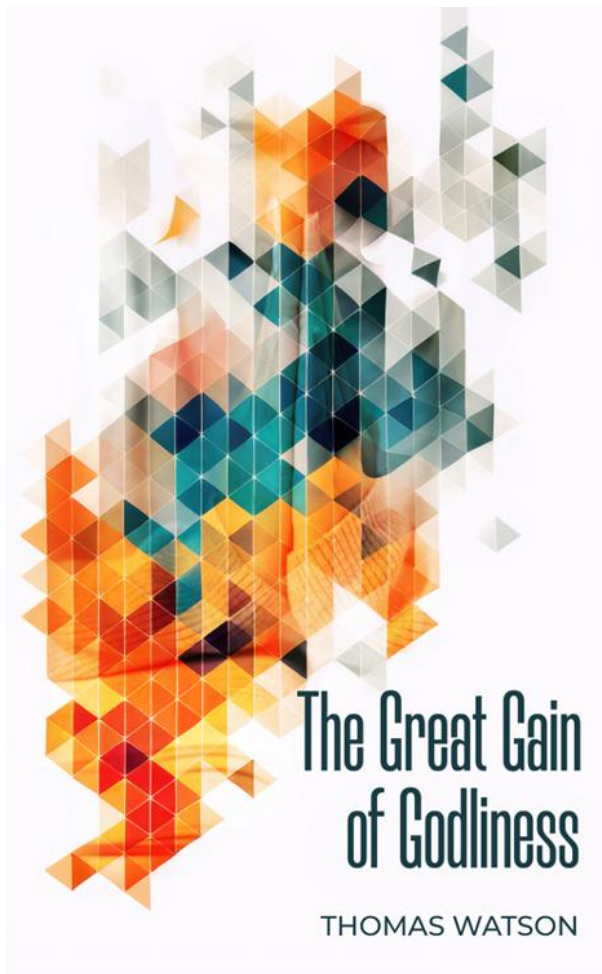




The Great Gain of Godliness

THOMAS WATSON



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by Thomas Watson

Table of Contents

[Christian Reader](#)

[Part I: The Character of the Godly](#)

[Reasons to Fear God](#)

[The Excellence of the Fear of God](#)

[Is the Fear of God in our Hearts?](#)

[The Godly Should Speak of God](#)

[The Godly Should Meditate on God's Name](#)

[Part II: The Good Effects of Godliness](#)

[God Records the Piety of His People](#)

[God Rewards the Piety of His People](#)

[God Rewards His Piety by Owning Them](#)

[God Rewards His People by Honouring Them](#)

[God Rewards His People by Sparing Them](#)

[The Righteous and the Wicked Discerned](#)

[A Consolation in Affliction](#)

Christian Reader

"Of making many *books* there is no end, and much study wearies the body." Ecclesiastes 12:12. *Books* are the "children of the brain". In this writing age, when they are brought forth ad nauseam, I intended that my pen should have been silent—but the variety and weightiness of this subject, as also the desire of some friends, did prevail with me to publish it. The main design of this excellent Scripture, is to encourage solid piety, and confute the atheists of the world, who imagine there is no gain in godliness. It was the speech of King Saul to his servants, "Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards?" (1 Samuel 22:7). Will the world or men's lusts give them such noble recompenses of reward—as God bestows upon his followers! Surely, it is holiness which carries away the garland!

As for this treatise, it comes abroad in a plain dress: truth like a diamond—shines brightest in its native luster! Paul did not come to the Corinthians with excellency of speech, or the pride of oratory — his study was not to *court*—but *convert*. It is an unhappiness that, in these luxuriant times, religion should for the most part run either into *notion* or *ceremony*; the spirits of true religion are evaporated. When *knowledge* is turned into *soul food*, and digested into *practice*—then it is saving. That God would accompany these few imperfect lines with the operation and benediction of his Holy Spirit, and make them edifying—is the prayer of him who is

Yours in all Christian service,

Thomas Watson, London, November 22, 1681

"Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the Lord and thought upon His name. "They will be mine," says the Lord Almighty, "in the day when I make up My jewels! I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not." Malachi 3:16-18

The "scripture of truth" is the ground of faith. This portion of Scripture which now presents itself to our view, has its sacred elegancies, and is all glorious within. It was composed by Malachi, whose name means "messenger". He came as an ambassador from the God of heaven. This prophet was so famous that Origen and others injudiciously supposed him to be an angel. He lived after the building of the second temple, and was contemporary with Haggai and Zechariah.

This blessed prophet lifted up his voice like a trumpet, and told the Jewish nation of their sins. He was the last trumpet that sounded in the Old Testament. In the words of the text are these parts:

Part I. The character of the Godly

1. In *general*, they were fearers of God: "those who feared the Lord."
2. In *particular*—

a. They *spoke* often one to another.

b. They *thought* upon God's Name.

Part II. The Great Gain of their Godliness

1. The Lord *regarded* it—"the Lord listened and heard."

2. The Lord *recorded* it—"a book of remembrance was written.

3. The Lord *rewarded* it. This reward consisted in three things:

a. God's *owning* them: "They will be mine."

b. God's *honoring* them: "In the day when I make up my jewels."

c. God's *sparing* them: "I will spare them."

Before I come to the several parts distinctly, note the connective word standing at the beginning of the text which may not be omitted, namely, the word THEN. "*Then* those who feared the Lord talked with each other . . ." *Then*, that is, after Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity; then, when the major part of the people grew corrupt, and came out of the furnace worse than they went in! In this bad juncture of time, then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another.

Hence observe—that **the profaneness of the times should not slacken our zeal—but heighten it.** The looser *others* are—the stricter *we* should be. In those degenerate times when men were arrived at the peak and height of impudence, and dared to speak treason against heaven—then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another. When others were plaintiffs—these were defendants; when others spoke *against* God—these spoke *for* God.

In *Noah's* days all flesh had corrupted itself (the old world was drowned in *sin*—before it was drowned in *water*). Now at *this* time, Noah was perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). He was the phoenix of his age. Athanasius stood up in the defense of the truth when the world had turned Arian. The more *outrageous* others are in sin—the more *courageous* we should be for truth! When the atheists said, "It is vain to serve God," then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another.

Why should we be holiest in evil times?

1. Because of the divine injunction. God charges us to be *singular* (Matt. 5:47), to be *circumspect* (Eph. 5:15), to be *separate* from idolaters (2 Cor. 6:17), to shine as lights in the dark world (Phil. 2:15). He forbids us to *join* together with sinners, or *do* as they do. The way to hell is a well-trodden road, and the Lord calls to us to turn out of the road: "You shall not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exod. 23:2). This is sufficient reason to keep ourselves pure in a time of common infection. As God's *Word* is our *rule*—so his *will* is our *warrant*.

2. To be holiest in evil times, is an indication of the truth of grace. To profess religion when the times favor it, is no great matter. Almost all will court the *Gospel Queen* when she is hung with *jewels*. But to own the ways of God when they are *decried* and maligned, to love a *persecuted* truth—this evidences a vital principle of goodness. *Dead fish swim down the stream—living fish swim against it.* To swim against the common stream of evil, shows grace to be alive. The prophet Elijah continuing zealous for the Lord Almighty, when they had dug down God's altars—showed his heart and lips had been touched with a coal from the altar.

Use 1. See hence how unworthy they are of the name of Christians, who use sinful compliance, and cut the *garment of their religion* according to the *mode* and *fashion* of the times. They do not consult what is best—but what is safest. Complying spirits can truckle to the desires of others; they can bow either to the East or to the West; they prefer a *whole skin* before a pure conscience. They can, with the planet Mercury, vary their motion; they can, as the mariner, shift their sail with every wind and, as the mongrel Israelites, speak the language of both *Canaan* and *Ashdod*. These are like the *Samaritans* of whom Josephus says, when the Jews flourished they pretended to be akin to them—but when the Jews were persecuted, they disclaimed kindred with them. The old serpent has taught men *crooked windings*, and to be for that religion which does not have truth on its side—but worldly power.

Use 2. Let us keep up the vigor of our zeal, in degenerate times. We should by a holy contrariness—burn *hotter* in a *frozen* age. We live in the *dregs* of time; sin is grown common and impudent. It is excellent to walk *contrary* to the world, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world!" (Romans 12:2). Let us be as *lilies* and *roses* among the briars. *Sin is never the better, because it is in fashion!* Nor will this plea hold at the last day—that we did as the most did. God will say, Seeing you sinned with the multitude—you shall go to hell with the multitude! Oh, let us keep pure among the dregs; let us be like fish that retain their freshness in salt waters; and as that lamp which shone in the smoking furnace (Gen. 15:17).

1. Consider—To be holy in times of general defection, is that with which God is greatly pleased. The Lord was much delighted with the holy conferences and dialogues of these saints in the text. When others were inveighing against God, that there should

be a remnant of holy souls speaking of glory and the life to come—their words were *music in God's ears!*

2. Consider—To keep up a spirit in holiness in an adulterous generation is a Christian's honor. This was the glory of the church of Pergamum, that she held fast Christ's name—even where Satan's seat was (Rev. 2:13). *The impiety of the times, is a foil to set off grace all the more, and give it a greater luster.* Then a Christian is most lovely, when he is (as Ambrose says) like the cypress, which keeps its verdure and freshness in the *winter* season. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright" (Psalm 37:37). An upright man is always worth beholding—but then he is most to be admired when like a bright star, he shines in the dark, and having lost all, he holds fast his integrity.

3. Consider—To be godly in a profligate age does much to animate weak beginners; it strengthens feeble knees (Isaiah 35:3) and shores up those temples of the Holy Spirit which are ready to fall. One man's zeal is a burning torch for others to catch fire at. How did the constancy of the martyrs inflame the love of many to the truth! Though only Christ's blood *saves*—yet the blood of martyrs may *strengthen*. Paul's prison chain made converts in Nero's court, two of whom were afterwards martyrs, as history relates. Mr. Bradford's holy advice and example, so confirmed Bishop Ferrar, that he would not touch the Roman pollution.

4. Consider—How sad will it be for professors to fall off from their former profession, and espouse a novel religion. Julian bathed himself in the blood of beasts offered in sacrifice to the heathen gods, and so as much as lay in him washed off his former baptism. In the time of Julius Caesar this astonishing thing happened: after a plentiful vintage, wild grapes appeared upon their

vines, which was looked upon as an ominous sign. When men seemed to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, and afterwards bring forth the *wild grapes* of impiety—it is a sad omen and prognostic of their ruin! "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment (2 Pet. 2:21). Let all this make us maintain the *power of holiness* in the *worst* times. Though others wonder we do not sin after the rate that they do—yet remember, *it is better to go to heaven with a few than to hell in the crowd*. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Matthew 7:13-14.

Question: How may we keep up the briskness and fervor of grace, in times of apostasy?

Answer 1. Let us beware of having our hearts too much linked to the world. The world damps zeal—as earth chokes the fire. We are bid to love our enemies; but the world is such an enemy as we must not love, "Do not love the world or anything in the world." (1 John 2:15). The world *bewitches* with her blandishments, and *kills* with her silver darts! He who is a *Demas*—will be a *Judas*! A lover of the world will, for a piece of money, betray a holy cause, and make shipwreck of a good conscience.

Answer 2. Let us be volunteers in piety; that is, choose God's service; "I have chosen the way of truth" (Psalm 119:30). It is one thing to be good, with a holy end in view. Hypocrites are good only out of worldly design. They embrace the gospel for secular advantage, and these will in time, fall away. It is fabled that the *Chelidonian stone* keeps its virtue no longer than it is enclosed in

gold; take it out of the gold, and it loses its virtue. False hearts are good no longer than they are enclosed in golden prosperity; take them out of the gold and they lose all their *seeming* goodness. But if we would retain our sanctity in backsliding times we must serve God purely out of choice. He who is godly out of choice, loves holiness for its beauty, and adheres to the gospel, when all the *jewels of preferment* are pulled off.

Answer 3. Let us be inlaid with *sincerity*. If a piece of timber begins to bend, it is because it is not sound. Why do any bend and comply against their conscience—but because their hearts are not sound. "Their hearts were insincere toward Him, and they were unfaithful to His covenant." (Psalm 78:37). *Sincerity* causes *stability*. When the apostle exhorts to *stand fast* in the evil day, among the rest of the Christian armor, he bids them put on the belt of truth, "Stand firm then, with the *belt of truth* buckled around your waist." (Eph. 6:14). The *belt of truth* is nothing else but *sincerity*.

Answer 4. Let us get love to Christ. Love is a *holy fuel*. It fires the affections, steels the courage, and carries a Christian above the love of life, and the fear of death. Many waters cannot quench love (Song of Solomon 8:7). Love made Christ suffer for us. If anyone asks what Christ died of, it may be answered, "He died of love!" If we love Christ—we will own him in the worst times, and be like that virgin of whom Basil speaks who, not accepting deliverance upon sinful terms, cried out, "Let life and money go! Welcome Christ!"

Answer 5. If we would keep up the sprightly vigor of grace in evil times, let us harden our hearts against the taunts and reproaches of the wicked. David was the song of the drunkards (Psalm 69:12). A Christian is never the worse for reproach. The *stars* are not the less glorious, though they have ugly

names given them, the *Bear*, the *Dragon*, etc. Reproaches are but *splinters of the cross*. How will he endure the *stake*—who cannot bear a *scoff*? Reproaches for Christ, are ensigns of honor, and badges of adoption (1 Peter 4:14). Let Christians bind these reproaches, as a *crown* about their head. *Better have men reproach you for being godly—than have God damn you for being wicked!* Be not laughed out of your religion. If a *lame* man laughs at you for walking upright—will you therefore limp?

Answer 6. If we would keep up the vigor of devotion during evil times, let us beg God for *confirming* grace. *Habitual* grace may flag; Peter had habitual grace—yet was foiled; he lost a single battle, though not the victory. We need exciting, assisting, sustaining grace; not only grace *in* us—but grace *with* us (1 Cor. 15:10). Sustaining grace (which is a fresh gale of the Spirit) will carry us undauntedly through the world's blustering storms. Thus shall we be able to keep up our heroic zeal in corrupt times, and be as Mount Zion—which cannot be moved.

Part I. The Character of the Godly

Having done with the *frontispiece* of the text, I begin, in the first place, with *the character in general of the godly*: they are fearers of God, "*Those who **feared** the Lord*". What fear is meant here? Considered **negatively**:

1. It is not meant of a **natural** fear, which is a tremor or palpitation of heart, occasioned by the approach of some imminent danger. "They are afraid of dangers on the road" (Eccles. 12:5).
2. It is not meant of a **sinful** fear, which is twofold:

A **superstitious** fear. A black cat crossing the path, is by some more dreaded than a harlot lying in the bed.

A **carnal** fear. This is the fever of the soul which sets it a shaking. He who is *timorous*, will be *treacherous*; he will *decoy his friend*, and *deny his God*. Three times in one chapter Christ cautions us against the fear of men, (Matthew 10:26-31). Aristotle says that the reason why the chameleon turns into so many colors, is through excessive fear. Fear makes men change their religion as the chameleon does her colors!

A carnal fear is EXCRUCIATING, "fear has torment in it." (1 John 4:18). The Greek word for torment is sometimes put for *hell* (Matt. 25:46). Fear has *hell* in it.

A carnal fear is PERNICIOUS. It indisposes for duty. The disciples, under the power of fear, were fitter to flee than to pray, (Matthew 26:56), and it puts men upon sinful means to save themselves: "The fear of man brings a snare!" (Proverbs 29:25). What made Peter deny Christ, and Origen sprinkle incense before the idol—but fear?

Considered **positively**, the fear meant in the text is a **divine** fear, which is the reverencing and adoring of God's holiness, and the setting of ourselves always under his sacred inspection. The infinite distance between God and us causes this fear.

When God's glory began to shine out upon the Mount, Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake!" (Heb. 12:21). Such as approach God's presence with light feathery hearts, and worship him in a crude, careless manner—have none of this fear.

"Those who feared the Lord". In the words are two parts.

1. The Act—fear.

2. The Object—the Lord.

"Those who feared the Lord". The fear of God is the sum of all true religion. "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Fear is the *leading* grace, the first *seed* which God sows in the heart. When a Christian can say little of *faith*, and perhaps nothing of *assurance*, yet he dares not deny that he *fears* God (Neh. 1:11). God is so *great*—that the Christian is afraid of *displeasing* him; and so *good*—that he is afraid of *losing* him.

Doctrine: It is an indispensable duty incumbent on Christians, to be fearers of God. "Fear God!" (Eccles. 5:7). "That you may fear the glorious and awesome name of the Lord your God!" (Deut. 28:58). This fear of God, is the very foundation of a saint. One can no more act as a *Christian* without the fear of God—than he can act as a *man* without reason. This holy fear is the fixed temper and complexion of the soul; this fear is not *servile*—but *filial*. There is a difference between *fearing God*, and *being afraid of God*. The godly fear God as a child does his *father*; the wicked are afraid of God as the prisoner is of the *judge!* This divine fear will appear admirable if you consider how it is *mixed* and *interwoven* with several of the *graces*.

1. The fear of God is mixed with LOVE (Psalm 145:19, 20)

The chaste spouse fears to displease her husband, because she loves him. There is a necessity that fear and love should be in conjunction. *Love* is as the sails to make swift the soul's motion; and *fear* is as the ballast to keep it steady in true religion. Love will be apt to grow wanton, unless it is counter-balanced with fear.

2. The fear of God is mixed with FAITH. "By faith Noah, moved with holy fear, prepared an ark" (Hebrews 11:7). When the soul looks either to God's holiness, or its own sinfulness—it fears. But it is a fear mixed with faith in Christ's merits; the soul *trembles*—yet *trusts*. Like a ship which lies at anchor, though it *shakes* with the wind, yet it is fixed at anchor. God in great wisdom couples these two graces of *faith* and *fear*. *Fear* preserves seriousness, *faith* preserves cheerfulness. Fear is as lead to the net—to keep a Christian from floating in presumption; and faith is as cork to the net—to keep him from sinking in despair.

3. The fear of God is mixed with PRUDENCE. He who fears God has the *serpent's eye* in the *dove's head*. He foresees and avoids those rocks upon which others run. "A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it." (Proverbs 22:3). Though divine fear does not make a person *cowardly*—it makes him *cautious*.

4. The fear of God is mixed with HOPE. "The eyes of the Lord are on those who *fear* him, on those whose *hope* is in his unfailing love" (Psalm 33:18). One would think that fear would destroy hope—but it nourishes it. Fear is to hope, as the oil to the lamp—it keeps it burning. The more we *fear* God's justice—the more we may *hope* in his mercy. Indeed, such as have no fear of God do sometimes hope—but it is not "good hope through grace" (2 Thess. 5:26). Sinners pretend to have the "helmet of hope" (1 Thess. 5:8)—but lack the "breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14).

5. The fear of God is mixed with INDUSTRY. "Noah, moved with holy fear, prepared an ark" (Hebrews 11:7). There is a carnal fear, which represents God as a severe Judge. This takes the soul off

from duty, "I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground" (Matthew 25:25).

But there is also a fear of *diligence*. A Christian fears—and *prays*; fears—and *repents*. Fear quickens industry. The spouse, fearing lest the bridegroom should come before she is dressed, hastens and puts on her jewels, that she may be ready to meet him. Fear causes a *watchful eye*—and a *working hand*. Fear banishes *sloth* out of its diocese. "The greatest labor in true religion," says holy fear, "is far less than the least pain the damned feel in hell." There is no greater spur in the heavenly race—than the fear of God.

Reasons to Fear God

Includes the following:

1. God's eye is always upon us. He who is under the eye of his earthly prince, will be careful of doing anything which would offend him. "Does He not see my ways and number all my steps?" (Job 31:4). God sees in the dark: "Even the darkness is not dark to You. The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to You" (Psalm 139:12). The *night* is no curtain, the *clouds* are no canopy—to hinder or intercept God's sight. God sees the heart. An earthly judge can judge of the *fact*—but God judges of the *heart*. "I, the Lord, examine the mind, I test the heart!" (Jeremiah 17:10). He is like Ezekiel's wheels, "full of eyes." God is *all eye!* Should not this make us walk with fear and circumspection? We cannot sin—but our judge looks on!

2. God interprets our not fearing of Him—as a slighting of Him. As not to *praise* God is to wrong him—so not to *fear* God is to slight him. Of all things, a person can least endure to be slighted:

"Why has the wicked *despised* God?" (Psalm 10:13). For a worm to slight its Maker causes the fury to rise up in God's face! "My fury will flare up!" (Ezekiel 38:18).

3. God has power to destroy us. "Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell!" (Matthew 10:28). God can *look* us into our grave—and with a breath blow us into hell—and shall we not fear him! Is it easy to wrestle with flames? "Who knows the power of his anger!" (Psalm 90:11). What engines or buckets can quench the infernal fire of hell? We are apt to fear men who may try to hurt us—but what is their power compared to God's power? They threaten a *prison*, God threatens *hell*. They threaten our *life*, God threatens our *soul*—and shall we not tremble before him! Oh, how dreadful, when the great fountains of God's wrath shall be broken up, and all his bitter vials poured out! "Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the day that *I* shall deal with you!" (Ezekiel 22:14)

Objection: **But are not we bidden to serve God without fear?**
(Luke 1:74)

Answer. We must not fear God with such a fear, as the wicked do. They fear him as a Turkish slave does his master; they fear him in such a way as to *hate* him—and wish there were no God! We must not serve God with this hellish fear—but we must serve him with a sincere filial fear, sweetened with love.

Use 1. Refutation. This refutes the *Papists* who hold that a Christian cannot have assurance, because he is to serve God with fear. Assurance and fear are *different*—but not *contrary*. A child may have *assurance* of his father's love—yet a *fear* of offending him. Who was more fearful of sin than Paul? (1 Cor. 9:27) Yet who had more assurance? "Christ, who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*" (Gal.

2:20). Faith *procures* assurance (Eph. 1:13) fear *preserves* assurance.

Use 2. Instruction. It is a Christian duty to fear God. What strangers, then, are they to true religion—who are *void* of this holy fear! The *godly* fear—and sin not. The *wicked* sin—and fear not. They are like the Leviathan, who is "made without fear" (Job 41:33). Lack of the fear of God is the innate cause of all wickedness: "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood" (Romans 3:14-15). Why was this? "There is no fear of God before their eyes!" (verse 18).

Abraham surmised that the men of Gerar would stick at no sin. Why so? "I thought, *Surely the fear of God is not in this place*" (Gen. 20:11). The judge in the Gospel is called an *unjust* judge (Luke 18:6); and no wonder, for he "had no fear of God" (verse 2). There must be an excess of sin, where there the fear of God is lacking to restrain it. The water must overflow, where there are no banks to keep it out. We live in a godless age; would men dare to sin at the rate they do—if the fear of God were ruling in their hearts? Would they dare to swear, be immoral, use false weights, bear false witness, hate purity, deride God, forge plots, persecute Christ's body—if they had the fear of God before their eyes? These men proclaim to the world that they are atheists; they do not believe in the immortality of the soul. They are worse than brutish—a beast fears the fire—but these fear not hell-fire! They are worse than devils, for the devils "believe and tremble" (James 2:19).

Use 3. Lamentation. Let us bewail the lack of the fear of God in our world. **Why is it that so few fear God?**

1. Men do not fear God—because they have not the knowledge of God. "They hated knowledge, and did not choose

the fear of the Lord" (Proverbs 1:29). Every sin is founded in ignorance of God. If only men knew God in his immense glory, they would be swallowed up with divine amazement. When the prophet Isaiah had a glimpse of God's glory, he was struck with holy consternation: "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!" (Isaiah 6:6). *Ignorance* of God, banishes the *fear* of God.

2. Men do not fear God—because they presume on his mercy. God is merciful, and they do not doubt of the virtue of this sovereign balm. But who is God's mercy for? "His mercy extends to those who fear him" (Luke 1:50). Such as do not fear God's *justice*—shall not taste his *mercy*.

Let this be "for a lamentation", that the fear of God is so vanished from our world. Why is it almost nowhere to be found? Some fear *shame*, others fear *danger*—but where is he who fears *God*?

And not only among the generality of people—but even among professing Christians, how few fear God in truth! *Profession* is often made a *cloak* to cover sin. *Absalom* palliated his treason with a religious vow (2 Samuel 15:7). The *Pharisees* made *long prayer* a cloak for oppression (Matt. 23:14). This is sordid—to carry on wicked designs—under a mask of piety. The *snow* covers many a *dunghill*. A snowy white profession covers many a foul heart! The sins of professors are more odious. Thistles are bad in a *field*—but worse in a *garden*. The sins of the *wicked* anger God—but the sins of professing Christians *grieve* him.

Use 4. Reproof.

1. This reproves jovial sinners, who are so far from fearing God, that they spend their time in mirth and wantonness!

"People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all!" (Luke 17:27). There is a place in Africa called Timbuktu, where the inhabitants spend all the day in playing and dancing. What sensual, jovial lives do the gallants of our age live! They spend their life in a frolic, as if God had made them to be like the leviathan who plays in the sea. "They sing with tambourine and harp. They make merry to the sound of the flute." (Job 21:12). *They ride to hell upon the back of pleasure, and go merrily to damnation!*

Does not God call us to trembling? Our sins presage evil. May not we fear that "the glory is departing"? May not we fear the death of true religion before the birth of reformation? May not we fear that some momentous calamity should bring up the fear of former judgments? As the prophet Ezekiel says, "Should we then make mirth?" (Ezekiel 21:10). But jovial spirits have banished the fear of God.

"How terrible it will be for you who sprawl on ivory beds surrounded with luxury, eating the meat of tender lambs and choice calves. You sing idle songs to the sound of the harp!" (Amos 6:4,5). Sinners whose hearts are *hardened with soft pleasures*, let them have their lusts—but farewell Christ and his gospel. "They feast without fear" (Jude 12.). But they forget death will bring in the reckoning, and they must pay the reckoning in hell-fire! The Turkish sultan, when he intends the death of any of his minions, invites them to sumptuous feast, and then causes them to be taken away from the table and strangled. Just so, Satan gluts men with sinful pastimes and delights, and then strangles them! Foolish pleasure-lovers are like the fish that swim pleasantly through the silver streams of Jordan, until at last they fall into the *Dead Sea*. "Those who want to be rich fall into

temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction!" (1 Tim. 6:9).

2. This reproves secure sinners who have no fear of God.

Like Laish of old, they are "a secure people" (Judges 18:27). Those who are least safe—are most confident! Carnal security throws men into a deep sleep. Birds which roost in steeples, being used to the continual ringing of bells, the noise does not at all disturb them. So sinners who have been long used to the sound of Aaron's bells, though now and then they have a peal rung out against their sins yet, being used to it, they are not startled at all. **A carnally secure sinner is known thus:**

a. He lives as had as the worst, yet hopes to be saved as well as the best. "I am safe, even though I am walking in my own stubborn way." (Deut. 29:19). This is as if a man should drink poison—yet believe that he shall have his health. A secure sinner now lies in Delilah's lap—yet hopes to some day lie in Abraham's bosom!

b. A secure sinner thinks all is well, because all is in peace. He hears others speak of a "spirit of bondage", and the terrors they have felt for sin—yet he thanks God that he never knew what trouble of spirit meant; he thinks his conscience is *good*, because it is *quiet*. When the devil keeps the palace—all is in peace" (Luke 11:12). *Ungrounded* peace presages an earthquake in the conscience.

c. A secure sinner is careless about his soul. The soul is the princely part, which is crowned with reason. A secure sinner provides for his *body*—but neglects his *soul*. He is like one who waters his flowers—but never minds his jewels. Behold here a secure person, who is in a spiritual lethargy; he has no sense of the life to come; he is destitute of the fear of God.

3. This reproves scoffers, who are the vilest of sinners.

"There shall come in the last days, scoffers" (2 Pet. 3:3). These Ishmaels jeer at holy living—and ridicule all true religion. They throw squibs of reproach at the saints. In the massacre at Paris, the Papists scoffed at the Protestants when they murdered them, "Where is your God now? What has become of all your prayers now?" These are devils in the likeness of men! They are far from the fear of God! The scorner's chair stands at the mouth of hell!

Use 5. Exhortation. It exhorts us to get the fear of God planted in our hearts. "Happy is he who fears always" (Proverbs 28:14). The fear of God would influence all our *actions*. It would make us *godly* in both tables of God's laws. It would make us holy towards *God*—and righteous towards *men*. We would be true in our promises—and just in our dealings (Matt. 7:12).

The Excellence of the Fear of God

1. The fear of God is the true BADGE and uniform of a saint. The saints of old were God-fearing men (Gen. 22:12; Acts 10:22); Obadiah feared the Lord greatly (I Kings 8:13). All the moral virtues in their highest elevation, do not make a saint. But here is the Christian's true character—he is one who fears God. Augustine said of himself, that he did knock at heaven-gate with a *trembling* hand. Christ calls his elect, "his sheep" (John 10:27). Sheep are of a *trembling* nature. The saints are *tremulous*—they dare not take liberties as others do.

2. The fear of God is the beginning of true WISDOM. (Proverbs 1:7). Wisdom is "more precious than rubies" (Prov. 3:15). No jewel we wear so adorns us as *wisdom*. Now, the fear of Lord is our wisdom: "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom" (Job 28:28).

Wherein is the fear of God the true wisdom?

A. The fear of God is wisdom, in that it makes its careful about our spiritual accounts. Wisdom lies in nothing more than in keeping accounts exactly. The fear of God teaches a person to examine the state of his soul critically. "O my soul, how is it with you?" Do you gain or lose? Is our faith in its infancy, being but newly laid to the breast of the promise? Or is it grown to some stature? How is it? Does *grace* or *sin* prevail? Thus the fear of God makes us wisely balance our accounts, and see how matters stand between God and our souls. "I meditate in my heart, and my spirit made diligent search" (Psalm 77:6).

B. The fear of God is wisdom as it makes its understand divine secrets. "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him" (Psalm 21:14). He must be wise, who is acquainted with the *secrets of heaven*. A fearer of God is acquainted with the secret of *election* (1 Thess. 1:4), of *God's love* (Rev. 1:5), of the *holy anointing* (1 John 2:20). He knows God's mind: "We have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).

C. The fear of God is wisdom, in that it makes us consider. "I considered my ways" (Psalm 119:59). A great part of wisdom lies in *consideration*. He who fears God considers how vain the *world* is—and therefore dares not love it. He who fears God considers how short *time* is—and therefore dares not lose it. He who fears God considers how precious *salvation* is—and therefore dares not neglect it.

D. The fear of God is wisdom, in that it makes its walk wisely. "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the time" (Col. 4:5).

a. The fear of God makes us walk *amiably*: "Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the children of Heth" (Gen. 2.3:7). *Piety* does not exclude *courtesy*.

b. The fear of God makes us walk *inoffensively*: it prevents not only scandals but indecencies. The veneration of God, causes circumcision of heart, and circumspection of life.

E. The fear of God is wisdom, as it preserves us from hell. It is wisdom to keep out of danger; fear makes us flee from the wrath to come.

3. The fear of God is the best certificate to show for heaven. Do you have *knowledge*? So has Satan. Do you have *profession*? So has Satan, he "transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). But do you have filial fear? In this you will excel him. The fear of God is, though not our *plea* for heaven—yet our *evidence* for heaven.

4. There is that in God, which may command fear:

1. "He is clothed in awesome majesty!" (Job 37:22).

a. There is majesty in God's *Name*, Jehovah. It comes from a Hebrew root which speaks of God's absolute, eternal, and independent being.

b. There is majesty in God's *looks*. Job had but a glimpse of God, and he was even swallowed up with divine amazement: "My ears had heard of you—but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes!" (Job 42:5-6).

c. There is majesty in God's *words*. He speaks with majesty, as when he gave the law in thundering, insomuch that the people said, "Let not God speak with us lest we die!" (Exodus 20:19).

d. There is majesty in God's *attributes*: his holiness, power, justice, which are the irradiations of the divine essence.

e. There is majesty in God's *works*: "They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds" (Psalm 145:5). Every creature sets forth God's majesty; we may see the majesty of God blazing in the sun, twinkling in the stars. God's majesty is discernable in those two wonders of nature, behemoth and leviathan (Job 40:18; 41:19).

In short, the majesty of God is seen in humbling the children of pride. He turned King Nebuchadnezzar out to pasture, and made him fellow-commoner with the beasts. Does not all this call for fear?

2. "He is clothed in awesome majesty!" "He is feared by the kings of the earth" (Psalm 76:12). There is a time coming when God will be dreadful to his enemies; when conscience is awake, when death strikes, when the last trumpet sounds. And shall we not fear this God? "Do you not fear Me? Do you not tremble before Me?" (Jer. 5:22). *Fearing* God's justice—is the way not to *feel* it.

And let it not seem strange to you, if I tell you, that in respect of God's infinite majesty, there will be some of this blessed fear in heaven. Not a fear which has torment in it, for perfect love will cast out fear—but a *holy, sweet, reverential fear*. Though God has so much beauty in him as shall cause love, and joy, in heaven—yet this *beauty* is mixed with so much *majesty*, as shall cause a *veneration* in glorified saints.

5. The fear of God tends to life (Proverbs 19:23).

1. This is true in a **temporal** sense, "The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked are cut short" (Proverbs 10:27); in the original it is, "adds days". Long life is promised as a blessing, "With long life will I satisfy him" (Psalm 91:16). The best way to come to "a good old age", is the fear of God. Sin curtails the life: many a man's excess wastes his vital organs, enervates his strength, and cuts him short of those years which by the course of nature might be arrived at, "Don't be excessively wicked, and don't be foolish. Why should you die before your time?" (Eccles. 7:17). You who desire to live long—live in the fear of God! "The Lord commanded us to follow all these statutes and to fear the Lord our God for our prosperity always and for our preservation." (Deut. 6:24).

2. This is true in a **spiritual** sense. "The fear of the Lord tends to life"—namely, to "life eternal". Life is sweet, and *eternal* makes it sweeter. "Eternal life is true life" (Augustine). The life of bliss has no term of years wherein it expires: "*Forever ...with the Lord!*" The lamp of glory *shines*—but is never *spent*; so that divine fear tends to life; a life with God and angels forever.

6. The fear of God gives full satisfaction. "He who has it, shall abide satisfied" (Prov. 19:23). Such as are destitute of God's fear, never meet with satisfaction. "In the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him; the full force of misery will come upon him" (Job 20:22). This is a riddle, to be full—yet not have enough. The meaning is there is still something lacking: he who fears not God, though his barns are full—yet his mind is not at rest. The sweet waters of pleasure do rather *inflame* the thirst—than *satisfy* it. "I have run through all the delights and grandeurs of the world, and could never find full contentment", said the emperor Severus. But he who has the fear of the Lord "shall abide satisfied".

1. He shall **be** satisfied. His *soul* shall be filled with grace, his *conscience* with peace. A holy man said, when God had replenished him with inward joy, "It is enough Lord, your servant is a full vessel, and can hold no more!"

2. He shall **abide** satisfied. This satisfaction shall not cease; it shall be a *cordial* in death, and a *crown* after death!

7. The fear of God makes a little to be sweet. "Better is little with the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 15:16). Why is a little better? Because that little a believer has, he holds in his Head, Christ. That little is sweetened with the love of God. He has with that little a contented mind; and contentment turns Daniel's *vegetables* into choice *meat* (Dan. 1:12). Again, that *little* is a pledge of *more*; that little oil in the cruse—is but a pledge of that golden joy and bliss which the soul shall have in heaven. Thus a little with the fear of God, is better than all unsanctified riches. Lazarus' *crumbs* were better than the rich man's banquet!

8. The fear of God is a Christian's safety. He is invulnerable; nothing can hurt him. Plunder him of his money, he carries a treasure about him of which he cannot be robbed (Isaiah 33:6). Cast him into prison—his conscience is free; kill his body—it shall rise again. He who has on this breastplate of God's fear may be shot *at*—but can never be shot *through*.

9. The fear of God makes all things go well with us. "How happy are those who fear the Lord—all who follow his ways! You will enjoy the fruit of your labor. How happy you will be! How rich your life!" (Psalm 128:1-2). Is it not well with that man who has all things working together for his good—and has nothing lacking which may do him good (Psalm 84:11)? If God sees health and riches good for him—he shall have them. Every providence shall center in his

happiness. Oh, what an inducement is here to solid piety! Come whatever will, "it shall be well with those who fear God" (Eccles. 8:12). When they *die*, they shall go to God; and while they *live*, everything in the world shall do them good.

10. The fear of God is a great cleanser. "The fear of the Lord is *clean*" (Psalm 19:9). It is so:

1. In its own nature—it is a pure, crystal, orient grace.
2. In the effect of it—it cleanses the heart and life. As a spring works out the mud—so the fear of the Lord purges out the love of sin. The heart is the temple of God, and the fear of the Lord sweeps and cleanses this temple, that it may not be defiled.

11. The fear of God makes us accepted with God. "In every nation he who fears him ... is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35). What was Paul so ambitious of? "We labor that we may be accepted by him" (2 Cor. 5:9). Divine fear ingratiates us into divine favor. Such as are fearless of God, neither their persons nor offerings find acceptance: "I despise your feast days, and I will not dwell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings . . . I will not accept them" (Amos 5:21-22). Who will take a gift from one who has the plague!

12. The fear of God paves the way for spiritual joy. Some may think the fear of God breeds sadness; no, it is the inlet to joy! The fear of God is the morning star, which ushers in the sunlight of comfort: "Walking in the *fear* of the Lord, and in the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31). The fear of God has solid joy in it, though not frivolity. God mixes joy with holy fear, that fear may not seem slavish.

13. The fear of God drives out all base fear. Carnal fear is an enemy to true religion. The fear of God frightens fear away; it causes courage: "Able men, such as fear God" (Exod. 18:21); some translations render it, "men of courage". When a *dictator* governed in Rome, all other offices ceased. Where the *fear of God* rules in the heart—it expels fleshly fear. When the empress Eudoxia threatened to banish Chrysostom, the preacher said, "Tell her, *I fear nothing but sin!*" The fear of God swallows up all other fear, as Moses' rod swallowed up the magicians' rods.

14. To be void of God's fear, is folly. "I said to the fools—do not deal foolishly" (Psalm 75:4).

1. Are not they fools who gratify their enemy? Those who lack the fear of God, do so. Satan baits his hook with pleasure and profit, and they swallow bait and hook and all! This pleases Satan; *men's sins feast the devil*. Who but a fool would please his enemy?

2. Is it not folly to prefer slavery before liberty? If a slave in the galley should have his freedom offered him—but says that he would rather tug at the oar and be a slave, than have his liberty—would he not be judged to be a fool? Such is the case of him who does not fear God. The gospel offers to free him from the miserable captivity of sin—but he chooses rather to be a slave to his lusts. He is like a servant under the law: "I love my master—I will not go out free" (Exod. 21:5). The foolish sinner had rather have his ear bored to the devil's service, than be translated "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:21).

3. Is not he a fool who, having but one jewel, will venture the loss of it? The soul is the jewel, and the sinner is fearless of it, he will throw it away upon the world; as if one should throw pearls

and diamonds into the river. He who pampers his body and neglects his soul, is like him who feasts his slave and starves his wife!

4. Is not he a fool who refuses a rich offer? If one should offer to adopt another and make him an heir of his vast estate, and he should refuse it, would not his discretion be called in question? God offers Christ to a sinner, and promises to entail all the riches of heaven upon him—but, lacking the fear of God, he refuses this great offer: "Israel would have none of me" (Psalm 81:11). Is not this a prodigy of madness? Yea not the devil peg every sinner for a fool at the last day!

15. The fear of God is a sovereign antidote against apostasy. The devil was the first apostate. How rife is this sin! More shipwrecks are on *land*—than at *sea*; men make shipwreck of a good conscience. Apostates are said to put Christ to "open shame" (Heb. 6:6). The fear of God is a preservative against apostasy: "I will put my fear in their hearts—that they shall not depart from me" (Jer. 32:40). I will so love them—that I will not depart from them; and they shall so fear me—that they shall not depart from me.

16. There are excellent promises made to those who fear God. "Unto you who fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Mat. 4:2). Here is a promise of Christ; he is a Sun for light and life-giving influence; and a Sun of righteousness, as he diffuses the golden beams of justification. And he has healing in his wings; the sun heals the air, dries up the cold moistures, exhales the vapors which would be pestilential. Just so, Christ has "healing in his wings"; he heals the hardness and impurity of the soul. And the horizon in which this sun arises, is in hearts fearing God: "To you who fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise."

And there is another great promise: "He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great" (Psalm 115:13). God blesses such in their name, estate, souls. And this blessing can never be reversed! As Isaac said, "I have blessed him—and he *shall* be blessed" (Gen. 27:37). Such as fear God are privileged people: none can take away from them—either their birthright or their blessing.

17. Fear is the admirable instrument in promoting salvation. "Work out your salvation with fear" (Phil. 2:12). The fear of God, is that flaming sword which turns every way—to keep sin from entering (Prov. 16:6). The fear of God stands sentinel in the soul, and is ever upon its watchtower. Fear causes circumspection: he who walks in fear, treads warily. Fear gives birth to prayer, and prayer engages the help of heaven.

18. The Lord is much pleased with those who fear him. "The Lord takes *pleasure* in those who fear him" (Psalm 147:1). In the Septuagint it is, "The Lord bears *good will* towards those who fear him." Some render it, "The Lord *delights* in those who fear him." Never did a suitor take such pleasure in a person he loved—as God does in those who fear him; they are his "Hephzibah", which means, *my delight is in her* (Isaiah 61:4). He says of them as of Zion: "This is my rest forever—here I will dwell" (Psalm 132:14). A sinner is "a vessel in which is no pleasure" (Hos. 8:8). But fearers of God are his favorites.

19. Such as fear God are the only people that shall be saved. "Salvation is near those who fear him" (Psalm 85:9). Salvation is said to be "far from the wicked" (Psalm 119:155). They and salvation are so far apart—that they are likely never to meet. But God's salvation is near to those who fear him. What do we aspire after, but salvation? It is the end of all our prayers, tears, sufferings. Salvation is the crown

of our desires, the flower of our joy. And who shall be enriched with salvation—only the fearers of God! "His salvation is near those who fear him."

Let these 19 powerful arguments persuade us to fear God.

Use 6. Trial. Let us put ourselves upon a strict scrutiny and trial, whether we have the fear of God planted in our hearts.

Is the Fear of God in our Hearts?

Answer 1. The fear of God—will make a man fear SIN. "How can I do this great wickedness—and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). Indeed, sin is the only evil thing; it is the evil of evils. Sin is the poison which the old serpent spat into our virgin nature! In sin there is both pollution and enmity. Sin is compared to a "thick cloud" (Isaiah 44:22), which not only hides the light of God's face—but brings down showers of His wrath. Sin is worse than all evils. There is more evil in a *drop* of sin—than in a *sea* of affliction!

1. Sin is the cause of all affliction. Sin conjures up all the winds and storms in the world. The *cause* is worse than the *effect*. Out of this viperous womb come, "evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness."

2. In affliction conscience may be quiet; the hail may beat upon the tiles, when there is music in the room. But sin terrifies the conscience. *Nero*, in the midst of feasts and Roman sports was full of horror of mind; the numbers of men he had killed troubled him. *Cataline* was frightened at every noise. *Cain* in killing Abel, stabbed

half the world at one blow, yet he could not kill the worm in his own conscience!

Sin is the quintessence of evil—it puts a sting into death (1 Cor. 15:56). Sin is worse than hell:

a. Hell is a burden only to the sinner—but sin is a burden to God (Amos 2:13).

b. There is justice in hell—but sin is the most unjust thing. It would rob God of his glory, Christ of his purchase, the soul of its happiness. "It is more hitter to sin against Christ, than to suffer the torments of hell", says Chrysostom. Is not sin then, to be feared? *He who fears God is afraid of touching this forbidden fruit!*

More particularly:

1. He who fears God—is afraid to do anything which he suspects may be sinful (Romans 14:23). He will not swallow oaths like pills, lest they should afterwards work in his conscience. He dares not mix anything in God's worship, which God has not appointed; he fears it is like offering strange fire. Where conscience is scrupulous, it is safer to forbear; for, "what is not of faith is sin".

2. He who fears God—fears the appearance of sin. "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thes. 5:22). Some things have a bad look, and carry a *show of evil* in them. To go to the idol temple, though one does not join with them in worship, is an appearance of evil. He whose heart is ballasted with God's fear—flies from that which looks like sin. It was a good speech of Bernard to, "By avoiding the *act* of sin we preserve our *peace*; by avoiding the *appearance* of it we preserve our *fame*." The fear of God makes us shun the occasion of sin: the *Nazarite* under the law was not only to forbear

wine—but he must not eat *grapes*, which might occasion intemperance. Joseph fled from his mistress' temptation; he would not be seen in her company.

The *appearance of evil*, though it does not defile one's own conscience, may offend another's conscience. And hear what the apostle says: When you "wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ!" (1 Cor. 8:12). Such as do not avoid the appearances and inlets to sin—make the truth of their grace to be suspected. How far are they from the fear of God who, forgetting their prayer, "Lead us not into temptation", run themselves into the devil's mouth! They go to plays and theaters, which are the lures and inducements of filthiness! Others associate familiarly with the wicked, and are too often in their company: which is like going among those who have the plague! "I wrote to you not to company with fornicators," (1 Cor. 5:9). Business is one thing, keeping company is another. Polycarp would have no society with Marcion, the heretic. Twisting into a cord of friendship with sinners is an appearance of evil; it hardens them in sin, and wounds the credit of true religion.

Question: But did not Christ often converse with sinners?

Answer 1. Christ did sometimes go among the wicked; not that he approved of their sins—but as a *physician* goes among the diseased to heal them, so Christ intended to work a cure upon them (Mark 2:17). It was their conversion which he aimed at.

Answer 2. Though Jesus Christ did sometimes converse with sinners—yet he could receive no infection by them; his divine nature was a sufficient antidote against the contagion of sin. As the sun cannot be defiled with the thick vapors which are exhaled from the earth, and fly into the sky—so the black vapors of sin could not defile the Sun of righteousness. Christ was of such spotless purity, that he had no

receptibility of evil. But the case is otherwise with us; we have a stock of corruption within. Therefore it is dangerous to mix with the wicked, lest we be defiled.

Such as revere the divine majesty of God, dare not go near the *borders* of sin. Those who went *near* the fiery furnace, though they did not go into it, were burned (Dan. 3:22).

3. He who fears God—dares not sin secretly. A hypocrite may forbear *gross* sin because of the shame—but not clandestine, secret sin. He is like one who shuts up his shop windows—but follows his trade within doors. But a man fearing God dares not sin, though he could walk invisibly, and no eye see him. "You shall not curse the deaf, or put a stumbling block before the blind; but shall fear your God" (Lev. 19:14). If one should curse a deaf man, he cannot hear him. If one should lay a stumbling block in a blind man's way, he cannot see him. Yes—but the fear of God will make one avoid those sins—which can neither be heard or seen by men. *God's seeing in secret*, is a sufficient counter-poison against sin.

4. He who fears God—dares not commit sin, though it might bring him a profitable advantage. Gain is the *golden bait* with which Satan fishes for souls. This was the last temptation the devil used to Christ: "All this will I give you" (Matt. 4:9). How many bow down to the *golden image*! Joshua who could stop the course of the *sun*—could not stop *Achan* in his pursuit after the wedge of gold! But he who fears God dares not sin to get preferment. David dared not touch the Lord's anointed, though he knew he was to reign next (1 Sam. 26:33). A godly man is assured that a full purse is but a poor recompense for a wounded conscience.

5. He who fears God—dares not gratify his own revengeful humor. Homer says that revenge is sweet as dropping honey; but

grace makes a man rather *bury* an injury, than *revenge* it. He knows who has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Rom. 12:19). He who has the fear of God before his eyes, is so far from revenge, that he requites good for evil. Miriam *murmured* against Moses, and Moses *prayed* for her, that God would heal her of her leprosy (Num. 12:13). The prophet Elisha, instead of *smiting* his enemies, "set bread and water before them" (2 Kings 6:22).

6. He who fears God—dares not do that which is of evil report, though possibly the thing in itself may be no sin. "If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment?" (1 Cor. 6:1). Yes, some might say, what sin is it to have a just cause brought before unbelievers, that it may be decided? Oh but, might the apostle reply, though the thing in itself is lawful—yet because it sounds evil, and exposes your religion to the scorn and insult of unbelievers, you who fear God, should not dare to do it. It were better to decide it by a prudent arbitration. Everything is *permissible* for me—but not everything is *beneficial*" (1 Cor. 6:12).

7. He who fears God—is not only afraid of evil actions, but fears to offend God in his thoughts. "Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought." (Deut. 15:9). To think of sin with delight, is to act it over in the imagination. This is culpable. *A man may think himself into hell!* What were the apostate angels damned for—was it for any more than proud thoughts?

This is the first note of TRIAL: He who reverences God—flees from sin. It is a saying of Anselm, "If sin were on one side and hell on the other, I would rather leap into hell than willingly sin against God!"

Answer 2. He who fears God—walks by Scripture rule, rather than by the example of others. Example is, for the most part, corrupt. Examples of great men are influential. Pharaoh had

taught Joseph to swear—but Joseph had not taught Pharaoh to pray. The examples of others cannot justify a thing which is intrinsically evil. A God-fearer directs the *rudder of his life* according to the compass of the Word. He looks to the sacred canon as the mariner to the compass, or Israel to the pillar of fire, to direct him. "To the law and to the testimony!" (Isaiah 8:20).

Answer 3. He who fears God—keeps his commandments. "Fear God and keep his commandments" (Eccles. 12:13) Luther said he had rather obey God, than work miracles. A gracious soul crosses his own will to fulfill God's. If the Lord bids him to crucify his favorite sin, or forgive his enemies—then he instantly obeys. A heathen exercising much cruelty to a Christian, asked him in scorn what great miracle his master Christ ever did? The Christian replied, "This miracle, that though you treat me thus cruelly—I can forgive you." A holy heart knows, that there is nothing lost by obedience. David swore to the Lord that he would not rest until he found a place for God (Psalm 132:4-5). And God swore back to David, that one of his offspring he would set one upon his throne (Psalm 132:11).

Answer 4. He who fears God—is alike godly in all companies. He diffuses the sweet savor of godliness wherever he goes. Hypocrites can change themselves into all shapes, and be as their company is; serious in one company and vain in another. He who reverences a Deity, is alike godly in all places. A *steady pulse* shows health: a *steady walk* shows grace. If a godly man is providentially placed among the wicked, he will not coalesce with them—but in his deportment displays a majesty of holiness.

Answer 5. He who fears God—is godly in the position where God has set him. Take an instance in Joseph: "I fear God" (Gen. 42:18). And see a pattern of relative sanctity: he showed towards his

master fidelity, towards his *mistress* purity, towards his *father* duty, towards his *brethren* generosity. A godly man makes his family, a training ground of piety (Psalm 102:1).

Answer 6. He who fears God, dares not neglect family or closet prayer. "I give myself unto prayer" (Psalm 109:4). *Prayer whispers in God's ears!* Prayer is private conference with God. Why was Nymphas' house called a *church* (Col. 4:15). Because it was consecrated by prayer. A gracious soul puts forth fervent sighs in prayer (Rom. 8:26). And surely that prayer soonest pierces heaven—which pierces one's own heart.

If prayer be made the touchstone—then the number of those who fear God is but small. Are there not many prayerless families in this city and nation? "You cast off fear, you restrain prayer" (Job 15:4). When men restrain prayer, they cast off the fear of God. It is the brand set upon reprobates, that "they do not call on the Lord" (Psalm 14:4).

Answer 7. He who fears God will not oppress his neighbor. "You shall not oppress one another; but you shall fear your God" (Lev. 25:17). How can he be holy—who is not just? A saint—yet an extortioner, is a contradiction. The fear of God would cure oppression. "Will you even sell your brethren? Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God?" (Neh. 5:8-9). As if Nehemiah had said, If you had the fear of God, you would not be so wicked, you would not rise upon the ruins of others and—to wrong them, damn yourselves.

Answer 8. He who fears God—is given to works of mercy. The fear of God is always joined with love to our brethren. Grace may have a *trembling* hand—but it does not have a *withered* hand; it stretches itself out to relieve the needy, "Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows

in their distress " (James 1:27). To *visit* them is not only to go to see them in affliction. Our Savior expounds what visiting is in Matthew 25:36, "You visited me"; how was that? "I was an hungry, and you gave me food" (verse 35). Good works are not the *cause* of our justification, but they are the *evidence* of our justification. How far are they from the fear of God, who are hard-hearted to Christ's poor! You may as well extract oil out of a flint—as the golden oil of charity out of their flinty hearts! The rich man denied Lazarus a crumb of bread—and he was denied a drop of water (Luke 16:21).

Answer 9. He who fears God—would rather displease man, than God. "The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them—but saved the men children alive" (Exod. 1:17). What, not obey the king's command! How could this stand with their allegiance? Very well, because it was an *unlawful* command. The king had ordered them to put to death the Hebrew males—which they dared not do, for fear of incurring God's displeasure. King Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden image to be worshiped—but the three Hebrew children (or rather champions) said, "Be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods—nor worship the golden image which you have set up!" (Dan. 3:18). They would rather *burn*—than *bow*! He who fears God, knows it is best to please God. *He is the best Friend—but the worst Enemy!*

Answer 10. The fear of God will make a man fear these six things:

1. Satan's snares
2. His own heart
3. Death

4. Judgment

5. Hell

6. Heaven

1. The fear of God will make a man afraid of SATAN'S SNARES. He has the *eye of faith* to see these snares, and the *wing of fear* to fly from them! Fear gives wings to the feet. "We are not ignorant of his *devices*" (2 Cor. 2:11). The word means "subtle stratagems". Satan is called the "old Serpent" (Rev. 12:9). Though he has lost his *holiness*, he has not lost his *deceitfulness*. His snares are so cunningly laid, that without the guidance of God's fear, we cannot escape them.

a. One subtle artifice of Satan—is to bait his hook with religion. He can change his flag, and hang out Christ's colors; here he transforms himself into an *angel of light* (2 Cor. 11:14). The devil tempts men to evil, "that good may come" of it (Rom. 3:8). He whistles them into the snare of preferment, that hereby they may be in a capacity of doing God more service. The *white devil* is worst! Who would suspect Satan when he comes as a *minister*, and quoting Scripture?

b. Another snare of Satan—is to tempt to sin under a plea of necessity. Lot offered to expose his daughters to the lusts of the Sodomites, that he might preserve his angel-guests who were come into his house (Gen. 19:8). Did not Satan instigate him to this? *Necessity* will not excuse *impiety*.

c. Another snare of Satan—is to color over sin with the pretense of virtue. Alcibiades hung a finely embroidered curtain over a foul picture full of dragons and satyrs. Satan puts good names

on sin, as physicians call that film in the eye which hinders the sight a "pearl" in the eye. Satan colored over Jehu's ambition with the name of zeal (2 Kings 10:16). He makes men believe that *revenge* is valor, or that *covetousness* is frugality; as if one should write "medicine" upon a bottle of poison!

d. Another snare of Satan—is to carry on his mischievous designs under a pretense of *friendship*. He puts off his *lion's* skin, and comes in *sheep's* clothing. Thus Satan came to Christ: "Command that these stones be made bread" (Matt 4:3). As if he had said, "I see you are hungry; I therefore out of pity, counsel you to get something to eat—turn these stones to bread, that your hunger may be satisfied." But Christ spied the serpent in the temptation, and repulsed him. Thus Satan came to Eve in the guise of a friend. He said of the tree in the midst of the garden, "You shall not surely die . . . you shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:4-5). As if to say, "I persuade you only to that which will put you into a better condition than now you are; eat of the tree of knowledge and it will make you omniscient!" What a *kind* devil was here! But Eve found a *worm* in the apple!

e. A fifth snare—if Satan cannot take a Christian off from duty, he will put him on too far in duty. Humiliation is a duty—but Satan suggests that the soul is not humbled enough: and indeed he never thinks it humbled enough, until it despairs. Satan comes thus to a man: "Your sins have been great—so your sorrow should be proportionate. But is it so? Can you say you have been as great a *mourner*—as you have been a *sinner*? What is a drop of your sorrow—compared to a sea of your sin? This is laid only as a snare. The subtle enemy would have a Christian weep himself blind, and in a desperate plight, throw away the *anchor of hope*. And if Satan has such *fallacies*, and as a *decoy* draws so many millions into his snares, is there not cause of jealous fear lest we should be trapped? The fear

of God—will make us fear hell's stratagems. Satan's *snares* are worse than his *darts*!

2. The fear of God will make a man afraid of his own HEART. Luther used to say, that he feared his own heart more than the pope or cardinals! "The heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9).

It is "deceitful". The word signifies, it is a "Jacob" or "supplanter". As Jacob supplanted his brother, and took away the blessing, so our hearts would supplant and beguile us.

"Above all things": there is deceit in weights, deceit in friends; but the heart has an *art of deceiving* beyond all. In the best hearts there is some fallaciousness. David was upright in all things, "except in the affair concerning Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). A godly man, knowing there is a measure of this deceit in his heart, fears himself! The flesh is a bosom-traitor. No man can fathom what evil is in his heart. "Is your servant a dog!" (2 Kings 8:13). Hazael could not believe his heart could give birth to such monsters. If one had come to Noah and said, "You will be drunk shortly"; he would have said, "Is your servant a dog?" No man knows the depth of evil which in his heart, or what scandal he may fall into—if God should leave him. Christ warns his own apostles to "take heed of surfeiting and drunkenness" (Luke 21:34). A godly man therefore fears his heart with a fear of caution and jealousy.

The heart is not only *stubborn*—but *subtle*. Let us a little trace this impostor, and see if there is not cause to fear it. The heart shows its deceitfulness regarding *sinful* things—and *sacred* things.

The heart shows its deceitfulness regarding SINFUL things, this deceit is in the **hiding** of sin, as Rahab hid the spies in the flax

(Josh. 2:6). So the heart hides sin. And how does it hide sin? Just as Adam hid himself under fig leaves—so the heart hides sin under the fig leaves of *rationalization* and *excuses*. "It was done against my will; or done in a passion; or it was done along with others." Aaron blamed his sin in the making of the golden calf, upon the people: "The people are set on mischief" (Exod. 32:22). And Adam tacitly blamed his sin upon God himself: "The woman *You* gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12), as if to say, "If *You* had not given me this tempting woman—I would not have eaten!"

The heart's deceit is seen in **flattering** us. It will make us believe we are not so bad as we are. The physician deceives the patient when he tells him that his disease is not so dangerous, when he is falling into the hands of death! The heart will tell a man that he is free from theft, when yet he robs others of their good name. The heart will tell a man that he is free from drunkenness when, though he will not be drunk with wine, he will be drunk with passion. Thus the heart is a *flattering mirror* to make one look *better* than he is! Is there not cause to suspect this impostor!

Secondly, the heart shows its deceitfulness regarding SACRED things. It will be ready to put us off with counterfeit **grace**. Many have been deceived in taking false money; and many, it is to be feared, have been deceived in taking false grace.

The heart is ready to deceive with a false **repentance**. A sinner is troubled a little for sin, or rather the *consequences* of it, and perhaps sheds a few tears, and now his heart soothes him—and tells him that he is a true penitent. But every *legal* terror is not true repentance: "They were pricked in their hearts" (Acts 2:37); yet after this, "Peter said unto them *repent*" (verse 38). If every *slight trouble for sin* were

true repentance—then Judas and Cain may be enrolled in the number of penitents. *Evangelical repentance* works a change of heart (1 Cor. 6:11). It produces sanctity. But the false penitent, though he has trouble of spirit—yet has no transformation or change of heart and life. He has a weeping eye—but an adulterous heart. Ahab fasts and puts on sackcloth—but after this, he puts the prophet Micah in prison (1 Kings 22:27).

The heart is apt to deceive with a false **faith**; it would put the dead child in the place of the living child. Those in the second chapter of John are said to *believe*; but Christ did not believe their faith (John 2:24). True faith, as it casts itself into Christ's arms to *embrace* him, so it casts itself at Christ's feet to *serve* him. But spurious faith, though it is forward to receive Christ's *benefits*—yet it plucks the *crown* from his head—and will not submit to his authority! (Isaiah 9:6). It would have him a *Priest* to save him—but not as a *King* upon his *throne* to rule him (Zech. 6:13).

Thus the heart is full of fallacies; he who fears God, fears his heart lest it should rob him of the blessing.

3. The fear of God—will make a man fear DEATH. We should fear death, first, because it is such a **serious** thing, it is the inlet to eternity and puts us into an unalterable state!

Secondly, because of its **proximity**. It is nearer to us than we are aware; it may be within a few hours march of us! God may this night say, "Give an account of your stewardship!" And what if death should come before we are ready?

Thirdly, because after death there is nothing to be done for our souls. There is no repenting in the grave: "In the grave, where you are

going, there is neither working nor planning" (Eccles. 9:10). So death is to be feared with a holy and pious fear.

Question: *How far may a child of God fear death?*

Answer 1. So far as the fear of death is a curb bit, to keep him from **sin**. A believer may lawfully make use of all means to deter him from sin. There is no stronger antidote against sin—than the fear of death. "Am I *sinning* today—and tomorrow may be *dying*—and going to *judgment!*"

Answer 2. A child of God may so far fear death, as it makes him die to the **world**. The fear of death should sound a retreat and call us off from worldly vanities. What is the world? We must leave it shortly, and all we will then have, is our burying place (Gen. 49:30).

Answer 3. A child of God may so far fear death, as this fear fits him more for **death**. Jacob feared his brother Esau's coming against him, and he prepared to meet him, addressing himself to prayer (Gen. 32:7, 24). So when we fear death's coming, and we prepare to meet it—we set oh soul in order. This is a *godly* fear of death.

But this fear of death in the godly must be mixed with hope. The nature of death to a believer, is quite changed. Death is in itself a curse—but God has turned this curse into a blessing. To a child of God, death is not a *destruction*, but a *deliverance*. When the mantle of his flesh drops off, he ascends in a fiery chariot to heaven!

4. The fear of God—will make a man fear JUDGMENT. Anselm spent most of his thoughts upon the Day of Judgment; and Jerome thought he always heard that voice sounding in his ears, "Arise you dead—and come to judgment!" That there shall be such a day is evident:

a. From God's **veracity**: he who is the Oracle of truth has asserted it: "For he comes—for he comes to judge the earth" (Psalm 96:13). There is *duplication* here, firstly, to show the *certainty*: "he comes, he comes". It is an indubitable maxim. Secondly, to show the *speediness*, "he comes, he comes", the time draws near—it is almost daybreak, and the judge is ready to take the bench! (James 5:9). *God's decree cannot be reversed!*

b. There shall be such a day for the vindication of God's **justice**. Things seem to be done in the world, very unequally: the godly suffer, the wicked prosper. Atheists are ready to think God has thrown aside the government of the world—and does not mind how things are transacted here below. Therefore there must be a judicial process, that God may undeceive the world and set all things right.

c. That there shall be such a day is evident by the principles engrafted in a natural conscience. When Paul reasoned of judgment to come, "Felix trembled" (Acts 24:25). The *prisoner* at the bar—made the *judge* tremble! That a wicked man dying is so surprised with terrors—from where does this arise, but from a secret apprehension of ensuing judgment!

It will be a *great* judgment. Never was the like seen! We must *all* appear before the judgement seat! (2 Cor. 5:10). There is no fleeing, no absconding, no bribing, no appearing by a proxy—but all must make their *personal* appearance. Those who were above trial here, and the law could not reach them, *must* appear before the tribunal of heaven!

Who shall be the Judge? Jesus Christ (John 5:22.; Acts 17:31). "He has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world—by that man whom he has ordained." Christ the Judge, is called *man* because he shall judge the world in a visible shape. He must be *both* God and

man: he must be God, that he may see men's hearts—and he must be man, that he himself may be seen.

What a solemn day will this be, when Christ shall sit upon the bench of judicature! He will judge "righteously" (Psalm 9:8). Though he himself was wronged, he will do no wrong. And he will judge *thoroughly*: "Whose fan is in his hand and he will thoroughly purge his floor" (Matt. 3:12). He will see what is wheat—and what is chaff; who have his image upon them—and who the mark of the beast. Surely, the fear of God will cause a holy trembling at the thoughts of this day!

Question: In what sense should those who fear God—fear the Day of Judgment?

Answer: Not with a fear of dread or despondency, for the Day of Judgment will be a *Jubilee*—a *blessed comfortable* day to them! The thrush *sings* at the approach of rain—and so may believers at the approach of Judgment. Christ who is their *Judge* is also their *Redeemer* and *Advocate*. But,

a. The godly should so fear judgment as every day to renew their *sorrow for sin*. They have sins which creep upon them daily—and they must with Peter weep bitterly. They must *steep their souls* in the salty tears of repentance. It would be sad to be found at the last day, in any sin unrepented of.

b. The godly should so fear the Day of Judgment as to make them afraid of *sins of omission*. Not dressing a wound brings death. Not discharging duty may bring damnation. You may read the solemn process at the last day: "I was *hungry* and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was *thirsty* and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a *stranger* and you didn't take Me in; I was *naked* and you didn't clothe Me, *sick*

and in *prison* and you didn't take care of Me" (Matt. 25:42). The charge here brought in, is for sins of *omission*. Christ does not say, "You took away my food from me"—but "You gave me nothing to eat"; He does not say, "You put me in prison"—but "You did not visit me." The sins of *omission* condemned them. Not praying in the family, not attending the means of grace, not giving alms, will be the fatal indictment.

c. The godly should so far fear the Day of Judgment as to make them afraid of *pretending* in religion. For at that day, false hearts will be unmasked. Why did Paul walk with such integrity? "You are witnesses and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you" (1 Thess. 2:10). What was the cause of this? Surely a fear of the approaching Judgment Day: "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ!" (2 Cor. 5:10). The word in the original means we must be made *manifest*, our hearts must be laid open before men and angels. Such is the *witchcraft of hypocrisy*, that it is hard in this life, to know who is a false professor, and who is sincere. But shortly there will be a full revealing. It is good for God's people so to fear judgment, as to make them strive against deceit and hypocrisy; for then the hypocrite will be found out.

5. The fear of God—makes a man fear HELL. Hell is called the "place of torment" (Luke 16:28). Not only notoriously wicked sinners—but such as fear God, ought to fear hell: "I say unto you *my friends*, Fear him who has power to cast into hell!" (Luke 12:4).

Question: *How far should God's people fear hell?*

Answer: *Not so far, as to let go their hope.* A mariner fears a storm—but not so as to throw away his anchor. Such as fear God—should fear hell in four ways.

a. Those who fear God ought to fear hell—as that which they have deserved. Their sins have merited hell. Woe to the holiest man alive—if God should weigh him in the balance of his justice!

b. Those who fear God ought to fear hell—insofar as this is a means to make them shake off spiritual sloth. This *sleeping disease* is apt to seize upon God's own people; "the wise virgins *slumbered*" (Matt. 25:5). Now, so far as the fear of hell is an alarm or a warning-bell to awaken the godly out of security, and make them run faster to heaven, so far it is a godly and blessed fear.

c. The fear of hell is good in the godly—insofar as it makes them afraid of being in the number of those who shall go to hell. There are certain people who are in danger of hell:

First, those who have their heaven in this life: "You who are given to pleasure" (Is. 47:8). Epicures swim in sensual delights; they would rather displease God—than deny the flesh. These shall take up their quarters in hell. "The Lord, the Lord Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth. But see, there is joy and revelry, eating of meat and drinking of wine! "Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!" The Lord Almighty has revealed this in my hearing: "Until your dying day this sin will not be atoned for," says the Lord, the Lord Almighty!" (Isaiah 22:12-14) That is, this sin shall not be done away by any sacrifice.

Second, they are in danger to be cast into hell who live in the sin of adultery (Prov. 22:12). *Those who burn in lust—shall burn in hell!* "Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, *especially* those who follow the polluting desires of the flesh." (2 Pet. 2:9-10). See the corruption of man's nature! Instead of drinking water out of his own cistern, he loves

stolen waters (Prov. 9:17). The same Latin word signifies a *stable* and a *whore-house*—both are for *beasts!*

Third, they are likely to go to hell who, by giving *bad example*, cause others to sin. Bad example, like the plague, is contagious. Great men are *mirrors*—by which the common people dress themselves. Such as give bad example, have not only their own sins, but the sins of others to answer for. That doubtless was the reason why the rich man entreated Abraham that one might go from the dead to preach to his brethren (Luke 16:27), and not that he had love to their souls, but because, while he was alive, he had occasioned his brethren's sins by his wicked example, and knew that their coming to hell would increase his torment!

Fourth, they are likely to go to hell who live and die in the contempt of God's Word. Ministers have preached until their lungs are exhausted—but men stop their ears and harden their hearts! "They made their hearts as an adamant stone" (Zech. 7:12). Hardness of heart lies in the insensibility of the *conscience* (Eph. 4:19), and the inflexibility of the *will* (Jer. 44:16-17). Obdurate sinners shake out the *arrow of conviction* and scorn all godly reproof. When the prophet cried to the altar of stone, it broke apart (1 Kings 13:2). But sinners hearts do not break! These are likely to have the wrath of God flame about their ears! "This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, taking vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't *know* God and on those who don't *obey* the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of everlasting destruction, away from the Lord's presence and from His glorious strength!" (2 Thess. 1 :7-8).

Fifth, they shall go to hell who fall away (Mat. 13:6). Because they had *no root*—they withered. Flowers in a waterpot will keep green

and fresh a while—but having no root, they wither. Demas made a fair show a while—but ended as the silkworm which, after all her fine spinning, at last becomes a common fly. "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God!" (Heb. 10:26-27).

Thus we see who are likely to be thrown into hell. Now it is good for the godly so to fear hell—as to fear to be in the number of those who shall go to hell.

d. The fear of hell is good in the godly—insofar as it is a fear mixed with rejoicing. "Rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11). A believer's fear of hell must be like the fear of the two Marys going from the sepulcher: "They departed from the sepulcher with *fear* and great *joy*" (Matt. 28:8). With *fear*, because they had seen an angel; and with *joy*, because Christ was risen! So must the godly look on hell, with fear and joy. With *fear*, because of the fire; and with *joy*, because Christ has freed them from hell. A man who stands upon a high rock, fears when he looks down into the sea—yet rejoices that he is not there drowning in the waves. So a child of God, when he looks down into hell by contemplation, may fear because of the dreadfulness of the torment; yet this fear should be mingled with joy, to think he shall never come there! Jesus has delivered him "from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10).

6. The fear of God will make a man fear HEAVEN. You may say, "that is strange—we should rather *hope* for heaven." No, a regenerate person is to fear heaven—lest he fall short of it. "Therefore, while the promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear so that none of you should miss it!" (Heb. 4:1). It is a metaphor

taken from athletes who, growing weary and lagging behind, come short of the prize. Who had more hope of heaven than Paul? Yet he was not without his fears: "I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27). And well may he who shall go to heaven, fear lest he miss it, if you consider:

a. It is possible for many who make a *splendid profession*, to lose heaven. What do you think of the *foolish virgins*? They are called virgins because they were not tainted with any gross sin; yet these virgin-professors were shut out of heaven! (Matt. 25:10). Balaam, a *prophet*; and Judas, an *apostle*—were both shut out of heaven! We have seen some ships which had glorious *names* given them, the *Good-speed*, the *Hope*, the *Safeguard*—which were lost at sea.

b. It is possible to come *near* to heaven—yet fall *short* of it: "You are *not far* from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34); yet he was *not near enough*! Men may commend the ministry of the Word, have their affections moved at an ordinance, and in *outward show* out-do the children of God (Num. 23:1-2); yet, not having the *oil of sincerity* in their vessels, they will fall short of eternal happiness. And how dismal is that—to lose *God*, to lose their *souls*, to lose their *hopes*! The millions of tears shed in hell—are not sufficient to bewail the loss of heaven! Well may such as have heaven in them, fear their coming short of it.

So much, then, for this sixth use, *trial*.

Question. ***How shall we arrive at this blessed fear?***

Answer.

1. Let us set God ever in our eye—study his immensity! He is God Almighty (Gen. 17:1). He gives laws to the angels, binds the consciences of men, cuts off princes "He breaks the spirit of rulers; he is feared by the kings of the earth." (Psalm 76:12). The thoughts of God's *incomprehensible greatness*, should strike a *holy awe* in our hearts! Elijah wrapped his face in a mantle when God's glory passed by. *The reason men do not fear God—is because they entertain slight thoughts of him!* "You thought that I was altogether like you!" (Psalm 50:21).

2. Let us *pray* for this fear of God, which is the root of all holiness, and the mother of all wisdom. "Give me an undivided heart—that I may fear your name" (Psalm 86:11). The Lord has promised to put his fear in our heart (Jer. 32:40). Let us pray over this promise. While some pray for riches, and others for children—let us pray for a heart to fear God!

To conclude this, you who have this fear planted in your souls—bless God for it! "You who fear the Lord—bless the Lord" (Psalm 135:20). God has done more for you than if he had made you kings and queens—and caused you to ride upon the high places of the earth! He has enriched you with that jewel which he bestows only upon the elect.

Oh, stand upon Mount Gerizim, *blessing*. The fear of God is an immortal seed springing up into glory! "You who fear the Lord—praise him!" (Psalm 22:23). Begin the work of heaven now. Be spiritual choristers! Sound forth holy doxologies and triumphs! Say, as David, "My mouth is full of praise and honor to You all day long!" (Psalm 71:8).

God has but little praise in the world. Who should thus pay that which is due to him—if not those who fear him?

The Godly Should Speak of God

Having done with the *character* of the godly in general terms, I proceed next to their special characteristics: "Then those who feared the Lord *talked with each other*". When the wicked said, "It is vain to serve God", then "Then those who feared the Lord *talked often with each other*". The meaning of this word, they "talked often", is they discoursed piously together; their tongues were divinely tuned by the Holy Spirit.

Christians, when they meet together, should be much in "holy conference". This is not only an advice—but a charge: "You must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. *Talk* about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again." (Deut. 6:6). Indeed, where there is *grace poured in*—it will effuse out! Grace changes the language—and makes it spiritual. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, they "spoke with other tongues" (Acts 2:4). Grace makes Christian speak with other tongues. A godly Christian not only has the law of God in his *heart* (Psalm 37:31)—but in his *tongue!* (verse 30). The body is the *temple* of God (1 Cor. 6:19). The tongue is the *organ* in this temple, which sounds in holy discourse! "The tongue of the just is as choice silver" (Prov. 10:20). He drops silver sentences, enriching others with spiritual knowledge! "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him; and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be

condemned." (Matt. 12:35-37). In the godly man's heart, there is a *treasury of goodness*, and this is not like a bag of hidden money—but he brings something out of the treasury within—to the enriching of others.

Grace is of the nature of fire, which will not be pent up. Like new wine, grace requires a vent (Acts 4:20). There is a principle within, which constrains to holy conference: "I am full of words, and my spirit compels me to speak." (Job 32:18).

The first use of this doctrine is for INFORMATION. It shows the character and temper of true saints: they "speak often one to another"; their lips drop as a *honeycomb*. The country to which a man belongs—is known by his language. He who belongs to the Jerusalem above—speaks the language of Canaan. None of God's children are *dumb*; their mouth is a "wellspring of wisdom" (Prov. 18:4).

The second use is REPROOF. Here I may draw up a bill of indictment against five sorts of people.

1. Such as are SILENT in matters of true religion. They would be counted godly—but he must have good *eyes*, who can see it! I know not whether it is *ignorance* or *timidity*—which sets godly discourse aside. Many are as mute in piety—as if their tongues did cleave to the roof of their mouth! Had they any love to God, or had they ever tasted how sweet the Lord is—their mouth would "talk of his righteousness" (Psalm 71:24).

Friends, what should concern us but *salvation*? What are the things of this *world*? They are neither *real* or *lasting* (Proverbs 23:5). Do we not see men heap up riches, and suddenly death, as God's sergeant, arrests them! What should we talk of—but the things

pertaining to the kingdom of God? Let this cause *blushing* among Christians—that their meetings are so unprofitable, because they leave God out of their discourse!

Why is there no godly conference? Have you so much spiritual knowledge, that you need not have it increased? Have you so much faith, that you need not have it strengthened? Silence in piety—is a loud sin! We read of one who was possessed with a *dumb devil* (Mark 9:17). How many are spiritually possessed with a *dumb devil*!

2. It is a rebuke to such as, when they meet together, instead of speaking of heaven, have IDLE, FROTHY discourse! They talk—but do not say anything spiritually profitable. Their lips do not drop as a honeycomb. Their speaking is no more profitable, than an infant's mutterings. "They speak *vanity* everyone with his neighbor" (Psalm 12:2). If Christ should ask some today, as he did the two disciples going to Emmaus, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" (Luke 24:17); they could not answer as those did, "The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene!" No, perhaps they were talking about toys, or new fashions! If *idle words* must be accounted for (Matt. 12:36), Lord, what an account will some have to give!

3. It reproves the avaricious person who, instead of speaking of heaven, talks of nothing but the WORLD. The *farmer* speaks of his plough and yoke of oxen; the *tradesman* of his wares and drugs; but not a word of God. "The one who is from the earth belongs to the *earth*—and speaks as one from the *earth*." (John 3:31). Many are like the fish in the gospel—which had *money* in its mouth! (Matt. 17:27). They talk only of *secular* things, as if they imagined to fetch happiness out of that earth which God has cursed!

Seneca, being asked of what country he was, answered he was "a citizen of this world". We may know many to be citizens of this world—their speech betrays them! O souls bent towards the earth and empty of spiritual things!

4. It reproves those who do indeed speak often to one another—but with EVIL speech. "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." (James 3:6).

i. They speak one to another in **harsh** words. Their words should be like the "waters of Shiloh—which go *softly*" (Isaiah 8:6). But too often they are fierce and biting. Water, when it is *hot*, soon boils over; when the heart is heated with anger—it soon boils over in furious speech!

Many curse in their anger. The tongue is made in the fashion of a *sword*—and it *cuts* like a sword! Angry words often harm the one who utters them. Rehoboam with one churlish word, lost ten tribes. A fiery spirit is unsuitable to the *Master* we serve—"the Prince of Peace"; and to his *message*—"the gospel of peace". Such whose tongues are set on fire, let them take heed that they do not one day in hell, desire a drop of water to cool their tongue! (Luke 16:24).

ii. They speak one to another in a bad sense, who **MURMUR** and **COMPLAIN** one to another. They do not complain of their sins—but their vain desires. Murmuring proceeds from unbelief: "They did not *believe* his word: but *murmured*" (Psalm 106:24-25). When men distrust God's *promises*, they murmur at his *providences*. This is a sin God can hardly bear! "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmurs against me?" (Num. 14:27). Israel's

speeches were venomous, and God punished them with venomous serpents! (1 Cor: 10:10).

iii. They speak one to another in a bad sense who give vent to **FILTHY, CORRUPT** language. The heart is a *cask* full of wickedness, and the tongue is the *tap* which lets it flow out! When the face breaks out in sores and pimples—it shows that the blood is corrupt. When men break forth in filthy speech—it shows the heart is corrupt. We read that the lips of the *leper* were to be covered (Lev. 13:45). It would be a blessing—if we could cover the filthy lips of our spiritual lepers!

iv. They speak one to another in a bad sense who, instead of seasoning their words with grace, mix them with **SWEARING**. Swearers rend and tear God's name, and, like mad dogs—fly in the face of God! "Because of swearing the land mourns" (Jer. 23:10). Some think it *fine* speech, to mix every sentence with an oath; as if they would go to hell *genteelly*. "But", says one, "it is my custom to swear." Is this an *excuse*—or an *aggravation* of the sin? If a malefactor should he arraigned for robbery, and he should say to the judge, "Spare me—for it is my custom to rob and steal", the judge would say, "You shall all the more die!" *For every oath that a man swears, God puts a drop of wrath into his vial!*

v. It reproves those who, instead of speaking in a holy manner one to another, speak **of** others:

First, they speak of others in **CENSURING**. Some make it a part of their religion to talk about and criticize others. They do not imitate their *graces*—but speak upon their *failings*. God grant that professors may wash their hands of this! Were people's hearts more *humble*—their tongues would be more *charitable!* It is the sign of a hypocrite—to criticize others and commend himself.

Secondly, they speak of others in SLANDERING. "You slander your own mother's son!" (Psalm 50:20). Slandering is when we speak to the harm of another—and speak that which is not true. *Worth* is blasted by slander! Holiness itself is no shield from this sin. The *lamb's* innocency will not preserve it from the *wolf!* Job calls slandering "the *scourge* of the tongue" (Job 5:21). You may *smite* a man—yet never *touch* him! A slanderer wounds another's reputation, and no physician can heal these wounds! The *eye* and the *name*—are two tender things. God takes it ill at our hands—to calumniate others, especially to slander those who help to keep up the credit of true religion: "Were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num. 12:8). What, my servant, who has wrought so many miracles, whom I have spoken with face to face on the mount! Were you not afraid to speak against *him!*

The Greek word for *slanderer* signifies *devil* (1 Tim. 3:11). Slander is the devil's proper sin—he is "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). The devil does not commit adultery—but he bears false witness. The slanderer may be indicted for *clipping*; he *clips* his neighbor's credit to make it weigh lighter. Our nature is prone to slander; but remember, it is just as much a sin in God's reckoning to break the Ninth Commandment, as the Eighth Commandment.

The third use is EXHORTATION. Put this great duty into *practice!* Imitate these holy ones in the text, who "spoke often one to another". Jerome thinks they spoke something in defense of the providence of God; they vindicated God in his dealings, and exhorted one another not to be discouraged at the virulent speeches of the wicked—but still to hold on a course of piety. Thus, Christians, when you meet, give one another's *souls* a visit—impart your spiritual knowledge, impart your experiences to each other (Psalm 66:16). Samson having found honey, did not only eat of it himself—but

carried it to his father and mother (Judges 14:9). Have you tasted the honey of the Word? Let others have a taste with you!

He who has been in a perfumer's shop does not only himself partake of those sweet fragrances—but some of the perfume sticks to his clothes, so that those who come near him partake of those perfumes. Just so, having ourselves partaken of the sweet savor of Christ's ointments, we should let others partake with us, and by our heavenly discourse, diffuse the *perfume of piety* to them. Let your words be seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6). Let grace be the salt which seasons your words and makes them savory. Christians should take all occasions for godly discourse, when they walk together, and sit at table together. This makes their eating and drinking to be "to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). What makes it a communion of saints—but godly conversation?

But some may say they are barren of *matter*—and know not what to speak of. Have you walked so often through the *field* of Scripture—yet gathered no ears of corn? Have not you matter enough in the Word to furnish you with something to say? Let me suggest a few things to you. When you meet, speak one to another of the **promises**. No honey is so sweet—as that which drops from a promise! The promises are the support of faith, the springs of joy, and the saints royal charter. Are you citizens of heaven, and yet do not speak of your charter?

Speak of the preciousness of **Christ**. He is all beauty and love; he has laid down his blood as the price of your redemption. Have you a friend who has redeemed you—and yet you never speak of him?

Speak one to another of **sin**, what a deadly evil it is, how it has infected your virgin-nature, and turned it into a lesser hell.

Speak of the beauty of **holiness**, which is the souls embroidery, filling it with such orient splendor, as makes God and angels fall in love with it. The *graces* are the sacred characters of the divine nature.

Speak one to another of your **souls**: enquire whether they are in good health.

Speak about **death** and **eternity**: can you belong to heaven and not speak of your country?

Thus, you see, here is matter enough, for holy conference. Why then do you not maintain godly discourse? I believe that one main reason for the decay of the power of godliness, is a lack of Christian conference. People when they meet talk of *vanities*—but *God* and *heaven* are left out of their discourse! That I may **persuade** you in your conversations to put in a word about your souls—let me offer these few things for your consideration.

1. Holy conversation was the practice of the saints of old. Elijah and Elisha went on in godly discourse until the chariot of heaven came to part them (2 Kings 2:11). David's tongue was tuned to the *language of Canaan*, "My tongue shall talk of your righteousness" (Psalm 71:24). The primitive Christians, into whatever company they came, spoke of a *glorious kingdom* they expected, so that some thought they were ambitious of worldly honor. But the kingdom they looked for, was not of *this world* but a kingdom with Christ in heaven. Jerome says that some of the Christian ladies spent much of their time in communing together, and would not let him alone—but continually asked him questions about their souls.

2. We are bidden to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16). The poets painted time with *wings*, because it *flies* so fast! Time *lost* must be redeemed, and is there any better way to redeem time, than to improve it in trading for heaven, and speaking of God and our souls?

3. Jesus Christ has left us a pattern. His words were perfumed with holiness, "All bore him witness, and wondered at the *gracious* words which proceeded out of his mouth!" (Luke 4:22). Christ had grace poured into his lips (Psalm 45:2.). In all companies, he maintained godly discourse. When he sat on Jacob's well, he falls into an heavenly discourse with the woman of Samaria about the water of life (John 4:14). And so when Levi made him a feast (Luke 5:29), Christ feasts him in return—with heavenly discourse. And no sooner was Christ risen from the grave but he "was speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). *The more spiritual we are in our speeches—the more we resemble Christ!* Should not the *members* he like the *Head*? Christ will not be our *Savior*—unless we make him our *pattern*.

4. Godly discourse would prevent sinful discourse. Much *sin* passes in ordinary talk—as *gravel* and *mud* pass along with water. How many are guilty of tongue-sins! Godly discourse would prevent evil—as labor prevents idleness. If we accustomed our tongues to the heavenly dialect, the devil would not have so much power over us.

5. We may somewhat have a knowledge of men's hearts—by their common discourse. *Words are the looking-glass of the mind.* As you may judge of a face by the mirror, whether it be fair or foul; so by the words—we may judge of a man's heart. A lascivious tongue shows a *lustful* heart; an earthly tongue shows a *covetous* heart; a gracious tongue shows a *gracious* heart. The Ephraimites were known by their pronunciation, saying "sibboleth" for

"*shibboleth*" (Judg. 12:6). So by the manner of our speech—it may be known to whom we belong. The *tongue* is the index of the *heart*! If you broach a cask, that which is within, will come out. By that which comes out of the mouth—you may guess what is within, in the heart! "Of the abundance of the heart—the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

6. Godly discourse is beneficial. "The tongue of the wise brings healing." (Proverbs 12:18) A word spoken in season may make such a powerful impression upon another's heart, which will do him good all his life. One single *coal* is apt to die—but many coals put together keep in the heat. Christians by their heavenly talk may "blow up" one another's grace into a flame!

When the daughters of Jerusalem had conversed a while with the spouse, and had heard her describe Christ's admirable beauty, their affections began to be inflamed, and they would seek him with her. "Where is your beloved gone, O fairest among women—that we may seek him with you?" (Song of Sol. 6:1).

A Christian by divine discourse may *enlighten* another when he is ignorant; *warm* him when he is frozen; *comfort* him when he is sad; and *confirm* him when he is wavering. Latimer was much strengthened by discourse with Thomas Bilney in prison, and hearing his confession of faith. A godly *life* adorns true religion—a godly *tongue* propagates it! When the apostle would have us edify one another, what better way could he prescribe than this—to have such holy speeches proceed out of our mouths as might "minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29)?

7. We must be accountable to God for our speech. Words are judged *light* by men—but they weigh *heavy* in God's balance. By our words we shall be either *saved* or *damned*. "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned" (Malt.

12:37). If our words have been seasoned with grace—then the acquitting sentence is likely to go on our side.

8. Godly discourse is a Christian's honor. The tongue is called our glory (Psalm 30:12), because it is the instrument of glorifying God. When our tongues are out of tune in murmuring, then they are not our glory; but when the organs sound in holy discourse, then our tongues are our glory.

9. Godly discourse will be a means to bring Christ into our company. While the two disciples were conferring about the death and sufferings of Christ, Jesus Christ himself came among them: "While they communed together . . . Jesus himself drew near, and went with them" (Luke 24:15). When bad discourse prevails—Satan draws near and makes one of the company; but when godly discourse is promoted—Jesus Christ draws near.

Let all that has been said excite us to godly discourse. Certainly, there is no better way than this to increase our stock of grace. Others by spending grow poor; but the more we spend ourselves in holy discourse, the richer we grow in grace; as the widow's oil, by pouring out, increased (2 Kings 4).

Question: **How may godly conference be arrived at?**

Answer 1. If you wish to discourse of true religion, get your minds well furnished with knowledge. Hereby, you will have a *treasury* to fetch from. "I am pent up and full of words" (Job 32:18). Some are backward to speak of godly things for lack of matter. The *empty* vessel cannot run. If you would have your tongues run fluently in piety, they must be fed with a spring of knowledge. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16). In one of the miracles which Christ wrought, he first caused the water-pots to be *filled* with water,

and then said, "Now draw some out" (John 2:8). So we must first have our heads *filled* with knowledge, and then we shall be able to draw out to others in godly discourse.

Answer 2. If you would discourse readily in the things of God, make piety your delight. What men *delight* in—they will be *speaking* of. The sensualist speaks of his sports; the worldling of his rich purchase. *Delight* makes the tongue as the pen of a ready writer. The spouse, being delighted and enamored with Christ's beauty, could not conceal herself; she makes an elegant and passionate oration in the commendation of Christ. "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand! Yes—he is altogether lovely!" (Song of Solomon 5:10, 16).

Answer 3. Pray that God will both gift and grace you for Christian conference. "O Lord, open my lips!" (Psalm 51:15). Satan has locked up men's lips. Pray that God will open them. Perhaps you pray that you may believe in Christ—but do you pray that you may commend him, and not be ashamed to speak of him before others? "I will speak of your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed" (Psalm 119:46). To end this, let me briefly insert two cautions:

Caution 1. I do not deny that it is lawful to confer of worldly business sometimes; communication requires conference. But with this proviso, that we should show more delight and earnestness in speaking of spiritual things than earthly things, remembering that the *soul* is far more valuable than the *world*.

Caution 2. When people speak of true religion, let it not be for any sinister, unworthy end, nor for *ostentation*—but for *edification*; and then, having your aim right, speak of the things of God, with life and

affection, that others may perceive you *feel* those truths of which you *speak*.

A. The Godly Should Meditate on God's Name

The second special characteristic of the godly in the text is, "they thought upon God's name." These saints, when they were together—*spoke* of God; when they were alone—they *thought* of God. They "thought upon his name".

Question. **What is meant by God's name?**

Answer 1. By the name of God is meant his *essence*; God's name is put for *God himself*.

Answer 2. By the name of God is meant his glorious *attributes*, which are, as it were, the several letters of his name.

Answer 3. By the name of God is meant his worship and ordinances, where his name is called upon. "Go to the place at Shiloh where I once put the Tabernacle to honor my name" (Jer. 7:12). That is, where I first set up my public worship.

Now this name of God, the saints in the text did contemplate, they thought upon his name. Thoughts are the first-born of the soul, the conceptions of the mind, the immediate fruit and outcome of a rational being. "Thoughts are the representations of things in the imagination." These devout souls in the text were chiefly busying their thoughts about God and heaven.

It is the inseparable sign of a godly man, to employ his chief thoughts about God: "The thoughts of the righteous are right" (Proverbs 12:5); that is, they are set upon the right object. It is natural to think. Thoughts fly out of the mind—as sparks fly out of a furnace. The Hebrew word for a *thought* signifies the *boughs of a tree*, because thoughts shoot out from our minds as branches do from a tree. It is, I say, natural to think—but it is not natural to think of God; this is proper to a saint. His thoughts are sublime and seraphic—they fly to heaven.

The mind is a mint-house where thoughts are minted. David minted golden thoughts: "I am still with you" (Psalm 139:18), that is, by divine contemplation. Thoughts are the *travelers* of the soul. David's thoughts kept on heavens road: "I am continually with you" (Psalm 73:23). As the mariners needle turns to the North Pole, so a saint's thoughts are still pointing towards God.

Question. Why is it, that the saints thoughts mount up to God?

Answer 1. There will be this thinking on God—from those intrinsic perfections which are in him. *The loveliness of the object, attracts the thoughts.* God is the Supreme good. There is nothing but God, which is really worth thinking upon. "You are my portion, O Lord" (Psalm 119:87). Will not a man's thoughts run upon his portion? A gracious soul has found *pleasure* in thinking on God (Psalm 63:5-6). He has had those transfigurations on the mount, those *incomings* of the Spirit, those *enterings* of God's love, those *foretastes* of glory—so that he cannot keep his thoughts off from God! To hinder him from thinking on God—is to bar him of all his pleasure.

Answer 2. There will be thinking on God—from the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit. We cannot of ourselves think a godly thought (2 Cor. 3:5)—but the Spirit elevates and fixes the heart on God: "The Spirit lifted me up" (Ezek. 3:14). When you see the iron move *upward*—you know there has been some *magnet* drawing it. Just so, when the thoughts move upwards towards God, the Spirit has, as a divine magnet, drawn them!

First Use: REPROOF.

Out of the quiver of this text I may draw several *arrows of reproof*:

1. It reproves those who do not think upon God's name. It is the brand-mark of a reprobate: "God is not in all his thoughts" (Psalm 10:4). He endeavors to expunge and blot God out of his mind. Though he draws his breath from God—yet he does not think of him. His thoughts all shoot into the *earth* (Phil. 3:19). Had not sinners by their fall lost their head-piece, they would reason thus with themselves: "Certainly God is best worth thinking on. Is there any excellency in the world? Then what excellency there is in God—who has made it! He gives the *star* its beauty, the *flower* its fragrance, *food* its pleasantness! If there is such deliciousness in the creature, what must there be in God! He must needs be better than all. O my soul, shall I admire the *drop*—and not the *ocean*? Shall I think of the *workmanship*, and not of *him* who made it?"

This *forgetfulness of God*, is the fruit of original sin—which has warped the soul, and taken it off from the right object.

2. It reproves such as indeed think of God—but who do not have RIGHT thoughts of him. As the Lord said to Eliphaz, "You have not spoken of me what is right" (Job 42:7); so some think of God—but they do not think of him rightly.

1. They have low *unworthy* thoughts of God. They imagine God to be like themselves (Psalm 50:21). Men think that God is as short-sighted as they, and that he cannot see them through the thick canopy of the clouds. (He who makes a watch knows all the wheels and pins in it, and the spring which causes the motion.) God who is the inspector of the heart (Acts 1:24; 15:8) sees all the intrigues and private plots in the thoughts (Job 42:2; Amos 4:13). God knows the *true* motion of a *false* heart! "I *know*, and am a *witness*—says the Lord" (Jer. 29:23).

2. Men have *injurious* thoughts of God.

First, they think that his ways are **unjust**. "Yet you say—The way of the Lord is not just. Hear, O house of Israel—Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?" (Ezek. 18:25). Some call God's providence to the bar of reason, and judge his proceedings to be unjust. But God says, "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line" (Isaiah 28:17). His ways are *secret*—but never *unjust*. God is most just in his way—when we think he is out of his way.

Secondly, they think that his ways are **unprofitable**. "You have said—It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His requirements?" (Mal. 3:14). We cannot show our earnings. These are not right thoughts of God. Men think him to be a hard master; but God will be in no man's debt, he gives double pay: "Neither do you kindle a fire on my altar for nothing" (Mal. 1:10).

3. It reproves such as, instead of thinking on God, have their minds wholly taken up with VAIN thoughts. Vain thoughts are the *froth of the brain*. "How long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?" (Jer. 4:14). I do not deny that vain thoughts may sometimes *come* into the best hearts—but they have a

care to turn them out before night, that they do not *lodge* there. This denominates a wicked man. His thoughts dwell upon vanity; and well may his thoughts be said to be vain, because they do not turn to any profit! "Vanity, and things wherein there is no profit" (Jer. 16:19). They are vain thoughts, which are about foolish things, and run all into straw. They are vain thoughts which do not better the heart, nor will give one drop of comfort at death, "In that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:4). Vain thoughts are corrupt; they *taint* the heart and leave an evil tincture behind.

4. It reproves such as have, not only vain thoughts, but VILE thoughts.

Firstly, **proud** thoughts: while they view themselves in the mirror of self-love, they begin to take up venerable thoughts of themselves, and so pride fumes up into their head and makes them giddy! (Acts 5:36).

Secondly, **impure** thoughts. They think how to gratify their lusts—they "make provision," or as the word signifies, become "caterers" for the flesh (Romans 13:14).

Sin begins in the thoughts. First men *devise* sin—then they *act* it (Mic. 2:1-2). For instance, if one seeks *preferment*, he thinks to himself by what *ladder* he may climb to honor. He will cringe and comply, and lay aside conscience, because he thinks that this is the way to rise. If a man would grow *rich*, he sets his thoughts to work how to obtain an estate. He will pull down his soul—to build up an estate. Would he wreak his *malice* on another? He frames a plan in his thoughts to harm him. As Jezebel (that painted harlot) when she would ruin Naboth, presently feigns a sham-plot and subtly thinks of a way how to dispatch him: "She commanded: Call the citizens together for fasting and prayer and give Naboth a place of honor.

Find two scoundrels who will accuse him of cursing God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death!" (1 Kings 21:9-10).

Oh, the mischief of thoughts! A man may *deny God* in his thoughts: "The fool has said in his *heart*—there is no God" (Psalm 14:1). He may commit *adultery* in his thoughts: "Whoever looks on a woman to *lust* after her, has committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). A man may *murder* another in his thoughts: "Whoever *hates* his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). O how much *contemplative wickedness* is in the world! Tremble at sinful thoughts. We startle at gross sin—but we are not troubled so much for sinful thoughts. Know firstly, that sin may be committed in the thoughts, though it never blossoms into outward act: "The *thought* of foolishness is sin!" (Prov. 24:9). See this illustrated in two things:

Envy—the Jews envied Christ, for the fame of his miracles: "Pilate knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Matt. 27:18). Here was sin committed in the *thoughts*. The Jews sinned by envying Christ, though they had never crucified him.

Discontentment--"The Lord accepted Abel and his offering, but he did not accept Cain and his offering. This made Cain very *angry* and *dejected*." (Gen. 4:4-5). He maligned his brother, and his thoughts boiled up to discontentment. Here was sin committed in the thoughts. Cain sinned in being discontented, even if he had never murdered his brother.

*Know that God will **punish** sinful thoughts.* We say thoughts are free—and so they are in *man's* court; but *God* will punish for thoughts! It was set upon Herod's score, that he thought to destroy Christ under a pretense of worshiping him (Matt. 2:8).

Let us be humbled for the sins of our thoughts. "If you have thought evil, lay your hand upon your mouth" (Proverbs 30:32); that is, humble and abase yourself before the Lord. The holiest people alive, need to be humbled for their thoughts:

First, for the **instability** of their thoughts. How do your thoughts dance up and down in prayer. It is hard to tie two godly thoughts together.

Secondly, for the **impiety** of their thoughts. In the fairest fruit, may be a worm—and in the best heart, evil thoughts may arise. Did men's hearts stand where their faces do, they would blush to look one upon another! Let us be deeply humbled for our thoughts. Let us look up to Christ, that he would stand between us and God justice, and that he would intercede for us, that the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven.

Second use: EXHORTATION.

Let us think on God's Name; let us lock up ourselves with God every day; let our thoughts get wings and, with the birds of paradise, fly up towards heaven. Christians, look upon that day to be lost, in which you have not conversed with God in your thoughts; think of God in your closet, in your shop; trade above the moon. "Isaac went out to meditate in the field" (Gen. 24:63). He *walked in heaven* by holy utterances. Our minds should be *steeped* in holy thoughts.

It is not enough to have a few transient thoughts of God—but there must be a *fixing* of our minds on God, until our hearts are warmed in love to him, and we can say, like those in Luke 24:32, "Did not our heart burn within us!"

But what should the matter of our holy meditations be?

1. Think of God's immense being.

Adore his illustrious *ATTRIBUTES*, which are the beams by which the divine nature shines forth. Think of God's **omniscience**. He particularly and critically assesses all our actions, and notes them down in his book. Think of God's **holiness**, which is the most sparkling jewel of his crown (Exod. 15:11). Think of God's **mercy**: this makes all his other attributes sweet. Holiness without mercy, and justice without mercy, would be dreadful. Think of God's **veracity**: "Abundant in truth" (Exod. 34:6); that is, God will be so far from coming short of his word, that he does more than he has said. He shoots *beyond* the promise, never *short* of it.

Think of the *WORKS* of God: "I will meditate also on all your works" (Psalm 77:12). God's works are bound up in three great volumes: *Creation, Providence, Redemption*. Here is sweet matter for our thoughts to expatiate upon.

To enforce the exhortation, let me propose some **arguments** and **inducements** to be frequent in the thoughts of God.

1. The reason why God has given us a thinking faculty, is that we may think on his Name. When our thoughts run out in vain things, we should think with ourselves thus: Did God give us this talent to misemploy? Did he give us thoughts that we should think of everything but him?

2. It we do not accustom ourselves to godly thoughts, we cannot be godly Christians. Thinking seriously on heavenly things—makes them *stick* in our minds, causes *delight* in them, and makes them *nourish* us. Musing on holy objects, is like *digesting* food, which turns it into nourishment. Without holy thoughts, there is no true religion. Can a man be pious and scarcely ever think of it?

3. We are deeply obliged to think on God. For, First, **God is our Maker.** "It is he who has made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3). Our bodies are God's fine needlework (Psalm 139:15). And as God has wrought the cabinet, so he has put a jewel in it—the precious soul. Has God made us—and shall not we think of him?

Secondly, **God has sweetened our lives with various mercies.** A city in Sicily is so finely situated, that the sun was never out of sight. Just so, God has so placed us by his providence, that the sunshine of his mercy is never out of sight. We are miraculously attended with his mercy! His mercy feeds us with the finest of the wheat—the bread of life; mercy guards us with a guard of angels; it makes the rock pour forth rivers of oil. Shall not the *stream* lead us to the *fountain*? Shall not we think of the *God* of our mercies? This is high ingratitude.

4. To have frequent and devout thoughts of God—evidences SINCERITY. No truer touchstone of sanctity exists, than the spirituality of the thoughts. What a man's thoughts are—that is the man! "For as he thinks in his heart—so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). *Thoughts* are freer from hypocrisy, than *words*. One may *speak* well for applause, or to stand right in the opinion of others; but when we are alone and think of God's Name, and admire his excellencies, this shows the heart to be right. *Thoughts* are freer from hypocrisy, than a man's *external behavior*. A man may be lovely in his outward behavior—yet have a covetous, revengeful mind! The acts of sin may be concealed, when the heart sits brooding upon sin. But to have the thoughts spiritualized and set upon God is a truer sign of sincerity—than a life free from vice.

What do your thoughts run upon? Where do they make their most frequent visits? Can you say, "Lord, our hearts are still mounting up

to heaven, our thoughts are lodged in paradise; though we do not see your face—yet we *think* on your Name!" This is a good evidence of sincerity. *We* judge men by their actions; *God* judges them by their thoughts!

5. Thinking much on God—would cure the love of the WORLD. Great things seem little—to him who stands high. To such as stand upon the top of the Alps, the great cities of Italy seem like little villages. For those who are mounted high in the contemplation of Christ and glory—how do the things of the world disappear, and even shrink into nothing! A soul elevated by faith above the visible planets, has the *earth* under his feet. A true saint intermeddles with secular affairs, more out of *necessity* than *choice*. Paul's thoughts are heavenly and sublime—he lived in the altitudes—and how he scorned the world! "The world is crucified unto me!" (Gal. 6:14).

6. Thinking on God—would be expulsive of SIN. From whence is impiety—but from thoughtlessness? If only men carefully considered God's holiness and justice—would they dare sin at the rate they do! That which kept Joseph in check, was the thought of a sin-revenging God. When the delights of sin tickle us—let the thoughts of God come into men's minds, that he is both *Spectator* and *Judge*—and that after the golden crowns and women's hair—comes the lions teeth! (Rev. 9:8). This would put them into a cold sweat—and be as the angel's drawn sword! (Num. 22:31). It would scare them from sin!

7. Thinking on God, is an admirable means to increase our LOVE to God. As it was with David's meditations, "As I was musing the fire burned" (Psalm 39:3); so it is with our musing on the Deity. While we are thinking on God—our hearts will kindle in love to him.

The reason our affections are so chilled and cold in religion—is that we do not warm them with thoughts of God. Hold a magnifying glass to the sun, and the glass burns that which is near to it. So when our thoughts are lifted up to Christ, the Sun of righteousness, our affections are set on fire. No sooner had the spouse been thinking upon her Savior's beauty—but she fell into love-sickness. (Song of Sol. 5:8). O saints, do but let your thoughts dwell upon the love of Christ, who passed by *angels* and thought of *you*; who was wounded that, out of his wounds, the balm of Gilead might come to heal *you*; who leaped into the sea of his Father's wrath, to save *you* from drowning in the lake of fire! Think of this unparalleled love, which sets the angels wondering—and see if it will not affect your hearts and cause tears to flow forth!

8. Thinking on God, will by degrees *transform* us into his image. As Jacob's flock looking on the rods which had white streaks conceived and brought forth like them (Gen. 30:39), so by contemplating God's holiness, we are in some measure changed into his likeness! "Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord—we are changed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18). The contemplative sight of God was transforming; they had some print of God's holiness upon them; as Moses when he had been on the mount with God, his face shone! (Exod. 34:35). What is *godliness*, but *God-likeness*? And who are so like him—as those that think on his name?

9. Thinking on God is *sweet*. It ushers in a secret delight to the soul! "My meditation of him shall be sweet" (Psalm 104:34). He whose head gets above the clouds—has his thoughts lifted high, has God in his eye, is full of divine raptures, and cries out as Peter in the transfiguration, "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" Holy thoughts are the *dove* we send out of the *ark* of our souls—and they return with an olive branch of peace. Some complain that they have no *joy* in their

lives. It is no wonder, when they are such strangers to heavenly contemplation! Would you have God give you joy and comfort—and never think of him? Indeed Israel had manna dropped into their tents, and they never thought of it; but God will not drop down this manna of heavenly joy on that soul which seldom or never thinks of him.

Would you have your spirits cheerful? Let your thoughts be heavenly! The *higher* the lark flies—the *sweeter* it sings. Just so, the higher a soul ascends in the thoughts of God—the sweeter joy it has!

10. Thoughts of God will turn to the best account. Thoughts spent on the *world* are often in *vain*. Some spend thoughts about laying up a portion for a child; and perhaps either it dies, or lives to be a severe trial to them. Others beat their brains how to rise in politics—when royal favor has shone upon them, all of a sudden an eclipse comes about, the king's smile is turned into a frown, and then their thoughts are frustrated!

How oft do men build castles in the air! But the thoughts of God will turn to a good account, they augment sanctification, and bring satisfaction: "You satisfy me more than the richest of foods. I will praise you with songs of joy. I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night" (Psalm 63:5-6). The thoughts we have of God in the time of *health*, will be a comfort to us in the time of *sickness*.

11. God thinks of us—and shall not we think of him? "The Lord thinks upon me!" (Psalm 40:17). God thinks on us every morning; his mercies are "new every morning" (Lam. 3:23). He gives us night-mercies, he rocks us asleep every night: "So he gives his beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2). And if we awaken, he gives "songs in the night" (Job 35:10). If God is thinking of us day and night, shall

not we think of his Name? How can we forget a friend—who is ever mindful of us? "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, with the Lord are thoughts of peace" (Jer 29:11). *Though God is out of our sight—we are not out of his thoughts!*

12. God will one day reckon with us, for our thoughts. He will say, "I gave you a mental faculty. What have you done with it?" If God asks a covetous man, "What have your thoughts been? Which way have your thoughts run?" He will answer, "To heap up riches!" If God asks princes and emperors, "How have you employed your thoughts?" They will say, "By our scepter—to beat down the power of godliness." What a dreadful account will these people have to give at last! Not only men's *actions*—but their *thoughts* will accuse them! "Their *consciences* also bearing witness, and their *thoughts* now accusing, now even defending them!" (Romans 2:15).

13. Our thoughts of God shall not be lost. God accepts the *thought*—for the *deed*. David had a good thought come into his mind to build God a house, and God took it as kindly as if he had done it! "Forasmuch as it was in your *heart* to build an house for my name, you did well in that it was in your heart" (2 Chron. 6:8). When Christians have thoughts of promoting God's glory—that they would do such good acts if it were in their power—the Lord looks upon it as if they had done it. So that our thoughts of God are not lost.

Let us think of God in a right MANNER. A good medicine may be spoiled in the *making*. So may a good duty be spoiled in the *doing*. Thoughts may be good for the *matter* of them—yet may be faulty in the *manner*. I shall show you, first, how thoughts of God may fail in their manner. There is a right manner of thinking upon God.

1. How thoughts of God may fail in their manner.

First, a man may think good thoughts of God—yet not intend his glory. Jehu had good thoughts come into his mind, to destroy the Baal worshipers—but his intent was to advance himself unto the throne! Bad *aims* spoil good *actions*!

Secondly, a man may have good thoughts of God—but they are forced. When one bleeds under God's afflicting hand, he may think of God—yet have no love to him. "When he slew them—then they remembered that God was their rock, and the most high God their Redeemer: nevertheless they only flattered him with their mouth" (Psalm 78:34-36). These were good thoughts—but it was to pay God a compliment in order to get rid of the affliction.

Thirdly, a man may have thoughts of God—out of a design to stop the mouth of conscience. Conscience lashes the profane sinner: "What! Are you so wicked as never to think of God, who indulges you with so many favors!" Hereupon, he may have a few good thoughts; but they are irksome to him—this is not from a principle of conscience—but to quiet conscience.

Fourthly, a man may think of God with horror! He thinks of God's sovereignty, and dreads the thoughts of God. You see—one may think of God, yet the thoughts may become sinful.

2. The right manner of thinking on God.

First, our thoughts of God must be **serious**. Feathers *float* on the surface—but gold *sinks* into the water. Feathery spirits have some floating thoughts; but godly hearts sink deep in the thoughts of God!

Secondly, our thoughts of God must be **spiritual**. Take heed of framing any gross conceits of God in your minds, representing him by the likeness of the creature: "You saw no form of any kind the day

the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire" (Deut. 4:15). Conceive of God *in Christ*. We cannot see him any other way, as we cannot see the sun in the circle—but in the beams. The Godhead dwells in Christ's human nature (Col. 2:9). Think of God as a Spirit full of immense glory, propitious to us through a Mediator.

Thirdly, our thoughts of God must be **delightful**. With what delight does a child think of his father! A gracious soul counts them the sweetest hours, which are spent with God.

Fourthly, our thoughts of God must be **operative** and **efficacious**, leaving our hearts in a better tune. The thoughts of God's *faithfulness* must make us *confide* in him. The thoughts of God's *holiness* must make us *conform* to him. This is the right thinking on God—when it is influential, leaving us in a more heavenly frame.

Third use: DIRECTION.

The text shows us **how** to have our thoughts frequently fixed upon God.

1. Begin the day with holy thoughts. "When I awake, I am still with you" (Psalm 139:18). God should have the first buddings of our thoughts. In the law, the Lord would have the *first* fruits offered him. Give God your *virgin* thoughts in the morning. What the vessel is first seasoned with, it keeps the relish of, a long time after. The mind seasoned with godly thoughts in the morning, will keep the heart in a better state all the day long.

2. If you would think of God—take heed of hindrances.

1. Turn away your eyes from beholding vanity (Psalm 119:37). Vain objects poison the imagination; lascivious pictures and wanton

talk leave bad impressions in the mind.

2. As far as you are able, call your thoughts off from the world. If worldly thoughts come crowding into our mind—godly thoughts will be lost in the crowd!

3. Get a love for God and his ways. One cannot but *think*—of that which he *loves*. "Does a young woman forget her jewelry?" (Jer. 2:32). When she has not her jewel on her *ear*—she will have it in her *thoughts*. A person deeply in love, cannot keep his thoughts off from the object he loves. *The reason we think on God no more—is because we love him no more!* Let there be but one spark of love to God—and it will fly upward in heavenly thoughts and prayers. By nature our hearts cannot be made to fix on God—but by love.

4. If you would think often on God, get a saving interest in him. "This God is *our* God!" (Psalm 48:14). We think most—upon that which is our own. If a man rides by beautiful houses and gardens, he casts his eyes slightly upon them. But let him have a house of his own—and his thoughts dwell in it. Why do men think no more of God—but because they and God are strangers? Let a man's interest in God be cleared—and he will not be able to keep his thoughts off from God.

Part II. THE GREAT GAIN OF GODLINESS

"Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord hearkened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his

name. "They will be mine," says the Lord Almighty, "in the day when I make up my jewels. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not." Malachi 3:16-18

A. The first of the good effects of the saints piety—is that God REGARDED it. "The Lord hearkened and heard." These blessed ones in the text were *speaking* and *thinking* of God—and he did not turn away his ear from them, as if he had not minded them. But he hearkened and heard; which expression denotes both *diligence* and *delight*.

1. It notes the **diligent heed** God gave to these saints—he "hearkened". Here was attention of *ear*, and intentness of *mind*. Harkening is the gesture of one who intently listens to what another says.

2. God's hearkening shows the **delight** he took in the holy dialogues of these saints. He was pleased with them; they were to him as a sweet melody.

God takes special notice of the good which he sees in his people. The children of God may perhaps think that God does not regard them: "I cry unto you—and you do not hear me" (Job 30:20). The church complains that God shuts out her prayer (Lam. 3:8)—but though God is some times *silent*—he is not *deaf!* He takes notice of all the good services of his people: "The Lord hearkened and heard."

Why is it that God takes such notice of his people's services?

*First, not from any merit in them—but the impulsive cause is his **free grace!** The best duties of the righteous, could not endure God's scales of justice—but God will display the trophies of his mercy. *Free grace accepts—what stern justice would condemn!**

*Secondly, God's taking notice of the good in his people, is through **Christ!** "He has made us accepted—in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Or, as Chrysostom renders it, he has made us "favorites". Through a *red glass* everything appears of a red color. Just so, through Christ's blood, both our persons and duties appear ruddy and beautiful in God's eyes!*

*Thirdly, God takes notice of the services of his people—because they flow from the principle of **grace**. God regards the voice of faith: "O my dove ... let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice" (Song of Sol. 2:14). The services of the *wicked* are harsh and sour—but the *godly* give God the first-ripe cluster (Mic. 7:1), which grows from the sweet and pleasant root of grace.*

First use: INFORMATION.

1. If God hearkens and hears, I infer from hence—God's OMNISCIENCE. How could he, being in heaven, hear what the saints speak and think—were he not omniscient? Through the bright mirror of his own essence he has a full knowlege of all things. He knows the intrigues of nations, and the stratagems of his enemies (Exod. 14:24). Future contingencies fall within his cognizance.

God's knowledge is **foundational**. He is the original, pattern, and prototype of all knowledge. God's knowledge is **instantaneous**. He knows all at once! Our knowledge is successive, we know one thing after another, and argue from the effect to the cause; but all things are in God's view—in one entire prospect. God's knowledge is

infallible and not subject to mistake. Such is the infinity of his knowledge, that the apostle cries out in admiration, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33). The world is to God as a *beehive of glass*, where you see the working of the bees and the framing of their honey-combs. All things are unveiled to the eye of Jehovah! "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account!" Hebrews 4:13

2. See God's GOODNESS, who often passes by the *failings* of his people (Num. 23:21), and takes notice of the *good* in them.

"**Sarah** obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord" (1 Pet. 3:6). The Holy Spirit passes by Sarah's unbelief and laughing at the promise—and takes notice of her reverence to her husband; she called him Lord.

"You have heard of the patience of **Job**" (James 5:11). We have heard of his impatience, cursing his birthday—but the Lord does not upbraid him with that—but observes the good that was in him: "You have heard of the *patience* of Job". The painter who drew Alexander's picture, drew him with his finger upon his scar. Just so, God puts a *finger of mercy* upon the scars of his children! He sees their *faith*—and turns a blind eye to their *failings*!

3. See God's differing dealings towards the godly and the wicked. If the godly think on his name, he hearkens and hears; but if the wicked meddle with religious duties, he turns away his ear. "He did not accept Cain and his offering" (Gen. 4:5). Suppose a man had a sweet breath—yet if he had the plague, nobody would come near him! Just so, though a sinner may give God many a sweet, elegant expression in prayer—yet, having the plague in his heart, God will not receive any offering from him! If God shuts men's *prayers* out of

heaven, it is a sad prognostic that he will shut their *persons* out of heaven.

4. See the privilege of the godly—they have God's ear! "The Lord hearkened and heard!" "His ears are open unto their cry!" (Psalm 34:15). It would be counted a great happiness to have the *king's* ear. How astonishing is it to have *God's* ear! Believers have the Spirit of God breathing in them—and God cannot but hear the voice of his own Spirit.

5. See what an encouragement is here to be conversant in the duties of God's worship. God takes notice of the services of his people—he hearkens to them as to sweet music. Who would not come with their humble addresses to God—when he is so pleased with them (Prov. 15:8)

Objection 1—*But I deserve nothing.*

Answer—God does not bestow his favors according to our desert—but according to his promise and grace.

Objection 2—*But I have prayed a long time and have no answer.*

Answer—God may hear prayer when he does not answer. He may lend us his *ear*—when he does not show us his *face!* The text says, "the Lord hearkened and heard." It is not said he gave an answer—but he "hearkened". It befits suitors to wait. Faith waits upon God, patience waits for God. "Like a servant's eyes on his master's hand—so our eyes are on the Lord our God until He shows us favor." (Psalm 123:2).

6. See the difference between God and men. God takes notice of the good in his people; the wicked pass by the good in the godly—

and take notice only of their failings. If they can spy any impropriety or blemish in them, they upbraid them with it; like those children who reproached Elisha for his *baldness*—but took no notice of the prophet's *miracles* (2 Kings 2:23).

7. From the words, "the Lord hearkened and heard", take note of the folly of idolaters. They worship a God who can neither *hearken* nor *hear*! The Cretans pictured Jupiter without ears. Idol gods have ears—but hear not (Psalm 115:6). A lifeless god is good enough for a lifeless worship.

Second use: EXHORTATION.

1. Let the people of God stand and wonder:

a. Stand and wonder at God's CONDESCENSION, that he who is so high in the praises and acclamations of the angels—should stoop so low as to listen to the lispings of his children. "The Lord hearkened and heard!" Alas, God has no need of our services; he is infinitely blessed in reflecting upon the splendor of his own infinite being! We cannot add the least cubit to his essential glory: "If you are righteous, what do you give Him, or what does He receive from your hand?" (Job 35:7). Yet such is his sweet condescension, that he does as it were, stoop below himself, and take notice of his peoples poor offerings.

b. Stand and wonder at God's LOVE, that he should regard those services of his people, which are so mixed with corruption! "Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags!" (Isaiah 64:6). The sacrifice of thanksgiving, which was the highest sacrifice, had some leaven *mixed* with it (Lev. 7:13). Our best duties have some leaven of imperfection *mixed* in them; yet such is God's love, that he receives and accepts them: "I have eaten my *honeycomb* with my *honey*"

(Song of Sol. 5:1). *Honey* is sweet—but the honeycomb is harsh and bitter, and can hardly be eaten; yet such was Christ's love to his spouse, that he ate of her honeycomb, her services mixed with imperfection, and was pleased and delighted with them! Oh, the love of God, that he should have respect to our offerings, which are interlaced with sin! Our best duties, are *sweet wine* coming out of a *sour cask*.

2. If God hearkens to us when we speak—let us hearken to him when he speaks. In the Word, God speaks to us. He is said now to speak to us from heaven (Heb. 12:25), that is, by the Word. Does God hearken to us, and shall not we hearken to him? Be not like the deaf adder which stops her ear. This the Lord complains of: "God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it" (Job 33:14) . If God's *Word* does not prevail with us—our *prayers* will not prevail with him.

God Records the Piety of His People

The second good effect of the saints piety—was that God RECORDED it. "A book of remembrance was written before him"; the word in the original for "book of remembrance" signifies "a book of memorials" or "monuments". The words immediately foregoing recite God's hearkening and hearing; but lest any should say, though God does at the present hear the holy speech and thoughts of his children—yet may they not in time slip out of his mind? Therefore these words are added, "a book of remembrance was written before him." The Lord did not only *hear* the godly speeches of the saints—

but *recorded* them, and wrote them down! "A book of remembrance was written."

This is spoken after the manner of men—not that God has any book of records by him. He does not need to write down anything for the help of his memory. He is not subject to forgetfulness. Things done a thousand years ago are as fresh to him—as if they were done but yesterday: "A thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past" (Psalm 90:4).

This "book of remembrance", therefore, is a borrowed form of speech, taken from kings, who have their *chronicles* wherein they note memorable things. King Ahasuerus had his book of records, wherein were written the worthy deeds of Mordecai (Esther 6:1-2). Just so, God bears in mind, all the godly speeches and pious actions of his children. God's particular and critical assessment is a book of records, where nothing can be lost or torn out.

Doctrine: God eternally remembers all the good designs and pious endeavors of his people. "God is not unjust; he will not *forget* your *work* and the *love* you have shown him, as you have helped his people and continue to help them." (Heb. 6:10). There are eight things which God writes down in his book of remembrance:

1. The Lord writes down the NAMES of his people. "Whose names are written in the Book of Life" (Phil. 4:3). This book has no *errata*, "I will never *erase* their names from the Book of Life!" (Rev. 3:5).

2. The Lord writes down the godly SPEECH of his people. When Christians speak together of the mysteries of heaven (which is like music in concert), God is much delighted with it. *When their tongues are going on earth—God's pen is going in heaven!* "Those

who feared the Lord spoke often one to another, and a book of remembrance was written!"

3. The Lord writes down the TEARS of his people. Tears drop down to the earth—but they reach heaven! God has his bottle and his book: "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book!" (Psalm 56:8). Tears drop from the saints—as water from the roses—they are fragrant to God—and he puts them in his bottle. And besides this, he has his book of remembrance, where he writes them down, "You have recorded each one in your book!" Especially God writes down such tears as are shed for the sins of the times. "There was another man among them, clothed in linen, with *writing equipment* at his side" (Ezek. 9:2). This was to write down the tears of the mourners, and to "put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations committed in the city" (verse 4).

4. God writes down the THOUGHTS of his people. We can write down men's *words*—but we cannot write down their *thoughts*. It would perplex the *angels*—to write men's thoughts! But be assured, never a holy thought comes into our mind—but God writes it down! So in the text—a book of remembrance was written for those who *thought* upon his name. Two things are silent—yet have a voice:

1. Tears: "the Lord has heard the voice of my *weeping*" (Psalm 6:8).

2. Thoughts: "I know what they are *thinking*" (Isaiah 66:18).

5. God writes down the DESIRES of his people. "Lord, my every desire is known to You!" (Psalm 38:9); that is, "It is set down in your book!" Desire is the spiritual appetite, or the soul's panting and breathing after God (Psalm 84:2). In this life we do rather *desire* God—than *enjoy* him. Can we say that we take our souls out of the quiver

of our bodies, and shoot them into heaven? Do our affections sally forth towards Christ? Do we desire him superlatively and incessantly? Every such desire is put down in God's register book! Lord, my every desire is known to You!"

6. The Lord writes down the PRAYERS of his people. (Jonah 2:7). Prayer, though it be not vocal, only mental, is recorded. "Hannah spoke in her heart" (1 Sam. 1:13). That prayer, God wrote down and answered. God was *better* to her than her prayer; she prayed for a *son*—and God gave her a *prophet*! At times the heart is so full of grief, that it can only *groan* in prayer; yet a *groan* is sometimes the best part of a prayer, and God writes it down: "My groaning is not hidden from You!" (Psalm 38:9). If we cannot speak with *elegance* in prayer; if it is only *lisping* and *chattering*, God puts it in his book of remembrance: "I chattered like a swallow, and then I moaned like a mourning dove. I am in trouble, Lord. Help me!" (Isaiah 38:14); yet that prayer was *heard* and *registered*, "I have *heard* your prayer—I have *seen* your tears!" (verse 5).

7. God writes down the WORKS of his people. Works of mercy must be done out of love to God. As Mary out of love brought her ointments and sweet spices, and anointed Christ's dead body—so out of pure love we must bring our *ointments of charity* to anoint the saints, which are Christ's living body. Such alms are not lost. With such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb. 13:16). And that we should see how well the Lord is pleased with them, he writes them down thus: "Your gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God." (Acts 10:4).

8. God has a book of remembrance for the SUFFERINGS of his people. The saints *purgatory* is in this life. But there are two things which may bear up their spirits:

First, every groan of theirs goes to God's heart: "I have also heard the *groaning* of the children of Israel" (Exod. 6:5). In music when one string is touched—all the rest sound. When the saints are stricken—God's heart reverberates.

Secondly, God has a book of records, to write down his people's injuries. The wicked make wounds in the backs of the righteous, and then pour in vinegar. God writes down their cruelty: "I remember what Amalek did to Israel" (1 Sam. 15:2). Amalek was Esau's grandchild (Gen. 36:12), a bitter enemy of Israel. The Amalekites showed their spite to Israel in two ways:

First, "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God." (Deuteronomy 25:17-18)

Secondly, they openly gave battle to them, and would have hindered them from going into Canaan (Exod. 17:8). Now God took notice of Israel's sufferings by Amalek: "I remember what Amalek did to Israel, and I have my book of remembrance; I write it down." "This is what the Lord Almighty says—I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." (1 Sam. 15:2-3).

First use of the doctrine: INFORMATION.

I. This shows us that it is not in vain to serve God. The wicked who do not know God, think him to be a hard Master, and say, like those Job speaks of, "What would we gain by praying to

him?" (Job 21:15). But the text shows us that God records all the services of his people, "a book of remembrance was written before him." God's writing in his book is:

A. An HONOR to the saints. The Romans wrote the names of their senators in a book, and in token of honor they were called the "chosen fathers" of the people. So God's book of remembrance shows his high esteem of his people and their services. He writes them down.

B. A mark of the SPECIAL FAVOR God bears to his people. He registers them and their services—with an intent to *crown* them! Tamerlane, wrote down all the memorable deeds of his soldiers, whom he afterwards advanced to places of dignity. God's service is most desirable; let us make Joshua's choice: "As for me and my house—we will serve the Lord!" (Joshua 24:15).

If we should desert God's service, where shall we go? When Christ asked his disciples, Will you also go away? Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68); as if to say, "If we leave you, we do not know where to get help for ourselves." Let us adhere to God; he has his book of memorials to record our allegiance. We may be losers *for* him—but we shall not be losers *by* him.

2. As God registers the good works of his people—so he has a book of remembrance to write down the sins of the wicked! "Go now, *write* it on a tablet for them, *inscribe* it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness. These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction!" (Isaiah 30:8-9).

Men's sins are written in the book of *conscience*—and the book of God's *omniscience*. They think that because God does not speak to

them by his loud judgments, therefore God does not know their sins. But though God does not *speak*—he *writes*: "The sin of Judah is written with an iron stylus. With a diamond point it is engraved." (Jer. 17:1). God writes down every act of oppression, bribery, and immorality. "They never consider that I remember all their evil. Now their sins are all around them; they are right in front of My face!" (Hos. 7:2). King Belshazzar was carousing and drinking wine in bowls, and praising his gods of gold and silver; but while he was *sinning*—God was *writing*! "At that very moment they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, and his face turned pale with fear. Such terror gripped him that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way beneath him!" (Dan. 5:5-6).

We read of God's *book*: "The *books* were opened" (Rev. 20:12); and we also read of his *bag*: "My transgression is sealed up in a *bag*" (Job 14:17). This seems to allude to law courts, where indictments against malefactors are sealed up in a bag, and produced at the trials. When God shall open his *black book* in which men's *names* are written, and his *bag* in which their *sins* are written—then their hearts will tremble, and their knees will knock together in terror! Every *lie* a sinner tells, every *oath* he swears, every *drunken* bout—God writes it down in his book of remembrance! And woe to him—if the book is not crossed out with the blood of Christ!

3. See the mercifulness of God to his children—who blots their *sins* out of his book of remembrance, and writes their *good deeds* in his book of remembrance. "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions" (Isaiah 43:25). This is a metaphor borrowed from the case of a creditor who takes his pen and blots out the debt owing to him; so says God, I will "blot out your transgressions". Or as the Hebrew has it, "I am blotting them out."

God in forgiving sin, passes an act of *oblivion* or *amnesty*: "I will remember their sin no more!" (Jer. 31:34). God will not upbraid his people with their former offences. We never read that when Peter repented, that Christ upbraided him for his denial of his Lord. Oh, the heavenly *indulgence* and *kindness* of God to his people! He remembers everything about them—but their sins! He writes down their good thoughts and speeches in a merciful book of remembrance; but their sins are as if they had never been—they are carried into the land of oblivion!

Second Use: EXHORTATION.

If God records our services—then let us record his mercies. Let us have our book of remembrance. A Christian should keep two books always beside him; one to write his *sins* in—that he may be humble; the other to write his *mercies* in—that he may be thankful. David had his book of remembrance: "David appointed some of the Levites to be ministers before the ark of the Lord, to give thanks and praise to Him." (1 Chron. 16:4). We should keep a book to record God's mercies—though I think it will be hard to get a book big enough to hold them! At such and such a time we were in straitened circumstances—and God supplied us; at another time under sadness of spirit—and God dropped in the oil of gladness; at another near death—and God miraculously restored us. If God is mindful of what we do for him—shall not we be mindful of what he does for us! God's mercies, like jewels, are too good to be lost! Get a book of remembrance!

Third Use: COMFORT.

1. It is comfort to the godly—in the case of friends forgetting them. Joseph did Pharaoh's cupbearer a kindness—"Yet the cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." (Gen.

40:23). It is only too usual to remember *injuries*—and forget *kindnesses*; but God has a book of remembrance where he writes down all his old friends. Near relations may sometimes be forgetful. The tender mother may forget her infant: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Isa. 49:15). A mother may sooner forget her child—than God be forgetful. Christ our high priest, has the names of the saints written upon his breastplate, and all their good deeds written in his book of memorials! Let this be a *remedy* to revive the hearts of God's people; though friends may blot you out of their mind—yet God will not blot you out of his book!

2. This is consolation to the godly—the Lord keeps a book of remembrance for this end—that he may at the last day make a public and solemn mention of all the good which his saints have done. God will open his book of records and say, "Then the King will say to those on His right—Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me." (Matt. 25:34-36).

God will make known all the memorable and pious actions of his people before men and angels! He will say, "Here are those who have prayed and wept for sin; here are those who have been advocates for my truth; here are those who have laid to heart my dishonors, and have mourned for what they could not reform. These are my renowned ones, my *Hephzibahs*—in whom my soul delights!" (Isaiah 62:4).

What a glorious thing will this be—to have God express the high praise of his saints! When Alexander saw the sepulcher of Achilles, he cried out "O happy Achilles, who had Homer to set forth your praise!" What an honor will it be to have the names and worthy deeds of the saints mentioned, and *God himself* to be the herald to proclaim their praises! (2 Cor. 4:5).

God Rewards the Piety of His People

The third good effect of the saints piety—was that God REWARDED it. "And they shall be mine, says the Lord Almighty, in that day when I make up my jewels!" (Mal. 3:17). The reward is threefold.

1. God's **owning** them: "They shall be *mine*, says the Lord Almighty."
2. God's **honoring** them: "In that day when I make up my *jewels*."
3. God's **sparing** them: "I will *spare* them, as a man spares his own son that serves him."

Note first, **the Person speaking**, "the Lord Almighty". This is too great a word to be passed by in silence. God is often in Scripture styled, "the Lord Almighty" (Psalm 46:11; Isaiah 1:24); that is, he is the Supreme General, and Commander of all armies and forces, and gives victory to whom he will.

Question: *Why is this name, "the Lord Almighty", given to God?*

Answer: Not because God needs any others to protect himself, or suppress his enemies. Earthly princes have armies to defend them from danger—but God needs none to help him: he can fight without an army. God puts strength into all armies. Other captains may give their soldiers *armor*; they cannot give them *strength*; but God does: "You have girded me with *strength* for the battle" (Psalm 18:39). Why then is God said to have armies—if he needs them not?

Firstly, it is to set forth his sovereign power and grandeur; all armies and regiments are under his command.

Secondly, it is to show us that though God can effect all things by himself; yet in his wisdom he often uses the *agency of the creature* to bring to pass his will and purpose.

Question: *What are these hosts or armies, of which God is the sovereign Lord?*

Answer 1: God has an army in **heaven**—*angels* and *archangels*: "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the armies of heaven around him" (1 Kings 22:19). By the *armies of heaven*, is meant the angels; they, being spirits, are a powerful army: "You his angels, which excel in strength" (Psalm 103:20). We read of one angel who destroyed in one night "a hundred and eighty-five thousand men" (2 Kings 19:35). If one angel destroyed such a vast army, what can a whole *legion* of angels do? A legion consisted of six thousand, six hundred and sixty six. How many of these legions go to make up the heavenly host! (Dan. 7:10).

The *stars* are God's army too (Deut. 4:19). These were set in battalions and fought against God's enemies: "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera" (Judg. 5:20). That is, the stars charged

like an army, raising storms and tempests by their influences, and so destroying the whole army of Sisera.

Answer 2: God has armies upon **earth**, both rational and irrational. The *rational* are armies of men. These are under God's command and conduct. They do not stir without his warrant. The Lord has the managing of all military affairs. Not a stroke is struck—but God orders it! Not a bullet flies—but God directs it! As for the *irrational* armies, God can raise an army of *flies*, as he did against King Pharaoh (Exod. 8:24); an army of *worms*, as he did against King Herod (Acts 12:23). Oh, what a Lord is here—who has so many armies under his authority!

First use of the doctrine: EXHORTATION.

1. Let us dread this Lord Almighty! We fear men who are in power, and is not that God to be adored and feared, who does all thing at his good pleasure? "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him—What have you done?" (Dan. 4:35).

His **power** is as large as his **will**. "What his soul desires—that he does" (Job 23:13). God is a sovereign power over all. "He pours contempt upon princes" (Job 12:21). He threw the proud angels to hell. God can with a word, unpin the wheels and break the axle of the creation. God's power is a glorious power (Col. 1:11). And in this it appears glorious—it is never consumed or exhausted. Men, while they *exercise* their strength, *weaken* it. "Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know that the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary." (Isaiah 40:28). "I will use up My arrows against them." (Deut. 32:23)

Though God "uses up his arrows" upon his enemies—yet he never exhausts his strength.

Oh, then tremble before this Lord Almighty! Remember, O hard-hearted sinner, how many ways God can be revenged on you! He can raise an army of *diseases* against you in your body. He can arm every creature against you, the dog, the boar, the elephant. He can arm conscience against you, as he did against Spira—making him a terror to himself. Oh, dread this Lord Almighty.

2. If God is the Lord Almighty—let us take heed of hardening our hearts against God. It was the saying of Pompey that with one stamp of his *foot*—he could raise all Italy up in arms. God can with a *word*—raise all the militia of heaven and earth against us, and shall we dare affront him! "Who has hardened himself against him, and has prospered?" (Job 9:4). Such as live in the open breach of God's commandments, harden their hearts against God; they raise a war against heaven! "He has stretched out his hand against God and has arrogantly opposed the Almighty!" (Job 15:25). Like warriors who muster up all the forces they can, to fight with their antagonists, so the sinner hardens and strengthens himself against Jehovah: "He runs upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers" (verse 26). *Bucklers* anciently had one great boss in the middle with a sharp spike in it to wound the adversary. The grossly wicked sinner encounters the God of heaven—and runs upon the thick bosses of his fury, which will wound mortally. Who ever hardened himself against God—and prospered! Will men go to measure arms with God! Do you have an arm like God's?" (Job 40:9).

God is *almighty*—and therefore can hurt his enemies; and he is *invisible*—therefore they cannot hurt him. Who can fight with a

spirit? God will be too hard for his enemies in the long run: "God will smash the heads of his enemies, crushing the skulls of those who love their guilty ways!" (Psalm 68:21).

How easily can God chastise rebels! "The Lord looked down on the Egyptian forces from the pillar of fire and cloud, and threw them into confusion" (Exod. 14:24). It need cost God no more to destroy his proudest adversaries than a *look*—a cast of the eye! It is better to be prostrate at God's feet, and to meet him with tears in our eyes—rather than weapons in our hands! We overcome God, not by *resistance*—but by *repentance*!

3. If God is the Lord Almighty—let us be so wise as to engage him on our side. "The Lord Almighty is with us!" (Psalm 46:11). Great is the privilege of having the Lord Almighty for us!

1. If the Lord Almighty is on our side, he can discover the subtle plots of enemies. Thus he detected the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 17:14). And did not the Lord discover the *Popish conspirators* of late, when they would have subverted true religion and, like Italian butchers, turned England into an *Aceldama*—a field of blood?

2. If the Lord Almighty is on our side, he can bridle his enemies and lay such a restraint upon their spirits that they shall not do the harm they intend. "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt (said Laban to Jacob) but the God of your father spoke unto me saying, Take heed that you speak not to Jacob either good or bad" (Gen. 31:29). Laban had *power* to do hurt—but no *heart*. When Balak called upon Balaam to curse Israel, God so dispirited Balaam that he could not discharge his thunderbolt: "How shall I curse, those whom God has not cursed?" (Num. 23:8). He had a good mind to curse—but God held him back.

3. If the Lord Almighty is for us—he can help us, though means fail, and things seem to be given up for lost. When Gideon's army was small, and rendered despicable, then God crowned them with victory (Judges 7:2, 22). When the arm of *flesh* shrinks, then is the time for the arm of *omnipotence* to be put forth: "The Lord will indeed vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees that their strength is gone" (Deut. 32:36). The less seen of man—the more of God.

4. If the Lord Almighty is on our side—he can save us in that very way, in which we think he will destroy us. Would not all have thought that the great fish's belly would have been Jonah's grave? But God made a *fish* to be a *ship*, in which he sailed safely to shore. Paul got to land by the breaking of the ship (Acts 27:44). God can make the adverse party do his work; he can cause divisions among the enemies, and turn their own weapons against themselves: "I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians" (Isaiah 19:22; Judges 7:22).

5. If the Lord Almighty is on our side—he can make the church's affliction—a means of her augmentation: "The more they afflicted them—the more they multiplied" (Exod. 1:12). The church of God is like that plant, which *grows* by *cutting*. Persecution propagates the church: the scattering of the apostles up and down was like scattering seed—it tended much to the spreading of the gospel (Acts 8:1, 4).

6. If the Lord Almighty is on our side—he can alter the scene and turn the balance of affairs whenever he pleases. "He changes the times and the seasons" (Dan. 2:21). God can *remove* mountains which lie in the way, or *leap over* them. His power is without limit; he can bring harmony out of discord. He who brought Isaac out of a *dead* womb, and the Messiah out of a *virgin's* womb—

what can he *not* do? The Lord Almighty can in an instant, alter the face of things. There are no *impossibilities* with God. If means fail, he can create. It is therefore, high prudence to get this Lord Almighty on our side. "If God is for us—who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

And if we would engage God to be on our side:

First, let us be earnest suitors to him—exercise eyes of *faith*, and knees of *prayer* (Jer. 14:9). And in prayer, let us use Joshua's argument, "What will You do about Your great name?" (Josh. 7:9). Lord, if the cause of true religion loses ground, how will your name suffer!

Secondly, let us put away iniquity. (Job 11:14). Sin is not worth keeping. Who would keep a plague sore? Let us discard and abjure our sins (Jer. 7:3); and then the Lord Almighty will be on our side and, as a pledge of his favorable presence, he will entail the gospel, that crowning blessing, upon us and our posterity.

So much for the Person speaking, "the Lord Almighty".

A. God Rewards His People by Owning Them

I now come to the REWARD itself, the first part of which is—God's **owning** them, "They shall be *mine*." I take the sense of it to be, "They shall be mine in covenant." "I entered into a covenant with you—and you became mine!" (Ezek. 16:8; Isa 43:1). This is no small blessing—to be in covenant with God. Therefore, when God told Abraham that he would enter into covenant with him, Abraham fell on his face (Gen. 17:3), as being amazed that the great God should

bestow such a signal favor upon him. God never entered into covenant with the angels when they fell—but he proclaims himself God in covenant with believers, "They shall be mine." This covenant enriched with *free grace*, is a better covenant than that which was made with *Adam in innocence*, for:

1. The *least* failing would have made the first covenant null and void—but *many* failings do not invalidate the covenant of grace. I grant the least sin makes a trespass upon the covenant—but it does not *cancel* it. Every failing in the marital relation, does not break the marriage bond.

2. If the first covenant was violated, the sinner had *no remedy*; all doors of hope were shut. But the new covenant allows of a remedy. It provides a Surety, "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 12:24).

First use: INFORMATION.

See the amazing goodness of God to his people, to enter into covenant with them and say, "You are mine!" "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure!" (2 Sam. 23:5). The first covenant stood upon the delicate foundation of works. Adam had no sooner a stock of original righteousness to trade with, than he broke the covenant. But this covenant of grace is confirmed with God's decree, and rests upon two mighty pillars—the oath of God, and the *blood* of God. That you may see how great a privilege it is to be owned by the Lord federally, consider:

1. If we are in covenant with God, and he says to us "You are mine"—then *all that is in God is ours!*A person falling on hard times and then marrying a king, has a share in all the crown revenues. God having entered into a near relation with us and saying,

"You are mine"—we have a share in his rich revenues! The Lord says to every believer, as the King of Israel said to the King of Syria, "I am yours, and all that I have is yours!" (1 Kings 20:4). My *wisdom* shall be yours to teach you, my *holiness* shall be yours to sanctify you, my *mercy* shall be yours to save you! What richer dowry—than Deity! God is a whole ocean of blessedness. If there is enough in him to fill the angels—then surely, he has enough to fill us!

2. If God says to us, "You are mine"—then he will have a *tender care for us.* "Cast all your care upon Him, because *He cares for you!*" (1 Pet. 5:7). God, to show his tender solicitude towards Israel, bore them "on eagles wings" (Exod. 19:4). The eagle carries her young ones upon her wing to defend them; the arrow must first shoot through the old eagle, before it can touch her young ones. A mother's care is seen in leading a child, so that it may not fall. Such is God's care: "It was I who taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand." (Hos. 11:3). We may argue from the lesser to the greater, that if God takes care of the lowest insects and animals which creep upon the earth, much more will he take care of his covenant saints. He is still contriving and planning for their good. If they *wander* out of the way—he guides them; if they *stumble*—he holds them by the hand; if they *fall*—he raises them; if they become *dull*—he quickens them by his Spirit; if they are *obstinate*—he draws them with cords of love; if they are *sad*—he comforts them with his promises.

3. If God says to us, "You are mine"—then he will entirely *love us!* "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). The Lord may give a man riches—and not love him; his prosperity may be as Israel's quails—sourced with God's wrath (Num. 11:32-33). But when God says, "You are mine"—he cannot but love. Everyone loves his own. If God has any love better than another—his covenant

people shall have it; he will extract the essence of his love for them; he loves them as he loves Christ! (John 17:23).

4. If God says to us, "You are mine"—then he will not allow us to be in need. Believers are not only of God's family—but of Christ's body; and will the Head let the body starve? "Truly you shall be fed" (Psalm 37:3). God has not promised *dainties*; he will not satisfy his people's *lusts*—but he will supply their *needs*. If the bill of fare should be restricted, what they lack in worldly comforts, they shall have in spiritual blessing: "He shall bless your bread, and your water" (Exod. 23:25). God will rather work a miracle than that any of his children shall famish. The raven is so unnatural that she will hardly feed her young—yet she became a *caterer* and brought food to the prophet Elijah.

5. If God says to us, "You are mine"—then we have great freedoms!

1. We are freed from the revenging wrath of God! We are not free from God's anger as a *Father*—but as a *Judge*. God will not pour his *vindictive* justice upon us. Christ has drunk the red wine of God's wrath upon the cross—that believers may not taste a drop of it!

2. We are freed from the predominant reign of sin. "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14). Though believers are not freed from the *indwelling* of sin, nor from *combat* with it—yet they are freed from its *imperious* command. As it is said of those beasts in Daniel, "They had their dominion taken away—yet their lives were prolonged for a season" (Dan. 7:12), so sin *lives* in the regenerate, but its *domination* is taken away. And to be thus freed from the jurisdiction, power, and tyranny of sin—is no small blessing! A wicked man is at the command of sin, as the donkey at the command of the driver. The curse of Ham is upon him, "a servant

of servants shall he be" (Gen. 9:25). He is a slave to his *lusts*, and a slave to *Satan!* Oh, what a privilege it is—to have one's neck out of the devil's yoke!

3. We are freed from the accusations of conscience. The *worm of conscience* is part of the torment of hell. But, God being our God, we are freed from the clamors of this hellish fury. Conscience sprinkled with Christ's blood speaks *peace!* A good conscience, like the bee, gives honey. It is like the golden pot which had *manna* in it (2 Cor. 1:12).

6. If God says to us, "You are mine"—then we shall be his forever! "This God is our God, forever and ever" (Psalm 48:14). You cannot say that you have *health*—and you shall have it forever. You cannot say that you have a child—and you shall have it forever. But if God is your God—you *shall* have him forever! The covenant of grace is a royal charter, and this is the happiness of it—it is made for eternity! *Justification* is never rescinded. The covenant between God and his people shall never be broken off. How false therefore is the opinion of *falling from grace!* Shall any whom God makes his own by federal union fall finally? Indeed if salvation has no better pillar to rest upon than *man's will* (as the Arminians hold) no wonder if there is falling away; but a Christian's stability in grace, is built upon a surer basis, namely, God's "everlasting (or inviolable) covenant" (Isaiah 55:3). Once in Christ—forever in Christ. A star may sooner fall out of its place—than a true believer be plucked away from God! "None of them is lost" (John 17:12). "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:28)

7. If God says to us, "You are mine"—then he will take us up to himself at death! Death breaks the union between the *body* and

the soul—but perfects the union between *God* and the soul. This is the emphasis of heaven's glory—to be forever with God. What is the joy of the blessed—but to have a clear, transparent sight of God, and to be in the sweet and soft embraces of his love forever! This has made the saints desire death, as the bride her wedding day! "I have the desire to depart and be with Christ—which is *far better!*" (Phil. 1:23). "Lead me, Lord, to that glory", said a holy man, "a glimpse whereof I have seen as in a glass darkly."

Second Use: COMFORT.

Let this be for the consolation of the saints. There is a covenant union between God and them. God is theirs—and they are his! "They shall be *mine*, says the Lord." Here is a standing cordial for the godly. God looks upon them as having a propriety in them, "They shall be *mine!*"

1. This is comfort, in respect of Satan's accusations. He accuses the saints first to God—then to themselves. But if God says, "You are mine", this answers all of Satan's accusations. Christ will show the debt book, crossed out in his blood. It was a saying of Bucer, "I am Christ's, and the devil has nothing to do with me."

2. This is comfort, in respect of poverty. Believers are married to the King of heaven—and all that is in God is theirs! A philosopher comforted himself with this, that though he had no music or vine trees—yet he had the household gods with him. So we, though we have not the vine or fig tree—yet if God is ours and we are his—this creates joy in the most impoverished condition! And that which may raise the comfort of the godly higher, and cause a jubilation of spirit, is that shortly God will own his people before all the world, and say, "*These are mine!*" At present the elect are not known: "It does not yet appear what we *shall* be" (1 John 3:2). The saints are like kings in

disguise; but how will their hearts leap for joy—when God shall pronounce that word, *"These are mine! The lot of free grace has fallen upon them! These shall lie forever in the bosom of my love!"*

Third use: EXHORTATION.

To all who are yet strangers to God: labor to get into covenant with him, that he may say, *"You are mine!"* Why does God woo and beseech you by his ambassadors, if he is not willing to be in covenant with you?

Question: *What shall a poor forlorn creature do, to get into covenant with God?*

Answer 1: If you would be in covenant with God--break off the covenant with sin! (1 Sam. 7:3). What king will be in league with a person who serves his enemy?

Answer 2: Labor for faith.

1. Faith in the mercy of God: "I am merciful. I will not be angry with you forever" (Jer. 3:12). As the sea covers great rocks as well as little sands—so Gods mercy covers *great sins!* Manasseh, a bloody sinner, is held forth as a pattern of mercy. Some of the Jews who had a hand in crucifying Christ—yet had their sins forgiven!

2. Faith in the merit of Christ. Christ's blood is not only an atoning sacrifice to appease God—but a sacrifice to ingratiate us into God's favor, and make him look upon us with a smiling aspect (1 John 2:2).

B. God Rewards His People by Honoring

Them

The second part of the saints reward—is God's honoring them: "In that day when I make up my jewels". Here are three propositions:

1. God greatly honors his people.
2. God's people are his jewels.
3. There is a day when God will make up his jewels.

1. God greatly honors his people. He speaks of them here with honor: "In that day when I make up my *jewels*". "Since you were precious in my sight—you have been honorable" (Isaiah 43:4). Honor attends holiness. That the Lord highly honors those who fear him, is evident by four demonstrations.

1. In that he prefers them before others. He choose, them, and passes by the rest: "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated!" (Mal. 1:2-3).

2. In that God gives them frequent love visits. It is counted an honor for a subject to have his prince visit him. "Our *fellowship* is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). The Rabbis say that Moses had one hundred and fifty conferences with God, and died with a kiss from God's mouth. What greater honor for a person—than to have *God* keep him company! (Exod. 33:11)?

3. In that God makes them rich heirs. We are "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). For a man to adopt another and make him heir to his estate—is no small honor done to him. The youngest believer is an heir, yes, and an heir of the crown! (1 Pet. 5:4). This crown he has in the promise (Rev. 2:10), and in the first fruits (Romans 8:23).

4. In that God sends his angels to be their servants. Such as are God's servants, have angels to be theirs: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14).

First use: Who would *not* be fearers of God! This makes God have an honorable esteem of them. "All men", says Chrysostom, "are ambitious for honor." True honor comes from God! (John 5:44).

Second use: If God so honors his people, let them honor him: "Where is my honor?" (Mal. 1:6). Let the saints be *God-exalters*; let them lift up his name in the world, and make his praise glorious (Psalm 66:2). But I only glance at this.

2. God's people are his jewels. "In that day when I make up my *jewels!*" Jewels are *precious* things; the Hebrew word for *jewels* signifies a *treasure*. A treasure is made up of costly things: gold, and diamonds, and rubies. Such a precious treasure, are the saints to God.

Question: *In what sense are the saints, God's jewels?*

Answer 1: They are jewels for their **sparkling** quality. Their holiness shines and sparkles in God's eyes! (Song of Sol. 4:9), "You have ravished my heart, with one of your *eyes!*" That is, with one of your *graces*.

Answer 2: The godly are jewels for their **scarcity**. Diamonds are not common. Just so, the godly are scarce and rare. There are but few of these to be found. There are many false professors (as there are paste diamonds) but few *Israelites indeed*. "Few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16). Among the millions in Rome, there were but few senators. Just so,

among the swarms of people in the world—there are but few true believers.

Answer 3: The godly are jewels for their **price**. Queen Cleopatra had two jewels which contained half the price of a kingdom. Thus the saints are jewels, for their *value*. God esteems them at a high rate; he parted with his best jewel for them. Christ's precious blood was shed to ransom these jewels!

Answer 4: The saints are jewels for their **adorning** quality. Jewels *adorn* those who wear them. The saints are jewels which adorn the world. Their piety mixed with prudence honors the gospel. Hypocrites eclipse true religion and make it badly spoken of. The saints as jewels render it illustrious, by their *sanctity*.

First use: INFORMATION.

1. See the worth of the godly—they are God's jewels—"a royal diadem in the hand of your God" (Isaiah 62:3). That is, they are eminent above others, as a crown hung with jewels is a sign of the highest state and honor. The saints are God's glory (Isaiah 46:13), as if God's glory did lie in them.

2. See then that which may bring holiness into repute, and make us desire to be godly. It casts a splendor upon us, and makes God number us among his jewels! Some are loath to embrace godliness, for fear it will be a stain on their reputation, and bring them out of favor with great men. But you see how it raises a person's renown; it makes him precious in God's sight—he is a jewel! Believers, on account of their mystical union with Christ, have a preciousness above the angels! The angels are morning *stars* (Job 38:7). Believers are clothed with the *sun* of righteousness (Rev. 12:1).

3. See the different opinion which God has—of the godly and the wicked. The one he esteems *precious*, the other *vile*. "You are vile" (Nahum 1:14). This is spoken of King Sennacherib; though he was by birth noble—yet he was by sin vile. The Hebrew word for *vile* signifies of *base esteem*. Though the wicked are high in dignity and worldly grandeur, yet God slights them. A dunghill may be higher than other ground—but it sends forth foul vapors: "They have all together become *filthy*" (Psalm 14:3). In the original it is, "They have become *stinking*."

The **wicked** are compared to *dogs* and *swine* (2 Pet. 2:22) and to *dross* (Ezek. 22:19). Dross is the filth of the metal. Sinners are compared to *chaff* (Psalm 1:4). When a wicked man dies—there is only a little chaff blown away! A sinner is the most contemptible thing in the world; there is no worth in him while he lives—and no loss of him when he dies! A sinner is worse than a toad or serpent; a toad has nothing but what *God* has put into it—but a wicked man has that which the *devil* has put into him: "Why has *Satan* filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:3).

4. See what a high estimate we should set upon the godly; they are jewels, they are the glory of the creation. They are compared to *stars* for their beauty (Rev. 1:20), to *spice trees* for their perfume (Song of Sol. 4:14). They are the excellent of the earth (Psalm 16:3). The Lord would soon destroy the earth—but that he has some of his jewels in it.

Prize the saints—though they are humbled with poverty. We esteem a diamond, though it lies in the dust. "John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey"—yet he was a jewel (Matt. 11:9). He was the

morning star to usher in the Sun of righteousness into the world. The saints are precious—for they are *God's lesser heaven!* (Isaiah 57:15).

5. See the saints safety: they are God's jewels, and he will take great care to preserve them. A man is careful that he does not lose his jewels. God often gives his people a temporal salvation. If a storm comes he knows how to hide his jewels. He hid a hundred prophets in a cave (1 Kings 18:4). The angel is commanded, before he poured his vial of curses on the earth, to *seal* the saints of God on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3), which was a mark of safety. God will ensure the spiritual safety of his jewels: "None of them is lost!" (John 17:12). "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:28)

6. If the saints are God's jewels—then how incensed and enraged will God be, against those who have abused his jewels! Theodosius, counted them traitors who abused his statue. What will become of those who persecute God's saints, and tread upon his jewels! It goes near to God's heart—to see his jewels sprinkled with blood! What is done to them—the Lord takes as done to himself: "Why do you persecute *me!*" (Acts 9:4). When the *foot* was trod on—the *head* cried out! The saints are God's royal diadem (Isaiah 62:3). Will a king endure to have his robes spat upon, or his crown-royal thrown in the dust! "He reproved kings for their sakes!" (Psalm 105:14).

What monuments of God's vengeance were Nero, Diocletian, Gardiner, and the rest of that persecuting tribe! "Shall not God avenge his own elect! I tell you—he will avenge them speedily!" (Luke 18:7-8). Persecutors stand in the place where all *God's arrows* fly! "He ordains his arrows against the persecutors" (Psalm 7:13). That is a killing Scripture: "The Lord will send a plague on all the nations that fought against Jerusalem. Their people will become like walking

corpses, their flesh rotting away. Their eyes will shrivel in their sockets, and their tongues will decay in their mouths!" (Zech. 14:12).

Second use: CONSOLATION.

Here is *comfort* to the people of God, in case of the world's disesteem of them—*God values them* as jewels! And his judgment is according to truth (Rom. 2:2). The wicked have low thoughts of the righteous. They beat down the price of these jewels as far as they can. They think them but refuse. They disdain them, and load them with slanders and invectives. The prophet Elijah was looked upon by Ahab as the "troubler of Israel" (1 Kings 18:17), and Luther was called a "trumpet of rebellion". Paul was judged "a pestilent fellow" (Acts 24:5). The wicked think that of all things in the world, the saints may be best exterminated: "We have become the *scum* of the earth, the *refuse* of the world" (1 Cor. 4:13).

But this is a great consolation to believers that, *low* as is the esteem the reprobate world has of them—yet God has *high* thoughts of them; he numbers them among his jewels! They are compared for their *preciousness*, to gold and silver (Rev. 1:20). They are the *coins* and *medals* which bear God's own image! They are *princes* in all lands (Ps. 45:16). Christ engraves their names on his breast, as the names of the twelve tribes were engraved on precious stones upon Aaron's breastplate. God will give whole kingdoms to ransom his jewels (Isaiah 43:3). The wicked think the godly are not worthy to live in the world, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" (Acts 22:22) But God thinks the world is not worthy of them "The world was not worthy of them." (Heb. 11:38). Hence it is, that God takes away his jewels so fast, and places them in his heavenly treasury!

Third use: EXHORTATION.

1. To the people of God.

Are you one of God's jewels? I then beseech you to SHINE as jewels! Walk circumspectly and holily! "That you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you *shine* like stars in the world!" (Phil. 2:15). Such as are God's jewels, should let the world see, that they have *worth* in them. *O Christians, let your lives be an imitation of the life of Christ!* Such a jewel was Bradford, the martyr—so humble and innocent in his demeanor that, at his death, many of the *Papists* could not refrain from weeping!

Are you one of God's jewels? Do nothing that may eclipse or sully your luster! When professors are proud, envious or censorious; when they break their promises, or cheat their creditors—these do not look like *saints!* What will others say? These are the *devil's dirt*—not *God's jewels*. Oh, I beseech you who profess to be of a higher rank than others—honor that worthy name by which you are called; shine as *earthly* angels! "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession—so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light!" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Alexander would have the Grecians known not only by their *garments*—but their *virtues*. God's people should he known by the *sparkling of their graces!* Shall there be no difference in behavior between the wicked and the godly—between a clod of earth and a diamond! Let it appear that you are heirs of heaven. You who are God's people, the Lord expects a holy life from you (Matt. 5:47). He looks that you should bring more glory to him—and by your exemplary piety--make proselytes to piety.

2. The godly should be THANKFUL. God has taken you out of the rubbish of mankind—and made you his jewels! "He raises up the poor out of the dust" (Psalm 113:7), that he may set him with princes. So God has raised you out of the dust of a natural estate, and ennobled you—that he may set you with angels, those princes above. Oh, admire God! Set the *crown of your praises* upon the head of free grace! A joyful, thankful frame of heart—is pleasing to God. If repentance is the *joy* of heaven, praise is the *music* of heaven! Bless God who has wrought such a change in you! From *lumps of dirt and sin*—he has made you into *his jewels!*

3. There is a time shortly coming when God will make up his jewels. "In that day when I make up my jewels".

Question 1: What is meant by God's making up his jewels?

Answer: There is a difference between God's making *of* jewels—and his making *up* of jewels. God's making *of* jewels is when he works grace in their hearts while on earth. What is God's making *up* of jewels? This implies two things.

Firstly, God's GATHERING his saints together. God's making up his jewels, implies his gathering his saints together. The godly in this life are like scattered diamonds, they are *separated* from one another, being *dispersed* all over the world. But there is a day coming when God will gather all his saints together, as one puts all his pearls together on a string. There must be such a collection or gathering together of God's scattered saints:

1. From the near relation they have to all the persons of the Trinity. God the *Father* has chosen these jewels and set them apart for himself (Psalm 4:3), and will he lose any of his elect? They are related to *Christ*—he has bought these jewels with his blood, and will

he lose his purchase? They are related to the Holy Spirit. He has sanctified them. When they were a lump of sin, he made them his jewels; and when he has bestowed cost on them, will he lose his cost? Will he not string these pearls, and put them in his celestial cabinet?

2. There must be a gathering together of God's scattered saints—from the prayer of Christ. It was Christ's prayer to his Father, that he would make up his jewels, that he would gather together his pearls, that they might be with him in heaven! "That they may be with me—where I am!" (John 17:24). Christ will not be *content*—until all the elect jewels lie together in his bosom. He does not think himself *complete*—until all his saints are with him!

Use: Here is a SOVEREIGN COMFORT to the people of God in two cases.

1. In case of **scattering**. God's people are scattered up and down in the world; and, which is worse, these jewels lie among *rubbish*—they dwell among the *wicked*! "Woe is me that I dwell in the tents of Kedar" (Psalm 120:5). Kedar was Ishmael's son. "Woe is me", says David, "that I live with an Ishmael-brood!" The wicked are still molesting the righteous. God's jewels lie scattered among the vile! But here is the comfort—that shortly God will gather his people from among the wicked—he will make up his jewels—and all his precious jewels shall lie with him in bliss!

2. It is comfort in case of **dividing**. God's people are now divided; their *love* for one another is very little. They often look suspiciously upon one another. These divisions are *flaws* in God's diamonds! *Discord among Christians* brings a reproach upon true religion, advances Satan's kingdom, and hinders the growth of grace! But this is comfort—God will shortly make up his jewels—he will so *gather* his saints together—that he will *unite* them together. They shall be all

of one heart (Acts 2:46). What a happy time it will be—when the saints shall be as so many *pearls upon one string*—and shall accord together in a blessed unity!

Secondly, God's making up his jewels also implies his PERFECTING his saints. A thing is said to be *made up*—when it is perfected. You make up a *garment*, when you perfect it. You make up a *watch*, when you put all the wheels and pins in perfect order. So God's making up his *jewels*, signifies his *perfecting* them. The godly in this life are imperfect. They cast but a faint luster of holiness; they receive but "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23), that is, *a small measure of grace*. The first fruits under the law were but a *handful*, compared to the whole vintage.

The consideration of this may humble us. We are God's jewels—yet we are now imperfect. Our *knowledge* is chequered with ignorance (1 Cor 13:5). Our *love* to God is feeble. Behold here, *flaws* in the diamond. This may take down our topsail of pride—to consider how flawed and incomplete we are. But when God shall make up his jewels, and *perfect* his saints—it will be a glorious time! This brings me to the second question.

Question 2: What is that day—when God will make up his jewels?

Firstly, God makes up his jewels at the day of DEATH. Then he makes the saints' graces, perfect. For this reason the departed saints are called "just men made *perfect*" (Heb. 12:23). Sin so mixes with, and dwells within a Christian—that he cannot write a copy of holiness without blotting it. Grace, though it abates sin—yet it does not abolish corruption. But at death God makes up his jewels—he perfects the graces of his people. Will not that be a blessed time,

never to have a vain thought again, never to be within the sight of a temptation, or the fear of a relapse?

This, I think, may make death desirable to the godly; then the Lord will complete the graces of His children! They shall be as holy as they desire to be, and as holy as God would have them to be! How will God's jewels sparkle--when they shall be without flaws! In that day of death when God makes up his jewels, the saints *light* will be clear, and their *love* will be perfect!

Their **light** will be clear. They shall be so divinely irradiated, that they shall know the "deep things of God". They shall in this sense be "as the angels" (Matt. 22:30). Their faculty of thought shall be raised higher and made more capacious! Through the crystal glass of Christ's human nature, the saints shall have glorious transparent sights of God! They shall know as they are known (1 Cor. 13:12); a riddle too mysterious for us mortals, if not for angels, to expound!

In that day the saints **love** will be perfect. Love is the queen of the graces—it outlives all the other graces. In this life, our love to God is lukewarm and sometimes frozen. A believer weeps that he can love God no more. But at the day of death, when God makes up his jewels—then the saints' love shall be seraphic! The spark of love shall be blown up into a pure flame! The saints shall love God—as much as they desire! They shall love him superlatively and without defect—they shall be made up wholly of love. Oh, blessed day of death! When God shall make up his jewels, the saints' graces shall shine forth in their meridian splendor!

Secondly, God makes up his jewels at the day of the RESURRECTION. Then he makes the saints **bodies** perfect. These, like sparkling diamonds, shall shine in glory! At the resurrection God is said to change the bodies of the saint, "He will

take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own!" (Phil. 3:21). How will he change them? Not that they shall be other bodies than they were before. The *substance* of their bodies shall not be changed—but the *qualities*. As wool, when it is dyed into a purple color, is not altered in the substance—but in the quality, and is made more illustrious. Just so, God in making up his jewels, will cause a greater resplendency in the saints bodies than before.

When God makes up the jewels of the saints *bodies* at the resurrection, *they shall be perfect in four ways*:

1. In amiability or sweetness of beauty. Here the bodies of the righteous are often deformed. Leah has her weak eyes, and Barzillai has his lameness; but at the resurrection the bodies of the saints shall be of unspotted loveliness. And no wonder, for they shall be made like Christ's glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

2. When God at the resurrection makes up the jewels of the saints bodies, **they shall have perfection of parts.** Their bodies in this world may be maimed and disfigured; but in the day of the resurrection they shall have all the parts of their bodies restored (Acts 3:21). Such as have lost an eye, shall have their eye again; such as lack a leg or an arm, shall have their arm again.

3. When God makes up the jewels of the saints bodies at the resurrection, **they shall be swift and lively in their motion.** Here on earth, the bodies of the saints move heavily—but *then* they shall be sprightly, and move rapidly from one place to another. Here the body is a *weight*; in heaven it shall be a *wing*!

4. When God makes up the jewels of the saints bodies, **they shall be immortal.** The body once glorified, shall never be subject to

death! "For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die!" (1 Cor. 15:53). Heaven is a healthy climate; no death-bell goes there. This mortal body shall put on immortality.

Let us labor to be in the number of God's jewels, that when the Lord shall make up his jewels, he may perfect our *souls* and *bodies* in glory

Question: *How shall we know that we are in the number of God's jewels?*

Answer: Have we holiness? "But we are washed—but we are sanctified" (1 Cor. 6:11). We are not God's jewels by *creation*—but *regeneration*. If holiness sparkles in us—it is a sign we are God's jewels; and then when God comes to make up his jewels, he will put glory upon our souls and bodies forever!

C. God Rewards His People by Sparing Them

The third part of the saints reward is God's sparing them: "I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him." The Hebrew word to spare signifies to use clemency. In this phrase, there is less said—and more intended. "I will spare them", that is, "I will deal with them as a father does with his son. The kind of tenderness that a father shows to his child, the same will I show to those that fear me."

Doctrine: God will deal with those who fear him—as a compassionate father does with his dutiful son.

Two things are in this proposition:

1. That God is a Father. He is a father by *creation*. He has given us our being: "Have not we all one father? Has not one God created us?" (Mal. 2:20). God is also a father by *election*: he has chosen out a certain number, to be his children (Eph. 1:4). And God is a father by special *grace*: he stamps his *impress of holiness* upon men (Col. 3:10). *All God's children resemble him—though some are more like him than others.*

2. That God will deal with those that fear him, as a compassionate father does with his dutiful son.

A. God will accept them, as a father does his son. If the child only lisps and can hardly speak plainly, the father takes all in good part. So God, as a father, will accept what his children do in sincerity: "There will I require your offerings ... I will accept you with your sweet savor" (Ezek. 20:40-41).

B. To such as fear God, he will be full of pity to them, as a tender father is to his son. There are in God, affections of compassion and *affections of delight*.

Affections of **compassion**. A father feels for his child. God has great pity and tenderness towards his children. (Isaiah 63:15). The compassion of parents are *steel* and *marble* compared with God's—"the *tender* mercy of our God" (Luke 1:78). In the Greek it is "the affections of mercy". These affections make God sympathize with his children in misery. He is touched in their wounds: "As a father pities his children so the Lord pities those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13).

In God are also affections of **delight**. How dearly did Jacob love Benjamin! His life was bound up in him (Gen. 44:30). All the

affections of parents come from God. They are but a drop of his ocean, a spark of his flame. God's love is a love that "passes knowledge!" (Eph. 3:19). The saints cannot love their own souls, so entirely as God loves them. In particular,

a. God loves the *persons* of his children; they are the apple of his eye (Zech. 2:8). He engraves them upon the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49:16). This alludes to those who carry about them, engraved on the stone of their ring, the picture of some dear friend whom they entirely love.

b. God loves the *places* his children were born in, the better for their sakes: "God loves the gates of Zion" (Psalm 87:2); "This and that man was born in her" (verse 5); that is, "this and that believer". God loves the very ground his children walk upon. Why was Judea, the ancient seat of Israel, called "a delightsome land" (Mal. 3:12)? Not so much delightful for the *fruit* growing in it—as for the *saints* living in it.

c. God so loves his children, that he charges the great ones of the world upon pain of death, not to hurt them. They are sacred to him. "He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm" (Psalm 105:14-15). By "anointed" are meant such as have the anointing of the Spirit (1 John 2:20).

d. God delights in his children's **company**, he loves to see their faces, "Let Me see your face, let Me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely." (Song of Sol. 2:14) If but two or three of God's children meet and pray together, God will be sure to make one of the company: "There am I in the midst of them!" (Matt. 18:20).

e. God so loves his children that his **eye** is never off them: "The eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him" (Psalm 33:18).

Question: *But is this such a privilege—to have God's eye upon his children? God's eye is upon the wicked too.*

Answer: it is one kind of eye that the *Judge* casts upon the malefactor; and another that the *Prince* casts upon his favorite. God's eye upon the wicked is an eye of *vengeance*—but his eye upon his children is an eye of *benediction*.

f. God sets a continual **guard** about his children, to preserve them from danger. He hides them in his pavilion (Psalm 27:5). He covers them with the golden feathers of his protection (Psalm 91:4). No prince goes so well guarded, as God's child, for he has a guard of *angels* about him. The angels are a numerous guard: "The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire" (2 Kings 6:17). Those horses and chariots of fire were the angels of God, gathered in the manner of a huge army to defend the prophet Elijah.

g. God clothes his children in rich **garments**: "Her clothing is of wrought gold" (Psalm 45:13). Jacob loved his son Joseph and gave him a finer coat to wear than the rest of his brethren: "He made him a coat of many colors" (Gen. 37:3). God loves his children and gives them a finer coat, more finely woven, a coat of diverse colors. It is

partly made of Christ's righteousness, and partly of inherent holiness (Rev. 19:8).

h. Such is God's love that he thinks nothing too good for his children! He enriches them with the upper and lower springs; he gives them the finest of the wheat, and honey out of the rock; he makes them a feast of fat things (Isaiah 25:6). He gives them the body and blood of

his Son, and delights to see his children spreading themselves as olive plants round about his table (Psalm 128:3).

3. God will receive the PETITIONS of those who fear him—as a tender father receives his son's petitions. They may come boldly to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). If they come for pardon of sin, or strength against temptation, God will not deny them. Three things may cause boldness in prayer—the saints have a Father to pray to, the Spirit to help them to pray, and Jesus Christ as their Advocate to present their prayers.

4. On such as are fearers of God, God will bestow an inheritance, as a father does upon his son. This inheritance is no less than a kingdom! (Luke 12:32). In it are gates of pearl, rivers of pleasure; and (which is to be noted as a difference between God's settling an inheritance on his children, and an earthly father's settling an inheritance) a son cannot enjoy the inheritance until his father is dead; but every adopted child of God may at once enjoy both the inheritance and the father, because God is both *father* and *inheritance!* (Gen. 15).

5. With such as are fearers of God, God will pass by many infirmities. That is what is meant by this expression in the text, "I will spare them as a man spares his own son." What a wonder is this—that God did not spare the angels (2 Pct. 2:4)! No, he did not spare his natural Son (Rom. 8:32). Yet he will spare his adopted sons! "I will spare, them, I will not use extremity as I might—but pass by many aberrations."

Caution: It is not that the sins of God's children are hidden from him—but such is his paternal clemency that he is pleased to bear with many frailties in his children. He spares them as a father spares his son. How often do God's people grieve his Spirit by the neglect of

spiritual watchfulness, or the loss of their first love; but God spares them! Israel provoked God with their murmurings—but he used fatherly indulgence towards them (Psalm 78:38; Neh. 9:17).

First Use: INFORMATION.

1. From this word, "I will spare them as a man spares his son", take notice that even the best need *sparing*. "If you, Lord, should mark iniquities—who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3). The Papists speak of *merits*—but how can we merit—when our best services are so defective that we need sparing! How can these two stand together, our meriting and God's sparing? What will become of us without sparing mercy? We need to pray as Nehemiah, "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also—and spare me according to the greatness of your mercy!" (Neh. 13:22). Let us fly to this asylum, "Lord, spare us as a father spares his son!"

2. See God's different dealing with the godly and the wicked. The Lord will not spare the wicked: "I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy—but destroy them!" (Jer. 13:14). It is sad when the prisoner begs of the judge to spare him—but the judge will show him no favor. God's cup of wrath is *unmixed!* (Rev. 14:10). Yet it is said to be *mixed*. The cup of wrath God gives the wicked is *mixed* with all sorts of punishments. But in this sense it is *unmixed*— it is without the least drop of mercy in it! (Psalm 78:45-51). God for a while reprieves men—but *forbearance* is not *forgiveness*. Though God spares his children—yet obdurate sinners shall feel the weight of his wrath!

3. If the Lord spares his people as a father does his son—then they should serve him as a son does his father.

1. They should serve him WILLINGLY. "Serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands the intention of every thought!" (1 Chron. 28:9). Cain's sacrifice was rejected, because he brought it grudgingly and against his will. It was rather the *paying of a tax* than a free-will offering. The best obedience is that which is voluntary, as that is the best honey which drops from the honeycomb. God sometimes accepts of willingness without the work (1 Kings 8:18)—but never of the work without willingness.

2. They should serve God UNIVERSALLY. True obedience is universal; it observes one command as well as another; it fulfills *difficult* duties and *dangerous* duties. As the needle points the way that the magnet draws, so a gracious heart inclines to those things which the Word teaches (Luke 1:6). It is the note of a hypocrite to be partial in obedience; some *sin* he will indulge (2 Kings 5:18), some *duty* he will dispense with; his obedience is lame on one foot.

3. They should serve God SWIFTLY. Beware of a dull temper of soul; the *loveliness* of obedience is in the *liveliness* of it. We read of two women, "The wind was in their wings" (Zech. 5:9). Wings are swift—but *wind* in the wings denotes *great* swiftness. Such swiftness should be in our obedience to God. If God spares us as a father does his son, we should serve him as a son does his father.

Second Use: EXHORTATION.

If God spares us as a father does his son—let us imitate God. It is natural for children to imitate their parents; what the father does, the child is apt to learn the same.

Let us imitate God in this one thing—As God spares us, and passes by many failures—so let us be sparing in our censures of others; let us

look upon the weaknesses and indiscretions of our brethren with a more tender compassionate eye.

Indeed, in cases of scandal we ought not to bear with others—but sharply reprove them. But if through inadvertence or passion they act wrongly—let us *pity* and *pray* for them. How much God bears with us! He spares us, and shall not we be sparing to others? Perhaps they have been wronged, and false things may be said about them. Athanasius was falsely accused by the Arians of adultery; Basil was falsely accused of heresy. It is usual for the world to *misrepresent* the people of God; therefore let us be sparing in our censures. God spares us--and shall not *we* be sparing towards others?

Third use: COMFORT.

Here is comfort to the children of God in case of **failings**. The Lord will not be severe to mark what they have done amiss—but will spare them. He passes by many infirmities: "He will rest in his love" (2eph. 3:17); in the original it is, "He will be silent in his love". As if the prophet had said, though the church had her failings—yet God's love was such, that it would not allow him to mention them. God turns a *blind eye* to our many oversights: "My eye spared them from destruction" (Ezek. 20:17).

I do not speak of presumptuous sins—but of failings such as vain thoughts, deadness in duty, sudden surprises by temptation. These being mourned for, God for Christ's sake will spare us as a father does his son.

This is one of the richest comforts in the Book of God. Who is he who lives—and sins not? How defective we are in our best duties! How full our lives are either of *blanks* or of *blots*! Were it not for God's sparing mercy—we would all go to hell. But this text is a choice

cordial; if our hearts are sincere, God will spare us as a father does his son. "I will not execute the fierceness of my anger" (Hos. 11:9).

I know not a greater rock of support, for a fainting Christian than this—God will abate the severity of the law. Though we come short in our duty, he will not fail of his mercy—but will spare us as a father spares his son.

The Difference Between Righteous and the Wicked

"Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not." (Mal. 3:18).

Here follows the close of the chapter, which I shall little more than paraphrase. These words are spoken to the *wicked*, as learned expositors assert; for though the godly shall at last discern what a difference God makes between them and the wicked, how *merciful* he is to the one, and how *severe* to the other—yet this text is chiefly spoken to the wicked: "You have said, *It is vain to serve God!*" (verse 14) "From now on we will say, 'Blessed are the arrogant.' For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them go free of harm." (verse 15). Well, says God, though now you call the *proud* happy and the *godly* foolish—yet when I have made up my jewels—then you wicked ones shall see clearly what a difference I make between the righteous, and the wicked; between him who serves God—and him who does not serve him. Then, when it is too late, when the day of grace is past, and the drawbridge of mercy is pulled up—then shall you discern a difference between the holy and the profane!

Doctrine 1: The wicked at present have their eyes shut! "To this day the Lord has not given you *minds* that understand, nor *eyes* that see, nor *ears* that hear!" (Deut. 29:4). Natural men have the sword upon their right eye, "The sword will cut his arm and pierce his right eye! His arm will become useless, and his right eye completely blind!" (Zech. 11:17). They see no difference between the pious and the impious; they imagine that it fares as well with the wicked as with the righteous; nay, it seems to fare *better* with the wicked. The wicked flourish: "These are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches" (Psalm 73: 12). Whereas those who pray and fast, are oppressed. The wicked bless themselves, and think they are now in a better condition than the righteous; the matter is not to be wondered at, for "the *god of this world* has blinded the minds of sinners" (2 Cor. 4:4). But at last their eyes shall be opened; and that brings me to the second doctrine.

Doctrine 2: There is a time shortly coming when impious, grossly wicked sinners, shall SEE an obvious difference between the godly and the wicked. The tables will then be turned! "Then you will again **see** the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

Question: When is the *time* when the eyes of sinners shall be opened, and they shall see a difference between the righteous and the wicked?

Answer: There are two times when sinners shall see a manifest difference between the righteous and the wicked.

Firstly, at the day of **judgment**. That will be a day of manifest difference. Things will then appear in their proper colors; the

difference will easily be seen between the godly and the wicked; the one being absolved—the other condemned!

Secondly, at the hour of **separation**, when God shall eternally separate the reprobate from the elect, as a winnowing fan separates the chaff from the wheat—and there shall be a visible discerning between the righteous and wicked. "All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life!" (Matt. 25:32-33, 46). Jesus Christ will take his saints up with him into glory—and will cast the wicked down to hell. He will make up the godly as jewels, and tie up the wicked in bundles to be burned! "Bind them in bundles to burn them" (Matt. 13:30). Now sinners shall be convinced with a vengeance, that the state of the righteous and the wicked is different! They shall **see** the righteous advanced to a *heavenly kingdom*, and themselves cast into a *fiery prison*!

Oh, the dreadfulness of that place of torment! Could men lay their ears to the infernal lake, and but for one hour hear the groans and shrieks of the damned—they would tell us that they now see what before they would not believe—the infinite difference between the righteous and the wicked! In hell is torment upon torment, "blackness of darkness" (Jude 13), "chains of darkness" (2 Pet. 2:4). These chains are God's *decree ordaining*, and his *power binding* men under wrath! And that which accentuates and puts a sting into the torments of the wicked—is that they shall be *always* scorching in the fire of God's wrath! "The smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11).

Christ said of his suffering on the cross, "It is finished!" But sinners shall never say of their sufferings in hell—that they are finished. No! if the damned had lain in hell as many thousand years as there are drops in the sea—eternity has yet to begin!

First use: INFORMATION.

This may inform all wicked men that, no matter how blind they are now—yet at last the veil shall be taken from their eyes! They now count themselves the only happy men, and look upon the people of God with derision. They load them with invectives and curse them with their slanders. Well, the time is not far off—when the wicked shall clearly discern who belong to Christ—and who belong to the devil. As Moses said to Korah and his company, "Tomorrow the Lord will show who are his" (Num. 16:5), so at the day of *judgment* the Lord will show who are his—and who are not. Nay, sooner than that: at the day of *death* the wicked shall see how it will be with them for eternity!

Oh, that the eyes of sinners may be speedily opened—that they may see the difference of things, the beauty which is in holiness, and the astonishing madness that is in sin!

Second use: Consolation to the righteous.

Though at present they are slighted, and have the odium of the world cast upon them—yet shortly God will make a visible difference between them and the wicked. As it was with Pharaoh's two officers, the butler and the baker; at first there seemed to be no difference between them—but in a short while there was difference made. The chief butler was advanced to honor—but the chief baker was executed (Gen. 40:21-22). So though now God's people are low and

despised, and the wicked treat them with boastful insolence—yet when the critical day comes, there shall be a *final separation* made between the righteous and the wicked. The one shall be *dignified*—the other *damned!* "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life!" (Matt. 25:46).

Be encouraged therefore, saints of God—to persist in a course of holiness. Though now you seem to be lowermost—yet in the resurrection you shall be uppermost: "The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning" (Psalm 49: 14). That is, they shall have dominion over the wicked in the morning of the resurrection. They shall then laugh the wicked to scorn (Psalm 52:6). "Then you will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not." Malachi 3:18

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