: with respect to the actual bringing of salvation to man, the Gospel can do nothing without the Law and the Law can do nothing without the Gospel, than to damn man forever and to bring him to the utmost degree of disastrous despair. But in contrast, when the Gospel receives the necessary help from the Law, and the Law the necessary service from the Gospel, then they both, by the life-giving Spirit of Christ, are the most powerful and most healing means to work a true contrition, a sincere faith and a sincere repentance in the hearts of all the elect.

In the dark and unspiritual age which we sadly now experience, it would perhaps not be totally inappropriate and without profit if these matters of Law and Gospel were more broadly and thoroughly discussed. It is not to be doubted, that all the light of the Spirit that shall shine among us, must have all her commencement and continuance from a correct combination of the Law and the Gospel. We can compare it to the natural light that shines upon the world through the two great lights, the sun and the moon. The light that we receive from the moon is entirely dependent on the position which she occupies in relation to the sun and the earth. How little light we have from the great multitude of stars, which are placed in the heavens, each one in their own order and distance, if the moon does not shine, especially in a dark night, when the sky is completely covered with thick clouds. Nevertheless, if it pleased the Lord to give us a little sufficiency to expound this weighty and extensive subject, it would still not be possible in this short treatise.

For whom the promises of the Gospel are given

For the profit of the reader we would desire, with the help of the Lord Jesus, to expound a small part of this subject, concerning the true believing embracing and use of the spiritual promises of the Gospel. Perhaps this shall grant us some more light in the matters that we have introduced above, and will enable us to see what a great weight these matters are in Christianity.

We know that the Gospel promises are opened wide for all those who are under sound of the Gospel; in so far that every truly contrite and humble sinner, by the Spirit of faith, not only may, but also must receive these promises from the gracious hand of Christ's grace and completely and solely place all his trust in them. The Gospel is just like a rich and full shop filled with all sorts of spiritual medicines. Every poor and miserable, sick and wounded sinner may collect his own medicine which he needs, for free. The door of the great Physician in Gilead is never closed for them night and day. The Holy Spirit assures us at the close of the Bible (Rev. 22:17), that the blessed sources and fountains of the Evangelical promises are always standing open for everyone who merely desires to drink of the water of life and who wishes to refresh his weary and fainting soul with them.

In the physical realm these are two different things: to collect the medicine and to apply it in the correct manner and to use it for his painful illnesses, or merely to look at them and to take them in your hands to play with them and to squander them without profit. Yes, it is possible to do oneself great harm and to bring one's health and life into great danger. It is also so in the case of the heavenly medicine of the Gospel promises. We can sincerely, believably embrace them and use them for healing of our soul, but we can also easily meddle with them with our cleverness and destroy our souls forever.

The promises of the Gospel are ultimately not for all people¹, but only for poor, broken-hearted sinners, just as medicine is actually only for sick and wounded persons. If a healthy person wants to use them, then he will only misuse them, even if it is simply because he doesn't need them. Every object is after all intended and suitable for a defined purpose. If persons use it in another manner, then this is ultimately only misusing it. But when an unhumiliated person tries to use the promises of the Gospel without true faith, then he does nothing else than to misuse them to his own destruction. The Lord Jesus, Who is the Master and the Dispenser of His own promises and the saving benefits and goods contained in them, exhorts us with the words: 'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you' (Matt. 7:6). Truly, if you wish to give the holy promises of the Gospel to a hypocrite, to apply them to him and to accept him and consider him as a good Christian, consider for a moment how it may end with him. Possibly, after a time he will trample these holy things under his feet, if God allows him to go on in this way, and ultimately allow him to be completely overwhelmed by the power of his foul lusts and the intricate ways of sin. Then he will, whilst he turns back to the world where he belongs, so bite and devour you and the people of the Lord, that it will pierce you and them to the depths of your souls. The Lord wants to express here, be always careful, and watch for yourselves, how you handle the holy pearls of the Gospel, and to whom and to which people in the world you give them.

Oh, if the holy promises of the holy Gospel, in this age of deep decline in God's Church, were not so grievously misused by so many! Were they not so shamefully defiled and trampled upon, after they have firstly meddled with them for a long time and in the end placed them under their feet!

¹ As van der Groe has pointed out before, the promises of the Gospel are freely made to all who come under the sound of the Gospel. However, in the heart of the matter, they are only directed to and benefit the broken-hearted sinner.

Where else do the many shocking blasphemies and public offences come from, that take place from time to time amongst us, to the bitter soul-sorrow and distress of the truly godly in the land, to the rejoicing and cheering of satan and to the hardening of the ungodly and the worldly. Yes, these things are also a grievous offence and hindrance for weak, troubled souls, who because of this sometimes end up in the awful sieve of satan.

From these things follow the vain, polluted, corrupted, loose, fleshly and worldly-minded life and walk, which we see amongst our Reformed confessors everywhere, more than ever before, to the greatest dishonour of God and to the irreparable damage and indelible shame of our holy religion. Yes, from where arises so much grievous ignorance, laziness, carelessness, pride, hypocrisy and lack of contrition, such a terrible despising of true godliness and of a precise and tender walk? We cannot be grieved over this too much. From where, we say, does this all arise? Is it not because people in this time make such a fearful misuse of the holy promises of salvation and have turned the grace of God into the most wicked lasciviousness?

We surely know that the Gospel is to some a savour of death unto death, and to others a savour of life unto life (2 Cor. 2:16). It was prophesied of Christ that he was set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel (Luk. 2:34). Let us take note, dear reader, the same Christ is sent by God into the world and there is set for two completely different purposes, namely that many of them, who live under the clear light of the Gospel, should very grievously and damnably fall over Him and descend forever into destruction. But also that many others might be raised again by Him and be blessedly healed from the heavy fall of sin, to the obtaining of eternal life.

Let us not imagine that Christ is only a Deliverer and Saviour and that He has no other name. For He is certainly set for a fall for so many thousands, yea millions of name-Christians in the world. As it fares with Christ Himself,

so it also fares with His Gospel and with all the glorious promises thereof. The same promises are for many to a catastrophic fall and for many to a blessed resurrection, after the promises have been handled and used and after they have put them to use with their heart and mind.

If we receive these holy promises with a true and upright faith, and by the working of the Holy Spirit, we humbly use them for their ultimate purpose, then they will certainly be a savour of life unto life for us. This cannot be otherwise, because they are truly life-giving promises, which are appropriated by us by the Spirit of life, which is in Christ.

What is lacking with the uncontrite and unbelieving

But it is completely otherwise, when unrepentant and unbelieving persons wish to apply God's promises to themselves in their blindness and with an unrenewed heart, and place their trust upon them in a fleshly way. Truly, then it cannot be otherwise than that these life-giving promises will be fatal for them, most surely a savour of death unto death. This is because applying them in this way, they cannot but make them careless, carnal, arrogant, audacious and lawless in sin. For they lay their hands too soon on the promises of grace, before they have been sufficiently prepared and made receptive for grace by means of the Law. What other result can this bring forth, than that all such people terribly misuse both grace and the promises, and must drag them into their way of sin; however beautiful a face and appearance they try to show? For nature can bring forth nothing else, from her own character. Let them be so beautiful, and so highly refined and made decent by the external power of spiritual and heavenly things, if they are not truly renewed from within and changed by the Spirit Himself in Christ, then they always remain completely corrupt and unholy. Consider this point by means of a parable. Deal with a foolish person without understanding, as though he had a good understanding. Place into his hands all sorts of costly medicines or means of healing, which with correct use will serve to the healing of the sick. Give him gold also, pearls, jewels and costly clothing, which make others rich and decorated. Entrust all this to him and let him do with it what he will. See then what he will do with all these beautiful things. Can you expect anything else than that he will only destroy everything and do himself damage by them? Even if he does not do so today, because he is in a good mood and behaves quietly and decently; he will do so tomorrow. Just so it is also with the promises of the Gospel, when unrepentant persons who are without a true faith use them and apply them to themselves on false grounds.

Sadly, this is the case with many in our time, whom we speak of here. They are those who have merely some general and outward concerns about their salvation, before they have been truly humbled before God in a real contrition of soul, by the sharp preaching of the Law. They immediately begin to work with the spiritual promises of the holy Gospel, which they receive and place their trust in, without the Spirit and without the instrumental means of a true faith. For only in this way can we appropriate the veritable promises of God unto salvation. We behold the comforting promises of the Gospel merely with a general illuminated and natural mind; but not in the actual and true light of the Holy Ghost, Who is the Spirit of promise, whereby we, after we believe, are sealed (Eph. 1:13). Thus we never acknowledge the holiness, the Divinity, the spirituality and the value of the promises. In this state, the heavenly light of the glory of God, which is revealed by the Holy Spirit in the promises to the soul of a rightly humbled sinner, can never shine upon us. Yea, we cannot enjoy even one ray of it. This is the reason why such persons never rightly delight in God's precious and holy promises, and estimate and value them above everything. Just as little do they value the spiritual benefits of redemption themselves, which are presented and promised. But because they are still completely carnal and unrenewed in the depths of their heart, and also remain in this condition, their esteem and affection remains fixed on the world and her vain imagined goods. They still seek them as their highest purpose and goal in all that they do and do not do. He who thinks otherwise of the best temporary believer, name-Christian and almost-Christian, or has other expectations from them, certainly does not yet know the true character of man's natural corruption and just as little does he know the power of heavenly grace in the regenerate soul.

Such a wrong use, or sad misuse of the promises of the Gospel, takes place in many ways. Nevertheless, how more craftily and ingeniously we act, how much more damaging it is to us, and how much more difficult it is to be

spotted and uncovered. Satan uses very hidden and even unfathomable lies in this way, to capture souls and bind them in his net. Unfortunately, how many astute sharp-eyed hypocrites and feigned believers have discovered this too late, to their eternal destruction and shame! All those who, without true sorrow for sin and without a sincere faith in the heart, embrace any promise and apply it falsely to themselves, steal the promises from the Gospel and take to themselves what does not belong to them. They do the same as the dogs, who steal the children's bread, and the thieves, who rob and steal people's goods out of their houses; for *a man can receive nothing, except it were given him from heaven* (Joh. 3:27). Ultimately, God gives His promises from heaven only to truly repentant and broken sinners, as has been said more than once. This necessary condition or requirement is either clearly pointed out or expressed by every promise of the Gospel, or at least it is always included and understood. Every thief has his own way of stealing and they who know how to practice this evil art with the most skill, speed and dexterity, are the worst thieves. So the greatest and most dangerous hypocrites are they, who know how to steal the promises of the holy Gospel in the most dexterous way, so that almost no one notices their theft. In the same way, the disciples didn't know that Judas was a thief, even less did they know that he was a thief of the promises. And as thieves habitually steal at night, when everyone is slumbering fast asleep, so God's precious promises are most often stolen by people when a dark night of ignorance has fallen upon the Church, and when the watchmen in Zion are slumbering and resting most securely on the walls of Jerusalem. Every thief and murderer then climbs over the walls into the stall of the sheep and robs the holy promises, as many as he wants, without almost anyone noticing it, except for but a small few, who do not dare to make a loud noise.

Dear reader, if you have a sincere desire to examine your priceless and never-dying soul sincerely before the Lord, then only have concern that you have received the promises of Christ's grace both sincerely and without

delay. That is: that you have become a truly contrite and broken sinner before God, for only such can receive the promises. The publican from whom we read in the Gospel of Luke, received the promises of grace honestly and without delay, as soon as his heart was completely wounded and broken before the most-high God because of his sins. Therefore, he went down to his house justified. If he had received the promises otherwise, or earlier, they would have certainly been to his damnation. Thus it was for the foolish virgins to destruction, that they had lit their burning lamps from the light of the Evangelical promises, before they had received any oil of true godly contrition and of a sincere faith in their vessels. It is the same today with many hypocrites and temporary believers. These people normally pass through a general conviction of their sin for a time, which does not pierce through to the inward recesses of their heart, by the Almighty power and working of the Holy Spirit. They can speak of concern and anxiousness, and of fear and distress about their sins and of such general experiences and emotions through a light conviction. *But they know nothing of a holy shattering and brokenness of heart before God and of such a humiliation, through a sense of the burden of their sins and of God's righteous curse and wrath, that has brought them to a heartfelt shame, a thorough abhorrence of themselves and a holy despair.* When they are only half-wounded and convicted by the Law, they take themselves immediately to the promises of the Gospel. They view them with some clarity in their mind, and often also with much moving of their affections and emotions of their spirit. Sometimes, through a deceitful lie of satan and of their own heart, one or more promises appear to them, during hearing or reading the Word. This is accompanied with a remarkable clarity, living perception and insight, so that as it were power is felt with the promise, which power they have not experienced before. In addition to this, the promises seem to be most remarkably suitable to their state and circumstances, or to their present situation. It is as though God Himself came to speak to their souls from heaven., by means of the Word of this promise. Such people do not wait or consider very long, but are immediately

prepared to accept such promises and to apply them to themselves, believing that they are from God Himself, applied to their hearts by the Holy Spirit. In this they act in their own strength, and are assisted by the general working of the Spirit, in the same way as takes place with almost-Christians and with temporary believers (Heb. 6)².

When they have received and taken the promises in this way, then their former fears and conviction normally depart. They now immediately rejoice greatly and comfort themselves with the light of the promises, which they have received, without noticing the deception that lies hidden in this tragic and damaging behaviour. *Their joy does not consist in the promises themselves, or from a hearty affection of the grace of God which is found in them, but arises merely from the light that the promises shed in the understanding, and also from the refreshment and the pleasant feelings and strong emotions which they sense when they behold them.* The Saviour teaches us this with the hearer, 'he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while' (Matt. 13:20, 21). All such almost-Christians and temporary believers always retain their stony heart, because it has never been truly broken and shattered in the depths, by the power of the Law. Nevertheless they take all the comforting promises of the holy Gospel and rejoice in them; just like someone who beholds a beautiful landscape with sumptuous pathways and idyllic spots depicted in an artistic painting and over which they are so cheerful and taken up with, that it is as though they were literally walking in such a landscape and idyllic spot. Nevertheless, all that his spirit takes pleasure in is nothing more than an imagination, a shadow and a painting of reality. The precious and comforting promises of the Gospel (which are

² Note: caution should be exercised in the use of Heb. 6 v. 4-6 in a general way with reference to those under the Word, as from the context of this text (v. 6) it clearly refers to those who, once illuminated by the Spirit, fall away irrecoverably from their confession of the faith. In the following paragraph van der Groe quotes a more suitable Scripture to teach the same truth, that is the parable of the sower.

made by a merciful and reconciled God in Christ to the most miserable sinner, and bring nothing but free grace and lovingkindness along with them), can by merely beholding them, move and touch the heart greatly. Especially when they are in some sorrow, anguish or anxiety because of their sins, they can rejoice so much that they are outside themselves, and immediately lose all their terror and sorrow by means of the adorable light of the promises that shine upon them. They then imagine assuredly, that God has truly spoken peace to their souls. In this way, unregenerate people can also sometimes ‘taste of the heavenly gift, and are made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come’. Yet in the end they ‘fall away’ and commit the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4-6). Indeed, they can give a very beautiful appearance of godliness for a time and ‘escape the pollutions of the world’, through a general ‘knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ and from the promises of the holy Gospel. Nevertheless, they later ‘are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.’ (2 Pet. 2:20).

How difficult it is to recognize such hypocrites and to distinguish them from true Christians, as long as they are in the bloom of their hypocrisy, experience teaches only too well. For outwardly they appear almost as pious and sometimes exceed the truly godly, especially when such live in a state of deep decline and declension from the Lord. Some hypocrites can give a better appearance than a sincere Christian, for a time. They were convicted of their sin and were very painful, fearful and troubled for a time. They have clearly seen that their way is a way of death, and leads to hell; and they have laid hold upon the promises as we have seen, and have been ‘saved’ and comforted by them in their own way. Since this has happened to them, their way of life is greatly changed. Outwardly there is a complete renewal and turnaround. They have forsaken their former friends and joined themselves to the truly godly, for whom they appear to have a great love and esteem.

They associate with them now, and for the eyes of the world, they are on the same way and are continually engaged in all the duties and ordinances of religion. Sometimes they appear very zealous and precise, so that they not only deceive many others, but also they can deceive themselves for a long time with this beautiful appearance of godliness.

Indeed, so it was with the feigned apostle and betrayer Judas. Did he not remarkably excel all the hypocrites of his time and perhaps also exceed all who were before him and who shall come after? No-one had a better opportunity to be a superb hypocrite than him. He was after all a lawfully called apostle and teacher of the Gospel, who had applied the promises of redemption to himself without grounds, and for a time steadfastly held to the Saviour and His Gospel. But more than that, in his office he preached Christ and the promises also for others, where he found opportunity to do so. He had daily intimate relationship with the Saviour Himself and with His pious apostles and disciples. He was continually in their company, always ate and drank with them and attended the preaching, exhortations, instructions and miracles of the Messiah. What clear outward distinction for the world was there during all this time between Judas and the other apostles and disciples of the Lord? Was he not considered by his brethren at that time as a sincere God-fearing man? Was there someone who had other thoughts of him, apart from the all-knowing Saviour? Indeed, who can say that Judas had other thoughts of himself at that time? He may have sometimes secretly feared and had beatings of conscience, that he was perhaps a hypocrite. For it cannot be imagined that he was completely ignorant of his old bosom sins and of the hidden hypocrisy in which he lived daily. But his ungrounded hope, which he constantly fed from Christ and His promises, must have continually smothered and suppressed the convictions within, so that they could not break out to the true light of a sound conversion. So it is generally in the case of hypocrites, that they quench and darken their convictions with the light of the promises that

shine to some extent on their understanding.

But please tell me, my friends, what was miserable Judas, with all this beautiful appearance, with all his zeal for Christ and with all his trust and resting on the promises, better than a vile and cursed hypocrite in the appearance of an apostle, yes, more than a wicked devil in the appearance of a man? ‘Have I not chosen you twelve? And one of you is a devil’ (Joh. 6:70). This is the correct name for the man, but this name could not be read by anyone, when the Lord Jesus spoke it. A time afterwards, it came to the light. Which hypocrite in the world is so audacious, that he can read these things with careful attention and not be shocked and begin to shake?

To the miserable Judas can be added a Demas, who if he was truly no more than a hypocrite, as is generally assumed, was skilful enough to know how to play the role. He was also a teacher of the Gospel and preached Christ and the promises everywhere to others. He certainly did not fail to apply them to himself also. He was a companion of the holy apostle Paul and for some time, he travelled everywhere with him to proclaim the Gospel and to establish and build up congregations. He was Paul’s fellow-worker for a time (Philem. 2:4). How soberly, tenderly and exemplary he must have conducted himself. Every day he was in the company of godly Christians and separated himself with them unto the Lord. He loved and esteemed them greatly and asked Paul to bring his greetings to the church (Col. 4:14). But what was the end of it all? It ended in the complaint of the apostle: ‘For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed to Thessalonica’ (2 Tim. 4:10). After this we read no more of him. If in speaking of him, the apostle only meant his decline and not his apostacy, as some people believe, then Demas has nevertheless placed a dark stain upon his name. He has given us reason to mention him as a remarkable example of a hypocrite. However it actually was, this is certainly sure, that if Demas was truly a hypocrite, he has had too many followers in this world. Like him,

these hypocrites, after they have feigned with Christ and the promises, eventually before they leave this world, have shown openly to all, that the world is more valuable to them than the Lord Jesus with all His promises. Also, they reveal that they never so steadfastly cherished and loved the godly, so that in the end they could easily depart from them in a time of temptation or prosperity, just as Demas forsook Paul. We can also add here the example of the foolish virgins (Matt. 25). For the eyes of the world, these had also the appearance of a pious walk. They had obtained this from the light of the Gospel and from the precious and comforting promises of salvation. Without this light, the hypocrite could not (in his own manner) walk as well as the godly.

What sort of people were these foolish virgins? If you only looked at their outward appearance, then they (or at least some of them) would, for the eyes of the world seem just as good and God-fearing as the wise virgins, with whom they lived and had contact in a close church fellowship. Both the foolish as well as the wise virgins had burning and shining lamps of knowledge, confession, religion and of an exemplary walk before the world. It was even easier for the foolish virgins to achieve this, because it happened in a time when the church was in great decline and in a time in which both the wise as well as the foolish virgins slept. That is: they lived very carelessly, unspiritually, blindly and carelessly, and served the world more than God. This is the most suitable time for all sorts of hypocrites and feigned believers in great numbers to sneak concealed into the church and to dexterously steal the divine promises, as well as all the holy things and institutions of the Gospel, as we have already mentioned. For in such a time, the true state of feigned believers is not sufficiently investigated, because there is insufficient light. Equally there is a lack of seriousness, watchfulness and necessary discipline over the church. Thereby, the holy house of the Lord is quickly filled with a multitude of all sorts of hypocrites.

Both the wise as well as the foolish virgins lay, sadly, in a deep sleep on the

bed of their worldly lusts, without truly waking up, however much the Lord in all sorts of ways called them by His Word and by His spiritual and physical judgments. Nevertheless, the devil does not sleep in such a time, but he takes all possible care that feigned believers are not discovered. If Christ has been spurned and rejected for a long time, and His Spirit eventually departs from the church of God, she comes into a pitiful and miserable state. The sincere believers and the shining feigned believers can then no longer be distinguished from one another, seeing they both make use of the promises of the Gospel and comfort and rejoice themselves with them.

Feigned believers continually light their lamps of a seeming and god-fearing walk from the Gospel. They maintain this work, as long as they can preserve the oil of their hypocrisy in their lamps. Sometimes it happens that the more the feigned believers labour with the promises and by this means their lamps burn brighter for a time, how sooner their oil is used up. Nevertheless, some can keep going in this way for so long, until the evening of their long and dark night breaks forth.

If we duly consider this, this may further reveal to us the nature and the condition of such evangelical hypocrites (let us call them so). What does the hidden life of their hypocrisy mostly depend on, than from the light and the power which they are able to draw from the promises of grace, and which they apply to themselves without warrant? For the more they use the promises, and can get their poor spirits sprinkled and moistened by these channels, as it were new light and life comes into them every time. Then their lamps must shine more and more clearly. *This is also the reason why generally it goes best with such people at the beginning.* Then everything is still new and fresh; they are then the most uncomplicated people. The light of the Gospel, that shines from the outside upon their hearts, is then normally most pleasant, sweet and delightful. It moves their affections, it quickens and delights their inward senses. It lights, as it were, their hearts in some

passionate warmth, zeal, earnestness and urgency of love to God and His service. Thereby, not only the love to the world seems to be dead for a time, but they can make a significant progress in the outward shedding, smothering and subduing of many sins, which seem to be rooted out of them by the light and the grace with which they labour. This is promoted still more by the fact that they exercise themselves daily in the outward duties of religion, and are found daily in the fellowship of the truly godly. Thereby in this period, they are kept from a thousand opportunities of sinful temptation and are constantly encouraged and excited to live a Christian life. What would hinder them, that they should keep their lamps burning brightly, especially if they have been brought up properly and religiously, and they have a good temper, and if their calling and circumstances do not present too many temptations. Thus, such persons can even surpass some truly devout souls in zeal, seriousness and tenderness, who in the Lord's inscrutable permission have fallen for a time into a lifeless declined state. But however high they raise the sail of their feigned piety, nevertheless it cannot be a steadfast and enduring work. Their lamps must gradually die out of themselves, and in the end go out leaving a foul smoke and a horrible stink. The reason for this is fundamentally, that from beginning to end they lack a foundation of the true spiritual and heart-renewing grace of Christ. If they would like to ask with the young man in the Gospel, 'what lack I yet?'³ then you could say to him, that he lacks three great things, which Christ by His Spirit gives to all true believers.

1. *They have never been thoroughly humbled before God because of their sins and their hell-worthy condition.* The law, by the convicting power of the Spirit, has never penetrated to a complete shattering of their heart and to a holy despair. The hard ground of their hearts has never been broken up, but only the surface has been somewhat loosened by a general conviction.

³ See Matt. 19:20

They always retain their natural hardness, unrepentance and adverse will toward God and His Gospel. For this reason, the seed of the Gospel shall never send down a deep, enduring root into the most inward ground of their hearts. The seed has merely come to lie loose in the topmost part of their heart, where it has quickly grown upwards, instead of downwards. Therefore, the foliage and blade of their flourishing seeming godliness grows much greater and heavier than the weak root can carry⁴.

2. *They have never been engrafted into Jesus Christ as their stem and root by a true and living faith.* They do not have their life and growth from Him and from the heavenly sap and moisture of His grace and Spirit. With all their work they remain standing unchanged in the foundation of their old nature. They have only received a borrowed light from the clear radiance of the Gospel. In addition, they have for a time received a borrowed life, from the root of the promises; this life according to the spirit does not belong to their nature. It cannot last longer than until the lustre of the clearly shining Gospel gradually disappears from them and is darkened, and until the root of the promises over time withers and dies.
3. *They are never truly united and reconciled to God through Christ.* Therefore, all that they imagine and apply to themselves is an opinion and a delusion of themselves, and a very cunning sham of satan. Eventually it has taken a solid place in their hearts and has grown up to a sort of faith or strong imagination. They have never believed on good grounds and they have never truly tasted the power and the soul-sanctifying comfort thereof. Truly, their own conscience could testify to this, if they would only give attention to so many secret knockings and accusations, which this faithful watchman⁵ from God has given them in this solemn matter.

⁴ This is a reference to the parable of the sower, Matt. 13:21

⁵ That is, their conscience

But they have borne this all easily by giving no attention to it, and always hiding behind the stronghold of a thousand sorts of deceptions and craftiness, both from their own heart and from satan.

4. *By logical consequence, they have never been truly renewed in the foundation of their hearts by the heavenly grace of Christ, and by the sanctifying power of His Spirit.* The love of Christ has never really constrained them to forsake sin and the world and to choose God and His service and blessed communion as their greatest good and portion, such that they only desire to live unto the Lord from a motive of holy gratitude for the grace He has shown to them, and to die more and more to themselves and to everything separated from God. O no, the greatest hypocrite in the world, with all his cunning and ability, has never been able to advance that far. They cannot advance further than only to an appearance and to certain levels and forms of it. But never for a moment do they come to the power and the reality of the matter itself; for then they could not remain feigned believers and hypocrites, because they would immediately enter into the sincerity of the Spirit.

The nature and state of the feigned believer

When, by the light of the Lord, we take careful note of the nature and the state of hypocrites, we will soon enough clearly perceive that all their use of the promises of the Gospel, as well as their all their light and life, joy and emotions which they get from them, are but general gifts of the Spirit. All their beautiful piety and appearance of godliness, which springs from it, is in its foundation nothing more than pure appearance and show, without real power and truth. We will perceive that they do not perform anything else but washing the Ethiopian's skin⁶. With all this they remain both before and after the same people, that is: completely blind, unholy, unregenerate and slaves of satan, sin and of the world, unbelievers and enemies of God.

Not the smallest speck of true grace or spiritual good is found in their souls. This is their true state, as soon as they rend the beautiful mask of their mischievous hypocrisy, they are nothing more than devouring wolves in sheep's clothing. Ungodliness is their own character and nature, but godliness is only their outward garment, which they have put around themselves. Thereby they are able to cunningly cover their Ethiopian skin. Therefore, they cannot be seen by others in their own form, until God in His time unclothes them for all to see. Often this happens clearly, before they depart and leave this world, because the holy and righteous God will not permit that those who have so greatly mocked Him and who have deceived the world so foully, through playing such a feigned role on the great theatre, should descend into the grave with a name and smell of godliness. Sadly, how many such dismal examples have been found in the church and are seen daily amongst us, if only we will give heed to them!

For those who until now have carefully read this treatise, it will not be

⁶ This is a reference to Jer. 13:23: can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?

strange to them, if they will consider that the nature of created things cannot always be coerced, but that from itself it is continually inclined, in every possible way, to seek her freedom again which she has lost for a time, through the restraint of opposing things. If sin always remains the character and nature of the hypocrite, as it surely does, so it can also lose its own liberty for a time, and be held in great restraint, by the power of heavenly things and the general gifts of the Holy Spirit. This means that sin cannot break out, nor live and work as it did before.

But this restraint, as great as it may be, cannot kill or completely subdue the sinful nature, that it never regains its old strength and liberty. You can place a lion on a chain for a time and shut it up in a kennel, so that it can do no harm nor catch its prey as it is used to doing. But this will not change the nature of the animal. He will always try to break the chain in pieces on which he is chained, and to escape from his imprisonment. And when he has succeeded, and has joined the other lions in the forest, then the lion shall remain a lion, however long the lions-skin has been covered with a sheepskin, when he lay in his kennel on the chain. Thus it is with the hypocrite. Their sinful nature is indeed restrained and suppressed for a time, but it is not slain or brought under, as takes place in the true believer. What can come forth from such, other than that their sinful nature always covertly strives to regain her lost freedom? Yet she cannot immediately be effective in this, so long as the conscience retains any fear for the law and she can maintain her hope, joy and confidence in the promises in a living and affectionate state. This is also possible, as long as everything else and the circumstances of her pathway are relatively favourable and advantageous for her.

But these things, which in former times were so powerful through their novelty and unfamiliarity, gradually begin to lose much of their influence and power upon the understanding and the affections, even if it is merely

by becoming used to them, although at the beginning this change is not immediately noticed. So they begin to decline, wear out and die out, as with all things which are used every day and are not maintained, renewed or supplied with new strength. As now the things which seek to constrain sin, and indeed in the beginning restrained it, gradually lose their lively power, it cannot be otherwise than that sin regains her former strength and working in our hearts.

A steel spring which is compressed powerfully, expands by itself, as soon as the force which held it compressed, gradually decreases. Ultimately, the spring has become stronger than the force which compressed her, so that it can easily overcome it and suddenly and violently spring free. Sin works in the heart of the hypocrite in the same way. Imperceptibly it raises itself up again from her oppression and works more than ever before with her silent movements and desires. The fire that seemed for a time to have gone out, obtains more air and opening in the heart and begins to inflame more and more. Initially the hypocrite does not notice it, because they have merely washed the outside of the cup, but never cleansed it to the bottom, by the power of heavenly grace. Thus they have never sincerely hated nor seriously striven against the evil desires of sin, which dwell concealed in their heart. Therefore, they pay no attention to the sinful lusts and desires, which they perceive gradually rising up from the hidden depths of their hearts. They are already satisfied if they can just keep them in their bosom and carefully conceal them, so that they do not come out. The sinful lusts and desires in the heart, which meet with no opposition, but rather are secretly maintained and treasured, slay the unborn children and unnoticed begin to grow in force and strength, and to increase more and more. Eventually, the hypocrite perceives it himself, that a strong fire of wicked lusts has begun burning in his heart. Normally, he then begins to strive with himself, thrashes and works in his own way to put out the fire, so that it will not break out at any moment. But unfortunately, what can he do against it? His heart is not yet

properly purified and is still devoid of the heavenly grace of the Holy Ghost. Only in this way can the roots and seeds of sin in the heart be mortified, and gradually rooted out and subdued by the truly godly, albeit with much conflict and difficulty. He may in his own way, daily pray and sigh about the evil that he finds there, he may go to the sources of duties and the promises, to draw water from them to put out the fire within; but he has nothing to draw with. Without perceiving it, sin now has put out that light and power of feeling, which he formerly sought to draw from the duties and the promises. Now the things that he needs the most, have become powerless and empty springs for him.

What shall he now begin? Normally he will very carefully cover his miserable condition for others, and speak from the heights about his precious experiences. If he is sometimes with people who have spiritual light, and it is suitable, he will complain that he is so miserable, so unspiritual and dark, etc. Apart from this, he will strive and struggle against sin with his mean light and strength. That is all that the poor person can do at this time. But sin is not of that nature, that it can be put aside so easily by such things. Even less can satan be put aside, for he has his hidden hand and working in all these dealings. On the contrary, sin begins to raise its head more day by day, to work more and more powerfully and to establish itself and to spread out in the heart, in order to take it completely into possession, as before. The result is that, the hypocrite begins to get weary of the conflict with sin and gradually to enter into a secret accord with it. This accord is concluded with this provision, that he will have a part and sin shall have a part. He and sin are somewhat reconciled to each other, after they were engaged in battle for a time.

The most important requirement of this negotiated peace is, that the small sins, which are least visible for others and can be concealed in darkness, again have a complete freedom of exercise and working in their daily life,

without the conscience speaking too much about it. However, with the explicit condition that they shall watch very circumspectly for all coarse and outbreking sins, which people could easily see. According to this firm agreement, the secret sins of greed, pride, drunkenness, uncleanness, dishonesty, deception, pretence, anger, revenge, selfishness and such hellish generations of vipers and wicked spots sit delicately on the throne. These things are always native to the hypocrite, in the long run they become normal and become freer in them. The hypocrite notices this, but what can he do against it? He cannot live without this sin, because he is in his element in it. Therefore, he thinks it best to live as decently as he can. Here, his main work and study appears, that is nimbly, with guile and skill, to hold on to sin and not to commit it so bluntly and coarsely as the thoughtless and shallow men of the world do, for then he would quickly have finished his act⁷.

When it has come this far with the hypocrite, then he is already well on the way, if he is not kept back from it, to become a sophisticated and polished hypocrite. Before long and unnoticed he gets a beautiful supply of light, gifts, talents, abilities, experiences, name, respect and so on. He gradually learns the finest divisions of the compass, so that he can bluff many others, he can prattle and flatter. Which matters, ways, or cases of conscience etc. can he not learn to masterfully deal with? Yes, he acquaints himself thoroughly with people in the world and in the church. He knows what each one needs and what he must give each one in order to gain the most esteem and to obtain the most benefit thereby. He gradually obtains a boldness, or more accurately named, a brutality, like a real hypocrite must have, to dare to set his feet everywhere, and also skilfully to creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins (2 Tim. 3:6). This is the chief artistry which a hypocrite must be well trained in, that he would often be able to strike the best stroke. In short, he is alright if he doesn't come into too intimate contact with tender god-fearing people, or with such who have a

⁷ The meaning is, he would soon be discovered for who he really is.

clear sight of these things. Still, he is cunning enough to watch out for this danger as much as possible. He is not afraid for others, with them he knows what to do to keep everything going with talking, praying, warning, guiding etc. But he is a great enemy of spending any length of time in private devotions, when he knows for sure that there is no-one in the world who can see him. If he ever gets a hole, a break, or a tear in his conscience, then he can sometimes fast the whole day. Nevertheless, this doesn't often happen, especially when he is versed in hypocrisy, and by sustained practice he is completely pervaded with it, because then his poor conscience is generally in a great measure seared.

Chained in the snares of satan

Dear reader, what shall we say more, to complete this catastrophic scene? For God's holy ways with these miserable people are very diverse. They are sunk so deeply and so bound in the snares of satan, that they must follow their leader everywhere. The strict justice of the Lord has not passed them by, but now begins gradually to reinforce itself against them, until it crushes them with an awesome stroke. Yet, to investigate now all the particulars of God's way with such people, as is described in the Scriptures, and we learn sooner or later from daily experience, would go far beyond the narrow scope of this prologue. We shall only say this, that it often happens, that in the end the righteous God in His wrath lets them go and gives them over to themselves and to the power of satan. Their evil lusts and sinful desires, which they could always keep under control, so that they did not come out into the open, are now like runaway horses, which cannot be controlled anymore. So they stretch out further from the shore and enter into the wide sea, where so many beautiful and strong ships have already been entirely lost. That cannot terrify them, because satan, and the overwhelming and irresistible power of their desires makes them audacious, so that they dare to do it. Now it normally doesn't last long before he (still so secretly and nimbly as possible) ensnares himself in all sorts of sins and fleshly pathways of carnality, theft, drunkenness, fornication, adultery or even worse impurity, or of other vile sins and evil deeds, to which the desires of the flesh and satan urge him, and to which the Lord gives him over. Hypocrites can live for a long time in such evil sins and abominations, and in this way they can finish what remains of their hypocritical role in secret. But eventually the Lord comes, often when they are most assured and careless, when they think that they have done their work most thoughtfully, that no-one knows anything. Then the Lord in His holy Providence causes the gallivanting to break out in such a way, whether it be gradually or suddenly, that it becomes public for some people or for the whole world who they are and who they

always were. Now the hypocrite finds himself under great pressure and misery, it grieves him that his hypocrisy has become publicly known. He is ashamed, fatally embarrassed and often desperate. What shall he do now?

If it is so, that everything is not yet completely lost or hopeless, then he is constantly musing day and night how he can restore those things that have been overthrown. If he sees a chance, he will act the role of a guiltless and innocent person. And however difficult this pathway may be, he will normally want to follow it; he will try everything, whatever it costs, to restore his respect. But who is not startled and does not tremble for the work that the shameless and astute hypocrite now commences! Everything that is incredibly sinful and ungodly, yes, all that is provoking to God, must be brought together to deliver him from the thorny situation into which he has come. Besides, he who enters this pathway, always imagines the best for himself, but he does not see the progress nor the end, before he has come that far. He also does not know that this pathway is under the miraculous governance of the righteous and Almighty God, which often extends to a chain of thousand links, that will eventually drag him down to the deepest place in hell and to bind him there forever. Oh, what a chilling spectacle!

But when the embarrassed hypocrite sees no possibility to appear before the world with a fair innocence, then there is no other way (if he wishes to remain a hypocrite) than to enter the way of confession, tears, sighs, pleadings, laments etc. For a time, he puts on a garment of apparent repentance. If he is at all able, he will keep going in this way for as long and as skilfully as he can. Thus he continues to deceive the world, until he has over time restored or retrieved his reputation with men. But even this work, without a particular and Almighty grace of God to convert his heart inwardly, cannot last for long. For the hypocrite has already made himself too familiar with sin and he is used to drinking in injustice too greedily. Such a long day of fasting is too much for him. He can maintain it as long as his

stomach is upset by the violent illness from the painful situation that has taken place. But as soon as the first consternation has calmed down and wears away, his stomach begins to feel hunger for food again, even before the illness is completely healed. How shall it be when all these things have somewhat sunk into the deep lake of forgetfulness, wherein after all, everything sinks, both good and evil?

A drunkard, who has fallen deeply into his drunkenness, and has lain in this sickness for some time, when he is in the midst of his pain, he can curse the strong drink and can even promise solemnly that he will never drink again. But normally, after a year he has forgotten everything and he drinks as freely as before. So it normally takes place with the hypocrite. When he has fasted long enough from his old sins, then he is like a starved thin dog, who swallows down everything that he can find⁸. He is like a flowing river, that has been hindered by a dam for a time. It eventually swells to such a height, until it breaks through with great strength here or there, and floods everything. Thus the hypocrite holds back his sin as long as he can; but in the end he returns to his old tricks and evil pranks, even before he has shed his skilful garment of pretended repentance. Then he goes on and draws from all that has passed no other lesson, than that he resolves to be more agile and more careful, and to watch more diligently for that on which he has burned himself so painfully.

Now such a person cannot keep his eye on the way and know where he is going, before God's justice, which is following him in all his ways, has a thousand means ready to expose him further, and to cause him to fall into new sins and scandalous offences. These appear openly, by which his reputation is irreparably lost, and he becomes known to almost everyone as a dastardly hypocrite. Accordingly, everything lies in tatters, and no matter

⁸ See 2 Pet. 2:22

how cunning and trained he may be, nevertheless he cannot find any way to restore it as before. For when a hypocrite falls for the second time in a scandalous and public offence, normally he breaks his legs in so many pieces, that afterwards he cannot walk normally anymore.

We often see that such people proceed to enter a completely different way and that they cast off their hypocrites' garment, which by now is completely torn and worn out. By this they dispose of all timidity, shame and modesty before the world, so that they take on a hardened harlot's forehead. They begin to play the indifferent one; whoever wishes to esteem him may do so, and who does not, he may leave it. If the godly, or those who seem to be such, with whom they associated, now wish to have nothing more to do with them, they will not be upset by it anymore. There are enough companions in the world. They can get favour, advantage and respect from another sort of person by slandering the God-fearing, by revealing their secrets and causing them all sorts of damage and sorrow. Thus they soon reveal that an apostate is much worse than a Turk. In one word: once the conscience of the hypocrite is in deathly sleep and is duly numbed, rusted up and ruined, then there is no remedy left. Then such a person is open to anything, because 'the dog is not only returned to his vomit, but the last state is worse than the first'⁹. In truth, there is no more dangerous sort of person to deal with than these, because they are at home in all sorts of markets, as people say¹⁰. They are familiar with both divine and natural things and can just as easily make a mockery of both. Yes, they can sometimes endure the most profane atheists and free-thinkers; especially when they have wrecked everything, such that even their domestic and worldly matters are in tatters. This often happens; because the curse of God follows on the heels of such devious hypocrites.

Alas, what a pitiful and terrible state to be in. It would have been better that

⁹ A quotation of both 2 Pet. 2:22 and Matt. 12:45

¹⁰ Van der Groe means here, that such persons can make themselves pleasing to all sorts of people.

such persons had never been born. For whilst they are diligently working to greedily swallow in and binge on the remains of their desperate ungodliness, the terrible vengeance of Almighty God comes like a hurricane and at last surprizes them. Completely hardened and careless, it plucks them out of this life; sometimes by a sudden and bitter death, whereby they are destroyed in a moment. Or they are gradually or suddenly given over into the power of the devil, who breaks out with the direst temptations, blasphemies, torments, terrors and distresses upon their seared and calloused consciences. The weak spirit, even if it has now become so hard as iron and steel, cannot endure this. What a thing this is! Heaven and earth, how immeasurably spacious they may be, are a thousand times too terrifying and too narrow for condemned hypocrites. Nothing remains, but to seek an end and destruction, the noose or the knife, poison, fire or water.

Oh, my friends, all those of you who read our treatise with earnestness, take note how spotless this way began, and how tragically it now ends. It began with the law and the promises and it now ends with hell and with an everlasting perdition, which shall be all the more unbearable for them, according as they have sinned against more light and grace. Happy Turks and heathens, who have never heard any promises of the Gospel; but who have merely sought to live in moderation and fairness according to the light of nature. How light your judgment and damnation shall be in the great eternity, compared with that of such catastrophic Christians!

Is it not certain and true what the Scriptures say, that the good word of the Gospel for some is ‘a savour of death unto death’, and for others ‘a savour of life unto life’? Yes, let us all consider this well, that this terrible fall of the hypocrite was not born in one day. No, it took place slowly. It took place like one, who slides down a high mountain, which gets steeper the further down he goes. First he slides slowly, and can still stop himself. But once he is half-way down, his speed is so great, that he cannot hold himself back

anymore. Whether he wants to or not, he must go on, until along the way he has already broken arms and legs, before he has reached the bottom.

Hypocrisy is soul-destroying

Oh, if there is one dangerous and soul-destroying thing in the world, which we must be watch out for with the greatest carefulness, then it is certainly hypocrisy. And most of all we should beware of the hypocrisy that has her foundation and commencement in the loose and ungrounded application of the holy promises of the Gospel to ourselves. For all these precious pearls are entirely painted red in the blood of God's eternal Son, therefore they are much too valuable to be played with. Cursed be the hand and may it wither immediately and become leprous, whosoever roughly grasps at these holy things without repentance.

The very least disadvantage that arises is that those who before were somewhat troubled and desperate about themselves, as soon as they stretch out their hand in such a glib fashion to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, all of a sudden lose their concern and convictions of sin. They not only imperceptibly return to a calm condition, but even to a much more careless, proud and dangerous state than they were in before. For now they are found in an vain fantasy of their imagined grace and Christianity. They are now just like the Laodiceans, 'rich and increased with goods and having need of nothing' (Rev. 3:17). Consequently, they no longer seek for conversion, because they allow themselves to boast, that they are already good believers. They also do not desire to perform any further examination of their condition and consider it is no longer necessary. Or alternatively, if they are thereafter not completely reassured of their state, (because God grants them to live for some considerable time with an awakened conscience and under faithful convicting means of grace), then it is often observed that such concern and need never truly pierces through their false hope. The reason for this is frequently that this light and false work¹¹, that they have

¹¹ Van der Groe means here a work of common grace that is misused by the hypocrite, whose religion doesn't go deeper than that of the stony ground hearer.

experienced more than once with a promise that has struck them, has already secretly laid firm and deep foundations of a deceitful hope in their hearts, whatever concerns they still outwardly retain. Only the all-powerful hand of the Lord can rightly convict them of their deception. This is especially so, because satan will never neglect to administer to such wretched people both outwardly and inwardly at every possible opportunity such helps and supports for their injurious soul-deception, as he knows are most suitable to stiffen and harden them. And what is more, their own blind, deceitful and wandering heart is always inclined to most eagerly embrace and grasp these enticements of satan. Thus the plight of such miserable people is like those who have carelessly drunk a small amount of a sweet poison, by which they languish for a long time, sometimes even until death. They are never really healthy and also not ill, eventually they can die from it, if they refuse to take the right medication.

It is greatly to be feared that in our Laodicean church of today, from which the Lord has already departed so far with His Spirit, a considerable multitude of such miserable people shall be found, who have either great imaginations of their state and their Christianity, or live in a 'middle-state'. These last, by means of a general work of the Holy Spirit, which they have sometimes had with themselves and with the promises, are careless and calm in the foundation of their hearts, but more or less needy and concerned in their consciences. It can easily happen, that those who are inexperienced or in a similar condition as they are, consider them to be truly concerned souls and weak believers, because they seem to be like them. Yes, even those who have received some discriminating light from the Lord, but nevertheless do not truly know the state and condition of such people, can sometimes deal with them quite favourably. Thus, examining the state of persons, when they show no clear signs of deceit and hypocrisy, is certainly a most difficult and weighty work. We can never be too careful, both on the one side as on the other. It is very saddening to see, that all sorts of people dare to begin this

great work of examining souls so easily, as though they were born with this skill. Yet, what shall we say of this? It appears that this must be so, according to the counsel of the Lord, to hasten our downfall.

Wherein consists the truly contrite and believing use of the promises

We consider it is now necessary before we end this treatise, for the benefit of the reader, to make clear wherein the true contrite and believing use of the gracious promises of the holy Gospel consists. Also to explain how the Spirit of the Lord works this in the hearts of true believers, who are inwardly united with Christ and who receive all their salvation from the promises. We have particularly in mind true afflicted and weak believers amongst God's people, who by reason of the things we have written concerning hypocrites, could easily be greatly shaken and troubled, which was however not at all our purpose. If the Lord is pleased to give them light and grace, then they will see that their state differs as wide as the heavens from that of hypocrites.

1. They who sincerely and believingly labour with the promises, *always lacks in himself the grace of the promises, or the promised good and salvation that is offered by God in the promises. By contrast, he always has such a lamentable misery and sinful lack in himself; for which the grace of the promises is suitable and necessary to take away such misery from us.* For the Gospel promises are in themselves no otherwise, than certain offerings or gifts of definite spiritual benefits, which God makes in the Gospel by free grace through the Lord Jesus Christ to utterly poor and wretched sinners. By this means he demonstrates most abundantly His boundless love and mercy to comfort them, to help, deliver, to redeem them from their sins and to save them. The poor, elect sinners accept this offer of God's grace and embrace it willingly by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever the exact nature or quality God's promises may be, they always suppose an utterly poor sinner, who is truly wretched, ruinous, utterly destitute and needy in himself. He cannot find any comfort or help anywhere else, but only in God's compassionate grace through Christ. If for

example it is a promise of the gracious forgiveness of sins, it is certain, that they are only intended for guilty and hell-worthy sinners, who have provoked God grievously and are entirely laden with sins. They are those who with heartfelt sorrow feel the burden of their sins and the wrath and curse of God, which always inseparably follows upon sin. If it is a promise of light, wisdom, knowledge etc., this can be for no others than for totally blind, foolish and ignorant sinners, whose understanding is so darkened by sin, that they do not know God, nor Christ nor themselves, nor the way of salvation truly. It is for those who are truly in need concerning their spiritual blindness. Is it a promise of holiness or righteousness? Then it is necessary for ungodly, unholy and unrighteous sinners, who are utterly destitute of all holiness and righteousness. If it is a promise of spiritual power or strength, then it is surely for wretched and powerless sinners, who can do nothing from themselves. Or if it is a promise of comfort and joy, of peace and quietness, of counsel and guidance, or protection and preservation, or whatever it may be, it applies the same. The whole Gospel, which is nothing other than a great book or repository of God's gracious promises, is only proclaimed to the poor (Matt. 11:5). Yes, the promises of the Gospel are like the opened channels, by which the spiritual benefits of God's grace, which Christ has purchased for all His elect by His death, are brought to us, poor sinners from the heaven to the earth. They are as it were placed into our hands, that we, by the working of the Spirit in our hearts, should sincerely believingly grasp them and hold them and thereby receive our salvation by grace through God in Christ. To deliver us from our sins, God does not deal with us in any other way, than only through His gracious promises, clearly revealed to us in Christ in the Gospel. *For every particular blessing or grace, which the Lord grants us to our salvation, there is also a particular and explicit promise in the Gospel, to offer and grant this blessing to us, and for that purpose, to open the way to that purpose. Otherwise, a poor sinner could never obtain any grace or blessing from God.* To conclude this part we should make plain, that if we do not rightly understand the character and nature of an evangelical promise

in the light of the Holy Spirit, then we can never proceed with one single promise of God in sincere faith to our salvation.

2. *We can never sincerely believingly embrace and receive an evangelical promise, unless we are firstly made capable and amenable to the reception thereof by God Himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit.* No-one shall accept an offered pardon until he has made himself culpable by some offence to the punishment of the law, and in great need, knows no other way to be delivered from this punishment. So also, no sinner will sincerely and believingly accept with his heart any promise of the Gospel, until by a true spiritual conviction, he is thoroughly convinced of his guilt and of his desperate misery and woeful lack in himself, so that he experiences that the burden of it presses his heart heavily, and he cannot find any help or deliverance for himself anywhere else, in heaven or in earth. So long as it does not come to this, that the need of his own sin and misery so presses him upon his heart, that it is impossible for him to bear the burden of it anymore, and he can see no remedy anywhere apart from in God, nothing in the whole world can persuade him as a poor, powerless and ruined sinner, to turn with all his heart to the promises of God's free grace in Christ.

Those who think that the stony heart of a sinner can be softened and made compliant enough by the sweet promises of the Gospel¹², in order to come sincerely and believingly to Christ for grace, greatly deceive themselves and others. How many there are who do not know of the foundation of man's deep corruption because of sin and his lethal enmity against God and the Gospel. Therefore, they also cannot understand how a sinner is completely conquered and shattered by the law before the Lord. Therefore, they speak of a soft and gentle call of the Gospel. According to them, the general preaching and working of the Spirit is sufficient to make us willing towards

¹² See for instance the 'stony-ground hearer', Mark 4:3-8, 13.

Christ and to sincerely and believingly accept the promises of grace, unto salvation.

If they proposed that it was possible in this way to work in the heart of man an unfruitful and deceiving temporary faith, we would concede this without much dispute. But these people refuse to hear anything of the essential difference between temporary faith and true saving faith. It is also certain, that the distinction between the two can never be rightly understood, if one does not rightly understand the distinction between Law and Gospel, and the working of both in the heart by the Spirit, both when someone is converted, as also in the daily walk of a Christian before the Lord.

We would like to seriously ask all such people, what a sinner shall do with Christ and what he shall commence with the promises of His grace, if prior to his coming to Christ and the promises, he has never felt his spiritual needs, sins and miseries with a true and painful shame and is not tired and perplexed under them?

This they will admit, but they desire, that the heart of man shall be brought to a sufficient shame and holy complacency, solely or primarily by means of the Gospel itself, and by the declaration of its precious and delightful promises. Yet we answer, that it was never God's way and it is also not the nature and the capacity of the Gospel, to do such a thing without the help and the shattering power of the Law. The Law must, by the convicting work of the Spirit, first pierce the soul of the sinner, and the Gospel must then heal the painful wound, which the Law has made in the heart. This is God's own way, to make poor sinners into true believers. But the other is a way which foolish people have invented to turn many in the world into glittering hypocrites.

It is equally so as in the natural realm, with someone who is healthy and has no need of either medicine or a doctor. Someone tries to get him to take some medicine; in doing so, such a person only seeks himself. What does

he do? He presents the doctor to him in the most favourable light possible. He praises him as a most wonderfully capable, skilful, experienced, kind and amiable man, who treats diseases extraordinarily well and most tenderly. He normally heals them in a short time and does it all for nothing, because he is such a rich man. He also praises the wonderful power of the medical products which he prescribes, how pleasant they are to take and how mild and certain their working is etc. All this takes place so skilfully, enticingly and with the greatest agility as possibly can be. They say, oh dear fellow, do come to the doctor, please don't wait any longer, etc. So they persist until such a person has been persuaded and convinced to go and lie down on the bed, and to call the doctor to come and to take his medicine. Is this not a beautiful display?

But in the spiritual realm it's no different. Even though the precious merits of the Lord Jesus and His bloody sufferings and death are proclaimed as powerfully and movingly as possible from the promises of the Gospel upon the conscience of an impenitent person, it will have no effect. Even though you portray Christ with all his benefits so gloriously, fairly and desirably; although you assure him that everything is his so long as he with a broken heart, sincerely and believingly desires to receive and accept it from the hand of God's grace. Yes, although you plead and beseech him in the most tender fashion and persist with every sort of serious arguments that he should do so. Behold what progress you will make with him, so long as God Himself, by a spiritual conviction of the Law, does not first in truth and with power press upon his heart the burden of his sins and the weight of wrath, curse and condemnation, and make him so needy, that at last completely desperate and broken, he falls in faith at the feet of Christ. Most surely, you will sooner move heaven and earth from their place, than that you will move the heart of an impenitent sinner to come in sincere faith to Christ and be saved by Him in His own way, even though you use all the promises of the holy Gospel to this end.

Normally, the promises of the Gospel are so presented, that they also indicate the required qualities in man, by which the promises shall be sincerely and believingly accepted and received. These qualities are: the mourning and comfortless, the poor in spirit, the sick and wounded, the labouring and heavy laden, the hungering and thirsting, the broken-hearted and the contrite, the blind, the lost, the powerless etc. to whom God makes His promises in the Gospel. Therefore, all those who will accept these promises sincerely and believingly, should indeed be such persons, not only in their state, but also in a true feeling, whereby they conduct themselves as such ruined creatures before God. If this is not the case, then they take the promises by pretense, and rejoice in them, just like hypocrites and temporary believers, which we have discussed before. Through the deceit of satan, the deceitfulness of man has always consisted herein, that he commonly takes the promises of the Gospel and acts with them before that they are suitable objects, and before they have heartily known or felt their spiritual needs and miseries, to which the promises alone relate. It is still so, that many people take God's holy promises which only belong to poor, broken-hearted sinners. They take them with an uncontrite and unbroken heart, through a general conviction, which nevertheless does not touch the depth of their hearts. They do the same as a healthy person who takes medicine or goes to the doctor. Such a misuse of the divine promises cannot be otherwise than highly dangerous and often fatal for them. For by this, all the light of conviction in their heart is completely counteracted and the candle put out with the clean damper of the delightful promises. Undoubtedly, many reprobates experience this now, sadly too late, with everlasting remorse in hell.

3. In the believing use of the divine promises *there is also a certain, fixed order, by which the first and the foremost promise of the Gospel must always firstly be received and embraced by us by faith.* The principle promise is that of Christ Himself and of the forgiveness of sins in His Name. The Spirit, who speaks in the

Gospel, normally presents to us the whole salvation of a poor sinner, by means of the one promise of reconciliation, or the forgiveness of sins, through Christ. So the apostle speaks, that God has set forth His Son Jesus Christ to be a propitiation through faith in His blood (Rom. 3:25). Christ is also set forth to us in the Gospel for many other objectives and blessed benefits, but the apostle summarizes them all under the only great and principal benefit of gracious reconciliation. Therefrom flow naturally all the other benefits of salvation, by the working of the Spirit. See 1 Joh. 4:10 and Acts 13:38: 'Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins', as the principal content and matter of all the promises of the Gospel. We find this in many places in the Scriptures. what other reason is there for this, than that the gracious reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of sins through Christ are the principal good and the first benefit of the Gospel? A poor, broken-hearted sinner, who is entirely separated from God and lies under His wrath, needs this more than anything else. For until he is reconciled to God by an unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus and has received forgiveness for all his sins, by grace, he remains an ungodly and unbelieving enemy of God, still lying under His severe curse and wrath. In such an unreconciled state, he cannot receive any other grace or benefit from God by a way of faith. For only 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him' (Joh. 3:36). Indeed, so long as someone remains in a state of unbelief in their hearts with respect to the great promises of Christ and the gracious forgiveness of sins through Him, it cannot be otherwise than that he shall also remain in unbelief towards all the other promises of the Gospel. For it is the native character and nature of true faith, to receive all God's promises without distinction. Particularly, faith does not reject the greatest and primary promises, which God has given to poor and miserable sinners. Therefore, it is always so vital that a contrite sinner, who shall sincerely believe unto salvation, firstly receives with his heart the promises of Christ

and of the gracious reconciliation with God in Him, and believingly approbates them to himself. Oh all poor and penitent sinners, who sincerely believe, should greatly hunger and thirst for this with all their hearts. Otherwise they only play loosely and hypocritically with all the other promises of the Gospel and woefully deceive themselves. Whatever they may desire by grace from God, on the grounds of His own offers and promises in the Gospel, it should always be thus in their hearts, that especially and before all other things their concern is to have the Lord Jesus, and through Him to be reconciled to God. Nothing should ever have precedence in their affections, above Christ and His grace. Whatever promise of sanctification, or of some other blessing, someone has obtained or received in his own way, before he has received the great promise of Christ and of gracious justification, this is always a deceptive work of satan to lull him to sleep. After all, the Lord Jesus teaches us clearly that He is the Way, and that no-one comes to the Father but by Him (Joh. 14:6). So long as we do not first receive Himself and the forgiveness of sins through Him by true faith, it is certain that for us sinners there is forever no other way or means of coming to God opened through any promise of the Gospel.

How could satan have ever devised a greater trick to the eternal destruction of men than this, that those who have never been truly brought to see their need of Christ and the forgiveness of their sins through His blood (which is the principle promise of the whole Gospel), but continue to reject it by pure unbelief; at the same time imagine that they are sincere in their approach to the other promises of God's grace, for their conversion and salvation! They cannot enjoy any real fruit, nor make use of these promises, so long they live outside of Christ and atonement. Oh, that we would consider this clear and weighty matter, upon which verily our eternal salvation depends, and would duly examine ourselves!

4. Those who sincerely and believingly receive the promises with their

heart, *seek to make these promises and the included benefits and graces wholly their own, they sincerely hunger and thirst to possess them as their own property and to place all their trust in them.* The reason for this is, that such persons have been thoroughly taught their spiritual need and misery, by a true divine conviction through the mirror of the Law. They feel the burden painfully in their hearts, so that it's impossible for them to endure missing or lacking the promised benefits of God's grace, which are presented to them in the Gospel. They will gladly miss all other things, if only they may obtain the promised grace in the Gospel.

Hypocrites and temporary believers are always satisfied with a bare consideration of the promises, or with the light of them. They have a casual imagination, that these things are also for them; without ever really desiring the promised blessings of Christ's grace with their whole hearts. Especially they have never desired them in the order in which God presents them in the Gospel. The reason for this is that they do not belong to the number of those who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' who are pronounced blessed by the Lord Jesus (Matt. 5:6). But the truly humbled and believing soul can never be satisfied, that he gets a clear insight into the divine promises and into the beauty and the preciousness of these benefits which they contain for the poor and broken-hearted sinners; just as little as a famished person can be satisfied with a mere sight of a table decked with costly dishes, when he is not allowed to eat of them. Oh no, the true believer must sincerely and believingly embrace these precious promises of God's grace for themselves, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Before this, they cannot be satisfied, before this their weary souls cannot find rest. They cannot be content, until they may truly believe that, that which God grants in general to poor, needy sinners is also given to them personally and belongs to them, so that they may embrace it and receive it as their own possession and place a true trust in it.

To take this away from the true believer and to dispute this, would surely be nothing else than to wish to make them into feigned Christians and hypocrites. A poor needy sinner, to whom God by grace has given saving faith says: Oh, the promises must also be for me, yes, as well as for me as for others. Me, poor sinner, who am utterly condemned and lost forever in myself, must also possess that great good of salvation and grace, and indeed must expect this grace from my God and Saviour in faith. Oh, otherwise I am the most wretched and most miserable person who lives upon earth; give me only the grace of the Gospel, may Christ be but mine, may my sins be forgiven for Christ's sake – and then my heart is satisfied. Then I am content to lack everything that the Lord is pleased to withhold or to take from me.

We can compare such people to one who is severely wounded, who when he arrives at the doctor, sees all sorts of ointments and plasters there. But he is not satisfied with them, he desires that these remedies are applied to his painful wounds. This is why we hear David crying to God so earnestly: 'Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, *even* thy salvation, according to thy word' (Ps. 119:41) and 'Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who *is devoted* to thy fear' (Ps. 119:38). A hypocrite would have sprung over this matter much more lightly. *Merely some light shining upon God's Word, which appears with some living emotion in their understanding, is enough for them to immediately conclude all is well, and to imagine that they are partakers of God's salvation and lovingkindness.* But David desired much more for his afflicted and needy soul than this. God's redemption and lovingkindness must come upon him, he must receive it and enjoy it from the Lord. The Lord must fulfill and confirm His Word to him. He could not simply be content that he was truly the servant of the Lord and He was endued with His fear. The hypocrite is hardly concerned about this in his heart, so long as he can appear to be God's child before men.

5. *A true believer clings to the promises with the hand of faith, as an utterly ruined sinner, his heart depends and leans upon them, without being willing to let the promises go.* He acts as a person in a shipwreck, who grasps a plank or beam from the broken ship and holds onto it with all his strength, as the only support that he has and whereby he hopes to save his life. In the same way, the evangelical promises are the only support for the soul of a poor, lost and believing sinner, who truly hungers and thirsts after God's grace from his heart, and who knows that outside of these promises his life is lost forever. Oh, if he should forsake these precious and gracious promises of God, then there is nothing in all the wide world that can comfort his soul or can keep his soul in life. Therefore, he not only grasps them with all his strength, but he also holds on to them immovably, not willing to let them go again for all the world. He remains cleaving so tightly to them with his afflicted and weary soul, whatever comes upon him. He finds all his rest, strength and comfort in them and says with David: Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope (Ps. 119:116). If he should lose this sole support of the promises, then he should also lose his life. Therefore the true believer speaks so much about the promises and holds them in such great value, because his whole salvation rests upon them. Yes, the more spiritual and believing his heart is, the more he will treasure God's promises and the stronger he will hold onto them. But if a true believer delights little in the promises, then this is a sure sign he is in a very lifeless condition. His heart will be cleaving too much to the world and to self-righteousness, which are the two most damaging enemies of the believer. So it is generally in the Church. If there is little or no lively instruction in the promises and no particular attention is given to them, and if the right emphasis is not laid upon them at every opportunity, then this is always a clear sign that but little Evangelical light shines, so that the state of such a church is very decayed and unspiritual. Unless the correct means against this decay are put into effect in good time, by the grace of the Lord, it cannot be otherwise than that the Church must before long be completely

decayed to an incurable luke-warmness and to the most damaging Pelagianism, sectarianism and liberalism whereby so many churches sooner or later have fallen.

6. When a true believer makes use of the promises of the Gospel by the working of the Holy Spirit, *he always sees most vividly and clearly his utter sinfulness, loathsomeness and hell-worthiness before the Lord, under a sense of which he sinks down in a sincere and humble shame.* Then he receives the promises from such a high, holy and merciful God no otherwise than with as it were with a trembling hand. He cries out: Oh, who am I, that the Lord should look upon such a dead dog as me and that God should be so unspeakably compassionate and gracious! I am nothing but an evil and hell-worthy creature, and nothing would be lost, even if the Lord should cast me immediately into hell forever! His soul is very humble and grateful, in every way inclined to God's praise; he can never praise the Lord enough. He can only sink down in astonishment for God's all-sufficiency and unfathomable mercy. He cries out with the Psalmist: 'Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death' (Ps. 56: 12,13).

By means of the promises which he believingly embraces, the true believer is made very humble and little in his own eyes before the Lord. By them he learns to walk humbly with His God (Mic. 6:8). On the contrary, the hypocrite always takes harmful food from the promises for their vain imagination, whereby they make a ladder by which they climb up to the heights.

7. A true believer embraces the promises of God *always only in Christ, and considers them to be nothing other than blessed fruits and results of His holy merits.* 'For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us' (2 Cor. 1:20). He sees clearly in the pure light of faith, that God can never have any fellowship with such a defiled sinner as he is, but through Christ. He sees that there is nothing to be found in himself, which the Lord could

look upon or could move Him to hold affection towards him. O no, it is all only pure grace, which Christ by His death has merited and purchased for His true believing people. Such a person shall therefore never believingly receive a promise from God (whether it be more clearly or more covered in their experience) than only from and by the hand of Christ. He has purchased them for him by grace, as the Surety and Mediator between God and the poor, believing sinner. Thus is also the Holy Spirit the Spirit of promise, Who works both faith as well as the grace of the promises in the hearts of the elect, by means of the Gospel. He does this in such a way, that the true believer in embracing the promises, is always (whether it be with clarity or in the foundation) having dealings with the Triune God by faith. In this, they grasp the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the power and communion of the Holy Spirit. In this way, they become 'partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel' (Eph. 3:6).

But for the hypocrites, in the heart of the matter, it is otherwise. Although they work in this way with their mind, nevertheless their hearts never come to union by faith with the Triune God. Usually, they have dealings with God in general, or with one of the Divine Persons in particular. They never lay much weight in their hearts upon the Divine Trinity, or upon the Mediatorship of Christ, however orthodox they confess, think and speak of these truths.

But a true believer knows no other promises in the Gospel that can give him life, than only those which are painted red in the holy blood of the Lamb, and over which the delightful odour of the precious merits of the Lord Jesus are spread. Only these make everything fragrant.

8. He who believingly embraces the promises of God with his heart, *he sees and feels in a very lively way his own blindness and powerlessness to ever be able to receive or hold on to any promise of the Gospel, otherwise than by a continual revival and*

communication of the spiritual light of faith in his soul. He experiences with painful sorrow the great opposition of his dark and unbelieving flesh which is within him. It refuses to submit to a Divine Gospel, that proclaims only heavenly and soul-sanctifying grace through the blood of a crucified Saviour, but always stands opposed to it with an unyielding enmity. This causes him to groan as a wretched creature, and to constantly look unto the Lord for an eye and a hand of faith, to embrace His precious promises and to hold on to them. For he feels that he continually needs light and the enabling grace of the Spirit. He needs this grace not only to grasp the promises by faith every time, but also to cleave unto the Lord, and to continually wait upon Him in everything, as the God and the Rock of his salvation. For again and again he meets with many mighty hindrances from within and without, that would drive the light of faith out of his heart. In time, all sincere Christians in this way learn their true misery in a very deep way, so that they can do nothing without the Lord Jesus (Joh. 15:5). On the contrary, the temporary believer and the hypocrite in their own manner, can always lay hold on all the promises of the Gospel, if only their mind receives some light from beholding them, and their natural affections are moved and are set in motion by them.

9. He who sincerely and believingly receives the promises of God, *he always obtains from them the power and the strength unto sanctification.* For the promises include nothing else, but pure holy, spiritual and heavenly commodities, which God grants by grace to poor believing sinners through Christ. When the true believer takes these commodities from the hand of God and receives them in his heart, then it cannot be otherwise than they are more and more sanctified, freed from sin, and stirred up and vigorously encouraged unto true godliness and heavenly-mindedness by this heavenly power of God's grace in their heart. Every promise, which we sincerely and believingly embrace and receive, is like a new bond and impetus for our souls, to unite us more unto God by the Spirit and to draw us further off

from sin and this vain world. For true faith, which only lives and works by the continual nourishment of the Divine promises and by them alone obtains her strength and growth, is after all the only means of our sanctification, whereby our hearts are purified from sin (Acts 15:9). Therefore, those who are the most employed in a life of faith in the promises, are always the most holy and tender Christians; for thereby they abide in Christ and Christ in them (Joh. 15:5). The promises are as it were pathways and apertures to heaven. Those who often believingly enter in and walk in them with their hearts, how can it be otherwise than that they more and more lay aside all vanity and worldly things and approach closer and closer to heaven, and are 'made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:6). This caused the apostle to say: 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Cor. 7:1).

But with the hypocrite it is once again completely otherwise. They always combine two things together, that is they are exercised with the promises and they live in sin. In their hearts they always remain unchanged in their love of sin, however beautiful an appearance of godliness they may display before others. Their hearts remain always much more devoted to the world than to heaven. However much they also take the promises, they nevertheless never receive true power to bring forth spiritual renewal and sanctification of their hearts. We have already pointed this out at length from their own ways.

Herewith we consider this great and weighty matter of the sincere and believing use of the promises of the holy Gospel to be a little expounded, with the help of the Lord, so far as the short scope of this treatise allows. The Lord Jesus Christ, Who sits upon the throne and Who lives for ever and ever, pour out His gracious and merciful blessing upon this little means. May it be beneficial and serviceable to salvation of one of His precious elect

people. That is the deepest desire and supplication before the Lord of me, of all men and particularly the saints, the least servant, by the grace of the Spirit of His Lord Jesus Christ,

Theodore van der Groe
Kralingen, 1st November 1749