

A Treatise on Various Subjects

John Brine

4th Edition Revised

Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee; that it may be displayed
because of the truth— Psalm 60:4

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Editor's Preface

CHRISTIAN READER,

You are here presented with a Treatise on subjects of the greatest importance to an immortal soul: the work of “a Master in Israel” in his day and generation. You will not find it to be a flimsy superficial performance, a mere skimming on the surface of religious matters. On the contrary, you have a display of deep thinking, and of holy research; incontestably proving that an enlarged scriptural, and an holy experimental acquaintance with Divine Truth, pervaded the mind of the judicious Author. He has spread before you a rich intellectual repast; a table well furnished with real gospel food. This little volume contains a greater quantity of excellent matter, than is comprised even in some large folios; it may therefore not unaptly be styled, in relation to the subjects treated on, a body of Divinity in miniature.

It was my primary intention to have subjoined a few notes throughout the work, calling the attention of the reader to various important passages, but, on reflection, I have thought it more advisable to let the truths advanced speak for themselves; with the addition of an Analytical Index, for the purpose of giving the reader an outline of each Chapter; and thus afford him the means of referring to any particular point of doctrine to which his mind may be led.

I freely acknowledge, that in a general point of view, I cordially approve of all Brine's writings; and was I possessed of the means, an uniform edition of the whole should be published. But this Treatise having been a sort of vade mecum, a constant book of reference with me, during my many years labour in the work of the ministry, I do now, in the evening of my day venture again to send it forth, humbly hoping that it may, in the Lord's hands, and with His blessing, be a means of preserving sacred truths, of enlightening and confirming the minds of gospel ministers, and of the people of God generally, into the same; and so conduce to the more firm establishment, of the regenerated Church of Christ into those most glorious realities which are here so luminously set forth.

Brine informs us in his preface, that he had “chiefly in view” in writing, the “lukewarmness, indifference, and sad declension into which professors were fallen” in his day. Alas! if it was so then, how is it with us now? Did Dr. Owen (upwards of 170 years ago, and in the last year of his life) write, “Divine truths are declining in our pulpits, not for want of skill, but for want of love. Though we tacitly own the doctrines of the gospel, the love of them seems greatly decayed, and the power thereof almost lost. They were the life of the reformation, and were also the soul and life of those who are gone home before us: they found the power and comfort of them in life, and in

death also; and they now find the truth of them in glory!" Did Dr. Gill also, more than 100 years ago, write, — "The first-love is left; iniquity abounds; the love of many waxes cold, and it will wax colder and colder;" fl and, is it not so? Alas! it is so, and it will be so, more and more. To this end I especially direct the reader's attention to Chaps. 8, 9, and 10. "Of declensions in the power of Godliness, its causes, etc. Of the symptoms of declension, and of the ways of revival." I know not that I should have republished this book but for the suitability and vast importance of those three chapters in the present day. O, reader, I beseech you to give at least this part of the volume your prayerful consideration. And should "grey hairs be here and there upon you." (Hosea 7:9). I would then beseech you in the words of this writer, to "remember from whence you are fallen; and lay to heart the sad occasions of your declensions." He says, — "we are in a sad slumber, perhaps some are in a dead sleep (as we used to say); and nothing will awake or rouse them out of their wretched carnal security, but some shocking and terrible dispensation, which, whenever it comes, will put them into the utmost consternation, and terror; and they may not be able to determine whether they are of the living in Jerusalem, or, sinners and hypocrites in Zion! Let us stand our ground, keep firm hold, and, 'quit ourselves like men,' in the defence of principles, which ought, to be far dearer to us than the most valuable privileges we can enjoy of a temporal nature, yea, than life itself;" — p. 164, etc.

Men and books are in the Lord's hand; and He can use the one, and dispose the other, just as seemeth good in His sight. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but, mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations [or carnal reasonings, marg.] and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:4. In the estimation of unrenewed men, our arms are but as it were, a pitcher and a lamp; (Judges 7:16) nevertheless this is God's treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of Him and not of us. 2 Corinthians 4:7.

"Who order'd Gideon forth To storm th' invader's camp, With arms of little worth,

A pitcher and a lamp?

The trumpets made his coming known, And all the host were overthrown."

Reader! Bear it in mind, that the contents of this volume concerns, intimately concerns, all the people of God; let them be Episcopalians, or Protestant Dissenters, who profess to hold the truth, of every denomination. I repeat, that it treats of subjects of infinite and unparalleled importance to the church of the great Jehovah; and therefore, from the fullest conviction

of the real merit of this sublime treatise, I do most cordially and earnestly recommend it to your attentive and frequent perusal; firmly persuaded that the blessing of the great Head of the church will rest upon you, when occupied in the delightful employ, and cause you to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;” and finally, to grow up into Him who is the head, even Christ. My heart’s desire for you is, “that you may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and, to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; that, ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” Ephesians 3:18, 19.

On the knee of prayer I send forth this book; may the truths which it contains be transmitted down to posterity, and largely enjoyed in their sanctifying influence in all the churches of Jesus Christ.

Christian reader,

I am, yours in the Lord, JOHN ANDREWS JONES London, May 1, 1851

A Brief Memoir Of Mr. John Brine

JOHN BRINE, a judicious minister, and of considerable celebrity in his day, was born in the town of Kettering, in Northamptonshire, in the year 1703. His parents being in humble circumstances, he had scarcely any advantages in respect to his education; but being of a studious turn of mind, and of close reading, he acquired a considerable stock of useful knowledge. He received his first religious impressions under the ministry of Dr. Gill; who then being a young man, was a member of the Baptist church at Kettering, and preached occasionally at Higham Ferrers. At an early age MR. BRINE joined the same church, then under the pastoral care of Mr. Thomas Wallis. Here he married a daughter of Mr. John Moore, a most valuable minister of Northampton, from whom he inherited Hutter’s Hebrew Bible, which was to him, at that time, a treasure of no small value. Mr. Moore was doubtless a most blessed minister of the gospel. Mrs. Anne Dutton was a member of his church, and writes concerning him — “The Lord Jesus, my chief shepherd, led me by the ministry of his servant and under-shepherd, Mr. Moore, into fat and green pastures. The doctrines of the gospel were clearly stated, and much insisted on in his ministry. The sanctuary streams ran clearly, and the sun shone gloriously. I was abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God’s house; and made to drink of the river of His pleasures: in His light I saw light.” These remarks are corroborated by a small volume of sermons, published by Mr. Moore in 1722, which for richness of gospel truth can scarcely be paralleled. The volume is now rarely to be met with, and as the author died in January 1726, it is presumed that this is the only production of his pen which he gave

to the public.

Mr. Brine, was called into the ministry by the church at Kettering; and after preaching occasionally for some time, he became pastor of the Baptist church at Coventry. He continued there a few years, when he was invited in 1730, to the pastoral charge of the church assembling in Currier's hall, Cripplegate, London. Among his predecessors in the ministry there may be named, Mr. Hanserd Knollys, (born in 1598) whose praise is in all the churches. The church was raised under his ministry; and he laboured among them nearly 50 years, going to his rest 1691, at the advanced patriarchal age of 93 years. Mr. John Skepp was also pastor of this church to the close of the year 1721.

Mr. Brine's ministerial labours in London comprised a period of 35 years, during which he took a principal lead in all the public transactions that concerned his own denomination, and of the Dissenters generally. And the weight that he acquired with his brethren, occasioned his being frequently called upon to preach at the ordinations of ministers, and in other public services.

His Ordination charges were remarkable for the weight and solidity of the matter, and the grave and judicious counsels they contained. Two of them were published; the first was delivered at the ordination of John Ryland, Sen. M.A., of Northampton, in 1750; the second at the settlement of Mr. Richard Rist, at Harlow, in 1756. The advice contained in the following extracts from these valuable discourses, is entitled to the consideration of those who are now called to minister in word and doctrine.

At the commencement of his charge to Mr. Ryland, he thus addresses him.

“As thou regardest the honour and authority of God, and art desirous to approve thyself to Him, so be thou concerned diligently and faithfully to attend unto the duties of thy station in the church: and as thou expectest to appear before the judgement seat of Christ, neglect not those important services which are proper to thy character; for, to Him thou must give an account of thy conduct in thine high and honourable office. Thou art to preach the word; the word of God; the word of truth; the word of life; the gospel of salvation; the gospel of the grace of God, even of the true grace of God, and, not the counterfeit of it.” — “But how may you know that any doctrine is that of the true grace of God? I answer, — If it exalts the glory of the grace of God, as the sole and entire cause of salvation; — if it humbles the creature, and excludes all boasting; — if it provides for the honour of God's holy law and justice; — if it is a solid and sure ground of strong consolation to the saints; — and lastly, if it is a doctrine according to Godliness. —

These are infallible rules whereby you may form your judgement of the truth of the doctrines you are to preach. No principle can be true, which is not calculated to subserve and secure those important ends. It will be your wisdom to examine well, all sentiments in Divinity; and, according as you find them agreeing, or disagreeing with those rules, so mind that you embrace, or reject them.”

In his charge to Mr. Rist, from 1 Timothy 4:15, 16, He says — be “diligent to enquire into the proper meaning of every text, which you shall undertake to preach from, explain, and treat upon; content not yourself, (as some preachers do) with expressing what may be true, though it be not the genuine sense of your text; but labour to find out the real import of that portion of the good word of God, which you have chosen for the subject of your sermon. Meditate much on the doctrines which are contained in the holy scriptures; that you may discern their admirable variety, adorable depth, strict connection, mutual dependence, and beautiful harmony. This is your proper business, as a minister; and it is that painful, though pleasant, and withal unremitting labour, which claims your constant attention.” — “If we are negligent and slothful, we cannot reasonably have any expectation of increasing our ministerial furniture, for the service and benefit of the church of Christ.” — [The above I consider to be (even now) words in season, fitly spoken, “like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”] Proverbs 25:11. But to proceed, —

When Dr. Gill retired from his Wednesday evening lecture, in Great Eastcheap, it was carried on for some years by Mr. Brine, in connection with other ministers he also preached in his turn at the Lord’s day evening lecture in Devonshire square, Bishopsgate street. His whole course of life was one of ministerial labour. He was also a very considerable writer, whether the number of his publications, or the ability displayed in them are considered. Ivimey, in his history of the Baptists, has three closely filled octavo pages, merely reciting a list of his works. They are mostly, polemical, and therefore more suited to the Biblical student, than to general, readers. They are now very scarce. All are valuable, but this “Treatise on various subjects,” especially to ministers, is invaluable, and cannot be too frequently read, too closely studied, or its holy maxims and injunctions too industriously practised. The result will be health and marrow. — Proverbs 3:8.

But the lives of studious gospel ministers, whose days are mostly spent in retired meditation, and in their pulpit administrations, have but little of general, and certainly less of worldly incident, to attract attention. They have to deal with their master, to obey his directions, to deliver his message, to declare unreservedly the whole counsel of God, and then to leave the result

in His hands, who has said, — “My word shall not return unto me void,” etc. — Isaiah 55:11. Every faithful minister must “go his way till the end be; for he shall rest, and stand in his lot, at the end of the days.” — Daniel 12:13.

Mr. Brine resided for many years in Bridgewater square, Barbican; but during his last illness he took lodgings at Kingsland, where he died. A little before his decease, he expressed the state of his mind by saying, “I think I am of sinners the chief, of saints the least; I know that I am nothing, but, by the grace of God I am what I am:” which words he ordered to be inscribed on his tomb stone. His death took place February 21st, 1765, in the 63rd year of his age. He left positive orders that no funeral sermon should be preached for him; and his request, as to this particular, was partly complied with. His very intimate friend, Dr. Gill, preached on the occasion from 1 Corinthians 15:10; “By the grace of God I am what I am.” In a note appended to that sermon, the doctor says, — “I am debarred from saying so much of him as otherwise I could do. We were born in the same place, and he was among the first-fruits of my ministry. I might take notice of his natural and acquired abilities, his great understanding, clear light, and sound judgment in the doctrines of the gospel, and the deep things of God; of his zeal, skill, and courage in vindicating important truths, published by him to the world, and by which he being dead, yet speaketh. I might also observe to you, that his walk and conversation in the world, was honourable and ornamental to the profession which he made, and suitable to the character he sustained, as a minister of Jesus Christ; which endeared him to his friends, and to all who knew him: but I am forbid to say more.”

The celebrated John Ryland enumerates him among the seven noble divines, who, by his daily reading their writings in his family, took it by turns to lead the worship there. These were, “Dr. Owen, Mr. Stephen Charnock, Dr. Witsius, Mr. James Hervey, Dr. Gill, Mr. George Whitfield, and Mr. John Brine.” Of the latter person he says, — “Mr. John Brine entertains us with most manly reasoning on all the branches of doctrinal and practical religion, and teaches us the most intense personal holiness by his own example.” Indeed so highly did Mr. Ryland rate him, that in speaking of Bunhill Fields burial ground, he used to say, “There lie the ashes of the three great Johns; — John Bunyan, John Gill, and John Brine.” Mr. Brine was buried in Bunhill fields, that great cemetery and repository of sacred dust.

The intersection of his grave, in that ground, is east and west 51, north and south 29.

On his stone may be read the following inscription: —

Here lie interred, the remains of The Rev. JOHN BRINE, Who departed this life Feb. the 21st, 1765. In the 63rd year of his age.

His ministerial abilities were very extraordinary, And his zeal and faithfulness In asserting and defending the great truths of religion Equally conspicuous. Not long before his decease, He expressed his sentiments in the following words:

“I think I am of sinners the chief, — of saints the least; I know that I am nothing; But, by the grace of God, I am what I am.”

Preface

OUR present situation, as a people professing Christianity, calls for two things in an especial manner. One is the defence of the doctrines and principles of our religion, and that revelation wherein those principles are contained. For many persons curtail, corrupt, or oppose the most important doctrines of the religion of Jesus, which makes it necessary truly to state, thoroughly explain, and defend them from the cavils and objections of bold and daring adversaries. And most needful it is to vindicate the sacred Word of God, which is objected unto by many, some in one way, and some in another; but the design of them all is to sink its credit with men, and to take them off from religiously regarding the sacred Scriptures.

The other service which is needful to be attended unto at this time, is an endeavour to convince professors of that lukewarmness, indifference, and sad declension, whereinto they are now fallen. This latter is chiefly had in view in the following work, though some regard is also had unto the momentous doctrines of the gospel, and their defence. Wherein, I know not; but some may think that I have used too much freedom in censuring several popular, and very spreading principles among us. This, I am convinced, is a liberty that some do not like should be taken with what they publish to the world. All among us disclaim a title to infallibility; but some there are, who cannot patiently bear contradiction. Though they pretend not to be infallible, they are displeased if they are thought to err. And some are offended, if their writings are examined, and their real sentiments are exposed to view; because it is not their choice that their apprehensions, on some principles, should be fully and clearly known to all. I confess that it never was, and I declare that it never will be any concern to me, what such men shall think or say of my animadverting upon what they publish.

As to the subjects of regeneration, conversion, and sanctification; and the difference between real conversion and the semblance of it, with those following, which are analogous to them, all who have any

true sense of religion, will confess their importance. If my manner of treating on them shall be acceptable, and in any degree serviceable to those

whose profit was in them intended, I shall have my reward. And if what is offered on the subjects of our present declension, etc., shall be successful to awaken, rouse, and excite drowsy and slumbering professors, unto more caution, diligence, and watchfulness against the temptations of the present age, the ends I had in view will be answered.

I have used great plainness in treating on some of the temptations which now attend us, and in cautioning against them; for which I have no other apology to make than this, that he who undertakes to expose the art which others use in religion, ought to use none himself; but be plain, open, and unreserved, in expressing his apprehensions, both of those doctrines and practices, whereof he speaks.

It has been my aim throughout the whole, so to treat on those subjects, as not to advance anything that might prove an occasion of stumbling and discouragement unto spiritually humbled and mourning souls in Zion, under a sense of their imperfections and unworthiness. For when I endeavour to bring the carnal and secure to a sense of their stupidity and danger, I would not make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom the Lord would not have made sad. Great caution is necessary to be used unto this end, wherein many have failed, and the effects of it have been distress, and unjust censures of themselves, with some pious, but disconsolate persons. In my opinion, greater difficulty attends not the ministerial work, than in this matter, and, therefore, great skill, spiritual wisdom, faithfulness, and compassion to the souls of men, are herein required. If, in any degree, I am possessed of these qualifications, it is owing unto the observations I have made on my own experience, and the experience of others, and through the instruction of the Spirit of Christ.

I desire solemnly to commend these endeavours to the divine blessing, without which, no spiritual advantage can arise from them.

JOHN BRINE

CHAPTER 1

Of The Original Purity Of Human Nature

O MY soul, what is that subject which thou art about to contemplate? Consider it well, it is important, copious, and what thou hast never had experience of. How then canst thou hope to form conceptions of it agreeable to its nature? Canst thou expect to delineate the original beauties of the human mind, who hast been unlovely, ever since thou wast, in the least degree, conscious of thy own acts? Is it likely that thou shouldest be able to represent the perfection of the intelligent creature, particularly Man, seeing thou hast never had a sight of the lovely image, either in thyself, or

in another? The undertaking must be difficult to any depraved mind, and it certainly must be so much the more difficult to thee, by how much thou art less holy, and more degenerated than others are. But, my soul, be not discouraged, nor decline the work before thee, on that account; the labour possibly, may be of some advantage to others, and to thyself, it doubtless will be profitable; for, the better thou shalt be acquainted with the original purity and perfection of thy nature, a juster sense thou wilt have of that vitiosity, which thou hast always been attended with, and therefore, it may reasonably be expected, that thou wilt learn humility, the evil nature of sin, and be stirred up to adore that divine favour, which hath provided for thee a new beauty that never can be lost. If these useful ends should be, on thy part, in any measure answered, thou wilt be well recompensed for all thy pains, were they far greater than thou art able to take in this momentous enquiry. And, therefore, proceed to consider what the excellency of thy nature was, in its primitive state; and be sure that thou fail not to give an impartial and fair representation of the original glory of the human mind, so far as thou shalt be enabled to obtain the knowledge of it, because thou naturally art the very reverse of it, in thy thoughts, desires, and affections. This, this is my firm resolution, and it is what I hope constantly to keep in view.

Man, as soon as he was created, became subject to a law. The relation between God and the creature necessarily supposes the subjection of the creature to the will and rule of God. And the divine will hath the power and force of a law; acting contrary to that, is disobedience and rebellion.

Again, that law whereunto man was subjected certainly was perfect; or it comprised the whole of his duty. For it is irrational and impious to imagine that God can be the author of an imperfect law. Infinite rectitude cannot fail of requiring what is holy in all its branches, and in its full extent.

Hence it follows that man was pure and holy in his creation state, or possessed of power to do the complete will of God. For equity requires that the powers of the creature, as he is created by God, be sufficient to enable him to keep a law, which is to be the rule of his actions. No acts of obedience, in justice, can be demanded of the creature, which exceed his powers, as he is formed of his Maker. For, it is equitable that there be a proportion between the ability of the creature and the command under which he is placed; and, consequently, man, in his original state was perfect, and attended with no moral disorder or defect. If he was not so, he could not keep a perfect law; and to subject him to a law which he could not obey, through a weakness natural to him, as created of his Almighty Ruler, would have been unjust. And, therefore, as the law was perfect, so was man, the subject of it. God cannot omit requiring of the creature what is holy, nor can He command

acts of obedience of the creature, which are beyond that ability which He furnishes the creature with, in his creation.

Moreover, the Holy Scriptures assert the perfection of human nature in its original state. Uprightness is attributed to man, and it is declared that, God made him in His own image. Lo, this only have I found, that God made man, μ da upright: (Ecclesiastes 7:29) that is to say, pure, and holy, and that perfectly so. Man had a perfection of knowledge, a holy disposition of mind, and perfect purity in his affections.

I. He had a perfection of knowledge; no ignorance attended him in his primitive state.

1. Man had a perfect knowledge of God, according to the nature of that law or covenant, whereby he was then directed to fear and serve Him. Without a perception of the Being, and infinite powers of Deity, no acts of adoration, reverence, trust, and love, can be exerted towards and on God our Maker. If, therefore, man was obliged in his primitive state, to worship his Creator, of which, surely, none can doubt, it must be supposed, that he was acquainted with his divine excellencies and glory. A blind devotion was not performed by man in innocency, nor did he worship he knew not what. Ignorance of God is the consequence of sin, and, therefore, man was not the unhappy subject of that ignorance and blindness, before his transgression.

Some have thought, that he had a knowledge of the Trinity, and it is not improbable. For, though that is not attainable by reasoning on the operations of God's hand, we may fairly suppose that man received by immediate and supernatural revelation, the knowledge of some truths, and why may we not conclude, that, the knowledge of this mystery was conveyed to him in that way? To the end he might, in his acts of devotion, pay those honours to the Divine Three, which are the due of each.

Since ignorance of God is everywhere represented as an unhappiness to men, it is unreasonable to think that man originally was unacquainted with Him.

2. We cannot rationally suppose that he was a stranger to his duty, either in the matter, manner, or extent of it. If he had not known what acts his Maker required of him, it would have been impossible for him to behave himself agreeably to His will. Obedience to any authority necessarily supposes the knowledge of what is enjoined. For, if a subject happens to act as the law requires, who has no knowledge of what is enacted, properly speaking, his acts would not be obedience to the legislator, because he could have no respect to his will in those acts, or intention of shewing his submission to his authority in what he acted, which always enters into the nature of real

obedience to a superior, in what he commands. And, consequently, man must know what he ought to practice, and in what manner, and with what views, the duties required of him were to be performed; for otherwise, he could not be obedient to the will of his Maker in what he did. And, unless he had had this knowledge of what it was, the will of God he should practice, if he had failed of his duty, or acted contrary to it, no uneasy consciousness could possibly have taken place in his mind, upon such failure, and unlawful acting. Conscience cannot accuse of offence, farther than a perception of what ought to be done, and what ought to be avoided, extends. It must, therefore, be concluded, that man was acquainted with his duty, in the whole compass of it. As his understanding was not blinded by any contracted prejudices, so no natural defect attended it.

His mind was then capable of discerning the objects which claimed his love, and of seeing those objects which it became him to turn from and avoid. His rejection of the highest good, and his choice of evil, were not the effects of ignorance. If he could have pleaded that in his excuse, we may be certain he had not failed of it, for he discovered an inclination to lessen his crime, if that had been possible; but he offers nothing of this kind to extenuate his guilt. This leads me to observe,

3. He knew wherein his happiness consisted. If man in his first estate had been insensible of the excellency of that good, unto which he was entitled so long as he preserved his integrity, his folly had not been so great in forfeiting of his title to it; neither could he have taken pleasure in that good, while he had it in possession; for delight from good enjoyed, arises from a perception of the nature of that good; and, consequently, pleasure in it, cannot exceed that measure of acquaintance the mind hath with it, in its excellency. We cannot therefore suppose, that Adam was ignorant of his happy circumstances, in his creation state. If he was then happy, he must have been sensible wherein his felicity consisted.

4. He was not ignorant of that misery which a breach of the law would bring him into. He perfectly knew that sin against his Maker would certainly be followed with consequences fatal to himself. His perfect reason could not but discern that rebellion against his Sovereign would expose him to his righteous displeasure. Ignorance as to this, cannot be pleaded in his excuse. He dared to rebel, with a full knowledge of the dreadful effects of an act of rebellion, according to the appointment of God in the law.

II. His disposition was such as God approved of. It is irrational to imagine that the mind of man was not the subject of any habits, good or evil, as he was created of God; for that supposes, that he was neither holy nor unholy. The disposition of his mind, as he came out of God's hand, could

not be sinful, for that would make God the author of sin; and, consequently, he had no aversion to holiness, nor inclination to evil, or his will was not under the influence of any evil bias. He then must have a good and holy disposition. Adam was created good in a moral sense, or else God gave being to a creature, which the purity of his own nature would necessarily incline him to disapprove of, and prevent him holding fellowship with, than which nothing more absurd can be supposed. For my part, I can as soon believe that man rose into existence of himself, as that God formed him with such dispositions as men universally give evidence have place in their minds. The absurdity of such an imagination, I cannot but think must be evident to every one who is not void of all consideration, and is not absolutely a stranger to himself. Is it rational to suppose that God made man with such instability, such inclinations, such irregularity and disorder in his passions, as are now found with all men? It may be questioned, whether that man thinks at all, (if he speaks truth) who says that he hath no experience, nor ever had, of any such depravity in him, as it is pretended every man is now the subject of. For it is hardly possible that reason can be exercised without a discernment, in some measure, that our reasonable nature is not, at present, such as it would be well if it was. — With respect to some, who confidently assert that they have no disposition to evil, it may partly be owing to ignorance of themselves, of the nature of holiness and of sin; but perhaps, much more to perverseness and obstinacy: they may hardily deny what they know to be true, rather than give any advantage to a principle which they are obstinately determined to oppose and run down at any rate. That human nature is now corrupt, is so plain a truth, that I cannot be persuaded that any man retains consciousness, who hath no perception of the dismal fact in himself. And is it not most absurd to imagine that God created man such as he now is? It is not so great a dishonour to God, to deny that he is the author of the being of man, as it is to assert that He created him such as he now is, in the temper and disposition of his mind. And to suppose that He formed him without either good or evil inclinations, or without a direction in his will, either to what is good, or to what is evil, is senseless and irrational.

III. His affections were untainted, and no disorder attended him in his passions. No temptation arose from vanity seated in the inferior powers of his soul, which is the case with man in his fallen state. Neither were his passions tumultuous and rebellious against his reason; so that his sin could not be occasioned by the impurity of his affections, nor the impetuosity of his passions. No unlawful love, delight, or aversion were implanted in the nature of man by the great Author of his being. And, therefore, the dictates of his reason did not meet with control from corruption in his affections,

while he continued innocent. And, consequently, obedience to the law of his Maker was not rendered difficult by any unruliness in the passions of his soul. Disorder there, was the effect, and not the cause of his apostacy. The arguments are various by which this doctrine of the original purity of man is proved.

1. God created him in his own image and likeness. And this image must intend moral rectitude. Intelligence or reason, though it is necessarily included, it is not the principal thing designed by that divine likeness; for if rationality was this image, it could never be lost. Sin, which defaces this beautiful image, does not deprive men or devils of intelligence. The nature of both will eternally continue rational. It is impossible that either can sink into brutality. Thought and consciousness are inseparable from the nature of both. And, therefore, the image of God must be something distinct from reason. Indeed, reason only can be the subject of it; but reason is not the thing itself. To suppose that mere reason is God's likeness, is an imagination unworthy of a reasonable nature, with how much confidence soever, some pretending unto a superior degree of reason, assert that it is. This is a glaring evidence of their deep corruption, depravity, and of their being unacquainted with the true glory of an intelligent nature, even in theory. No censure too great can be passed on an opinion so senseless, and reproachful to our Maker.

2. Whatever the law requires of men now, that was in human nature originally. Doth not the law demand love to God with our whole hearts? It does. Can we be supposed to love Him, without a true knowledge of Him, in His being, nature, and perfections? No; for such love is not a blind passion; but a holy affection, raised in the mind by a perception of His infinite excellencies. Ignorant devotion is every whit as good in itself, as undiscerning affection towards the Deity. Again, the law requires us to fear and reverence our Maker. And can there be a reverence of God, without the knowledge of Him? No. We may have a dread of something unknown, and revere a nature that we are taught is excellent; but unless we have some ideas of the power and excellency of that nature, we are afraid of we know not what, and pay veneration to a being or nature possessed of some supposed excellencies, but such as we are strangers unto. So the idolatrous Athenians worshipped God. They had this inscription on one of their altars, To the unknown God. And some men, if I understand them, would lead us into a belief of the possibility of the human mind exerting acts of love, fear, and reverence of God, without the knowledge of Him. Since the law requires these things of men, of all men, certain it is that human nature in its primitive state, was the happy subject of a true knowledge of God, in His nature, and infinitely glorious perfections; of a holy affection to God, and of a disposition to reverence and fear Him.

Nor is any intelligent nature like unto God, which approves not of goodness, truth, and righteousness. The moment an intelligent creature ceases to love and delight in these things, he is stript of his glory, and becomes depraved in his understanding, will, and affections.

3. Man in his original state was the object of the approbation of his Maker. This cannot be denied, without the absurdity of supposing that God gave existence to a creature, which He could not look upon with satisfaction and pleasure. Now, if God approved of man when He had made him, he must be the subject of such qualities in his reasonable nature, as were pleasing to Him. For bare intelligence is not the object either of God's approbation or disapprobation. A reasonable nature, which is the subject of perfect holiness, is the object of God's delight; and a reasonable nature depraved and vicious, is the object of his displeasure; and, consequently, man originally was the happy subject of good habits, or of integrity, righteousness, and a perfection of nature; for then nothing could be wanting in him, to render him the fit object of the approbation of his Creator.

4. Regeneration, or our new creation, is the implantation of, or giving being unto, holy principles in our minds; that is, making the heart good, in order, unto the performance of good works. And this is called the image of God, and it is said to consist in righteousness and true holiness. And, consequently, the divine image is not intelligence; but purity and holiness in an intelligent nature. Wherein a true knowledge of God, according to the nature of the covenant under which man is, and love to Him, fear of Him, and a disposition to obey Him, are included.

5. Man was happy in his original state. He not only was free from pain and misery, but he enjoyed delight. And the pleasure he had before his apostacy, was of a pure and holy nature, such as God approved of. If his mind was not the subject of perfect knowledge, according to the nature of that covenant under which he then was; if his will had not been disposed to obedience; if his affections had not been holy and pure, what pleasure could he possibly take in those truths which were contained in the law, whereunto his obedience was required? Happiness necessarily supposes delight, and delight as necessarily supposes an agreeableness between the disposition of the soul, and the objects from which its pleasure springs. Man was happy in innocency, he, therefore, enjoyed pleasure, and that pleasure was pure and holy. He, then, must know truth, and approve of it.

6. Man, in innocency, enjoyed a sense of divine favour, according unto the nature of the covenant which was then made with him. This seems to me so evident a truth, and so consonant to reason, that I think it cannot well be called in question. And if it is true that Adam in that state enjoyed communion

with his Maker, surely he must then be the subject of heavenly knowledge and true holiness. For if not, his mind would not have been disposed unto fellowship with God, and he must have been incapable of taking any pleasure therein. A depraved intelligent nature is averse to communion with God; and a mind which is not the subject of a holy disposition, can have no inclination unto intimacy with him. If any suppose that a reasonable nature, destitute of such a disposition, may be inclined to communion with the Father of spirits, they must be strangers to that happiness: because it includes a perception of what God is, of the creature's relation to Him, and that all its felicity springs from Him, and an adoration of His infinite perfections. Hence, it necessarily follows, that the mind of man, originally, was not only free from corruption; but, also, that it was the happy subject of pure and holy principles, which were concreated with it: for where real holiness is not, it is impossible that communion with God can be enjoyed.

7. If man by acts of obedience had acquired good habits, he would have been the author of his chief excellency, and not God, which it is blasphemous to imagine. God indeed gave him a reasonable nature; but its ornament and beauty would not have been a divine gift; the supposition of which is intolerable arrogance and insolence against the Author of our beings; and, therefore, man was certainly created pure and holy. A mind which is the subject of good dispositions, is better than a mind that is not. The acquirement, therefore, of such dispositions, by a mind destitute of them, must be esteemed an acquisition of greater glory than it before possessed; and, consequently, man's highest excellency must have been the effect of his own labour, and not of the bounty of his Creator. This reasoning is what I think cannot be answered by those who deny original righteousness. But holy acts can never arise in a mind destitute of holy habits. If Adam, therefore, was not created with a holy disposition, he could not have acquired it, because, without it, he could not perform holy acts.

8. Indifference to good and evil I think cannot have place in a reasonable nature. Indifference in the mind can only respect things indifferent, which are neither good nor evil, if the mind is supposed to be conversant about objects whose nature is not indifferent. That intelligent nature certainly is not what it ought to be, in whose account, it matters not whether truth or falsehood is embraced, whether right or wrong is chosen and pursued. When the mind gives the preference to what is right and fit, and is disposed to that, before its contrary, it is good; but when it is the subject of a disposition to what is unfit, and makes choice of it, then it is depraved. The supposed indifference of the human mind towards its duty, or the contrary of it, agrees not with the experience either of good or bad men. It is not found in the soul of any

man in this world, nor can attend any human mind in the next world; and to conceit that Adam was created of God, that which neither a good man nor an evil man is, is a fond and ridiculous imagination. That he could not create him with vicious dispositions all must grant, and, consequently, he made him with good dispositions, because it is impossible that indifference to holiness or sin, should ever be found in a reasonable nature; a creature disposed neither to good nor to evil, never had real existence; but is only a supposed being in the foolish imaginations of some perverse men.

The just and natural conclusions arising from these things are, viz., That man in his original state was the happy subject of moral perfection; not only free from all vitiosity and disorder in his reasonable nature, but possessed of positive holiness, the object of the approbation of God who made him, and made him good, in a moral sense; for otherwise, he had not been a fit object of divine approbation. — That his knowledge was complete, or that he was perfectly acquainted with all the momentous truths contained in that law or covenant, under which he then was. — That he had a disposition to good, or a liking to truth, righteousness, and holiness. — That he was capable of holding fellowship with his Maker, and actually enjoyed a sense of His favour. — That, therefore, pleasures pure and holy sprung up in his mind, from an apprehension of an interest in the good will, care, and bountiful kindness of his Creator. For he not only was entertained with a sight of the pleasing wonders that surrounded him above, and on the earth beneath, especially in that fertile spot of it whereon he was placed; but also with an apprehension of the glory of the Author of the universe, in that way, wherein he had then displayed it. Adam, therefore, was not only free from pain, uneasy consciousness and misery; but possessed happiness in a positive sense, full satisfaction, joy and delight pure and holy, and such as God designs to a pure and perfect mind. Hence it is apparent that no vain thoughts naturally sprung up in the mind of man, no unlawful desires arose in his soul from an evil bias in his will, nor were any natural tendencies then found in his affections towards objects trifling, vain, and hurtful, through impurity seated in them. His unclouded and perfect reason, which clearly discerned what was the matter of his duty, and dictated him to the practice of it, met with no opposition from disorder in his affections; for they were as pure as his mind was discerning. Reason in a state of innocency, as it was at no loss relating to the fitness or unfitness of the part it was to act, in any instance; so it had no rebellious inclination to subdue and conquer, in order to acting that part it knew to be becoming and fit. God did not place man in such a difficult and disadvantageous situation. He certainly had all the advantages which were necessary to facilitate the practice of what his Maker

required him to do. This cannot be scrupled without a reflection both on the wisdom and goodness of his Creator. For infinite wisdom and goodness must needs direct to the formation of the creature free from all such corrupt inclinations, as would render his duty a task difficult for him to perform. If man had found himself to be the subject of any such dispositions from the first moment of his existence, as were repugnant to his reason, he would never upon his apostacy have been silent on that head; but would certainly have pleaded it, as some extenuation of his crime. For, it is evident, that he had an inclination to have done this on some pretence or other, if it had been possible. And this would have been a much more plausible plea, than the shameful one he used with his Maker, Lawgiver, and Judge: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." He discovered an inclination to impute his crime to the Author of his being, or to prove that He was the occasion of it. And such is the impious and daring conduct of his wretched descendants in too many instances. Because men find themselves to be the subjects of such desires, or tendencies of mind, as they know to be unfit, and repugnant to reason, they easily excuse themselves for errors in practice, and with frontless assurance insist upon it, that it will be cruelty in their Maker to call them to an account for those defects and blemishes in their behaviour, which are unavoidable in their present circumstances. We, therefore, may conclude, with the greatest certainty, that infinite wisdom would take care to prevent all occasion of such like cavilling in the formation of man, that he might not have it to say that his duty was difficult to be performed, by reason of an unsuitable turn in his will, and tendency in his affections, as he was created of God.

And, surely, it is reasonable to conclude, that Adam performed devotional acts with holy reverence and sacred delight. He could not but give tributes of praise to God his Maker, for his superabundant beneficence and favour towards him, whereby he was furnished with everything not only needful to his sustentation, in those happy circumstances wherein he was placed; but with whatever he could desire for the entertainment and delight of his innocent and heavenly mind, and constituted ruler and lord over the numerous ranks of creatures the world contains. Above all, his grateful soul was doubtless possessed of adoring thoughts of the wisdom, goodness, and power of his great Creator, and of the interest he had in his approbation, protection, and kindness. And his principles, natural to him, directed him to implore the continuance of the care, aid, and guidance of his Almighty Former, wherein his guiltless soul could not be attended with any dread of his terrors, nor with the least suspicion of a want of a favourable regard to him, in the mind of that infinitely good Being who made him. And, therefore,

what serenity, what satisfaction, what pleasures must fill the breast of man in his primitive state, who had a free access to his Maker, a sense of his favour, and was absolutely free from all fear of his displeasure! O what a happy state must this have been!

Besides, his pure and holy mind was not reluctant and indisposed to religious services, nor wandering and sluggish in the performance of them; for man was then not the subject of any aversion to holiness and communion with God. And, therefore, divine worship must be a branch of duty, wherein man took a peculiar pleasure in his original state. Perfect love to the infinitely glorious Object of his worship, sweetly engaged all the powers of his soul unto acts of adoration, thanksgiving, and praise. As his understanding discerned the infinite excellencies of his Creator, and his will was free from all evil bias, it adhered to Him, and his affections being untainted, embraced and delighted in God his Maker. As has been observed, whatever the law requires of all men now, that was in man originally; the law commands us to worship our Maker, in a pure, holy, and reverential manner, without reluctance, wandering, and mixture of vanity in our thoughts, desires, and affections; and, consequently, innocent man performed service of that noble and heavenly kind. If he had not, he never could have claimed a title to God's approbation and favour; but, on the contrary, must have fallen under His displeasure and censure; for if God receives not that glory from the creature, which is due unto His holy and great name, He cannot but resent it. And since the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, in acts of love to Him, and in acts of obedience to His righteous will, certain it is, that Adam in a manner perfectly devout and holy, worshipped his great Creator.

Hereby we may be induced to enter upon a pleasing contemplation of the happiness of the lovely pair, in the delightful garden of Eden. Two pure minds were perfectly united in love, between which no strife or contention could arise, to the disturbance and vexation of either. Adam, on his part, to whom we may allow a superiority over the innocent and beautiful fair, he certainly was all affection and kindness to her, nothing of a stern and angry disposition appeared in his air, language, or in any of his actions towards her. His commands, when he gave her any, were no other than such as proceeded from perfect reason, sweetness of temper, and the truest affection. And the woman, on her part, was all submission to her gentle ruler and loving companion, for whom she was formed, and to whom she was given by her Maker, to attend him, and unite with him, in all acts of adoration and praise, to the Former of them both. Perfect harmony, unmixed delight, and untainted piety reigned in the breast of each. And the man, we may suppose, pronounced orations on the wisdom, power, and beneficence of

the great Creator, in her hearing; and that she, not less capable of discerning the bright display of these divine perfections in the wonderful works of creation, discovered an approbation of all he expressed, as what perfectly corresponded with her own ideas on those important Subjects, and unto both transporting!

Socinian and Arminian writers deny this original perfection and happiness of man, because, they think, his apostacy cannot be explained, if he was the subject of purity and holiness. They imagine that his mind, though it was not tainted with moral evil, yet that it was not the subject of those dispositions before mentioned, and, consequently, that he could not be so happy a creature as we conclude he was. But,

1. It is not a sufficient reason for the denial of the truth of anything which reason leads us to conclude is true, that difficulty attends the explication of some other thing, which fact proves is true also. It doubtless is more rational to conclude upon the truth of what reason dictates to us must be true, than to deny it, because somewhat afterwards occurs which we cannot explain, and show how the latter can consist with the former. Reason plainly proves the truth of man's original purity and rectitude, and fact proves the possibility of his sinning against his Maker, though He formed him holy and happy. It is open folly in men, whose understanding is much limited in the explication of things which they have a power of discerning the truth of, to deny the truth of anything, merely because they find themselves unable to explain how another thing is true, which fact undeniably proves to be so.

2. The greatest perfection which a creature can be the subject of, raises him not above a possibility of acting an unwise and sinful part; for his nature cannot be rendered immutable. It is inseparable from the nature of a creature, as a creature, to be liable to change. As it is of the nature of God to be unchangeable, who necessarily is what he is, and to whom it is impossible ever to be in his nature other than he is. Deity alone is above the possibility of a change. And, therefore, unto what height soever you raise the perfection of the creature man, in his original state, you place him not above the possibility of a mutation. That cannot be without blasphemy, or making him equal unto God, in what He always challenges, as a peculiar property of His nature. "I am the Lord, I change not." He is the "Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

3. I apprehend that it is not merely on account of this difficulty, that these men deny the doctrine of man's original holiness; but for another reason also, viz., man's apostacy, though he was perfectly holy, proves the necessity of the super-addition of divine grace immutably to preserve the pure creature in a state of perfection. This is what they are unwilling to grant, because they

will have it, that the continued happiness of the creature depends on his acts, without a determining influence from the grace of God. If they were to allow of such an influence on the mind of a perfect creature, they could not consistently insist upon it, that such an influence on the mind of an imperfect creature destroys its free agency, which is what they constantly and vehemently urge against it.

4. Since mutability, or a possibility of change, is true of the most holy creature, that creature may sin and involve himself in ruin, if God withholds confirming grace from him. And this was the case with man in innocency: his nature was holy, but not immutably so; and as God withheld his determining influence from Adam, and left him to the mutability of his own will, he made an unhappy choice. Obedience to the law was not beyond the powers of his nature, for God did not require impossibilities of him; but the holy habits of his mind were insufficient infallibly to influence it unto acts of obedience. Power to obey the divine command is one thing, that he had; and power to preserve the will infallibly, in a continued choice of duty, is another and farther thing; this latter he had not; and God withholding from him confirming grace, which is necessary unto the creature's invariably choosing to practise its duty, or continuing rightly to use that power it hath, he violated the law of his Maker. Ability to perform acts of duty, a perfect creature hath; but ability infallibly to persevere therein, he hath not, because his mind is mutable in its nature, and, consequently, how holy soever the creature is, he is not raised by his inherent principles above a possibility of sinning against God. And there is reason to conclude that he certainly will, without supernatural grace, from the fall of angels, and the apostacy of man, who were created pure and holy.

5. Those who deny the irresistible, or the effectual operation of God on the human mind, because they fear that such an influence destroys its free agency, must be obliged, according to their opinion, to maintain, that the saints in heaven continue happy, by virtue of inherent principles, and not in consequence of a determining act of the divine will upon their wills, to prevent their making at any time an evil choice; which is highly derogatory to the glory of divine grace. They allow indeed, that God makes the saints perfectly holy; but they must assert that they preserve themselves in a state of holiness and happiness forever. And they will not grant, that man, originally, was the subject of that perfection, purity, and holiness, which it is reasonable to conclude he was, lest an argument should be formed from thence, in confirmation of the necessity of such an influence from God on the perfect creature, in order, infallibly to preserve his holiness and happiness, — so cautious are they of yielding anything to the prejudice of their dunghill-

idol, free-will. That must stand, whatever falls. That is their governing principle, and their whole scheme of divinity is so framed, as not to injure in the least degree this Diana of theirs. By this they govern themselves in forming their sentiments of man before his fall, of human nature as fallen, of men unconverted, of men converted, and of the mints in heaven. Of so extensive an influence is this unworthy, filthy brat of their own begetting; and so enamoured are they with it, that they care not what is lost, so that that is but safe. They are determined to do homage to this favourite principle, at the expense of every thing else. Perhaps some would propound a question relating to this subject, and enquire thus; Why should evil habits have greater influence on the mind than good habits? or, why should evil habits prevent holy acts arising in the mind, since good habits, whereof the mind of man it is supposed was the subject, did not prevent a sinful act in him? I answer,

1. Sin is the consequence of mutability in the nature of a creature. If good habits infallibly determined the will to the choice of good, the creature's continuance in a state of happiness would be independent of an act of the divine will, and its influence upon the will of the creature, which it is impious to imagine the possibility of. And, therefore, good habits can have no such influence on the will of the creature, as infallibly to determine it to make a wise and fit choice. But though the most perfect creature may, possibly, change for the worse, because of its natural mutability, it by no means follows that a sinful creature may effect a change in itself for the better, or perform holy acts.

2. If a creature which is the subject of evil habits only, could will holiness, it would then be in the power of the sinful creature to raise itself out of its miserable state, and regain that happiness which it lost by sin; but that is impossible.

The creature is the cause of its misery; but God alone is the author of its salvation and recovery. I suppose that all such will acknowledge the truth of this reasoning, who are persuaded of the inseparable connection between holiness and happiness. If the sinful creature may become holy of itself, I think it is certain, that it may by an innate power, become happy also.

3. Evil may be chosen under a false notion, or under the appearance of good. But holiness cannot be chosen except as holiness, and because of its excellency. Such a choice the depraved creature cannot make, for two reasons; One is, his understanding discerns not the excellent nature of holiness. The other is, his mind is enmity against it, as holiness, and, consequently, it cannot be the matter of his choice.

The law denounces wrath and misery against the sinner, and, therefore, it is impossible that an apostate creature should ever recover its holiness,

and regain its happiness. When it doth the former, it also will the latter; for no holy creature will ever be rendered miserable, by infinite Holiness and infinite Goodness.

Hence we may observe,

1. If man was overcome by temptation, when he had no corrupt habits in his mind, but had holy dispositions in his soul, how foolish is it to think that, now he is depraved, he stands not in need of powerful, special, and effectual grace from God to make him holy, and preserve him in the midst of the numerous temptations, which continually, and in every condition attend him! If the natural mutability of his will, in a state of perfection, rendered it so easy for Satan to conquer and slay him, is it not absurd to imagine that he can defend himself, now his heart is possessed of enemies more dangerous by far, which are always disposed to join with him in whatever temptations he presents? It certainly is. The fall of our first parents ought to teach us humility, and a constant dependence on divine grace for our safety, unto which it is wholly owing.

2. Sovereign goodness alone provides for, and secures the lasting felicity of angels and men. Angels owe their standing unto favour beyond what is due unto a creature. God is not obliged to preserve the will of any creature from making an improper choice, by his determining influence upon it. Holiness is the intelligent creature's due, in his creation, on the footing of equity; but none have a farther claim upon God. If, therefore, he affords additional aid in order to prevent his creatures from sinning, through the mutability of their wills, it is the mere effect of his sovereign goodness. Unto this the saints owe their security in heaven. Invariable happiness rests on a certain and infallible cause, which the will of the holiest creature is not. Immutability can no more take place in the will of a creature, than any other perfection can, which is peculiar to the nature of God.

3. What a low notion the Socinians and Arminians have of rectitude, righteousness, and the image of God! I must needs say, that though they pretend to be zealous for holiness above others, their false notions about it, is one of the principal objections I have against their sentiments. This I know, that as there was more in man, in innocency, than they will allow of, so more is required to be in men, in order to the enjoyment of happiness hereafter, than they judge necessary hereunto. A man may carry to hell along with him, that which they call a preparation for heaven. And I am sure, if their experience, as to holiness, is not beyond their notions of it, they will never come there.

4. How greatly was the sin of man aggravated? It was committed against knowledge, and under great advantages, through the beneficence of the

object against whom it was directed, after warning given, and an explicit declaration of the consequence of his transgression. In his crime there was presumption, unbelief, horrid ingratitude, and rebellion against the most just, the most kind, and the most beneficent Ruler. How dreadful, therefore was his offence! No circumstance was wanting in it, which could aggravate it.

5. Since God shewed him mercy, as we have reason to conclude he did, what encouragement may we collect from hence, to hope for favour, under the deepest sense of our unworthiness.

6. How should we adore the rich mercy and grace of God, which hath provided for the recovery of lapsed men! He was under no more obligation to rebellious man, than to apostate spirits. And, therefore, he might as justly have left men, who are the sinful descendants of Adam, eternally to perish, as he has those angels that sinned. Can we seriously think of this without wonder, admiration, and praise! If we have any spiritual sense, and gratefulness in our minds, we cannot.

CHAPTER 2

Of The Present Entire Depravity Of Human Nature

MANY seem to, take a peculiar pleasure in extolling of human nature, and give such a representation of the state of mankind, as is plainly a contradiction both to Scripture and universal experience. Because man still continues intelligent, and hath a power of willing and nilling, of loving and hating, which is essential to his constitution and make, and, therefore, can never be lost, without his ceasing to be man, they persuade themselves, and would fain make others believe also, that human nature is not much, if anything, a sufferer by the fall. Hence, they are exceedingly lavish in their encomiums, and groundless flattering applauses of the human excellency. The depravation of our nature is not the loss of intelligence; but of that ability to exert itself in a wise and fit manner, which it originally possessed. And therefore,

When we assert the necessity of the communication of divine grace, in order to our acting in a holy and fit manner, we do not suggest that we are passive in doing good, nor that we are acted upon as machines and puppets, which have not intelligence, and consequently, neither perception, volition, nor pleasure, in or about any objects, towards which they are impelled to move. Those who object either the one or the other to us, plainly discover the want of due attention to what we say, or a defect in their boasted intellectuals, or else a want of fairness and honesty in their reasoning.

Our depravity is a subject very largely treated of in the Holy Scriptures.

And it is only the light of revelation which can guide us into the knowledge of the true nature and extent of that depravation which attends us. The following particulars are clearly taught and strongly inculcated, in those writings.

I. We are dead in sin. Death is not a decay of vigour and strength, through sickness, disorder, or wounds; but a privation of life, taken in a natural sense, as the body is the subject of it. And in a religious view, as the mind is the subject of death, it is not a diminution of power for acting in a holy manner, but a total loss and privation of that power. The life we lost by sin, is not that spiritual principle which flows from new covenant love; but that principle of holiness, which was concreated with man, and was connatural to him. Men indeed are without the former; but it is in a way of negation only, not by privation, as they are of the latter. Human nature in its original state, was not the subject of the former, and, consequently, it could not be lost by man's apostacy. Since we are deprived of this principle of holiness, in consequence of sin, we must be incapable of performing that obedience the law requires of us. And much more must we be unable to act in a spiritual manner, about and towards spiritual objects and things, to whose nature the new creature is congruous, and upon which it acts itself.

II. We are under the dominion of sin. Whatever is intended by this phrase, it is true of all those who are under the law. Romans 6:14. Hence we must conclude that the tyranny of sin is of universal extent, for all men are in subjection to the law, considered as the descendants of Adam. The phrase necessarily supposes that sin hath possession of the soul; for the mind certainly is the subject of that, under whose direction and influences it acts, whether it be a good or evil principle. Besides, it evidently suggests that the mind is in subjection to evil, as a governing principle, which determines it in all its volitions and acts. This rule of sin is not a force upon the mind, to which it makes opposition, for the soul is a subject, and not a captive to evil. It cannot but will evil, through the reign of sin; yet, all its evil volitions are spontaneous and free.

The dominion of sin consists in its determining influence upon the will. And this sway over the mind it keeps, until victorious grace makes a conquest upon the soul, by the implantation of a contrary principle, (which opposes the influence of sin, and disposes the will to contrary acts) let conscience remonstrate ever so sharply against the fatal choice sin inclines the will to make.

This is not a propensity to some particular evil; but an inclination to deviate from the rule of our duty, taken in its full compass. Yet, as the mind is incapable of exerting itself all manner of ways, and about all sorts of

objects at once, and in one instant, it is sometimes acting in one manner, and sometimes in another, as it is variously affected by the different objects about which it is conversant; but all its actions are evil. And those who study their own hearts most, will best understand the surprising variety of ways wherein evil concupiscence acts its part in the soul.

In the several stages of human life, this reigning power of sin discovers itself. In childhood, by follies proper to that age. In youth it exerts itself in various ways, by a low ambition, pride, and a strange fondness for sinful pleasures. In the state of manhood, by a pursuit of the transitory things of this world, and this is often under specious pretences of more extensive usefulness; but in fact, men are acted by a spirit of covetousness; and in an advanced age, by impatience, etc.

III. Ignorance and darkness have overspread our minds. As a person who hath not a power of seeing is incapable of being impressed by the strongest rays of light, which any bodies reflect upon him, and must be unable to form ideas of their appearance; so men, naturally, by reason of the blindness of their minds, cannot discern the nature of heavenly things. Hence the notions which they form about them are contrary to their nature, and they think them to be the very reverse of what in fact they are. The highest wisdom they account folly; and objects the most glorious and attractive, when viewed as they are in themselves, they despise and reject, as having in their account nothing of the amiable and charming in them. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” In which words, are these things observable, —

1. The person spoken of, a man who is not the subject of something supernatural, which might entitle him to a more raised character than that of natural, which is inclusive of all those accomplishments that are to be acquired by instruction, reading, and the most assiduous meditation.

2. The things of the Spirit of God, i.e. Christian doctrines, which are foolishness to him, he discerns not anything of wisdom in them, they seem to him the reverse, and, therefore, he despises them, as a rational man ought to contemn what is absurd and foolish.

3. He cannot know them, i.e. the things themselves, though he may the truth of them.

4. The reason is, they are spiritually discerned.

This incapacity of understanding divine mysteries, is common to all unregenerate persons. But in some, it is greatly heightened by the influence of Satan, who hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, and by various strong prejudices of their own contracting, through pride, and a

vain elation of mind, supposing themselves equal to the discovery of every branch of truth that is necessary to be known, in order to their happiness. And sometimes this darkness is increased, by a judicial act of God, giving them wholly over to follow the dictates of their own corrupt and distempered minds.

IV. Men are obstinate. The unyielding disposition of the human mind to heavenly things, is beyond expression. On this account, the heart is compared to a stone, to a rock, and the neck to an iron sinew. We not only want ability to perform what is good; but a will and inclination to it also. The most pathetic entreaties and moving expostulations, cannot entice the mind to close with what is absolutely necessary to its solid peace and final happiness; nor the most awakening threats and thundering menaces, force the will to retract the evil choice it has once made. An unsanctified mind will forever risk the loss of the chiefest good, and suffer the greatest misery, to gratify its sinful desires. And numerous are the evasive and deceitful reasonings it will use to prevent a sense of this its stupidity being fixed on it, to the disturbance of so ruinous a security.

As men are without ability to come to Christ, and submit to His authority, which is their misery; so they will not come to Him, that they might have life; but they reject Him by a positive act of opposition against Him, in the character of a Saviour, and this is their guilt, and will add to the weight of their punishment. There is such a settled aversion in the mind to holiness in them, that it will never be drawn by the alluring promises of happiness, nor be driven by the awful denunciations of death and everlasting misery, to subject itself to the law of God. Enmity, which the carnal mind is against God and his law, will never be soothed, or terrified into the love of either. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8:7.

The seeds of all vice are in all men, though all vices are not predominant in the conduct of any man. Some things may be proposed for consideration to confirm it.

1. The unregenerate mind approves not of any branch of holiness the law enjoins; but is contrary to it.

2. Nor does it disapprove of any sin, as sin, or as it is a breach of the divine law. Under some other considerations it may have a dislike of particular vices.

3. That which disposes to the breach of one divine precept, is not inclined to keep any upon the authority of the legislator.

4. Some vices are predominant in one man, and others in another; one is immersed in sensual pleasures; another, who despises them as low and

sordid, is carried by a torrent of intellectual vices, which, though they are more secret, are not less criminal. One man is proud, another is covetous. One is envious, another is malicious and wrathful.

5. Different vices act their part in the very same person, at different times, and under different temptations and circumstances; so you shall see the same person sometimes covetous, and sometimes profuse; sometimes fearful and diffident; sometimes presuming and rash. These things fully prove that men are the subjects of a disposition to violate the law in every part of it, and that they have not an inclination to obey any part of it. For

6. That in man which inclines him to neglect any duty, is disposed to none; and that which prompts him to one unlawful action, will lead him on under a different temptation to another of a different kind, how much soever he may fancy himself averse to it. The reason is evident; a disposition to any vice, sensual or intellectual, is wholly evil in its nature, and, therefore, it will betray a person into the commission of any unlawful action, when, and as it is influenced by various temptations. For though it is not possible that the flesh should gratify itself at once, in all the ways it can act, it will not refuse the gratification of its various lusts at different times, and by different acts.

V. No unregenerate person acts agreeably to the law in any instance. It is allowed that he may perform what is materially good, and decline what is materially evil, in many particulars, and thereby obtain the character of a virtuous man; but, yet not having in his heart a principle of holiness, which alone is the spring of actions, that are properly good, and pleasing to God, nothing he acts corresponds with the rule of his duty, with respect to its motives, its source, nor its end. To conceit that holy acts may arise from natural principles, and be performed by natural powers, is an imagination, which entirely destroys the grace of the gospel, and totally nullifies the distinction between persons regenerate and unregenerate. If this may be admitted, it is most certain that regeneration is unnecessary; the consequence is clearly discerned, and those actings of the mind, which are the genuine fruits of that gracious work of God upon men, are boldly pronounced enthusiastic and irrational by many, who put in their claim for the name of Christians. To such a height is men's contempt of divine grace advanced, in our sad times.

Holiness, in general, is a submission to God's authority in the law; or, it is an approbation of the commanding will of God: and this necessarily supposes a subjection unto his authority in every branch of duty. A holy mind declines whatever God forbids, and chooses to practice all he requires, without any exception. Nothing short of this is TRUE holiness. If, therefore, we approve not of our duty in its full extent, we are greatly mistaken, if we imagine that we have a real liking unto any part of it. A person who hath no principle

of holiness in him, may be disinclined to many vices, and be disposed to practise various virtues, as he discerns the former are unfit actions, and the latter are comely and fit actions in themselves; but his disapprobation of vice, and approbation of virtue, arise not from a disposition to submit to the will of God in the law, and, therefore, his dislike of vice is not universal, nor is his liking of virtue of that extent. Whereas a man imprincipled with real holiness, his aversion to evil and choice of good, are of the same compass with the law in its prohibitions and precepts. Where there is not an universal approbation of duty, there is not a real liking of any part of it, as duty. If our minds submit not unto the will of God in all He commands, we submit not to His authority in anything which He enjoins.

And if a man hates sin, as sin, or as it is contrary to the will of God, his abhorrence of evil must be of the same compass as the law is, in its prohibitions. But if his aversion to evil springs from other considerations, how great soever that aversion may be to some particular sins, it extends not unto all sin, nor is it a dislike of any sin, as sin; but as an action followed with some inconveniences, which he chooses to avoid; or at best, as an action unbecoming a creature of his make and rank: wherein, there is no true hatred of sin, as such. Abhorrence of evil, as evil, supposes an acquaintance with the exceeding sinfulness of sin, which produces in the mind a dislike of it, because of the malignity and vileness of its nature; and, where that is, the opposition unto it certainly is universal. Indulgence cannot be given unto any lust, either of the flesh, or of the mind. But, on the contrary, if the heart is not wrought up unto an abhorrence of sin, as sin, it will be for sparing some cursed lust, or another, under some pretence or other, either that it is but a small offence, and no great harm is in it; or, that he will hereafter part with it, and give it up to be slain in a future time; or, that God is not so rigorous, as not to connive at some little gratifications of our strong desires. Ten thousand ways the flesh hath of pleading for itself against the dictates of the conscience; and it will surely prevail in the issue in some degree, or other, unless a person hates sin, as sin.

Besides, grace only qualifies a person for performing holy and acceptable obedience. Until heavenly light is infused into our minds, we discern not the nature of that obedience which God requires of us, as Christians. That is not a legal, but evangelical obedience. The matter of it is indeed contained in the law, if not formally, yet radically; but the motives to it, and the ends of it, are such as the law is unacquainted with, and gives us no direction about. Those ends of obedience which are proper to the law, respecting us, are our justification and life by it, which are incompatible with the gospel; for that is a revelation of the acceptance of our persons, and of our right

to life, upon another foundation. Now, before a man is furnished with a spiritual understanding of the gospel way of justification, he acts in direct contradiction to the righteousness of God in the law, and unto his grace in the gospel. For though he cannot yield such obedience as the law requires, he proposes to obtain justification by what he acts, which proposal is contrary unto the righteousness of God in the law, for that requires sinless obedience unto that end; and in this proposal, he openly renounces the gospel of Christ, or submits not unto that righteousness of God, which is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith. And, therefore, his obedience cannot be accepted with God, or entitle him unto life.

That obedience which flows from faith in Christ, in a poor sinner, only is acceptable to God. "For without faith it is impossible to please God." The reasons of which are evident. In this obedience, the equity and justice of God are heartily acknowledged, in requiring a perfect observance of his holy commands, in order to justification and life. And, therein, a person approves of God's gracious method of justifying and saving miserable sinners, alone by and through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Wherein, his grace, wisdom, and justice most conspicuously shine, which his soul humbly adores. Besides, this obedience is an effect of gratitude, for the many great and inestimable blessings God in a way of mere sovereign goodness and mercy, bestows upon unworthy creatures, and it is cheerfully and voluntarily performed. A man is sweetly drawn by a sense of love, and not driven by the terrors of the law in what he acts. Whereas, an unbeliever, in his acts of obedience, proposes to make God a debtor to himself thereby; although his obedience is far, very far from being such as the law demands to that end, which is one of the highest acts of rebellion against the righteousness and justice of God, in the character of a lawgiver, that a sinner can be guilty of. Farther, this is not a choice of duty, as such; but only in a certain respect, and so far as regard to self-interest enters into it, which frame of mind God abhors.

VI. If it is a truth, that persons who are born again, act in a holy spiritual manner, only according to that spiritual principle, which is wrought in them at the time of their regeneration; then, no actions of an unregenerate man are good and holy. But Scripture and experience concur in giving evidence that this is true. The flesh serves the law of sin; and that which is engaged in the service of sin, will never be brought to enter into the service of God. It is in its nature to oppose the spiritual part, in all its motions and acts. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." And, therefore, the heart of a believer is never entirely holy in any of his actings; but imperfections, and a tincture of evil, attend his best performances, by reason of the continual presence of the law of sin, whereof he is the subject. And, consequently, such who

are unregenerate, have no spring of holy actions in them; hence, it must be concluded, that nothing they do can be holy and acceptable to God.

That an unregenerate person is the subject of evil habits only, is a clear case. For if an unregenerate man hath good principles in him, there can be no difference between a man who is in a regenerate state and one who is not. Persons born again are the subjects of evil habits, as well as of good habits; and, therefore, if an unregenerate person hath good principles in him, which dispose him unto good and holy acts, all difference between a man that is born of God, and one who is not, must necessarily be sunk and lost; because a regenerate man is no more, nor other than he is, viz., the subject of holiness and sin; to suppose which, is absurd and contradictory unto the whole current of sacred writ. Again, upon this principle, regeneration is not necessary, nay, it is impossible that it can pass upon a man, who is holy in the temper and disposition of his mind; for that work is the production of somewhat in a person, which before he was not the subject of; and that must be holiness, because God is the author of it; except there may be a birth, when nothing is produced, which is contradictory to reason. Regeneration is absolutely necessary to every man's final happiness, and, consequently, no man is holy before he is regenerated. All men, therefore, are void of holiness, as a principle, or spring of action, that is naturally; and of course no man until he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, can yield an holy obedience unto God. An unregenerate man is in the flesh, and cannot please God. He is wholly flesh, or hath nothing of spirit in him, from which spiritual acts can arise, such as faith, hope, love, and reverence of God.

VII. The carnal mind is enmity against God. By the carnal mind is intended a soul destitute of the spirit and grace of God, or which is in the flesh, and, therefore, cannot please God. Men may dispute, as long as they think fit; but they will never be able to prove that any unregenerate mind is other than flesh, whether it is drenched in sensual lusts, or no. All men in a state of unregeneracy are enmity against God. He is the object of their aversion. I sometimes, indeed, hear good, wise, and learned men, in popular addresses to sinners, tell them that they cannot believe, that they will care to say that they do not desire to have anything to do with God; but, that they are willing to gratify some lust, or another, which is the reason why they are for postponing acquaintance with God; and pathetically expostulating with them on this head, inform them that this is the accepted time, and that this is the day of salvation; and with great earnestness labour to convince them of their folly, in putting off until another season, a choice of God and real happiness, for the sake of any unlawful gratifications. This arises from the want of a due consideration of the dreadful truth, that the language of

the hearts of sinners unto the Almighty, is, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." The fact is really this; men choose lust, because they are not disposed unto a choice of God and holiness and not that they neglect to make choice of God, because they choose sin. A mind which chooses not God, certainly chooses sin, of that there can be no doubt. But the reason why a man chooses not God, is not because he chooses sin; but he chooses sin, because he chooses not God, through an alienation of mind from him. And I observe, that the very same persons who thus expostulate with sinners, when they are treating on different subjects, plainly tell them that they cannot understand, and make choice of spiritual things, through the blindness of their minds, and a fixed aversion in their hearts unto those things; and so they allow of the truth of what, when discoursing on some other subjects, they vehemently declare that they cannot be persuaded is true. The consistency of these things, I have no discernment of; nor is it in my power to reconcile contradictions. Alas! the dismal fact is this, our hearts are estranged from God, are enmity against Him, and are by no means willing to have anything to do with Him, nor with what is acceptable and pleasing to Him; and, therefore, there is nothing so vain, so trifling, nay, so pernicious, that we choose not, rather than God and holiness. Nor is it possible to persuade a depraved mind, to believe that its happiness consists in a sense of the favour of God, and in a conformity to His holy will, and, consequently, to prevail with it to choose God and holiness, by the highest strains of rhetoric such can use, who are best qualified for striking the passions of mankind, in the manner of their address.

Men's enmity against God appears in a variety of ways. They like not to think of him, as he is an infinitely holy and pure Being, and necessarily hates sin, and disapproves of the persons of sinners; nor, as he is a sovereign Being, and, consequently, may dispense of his favours according to his absolute pleasure, with respect to the guilty creature — that he may either save or destroy transgressors, just as it seems good in his sight. And, as men like not to think of God, so they take no pleasure in discoursing on him. No subject of conversation is so unacceptable to men in general, as God is; especially in the purity of his nature, the strictness of his justice, and his infinite displeasure with sin; these are things, which they hope, are not true, which is the very same as hoping that there is no God. The denial of these divine perfections amounts unto a denial of Deity. And he who takes a secret pleasure in thinking that God is not so holy, so inflexibly just, and so displeased with sin, as his Word represents him, wishes there was no God. For it is the same thing if we desire that we may not find him to be what he really is, viz. in purity, holiness, justice, and righteousness, as to wish that he

were not.

Enmity against God appears in an opposition to his law, in the extent and spirituality of its precepts, and in the terror of its threatenings for a breach of its commands. Its requirements are thought too strict, and its menaces too severe, by the carnal mind. God's authority in commanding is despised, and his justice in denouncing punishment, is censured as cruel. The carnal mind will not acknowledge the equity of divine precepts in their full compass, nor the justice of divine threatenings for a failure of obedience, in that extent which the law requires. Men who oppose the sovereignty of the grace of God in the gospel, are enemies to his authority in the law, and will always be so. Such who think that saving grace must be of universal extent, always judge that it is fit and proper that the law should be dispensed with, in the rigour of its commands. And they often break out into ungodly and hard speeches, against both the justice of God in the law, and his sovereignty in the gospel. Because, according to the former, they are obnoxious to eternal misery; and according to the latter, salvation cannot possibly be of themselves, either in whole or in part; but is entirely resolved into the free will of God, without any moving consideration in them. Men can neither be reconciled to the holiness of God, in the constitution of the law, nor to his grace in the constitution of the gospel. He who is an enemy to the latter, he also is so to the former.

I think that this natural opposition of the human mind to God and goodness, may be strongly argued from the motions and actings of the unregenerate part in believers. What their minds are according to that part, that the hearts of the unregenerate wholly are, as to spiritual things. Now, the flesh in the mints, opposes the actings of the spiritual part in them; and it raises other thoughts, other desires, and other delights in the mind, and is conversant with other objects than grace is; hence are all their wanderings in duty, their backwardness unto it, and weariness of it. The flesh is not for holding fellowship with God; He is the object of its aversion, and it too often diverts the mind from the object it hath no delight in, but averse from. This it is which renders it so difficult to contemplate heavenly things without distraction, and tergiversations of soul. And, if it is thus with sanctified persons, through the influence of the carnal part (unto the truth of which sad experience universally testifies) it necessarily follows, that the heart of an unsanctified person, is all opposition to God and holiness. And by how much the more any duty is spiritual, or how much the more nearly God is to be treated with therein, by so much the more our hearts are disinclined unto it. He is the most happy man living, who meets with the least interruption from the flesh in his contemplations on God, in his approaches unto him, and in communion with him, let his circumstances, as a man, be what they

may.

And hence we may learn that the carnal mind hath no desire of possessing heaven. Many delude their souls as to this matter, and think that they desire the happiness of that state, who have no love to God, nor the least pleasure in heavenly objects. None are willing to suffer the torments of hell, but they are few who have any relish for the joys of heaven. Let us not deceive ourselves in an affair of such importance. If we now have no pleasure in thoughts of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the mysteries relating to his person, and offices, and work, and precious benefits, we certainly have no disposition to enjoy heavenly glory; nor is it possible that we should take any delight in the fellowship subsisting in that state, or the pure spiritual service which is performed by the happy inhabitants of that blissful world. Our hearts are certainly averse from heavenly objects, heavenly communion, and heavenly service. If we form a conclusion that we desire heaven, merely because we are afraid of hell, we are under a dreadful deception. We may tremble at an apprehension of suffering the vengeance of God, when we have no desire of enjoying a sense of his favour.

If men are not swearers, or unclean persons, nor drunkards, or thieves, they are very apt to flatter themselves that all is well, that they are in a safe and happy state. "They are pure in their own eyes; but they are not washed from their filthiness." This is a sad delusion. Many who act not a brutal part, frequently act a diabolical one. They wallow not in the mire of sensual lusts; but they are under the sway of intellectual lusts, pride, covetousness, wrath, anger, malice, contempt of others, who, perhaps, in no sense, are their inferiors; these vices appear in them to the observation of almost every spectator. Can we think that such sort of persons are holy and good? We must be as much unacquainted with both sin and holiness as they themselves are, if we do. I must needs say, that no persons are more strangers unto real holiness than some, who despise others, because they imagine, that they excel them therein. They often say to such, who are truly sanctified, "stand by thyself, come not near to me, I am holier than thou," whereas in fact, they are as distant from true holiness, as any persons in the world can be. The proud pharisee, while he swells with an opinion of his superior merit, is no other than a slave, though not to sensual, yet to intellectual lusts. No persons are more remote from holiness than some who scorn to indulge sensual lust. The Pharisees, who were as unholy as any men upon earth, were not whoremongers, adulterers, nor drunkards; they abstained from those sordid vices, and practised many virtues, which much recommended them to the people, and caused them to esteem them as persons of great sanctity. If they had not maintained regularity in conduct, our Saviour would never

have compared them to “whited sepulchres,” which are fair and beautiful; and he would not have likened them to tombs, if they had not been inwardly full of putrid lusts. They declined fleshly lusts; but lusts of the mind were predominant in them. And this is the sad condition of many, who think themselves, and are accounted by others, righteous persons. Concupiscence is very extensive in its actings, and while it is restrained from exerting itself in one way, it acts with great violence in another. It is surprising how ready lusts of the mind are to break forth in some, who are not so much inclined to gratify the lusts of the flesh.

Malice and revenge often possess the breasts of men for a long season, and with great impetuosity break forth into injurious acts against their objects, whenever a fit opportunity offers, how long soever it may be, since they conceived displeasure in their minds against them.

Farther. That a man is either regenerate or unregenerate, is evident from many considerations.

1. He is either dead in sin, or alive unto God. There is no medium between death and life. What is life, but a principle of action, taken either in a natural or spiritual sense? If, therefore, a person hath such a principle in him, he is a living man; but if there is a total want of such a principle, or power in him, he is dead, and is absolutely incapable of action. And consequently, men must be either the subjects of spiritual life, or not. If they are the subjects of such a principle, they are of “the living in Jerusalem,” as the prophet’s phrase is. On the contrary, if they have no spiritual principle in them, they are dead in trespasses and sins. To conceit that a man may be neither living nor dead, is a ridiculous imagination. Again,

2. A person is either light or darkness, in a spiritual sense. He is darkness, if he hath no ability of discerning spiritual things. On the other hand, he is made light in the Lord, if he hath any capacity of seeing the glory of God in the person of Christ. This respects not the degree of light; but the presence of it, or the absolute and total want thereof. If a man is wholly destitute of such light, he is in darkness, and is darkness; but if in any measure, he hath this heavenly light, he is not in a state of darkness. In some, this light is strong, in others, it is feeble. Some discern spiritual things in a clear and distinct manner, others more confusedly, they “see men as trees walking.” But in all who have it, it will “shine more and more, unto the perfect day.” I add,

3. Men are either under the law, or under grace. The unregenerate are under the law, and there they must abide, whether they will or no, until they derive grace, light, and life from Christ. They like not their situation indeed, when conscience is awakened. And how should they, for it is a dreadful one? Such who are the subjects of the law, and retained under its power, fain would

come under the rule of what they through ignorance, imagine is the grace of the gospel. The yoke of the law galls them grievously, and, therefore, they are desirous to shake it off, or plead for an abatement in the strictness of its precepts, for a release from its curse; but it holds them fast, whether they will or not; it is God's just appointment, that so it shall be. And, consequently, their attempts to lay hold on evangelical privileges and benefits, are no other than endeavours to rob God of the choicest jewels He designs to bestow on His creatures. They have no present title to receive gospel promises and gospel consolations. Let them hear what the law saith, in its commands, prohibitions, and terrible threatenings, for they are according to justice its subjects. Men's concern for the encouragement of sinners in a state of unregeneracy, proceeds from ignorance of the true nature both of the law and gospel, or from a dreadful corruption of each. Such who are under grace, are indeed dead to the law by the body of Christ; and that wherein they were held, while in unregeneracy, i.e. the law is become dead to them, that is to say, as in the form of a covenant, and, therefore, they are not subject to its threatenings; but have a visible claim, according to the ordination of God, unto gospel promises, gospel privileges, and gospel consolations, and no other than these persons have any such claim. Again,

4. A man is either holy or unholy. Holiness here intends not perfection, but a holy gracious principle implanted in the heart by the Spirit of God, which disposes the mind unto acts of holy obedience to the law, for such uses and ends as are appointed of God. The man who is destitute of such a principle is unregenerate, whatever his convictions are, his sorrows, his joys, his resolutions, or his acts thereupon. There is no medium between sanctification and a total want of it. It is true that there are degrees in it; but impossible it is that any man can neither be sanctified in part, nor un sanctified. Such an apprehension is a mere dream. And, therefore, there can be no intermediate state between regeneracy and unregeneracy.

5. A man is either in a state of meetness for heaven, or he is not. If a person may be in a condition neither fit nor wholly unfit for heaven, then the notion of Purgatory is not so ridiculous as Protestant writers have represented it. Why may it not be thought probable, that men dying in such a condition, may be detained in some middle state, between heaven and hell, until such time as they shall be prepared for an entrance into the blissful mansions? This is the only doctrine by which the purifying flames of purgatory can be supported. Moreover,

6. The Scripture gives us no other distinction of men, than believers and unbelievers; of men who have faith, and those who have not faith. Unto the former, ministers are charged with a comfortable message; and unto the

latter with a dreadful one. "He that believeth, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned." The law condemns all as transgressors, and the gospel is a revelation of pardon, peace, and salvation, as claimable only by believers. Until a man believes in Jesus Christ, he can have no ground of comfort and peace. We must first die to the law, and despair of obtaining life in that way, before we can rightly receive comfort from the gospel.

That secret right the elect have to pardon, justification, and blessedness in Christ, is not the foundation on which faith acts, but the divine declaration of God in the gospel.

These things, I suppose, are sufficient to prove, that there is no intermediate state between regeneracy and unregeneracy. If not, more arguments offer themselves immediately to consideration, which would abundantly confirm it. Now, if there is no such intermediate state, then it will follow that no unregenerate man can be subject to the law of God, can discern the things of the Spirit, or can come to Christ, and believe in him. The carnal mind and the natural, must mean an unregenerate person, or one who is not born of God; and what is denied of the power of any in such a state, is denied of all who are in that state, whether they be profligate and abandoned sinners or no. Some observations on this subject.

Observ. 1. Pride in men, as it is a sin, so it is extreme folly. For we have all lost that which was the true glory of our nature, and are become the subjects of such base and sordid lusts, as render us most abominable and hateful.

2. Salvation must be unconditional and free; because as the human mind is thus debased, it is incapable of performing duty, in order to the reception of divine benefits.

3. It is astonishing goodness in God favorably to regard men.

He is at full liberty to bestow the special blessings of his grace on whom he pleases, since none can prevent divine goodness by holy acts of obedience.

4. It betrays self-ignorance in those who extol human wisdom and power.

5. If we imagine that we have a natural capacity of doing good, it is an evidence that we are in a state of unregeneracy. I would now answer some objections.

Object. 1. If it is once believed by men that they are thus impaired in their ability to do good, it will prevent them acting the best they can.

Ans. Wholly to neglect duty, because we cannot perform it as we ought, is a most dreadful way of sinning, and doubtless will add much to the weight of our punishment.

Object. 2. Ungodly men have desired and sought after spiritual good, and therefore, the human mind is capable of being raised up towards heavenly things. So did Balaam, for instance.

Ans. In spiritual blessings, three things are to be considered. 1. A freedom from misery, and the enjoyment of ease and pleasure, which are eligible to nature, though corrupt. 2. The true nature of those blessings, as spiritual, so they are neither discerned nor desired by a depraved mind. 3. God's way of bestowing these blessings is despised and rejected, as foolish and unfit, by the carnal mind.

Object. 3. The proofs which are brought to confirm this doctrine of the universal depravation of human nature, are impertinently alleged, because they are no other than descriptive characters of the baser part of mankind, who are abandoned to vice, and, consequently, those proofs in no way affect, nor can they relate to men of sobriety, virtue, and religion.

Ans. This objection, I confess, requires a particular consideration; for if it is founded upon fact and truth, then the whole scheme of what we account the gospel of the grace of God, will necessarily vanish into nothing.

1. There is no intermediate state between unregeneracy and regeneracy; or, every man is either unregenerate or regenerate. These two classes divide and comprise all mankind.

2. Regeneration is a work of God upon men, which capacitates them for, and disposes them unto a holy and acceptable obedience. And, therefore,

3. Until this work is wrought upon a man, he is not able to "serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear." For,

4. Every unregenerate person is the subject of impure habits only. He hath no good and holy principles in him. Yet,

5. There is a difference among unregenerate men, as to the eruption, or breaking forth of evil in their conduct. Though all of this character are unable to do good, yet many of them are just, sober, and benevolent in their behaviour, and do not run into any excess of riot. Hence it follows,

6. That we must not conclude that every unregenerate person is that in his conduct, which the Scripture charges upon some who are in this state, viz. a swearer, a deceitful man, a murderer, and other the like detestable characters.

7. Some things expressed in Holy Scripture of an evil nature, are true of all unregenerate persons, viz. ignorance of spiritual things, aversion to them, enmity against God, and the like. These must be granted to be true of all who are in a state of unregeneracy, except it can be proved that there is an intermediate state between unregeneracy and regeneracy, or that a man may be neither unregenerate nor regenerate, but something between both. And, consequently,

8. The seeds of all vice are in all men, though all vice does not appear in the conduct of every man.

9. God, who searches the heart, knows our internal, invisible acts, and in his account, we are what we act internally; and vice, yea, a great many vices may be acted in the mind of a person, who never proceeds so far as to perpetrate vicious acts outwardly; and therefore such who are virtuous in men's esteem, they may, in God's account be exceedingly criminal and vicious.

10. Vice is sensual and intellectual, and either the one or the other is predominant in every unregenerate person. These things, I think, amount unto a full answer to this objection.

What is said of the depravity of mankind, is true of every man: some particular actings of lust relate unto some persons only, which is no contradiction to the doctrine of the depravation of men universally. The truth is this, all men are corrupt; but the corruption of our nature discovers itself in some persons more in one way, in others,

more in another manner. Some things spoken in the Scripture of unregenerate men, respect concupiscence in their hearts; those things are true of all to whom that character belongs, whatever their deportment may be. There are other things expressed of the eruption of lust, in this or the other manner. Some of those particulars are true of one unregenerate man, and others of them are chargeable on some other unregenerate persons. When we say that sin in the heart is a disposition to all and every sin, we do not mean that it actually breaks forth into external acts of all kinds of evil in any man. Perhaps that is not possible, because some lusts are so different from others in some respects, that they are a check upon each other, which prevents the gratification of all sorts of sins, at the same time, and in the same acts. For instance, prodigality and covetousness: a man cannot well be lavish and niggardly in the same acts; though he may be both, in different acts and at different times. What we affirm, and shall always abide by, as a certain truth on this subject, is this, That every man naturally hath no disposition to holiness, and is inclined to evil. But we do not intend that this disposition to evil discovers itself in all the same way, and in the same degree. No, no, we allow that there is a very great difference among unregenerate men, as to the breaking forth of those sins whereof all men are the subjects, both in the manner and degree of them. Some are serious, and others are profane. Some are tender and compassionate, others are cruel and unaffected with the miseries of the most deplorable objects. Some are covetous, others are bountiful and generous in acts of liberality, for the relief of the indigent. Some are swearers, others tremble at an irreverent mention of the great name of their Maker. Some are tricking and fraudulent, others

are men of honour and probity. And, therefore, we are far from thinking that all unregenerate persons are of dissolute manners, or that they are all guilty of all those crimes which the sacred writers impute to men in a state of unregeneracy. Some of them are guilty of one, and others of them are guilty of others of those crimes; and so, take unregenerate men together, or in a collected view, and they afford matter for the whole charge exhibited by the divine writers: and this is what we ought to do, when we treat of the depravity of human nature.

CHAPTER 3

On The Spirit's Work In Regeneration; And Also In Conversion And Sanctification

Regeneration precedes, and may be considered as the foundation and spring of Conversion and Sanctification. For that is the principle from which both arise. Grace as a principle of spiritual acts, is first communicated, and from that proceeds all acts of a holy spiritual nature, both internal and external. Neither of the latter can be, until the former is wrought; and when that is effected, both the latter certainly follow. In the first we are merely passive, in conversion and sanctification we are active. For,

Conversion is the primary actings of the grace of Regeneration, in turning from sin, self, and Satan, unto God through Christ. And,

Sanctification is the progress of that work, and includes in it all the secondary actings of grace, in opposition to sin, and in a course of holy obedience unto God. Having observed the difference between these, I would proceed to shew,

First, The necessity of this work in order to our final happiness. And this will appear by the consideration of two things in general.

I. Without it no man is "meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.

II. Election is the choice of persons to holiness in this state, in order to the enjoyment of happiness in the next.

I. No unregenerate person is meet for, nor capable of enjoying the heavenly state.

1. He is not the subject of a disposition suited to view the infinitely glorious objects with the least degree of delight, which the blessed always behold and adore, viz. God, Christ in his glory as Mediator, and the Holy Spirit. Enmity, which the carnal mind is against God, will eternally turn from Him, and choose other, yea, any other objects, rather than Him to view. His infinite excellencies will never affect with pleasure the depraved mind, nor engage it for a single moment to reverence, praise, and adore him.

2. Nor is an unregenerate person capable of that holy fellowship which subsists in the heavenly world, between God and the saints. This communion, on the part of God, is His discovering to them His infinite perfections, as they have been exercised in the contrivance of the stupendous design of their eternal salvation, and in its accomplishment through the mediation of the blessed Jesus. On their part it is a clear, steady, and uninterrupted prospect thereof, with ineffable pleasure and the most profound reverence. The glory of heaven consists much in a contemplation of the eternal grace, mercy, wisdom, holiness, etc of God, as displayed in our recovery. And, consequently, minds prejudiced against these sublime mysteries, as all our minds naturally are, will never have any relish for them, nor satisfaction in them. Such who are indisposed to gracious communion with God now, will never desire fellowship with him hereafter. Such a cursed aversion is there in our hearts to God, that we could be always content without a sense of His favour, provided we might but, for the same endless duration, be free from a painful sensation of His terrible displeasure. It is not heaven those men love and desire, but hell which they dread, that influences them to reform their conduct, who are enemies to the gospel of Christ. The spiritual, the pure joys of the blessed world, they would never envy the saints the fruition of, were not they to suffer infernal torments. The annihilation of heaven would give them no pain, the ceasing of hell would afford them the highest degree of pleasure they at any time wish for. It is no better than infatuation to think that men whose minds are wholly taken up with trifles and carnal pleasures, who have no inclination to present communion with God, can have any desire to the nearer fellowship with Him in heaven. And, therefore, this new birth is absolutely necessary. Grace must be given, or else glory will never be desired and enjoyed. And this is true of every man.

3. Unregenerate persons are disinclined to that spiritual, pure, and holy service, which is the constant employ of the inhabitants of heaven. The departed saints are not entered into a state of slumber and inactivity; but of the noblest action and service, viz., of praising God, and punctually performing his will, without any interruption or defects. As they have always a ravishing sense of his goodness to them, so they exercise their perfectly pure minds in ascriptions of praise and glory to Him, for delivering them from deserved ruin, and placing them in the blissful mansions, where they find themselves possessed of ease, delight, complacency and glory, wholly unmerited. Now, minds who are unacquainted with the excellency, vast moment, and transcendent glory of the way of salvation, by the blood, righteousness, and grace of Christ, can never unite with the blessed in acts of adoration and praise on that account. For without a perception of the propriety and fitness

of this method of saving sinners, the mind can never be suitably affected with, nor give to God the glory due unto his name, for this infinitely wise and gracious contrivance. And without light subjective, the glory of heaven objectively considered will not be discerned; and, therefore, those only who are now made light in the Lord, will hereafter be capable of beholding the celestial light of glory in the world above. If we do not now admire and bless God for the provisions His rich grace and mercy have made for our pardon, peace, the acceptance of our persons, and the sanctification of our souls, by the sacrifice, obedience, and grace of His only Son, as our alone and complete Saviour; let us never think of an entrance into that world, all whose happy inhabitants are constantly employed in songs of praise to God and the blessed Redeemer, for all saving benefits which flow from His atoning death, and to God a well-pleasing sacrifice; for if we do, we shall find ourselves dreadfully deceived.

II. Election to everlasting life is the choice of persons to holiness here, as the means leading on to the fruition of it hereafter. As future blessedness is the result of the eternal gracious decree of predestination, the enjoyment of that, it must be concluded, was impossible to any, without this purpose of divine grace; and since this decree appoints the participation of holiness here, in order to the possession of felicity hereafter, it is a vain thing to admit the least hope of happiness in eternity, unless we partake of holiness in time. If God receives one unsanctified sinner to glory, He must act contrary to His own purpose, and change a resolution He has formed, which is agreeable to His own infinitely pure nature, and that would be a denial of Himself, which to Him is impossible. Add to this, all those whom God intends to render perfectly happy in the next world, He designs to make, in part, happy in this world; and as holiness is essential to the happiness of an intelligent creature, it is most certain that the participation of a happiness now begun, must consist in partaking of holiness in some degree, at least, as complete happiness supposes a perfection in holiness.

Hence observe, that it is mere calumny to asperse the doctrine of predestination as licentious and unfriendly in its aspect to holiness; nothing is more false in fact, nor anything more contrary to the truth and nature of things can be devised, than that is, with what confidence soever some are pleased to affirm it. That doctrine which supposes the necessity of holiness, and such a necessity as is indispensable in order to happiness, it is irrational to conceit that it is calculated to encourage sin in any. Farther, none can have an evidence of their election, who are destitute of holiness. This secret decree of God about men, opens itself to their view, only by a communication of grace and true holiness. Again, such as are the subjects of holiness, certainly

are objects of predestination unto everlasting life, and shall assuredly enjoy it.

Secondly. I would now shew what Regeneration, Conversion, and Sanctification are, or wherein they consist.

I. Regeneration is the infusion of a new principle of spiritual life. Naturally men are dead in trespasses and sins, and, therefore, in order to their acting in a holy and spiritual manner, a living holy principle must be communicated to them. Hence the saints are said to be quickened, that is to say, they are inspired with life. And this is a new life, and is a spring of new actions. It is called a new heart, and a new spirit, and a heart of flesh. Grace is not our old nature made better, and excited unto spiritual acts; but it is a new nature produced in our minds by the infinite power and grace of God; for which reason we are said to be new creatures. Something now exists in us, which had no being in our minds before. Nothing short of this comes up to the scriptural account of this matter. No excitations, no impulses, no aids, however forcible and great they are supposed to be, reach the intention of the Holy Spirit in those phrases which he uses on this subject. Besides, our corrupt nature is not a fit subject for heavenly excitations, nor is it possible to bring it in subjection to the obedience of Christ. The carnal mind can never become subject to the law of God. A bitter fountain will as soon send forth sweet streams, which all know is impossible. Regeneration doth not consist in acts, but in the production of a principle disposed unto actions holy and well-pleasing unto God, by Jesus Christ; and therefore this work is instantaneous, and wrought on the mind at once.

II. By Conversion I understand what may be called the primary actings of the regenerate principle: before I proceed in discoursing on which, I would premise two things; one is, the human mind, as it seems to me, is one rational principle of operation. The schools have taught us that there are three distinct powers of the human soul, viz., the understanding, the will, and the affections. They have done this for the sake of accuracy, in speaking of the distinct actings of our minds. I much question whether this is according to truth in philosophy, and I cannot but apprehend that it hath not been serviceable to the cause of truth in divinity; particularly, in treating on the subject now under consideration.

It seems to me, that our intelligent nature is one power, and not the subject of different and distinct powers, but capable of exerting itself in various modes. in perception, willing, nilling, loving, hating, etc. The other thing I would premise is this; that grace is one spiritual principle of operation in the soul; and not, properly speaking, various and distinct habits seated in our mind, but able to exert itself after divers ways, — as in spiritual

perception, holy choosing and refusing, loving and delighting in spiritual things, in a spiritual manner, which are commonly spoken of as acts of so many different and distinct habits of grace in our minds; but I think that they all proceed from one principle as their common root and spring. If this is true, those contests which have arisen and been litigated between learned men, concerning grace as having one power of the mind only for its subject, and concerning the impropriety of supposing that the grace of faith is seated in two powers of the soul, viz., the understanding and the will: I say, if this is true, those contests may soon be terminated; and that it is not, I am humbly of opinion, neither philosophy nor religion will prove. In conversion, or the primary actings of the regenerate principle, may be observed the following particulars: —

1. The mind perceives, or hath a conviction of its guiltiness and impurity. The soul is impressed with a piercing sense of guilt, and it is directed to look into that fountain from which have sprung all its sad criminal actions. And it discerns therein a disposition to violate the law of God in as great a variety of ways as our reasonable nature is capable of exerting itself. This is what the apostle designs by the revival of sin upon the entrance of the law into the soul: — “I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” Romans 7:9. Moreover, that spiritual light which is communicated in regeneration enables a man to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin; he becomes now really acquainted with the malignity of sin in its nature, as it is contrary to the holy law of God, which law is a transcript of His infinitely pure and holy nature. And from that arises an abhorrence of it, as a most vile and loathsome thing.

2. The demerit of sin is also discerned; that the wages of it is eternal death, or the loss of divine favour, and suffering a dreadful and terrible sense of the anger of God, and that forever: from which arise many bitter self-reproaches, and most keen reflections on account of sin committed. And the equity of the constitution in the law, that sin shall expose to such terrible punishment, is heartily acknowledged. Thus, a person's mouth is stopped, and he confesses himself to be guilty before God, or justly liable to His awful vengeance, for his numerous transgressions and the plague of his heart. Hence he cries out, What shall I do to be saved? In what way may I escape my dreadful doom, and obtain life and happiness? Rest and peace are at the greatest distance, and it is vain to hope for them in this state, says a person under this conviction.

3. The poor sinner is convinced of the absolute impossibility of contributing, in the least degree, to his recovery out of this miserable condition. Many ways are usually suggested to the mind; but as none of

them are safe for a person to trust unto, by the light of divine grace the poor sinner sees the vanity of them all, and that it would be acting a most egregiously foolish part in him, to propose placing any confidence in the flesh; — that it would be building on the sand, and that therefore the fall of the superstructure must be certain, in a time of temptation and trial.

4. God, in infinite goodness and compassion, by his Holy Spirit, discovers Christ in his suitableness, ability, and tenderness, as a Saviour, unto the poor trembling sinner. The merit of his obedience, the merit of his sacrifice, and the treasures of his grace, are presented to the view of the soul for its encouragement, support, and relief, in this distressed condition. And the prospect of a Redeemer, under a sense of guilt, its nakedness, pollution, and want of holiness, as a meetness for heaven, prevents the mind, overwhelmed with grief, from sinking into despondency. Hence,

5. Desires after an interest in Christ spring up in the mind, and it resolves to look for salvation in no other way. For it is fully convinced that security can only be had in this; and it also discerns in some measure, the glory of this method of salvation, And though the poor sinner heartily acknowledges that Christ might very justly reject him, and refuse to shew him favour, yet he will not hearken unto what carnal reason may tender for his peace under this trouble. And therefore,

6. He humbly applies to Christ, as the only way of salvation, and escaping divine vengeance. A man reasons thus with himself: — If I continue to go on in the practice of sin, certain destruction will be the consequence of it; and if I yield the best obedience I am able, that cannot justify me before God, and give me a right to eternal life, because it will not be such as the law requires to those ends; and therefore ruin, and that forever, is unavoidable in that way. He argues much after the same manner as the lepers did, who sat at the gate of Samaria, and said, “If we sit here we shall die; if we enter into the city, the famine is in the city, we shall die there; if we fall into the hands of the Assyrians, and they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we can but die.” So says the broken-hearted sinner; if I gratify my lusts, I am sure destruction will follow; and if I perform duty, and depend on that, nothing but endless misery is before me; Christ is the alone way of peace and safety; unto Him therefore will I apply myself, if he shews me compassion I shall live, if he refuses so to do, I can but die; and, therefore, I will throw myself at his feet, and “if I perish, I perish,” as Esther said, when she went into the presence of Ahasuerus without an order for it. And this application unto Christ is made with a deep sense of our own unworthiness, and with speed, as a man slayer hastened to the city of refuge for security from the avenger of blood. Hence faith is expressed by fleeing for refuge; Hebrews

6:18. Hereby we are preserved from entirely sinking into despondency, and in this trust, we remain fully satisfied, and some hope arises in our souls, that we shall meet with a kind and gracious reception, from Him, whose encouraging language always expressed His heart, and who hath said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. A precious and gracious declaration indeed! sufficient it is to answer all objections which are formed in the mind from the consideration of our guilt and impurity. Many thousands of poor convinced and sorrowful souls have had reason to adore the compassion of a tender Saviour, which is so strongly expressed in those blessed words of His. And that invitation wherewith the sacred canon is almost closed, hath afforded great encouragement to multitudes: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; let him that heareth say, Come; let him that is athirst come; and whomever will, let him take the water of life freely." Revelation 22:17. Under the benign influences of the good Spirit of God, the soul is by these sweet declarations and invitations, encouraged to apply to Christ for pardon, peace, righteousness, grace, wisdom, and strength; yea, for every thing necessary to its welfare and happiness. And herein, sometimes, great importunity is used, with a most frank and full acknowledgment of our vileness and unworthiness. It is with us, as with the Canaanitish woman, who upon a repulse from Christ, not out of unkindness to her, but to try her faith, said, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." So we, in this application to a Redeemer, confess that we are so vile, and so unworthy, that no name of reproach is too severe to be applied to us; but notwithstanding that, we are determined to lie at the feet of Jesus, and implore His help, who came into the world to save the chief of sinners. "Oh! (says the soul) I am justly described by that character, and therefore it is fit I should abase myself in the very dust, and eternally own that shame and confusion belong to me. But O, precious truth! Christ came to save even such, and, therefore, it may be, that I may obtain mercy, and find favour with Him. However, in Him alone will I place my hope."

7. This act is a receiving of Christ as a Saviour. Sometimes, by a reception of Christ and his benefits, we intend a man's appropriating Him and His salvation to himself, or his concluding upon it that Christ is his, and all saving blessings which flow from Him. This is faith grown up into assurance. But that is not what I here design, but a person's choice of Christ to be his Saviour, his approbation of Him in that character, not only from the consideration of the necessity of an interest in Him in order to his safety; but also from an apprehension, in some measure, of His fitness to deliver us from ruin, through His blood, righteousness, and grace. Upon this view, although we may be attended with many doubts and fears relating to our interest in

Christ and in his salvation, here we fix all the hope we have, and are fully resolved never to embrace any other object for our trust and confidence, let what will be the issue. Now this is a real and true reception of Christ as He is proposed to us in the gospel; or it is believing in Him, and taking Him for our Saviour, if saved we shall be. And those who are assisted thus to apply to Him for salvation from sin, and all its dismal effects, have no reason to doubt of the truth of their faith, nor of the love, compassion, and care of a tender Redeemer, who will not cast out any that come to Him.

8. This act grants to God the authority of His law, the rights of His justice; and it greatly honours Christ, though the soul, for want of skill in spiritual things, may not discern it.

(1.) There is in this act a hearty acknowledgement of the just authority of God in the law, as He commands perfect holiness, and condemns the creature for the want of it.

(2.) That it would be equal and righteous in God, to recompense the evil of sin, with the evil of punishment. The poor sinner hath nothing to object to the justice of his eternal damnation, and this he freely confesses, and it is supposed in his application to Christ for salvation; for it is only on the ground of free and sovereign grace and mercy.

(3.) Christ receives from us in this act, that glory which is His due, in the character of a Saviour from sin, both in its guilt and power. For herein we look to Him alone for remission, peace, acceptation with God, and sanctification, or for strength against every sin, and for grace to dispose and quicken us unto the practice of every duty. If we duly considered how much we glorify God in this act, and honour the blessed Jesus, we should not be so disconsolate, and mourn, as sometimes we do, through temptations, jealousies, fears, and questionings about our safety; but we should rather rejoice, in that, in some degree, we glorify God, and do honour to a dear Redeemer; and with some measure of cheerfulness, we should proceed in a renewal of such solemn and humble acts of application to Christ, our precious and only Saviour. It is a certain truth, that Christ is precious to those who believe, and it is equally true, that those to whom He is precious, really do believe in Him.

According to what principle a man sees Christ in His excellency, according to that principle he chooses Him. The understanding never receives spiritual light, without a communication of grace to direct and determine the will to make choice of the glorious objects, which the understanding, as enlightened, discerns. No man sees the glory of the Lord, without being changed into the heavenly image from glory to glory. It is not only light, but it is life and heat also. It is not ineffectual and idle, but operative, and influences unto holy acts. It is impossible, without spiritual light, spiritually

to discern our misery; or the way of recovery by grace; or the suitableness of Christ to our souls; or the riches of His grace; or the freeness of His love; or the readiness of His heart to save us; or the desirableness of happiness; or the beauties of holiness. It is only spiritual light which enables us in a spiritual manner to discern spiritual things; and if the mind is possessed of spiritual light, it is not destitute of holiness, for they are inseparable.

Other acts also flow from this principle, viz., Repentance, which is sorrow for sin, and abhorrence of it, as sin; and an earnest desire to forsake it, and to be completely delivered from it. An approbation of the law, as holy, just, and good. Fear and reverence of God. These I call the primary actings of grace, which immediately follow upon regeneration, and are true conversion; or a turning from sin, self, and Satan unto God; which we have seen is necessary to future blessedness. They are included in that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

III. Sanctification consists in what, I think, may be called the secondary actings of grace, and is inclusive of the primary acts of the spiritual principle, which are mentioned above.

1. Sanctification consists in a denial of our corrupt inclinations; or, in an abstinence from sin, out of a regard to the authority of God in the law. Which evidently supposes an approbation of both the precepts and prohibitions of that law; or a liking of what it commands, as good and holy, and an aversion unto what it forbids, as evil and vile. This latter is usually called mortification, and is one considerable branch of our sanctification; wherein we ought especially, in a very strict manner, to regard the principles and views, upon which we act, in our opposition to sin. For there may be an abstinence from acts of evil, without a grain of holiness in the heart. If we forsake sin, only from some prudential considerations; or, through the influence of legal motives, concupiscence maintains its rule in our minds, and will continue so to do. But it is to be feared that many are insensible of this, and content themselves with a bare denial to gratify the flesh in external acts, and take it to be true mortification; whereas, in fact, real mortification of sin, they are utterly strangers to. And those, who are truly gracious, do not always abstain from sinful actions, upon considerations of a pure, holy, and spiritual nature. For there be many motives unto this abstinence from evil, which have great influence on the mind, that arise not from the principle of grace in the souls of the saints; and, therefore, there is great need narrowly to observe our hearts, and closely to examine upon what views we act; without this, there will be little of real holiness, though our conduct may be such as raises it above the censure of those who know us best. If we are engaged in a spiritual manner, in this most necessary branch of our duty, our minds will

take into consideration the evil nature of sin; the many obligations we are under, as Christians, to leave every vice, that we should be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness; and from the great and numerous acts of goodness he hath put forth, in our favour, from a sense of the manifold benefits which we receive from him, merely on the foundation of kindness unmerited. Never let us think that we are any farther holy than we act under the influence of such like considerations and motives; for if we do, we shall form a mistaken opinion of ourselves. If we are not deceived, as to the being of grace in our souls, we certainly shall be, as to the degrees of it. It is a very dangerous mistake to think that all opposition to sin is real mortification. And, therefore, let us look well to our ends and our frames, in all our actions. If we fail in this thing, very little real holiness will be found in our walk before God, how free from blame soever it may be in the sight of men.

2. The other branch of sanctification consists in an attendance to holy duties, and the exercise of grace therein. The performance of duty, without the exercise of grace, brings no glory to God, nor any spiritual advantage to our souls. We may maintain the practice of religious services, in a regular manner, and yet be very far from that spirituality and heavenly mindedness, which our profession calls for. Regeneration is sanctification radically. The advancement of purity and spirituality in our souls, is our sanctification progressively considered. The Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of it. As grace in the principle is His production; so the vigour and increase thereof, is effected by His benign influences. And many precious considerations He suggests to the mind, to strengthen and invigorate the gracious principle in us, viz., the love of God to us; the tender and intense affection of the blessed Jesus; the greatness of that salvation, which we enjoy through His obedience and sacrifice; the dignity that is conferred upon us, as we are constituted sons of God, by a sovereign act of His immense goodness; the title we have to all spiritual and eternal blessings, in consequence of our being brought into that relation. Our union to Christ is another consideration, whereby our hearts are excited earnestly to desire a conformity to Him, in meekness, lowliness, patience, submission to the will of God, and in every other grace. Moreover, the divine Spirit gives us views of the glory of the Lord, in the glass of the gospel, whereby we are changed into the heavenly image from glory to glory. He that expects an increase of grace and holiness in any other way, will certainly find himself sadly mistaken in his expectations, let his endeavours be what they may. The new creature cannot be nourished and improved, but by feeding upon, and digesting spiritual food, which is Christ the Bread of Life: unless we receive the nourishing milk, and generous wine of the gospel, we shall languish and decline in our spiritual part. The want of

this, through one cause or another, is the occasion of that leanness of soul, which most complain of at this time, and it is to be feared, not without great reason.

CHAPTER 4

On The Great Difference Between Real Conversion, And The Mere Semblance Of It

SUCH a change may take place upon the mind, and appear in the conduct of a person, which he may account real conversion, and it may be so esteemed by others, which is far short of it, and hath nothing at all of the nature of that in it.

First. I propose to consider this change.

Secondly. To shew wherein the real difference lies between conversion and that change.

This is a subject of very great moment and considerable difficulty. Herein, therefore, it is necessary to proceed with caution, lest on one hand, the unconverted should imagine themselves to be in a safe and happy state, and on the other, lest some who really are the subjects of this good work, should fall under discouragement, and be tempted to fear that they are destitute of true grace, and have only the semblance of it. I begin with the former.

First. There is a change which is not conversion, and in this change the following particulars are included: —

I. Men may have an apprehension of the truth of spiritual things. This is light, but not the light of grace.

1. A perception of the work of the law, and of the truth in it. This is what is usually called the fitness and unfitness of things in relation to human actions. The monstrous nature of vice, in numerous branches of it, may be discerned, and the propriety and amiableness of virtuous actions be understood in a variety of instances. This light is indeed natural to men, and inseparable from human nature, though it may be much obscured by irregular passions, contracted prejudices, and the fatal influence of temptation, wherewith men are surrounded in every circumstance. The increase of this light by revelation, which exposes every kind of vice, and represents virtue in all her lovely charms, is what I here intend. Some by conversion seem to mean no more than a change of the manners of dissolute persons, under the influence of such light. But this is a great remove from it.

2. The knowledge of the truth of the doctrines of the gospel. They are principles above reason, and therefore could not be discovered by it; but the revelation of them, as to their truth, reason is capable of understanding; and, consequently, men may know that they are true; and as there is a

dependence of one truth upon another, and an inseparable connection between all the branches of revealed truth, the mind may discern that dependence and connection, and the harmony of its diverse parts. This is the work of reason, not of grace. Hence men destitute of the light of divine grace may have a clear discerning of the truth of heavenly mysteries, who are wholly unacquainted with the nature of those mysterious truths. This cannot be conversion. Orthodoxy is not to be taken for faith, nor soundness of judgment for holiness. A man may understand all mysteries, and preach the gospel, who is unconverted, and so remain. An awful truth indeed. Matthew 7:22, 23; 1 Corinthians 13:1, 2.

II. There may be a legal conviction of sin in its guilt. A man's sins may be set in order before him; his conscience may exhibit many charges against him, as having acted in a criminal manner, and sharply remonstrate for his misbehaviour. The demerit of sin may awaken dreadful fears in his soul, and occasion severe self-reproaches of folly, madness, and a wild fury, which has impetuously pushed him on to gratify extravagant and unlawful lusts, to his endless ruin. From hence springs —

1. Sorrow and distress. A guilty mind cannot look upon past offences without some degree of concern, lest that vengeance should overtake it, which is its due for those criminal actions.

2. An enquiry how to escape deserved punishment. And a man concludes that an alteration in his conduct is necessary to this end, about which he is earnestly solicitous, and, therefore he resolves upon forsaking a vicious course of life, avoiding the occasions of sin, and determines with himself to practise all known duties for the future. And by the influence of this conviction, he may become a virtuous person in his deportment, and much recommend himself to the esteem of the sober and regular, calm his disturbed conscience, and buoy himself up with hopes of regaining the divine favour, upon an apprehension that God will be favourable and propitious to him, if he acts the best part he is able.

III. He may not only yield an assent unto, but also take some pleasure in the gospel.

On account of its rationality. As it is a system of doctrines that are perfectly consistent and harmonious.

Its general design.

(1.) Salvation from misery. Self-love disposes men to be pleased with whatever they apprehend is for their advantage. And as the mind is impressed with a sense of danger, and is seeking after security, it is affected with pleasure by the report of the gospel, concerning a deliverance from eternal ruin

(2.) The same principle is excited by the revelation of a state of endless felicity. The thought of the enjoyment of good eternally, gives the mind a very sensible pleasure, though the nature of that good is not apprehended, but as the contrary of torment and anguish. Under these considerations the word may agreeably impress the mind, and possess it with joy, without any perception of its true nature and relish of that. This is the case of stony ground hearers.

(3.) Sometimes the reasoning or the pathos of the preacher entertains the mind, according to the different taste of the hearer. Some, though the smaller part of mankind, as I take it, are much pleased with just and nervous reasoning. With those, the logic of a preacher is acceptable; others, who are fax the greater part, love to have their passions moved, if their judgments are not informed; and they are generally much delighted when a religious address has such an effect upon them, because they flatter themselves that this is true edification by the word, though it is no such thing. They are entertained with the preacher's rhetoric, even when they have no relish for his doctrine.

IV. Divine institutions may be religiously regarded. A man who hath a serious turn of thought, cannot but apprehend, that it is his duty to worship his Maker, and he sees that it is certainly requisite to worship God, in that manner He requires. And as He hath clearly pointed out to us in His word, that mode of worship which is acceptable to Him, he finds himself inclined to submit to His will in this matter. Accordingly, he takes upon him the profession of Christianity, and celebrates its sacred rites. And thus, in his own opinion, he commences a true Christian, and often in the esteem of others also, when he is as far from real Christianity, as he was before this change. He is not turned from self to God; but cursed sin is still the reigning principle in him, though the manner of its rule is altered. Real grace takes away the dominion of sin; conviction only alters the form of its government. Sometimes it determines a man to gratify itself in one way, and sometimes in another, as the mind is variously affected by different circumstances.

V. Men may be conscientious and sincere in all these things. It would be injurious to many, and contrary to truth and fact, to pronounce them hypocritical and insincere, in their professions of sorrow for their crimes, resolutions to reform, desires of escaping divine vengeance, and in their endeavours to obtain that which they understand by happiness, and in the way wherein they think it is to be attained. The want of a principle of grace in the heart, by which alone a man can act spiritually, does not necessarily suppose that whatever such a person acts of a religious nature, is performed in an insincere and hypocritical manner. The convictions of these persons

are real, not pretended, though not spiritual; their sorrow on account of their sins is unfeigned, though it is not of a godly sort; and their resolutions to amend their ways are hearty, though not of a holy nature; their desires of the enjoyment of what they esteem happiness, are true, though not arising from grace; and their intentions to acquire it may be deliberately formed, and followed with earnest endeavours. For hypocrisy, in the gross sense of it, stands not opposed to grace; but to the truth and reality of a man's declared intentions in his actions. Though these persons are not really converted, and it may be, never will be so, they are, in truth and fact, what they profess to be, viz., greatly in earnest relating to an escape from hell, and the obtaining of eternal rest and peace, according to those apprehensions which they have thereof. I proceed to shew,

Secondly, Wherein lies the difference between this change, and real conversion.

I. A spiritual conviction of sin, much differs from a mere legal conviction, in several respects.

1. As to sin's demerit. Legal conviction is a perception of the fact that sin exposes a man to dreadful punishment. A person clearly discerns that it is a certain truth that hell, or eternal torment and misery, is the consequence of a violation of the law of God; and a consciousness of guilt awakens in his soul the most dreadful fears, and prevents his taking any rest or ease, while he is under the weight of this conviction. His language is, What shall I do? Whither shall I flee? By what means shall I screen myself from that terrible vengeance which is impending, and possibly may very soon fall upon me? Oh! the weight of it is insupportable, and it is endless! Oh, sad condition indeed! — what will not a man do in this case? — what will he not offer to avert the threatening storm? He will not withhold anything in the power of his hand to give, even though it were “thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil;” nay, he would even “give his firstborn for his transgression, and sacrifice the fruit of his body, for the sin of his soul;” he thinks nothing too dear to part with, for safety and peace, in this distressed condition. And all this may be, where there is no grace. Spiritual conviction proceeds much farther than the fact, that eternal death is the wages of sin; it is carried on to discern the justice of this constitution. Devils, and the spirits of wicked men know the dreadful truth to their inconceivable horror; but the righteousness of this appointment of God, they never will acknowledge. And a man may have a taste of hell, who hath no meetness at all for heaven.

Again, legal conviction, though it brings a man to dread suffering divine anger, it does not cause him to lament the loss of divine favour. A man could patiently bear an eternal separation from God, for communion

with Him he desires not; but His terrors give him the greatest uneasiness. We are mistaken, if we think that heaven is desirable to us, merely because we tremble at the thoughts of hell. In spiritual conviction, the mind of a poor sinner is influenced to mourn deeply under an apprehension of sin's exposing him to suffering the loss of God's gracious and glorious presence. The thought of being in a state of exile and distance from God, affects him sensibly, and his earnest petition unto God is, "Cast me not away from thy presence," wherein there is a discovery of true love to God; but trembling under a sense of divine vengeance, may be, without the least degree of love to God, or delight in divine favour. The devils tremble, but they will never love the object they dread.

2. In spiritual conviction, the mind of a poor sinner is furnished with the knowledge of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. By virtue of the light of grace, he discerns the malignity of sin, as it is contrary to the pure law of God, and unto the holiness and rectitude of His nature. And from that arises an abhorrence of sin, as sin, which is a real discovery that the mind approves of the purity of God. Nothing of this nature is ever found in a legal conviction. That indeed will prevail with a man to make opposition to sin, in its acts, upon hopes of escaping punishment for past offences; but as those hopes decline or lessen, his opposition to evil abates; and if they are entirely sunk, his language immediately is, "There is no hope, I have followed after my lovers, and after them I will go." To what purpose is it for me to deny myself of pleasures which I choose, since my ruin is inevitable? I can but perish, let me indulge my inclinations as far as I am able; why should I refuse it, seeing there is no room left for me to cherish hopes of escaping the damnation of hell? Now, under the influence of a spiritual conviction of sin, the mind reasons and acts otherwise; for as it, discerns the evil that is in sin itself, it loathes it on that account, and makes opposition to it from a sense of its vile nature; and even though punishment should be inflicted for past misconduct, yet the soul desires to sin no more. Grace influences a man to say, whether my sins are forgiven, or not forgiven; whether my soul is saved, or not saved; as I may be assisted, I will watch, pray, and strive against sin, which is so abominable and vile in its nature; yea, though my eternal damnation was to me as certain as I clearly discern it would be just, I should nevertheless be glad to sin no more. Where there is not something of this nature, I say of this nature, not to speak of its degree, I know not that a man hath any reason to think that he is the happy subject of a spiritual conviction of sin. Acquaintance with sin's nature, and abhorrence of it, are evidences of such a conviction, and not the fear of punishment.

3. There is a very great difference in the sorrow of a real Christian,

from what is found in the heart of a person who is not truly converted. A man who is convinced, but not converted, may be overwhelmed with grief under a sense of guilt; bitter sighs and deep groans may proceed from him, on account of his evil conduct, because of its consequences; and his sins may force him to cry, yea roar. He may really and truly lament that he has acted such a sinful part, as he is conscious to himself, he has done. So Judas repented of betraying his Master; he was sorry, but not after a godly sort. It is not the degree, but the nature of sorrow for sin, which is an evidence of that repentance, which the grace of God produces, and whereof he approves. If a man's concern only springs from the consideration of that penalty which is due to sin, he is not the subject of repentance unto life; for concern on that account, and in a very great degree too, may be in a mind which loves sin and hates holiness. That sorrow which arises from a gracious principle is of quite a different nature; it is a concern for having acted contrary to the will of God, for having abused His goodness, and for having despised His authority. In the former, a person is only under the influence of self-love; a man is not sorry that he has dishonoured God; but his grief is, that he has ruined himself. In the latter, a person is truly sorry for the evil he has committed, in distinct consideration from the consequences of such behaviour. He is a stranger to repentance unto life, who is wholly destitute of this sorrow, let him howl ever so much under a sense of divine wrath.

4. Legal conviction and spiritual conviction differ in this, the former brings not a man to a thorough acquaintance with the vitiosity of his nature, the latter does. Under a consciousness of guilt a person cannot be an absolute stranger to his corrupt inclinations and disorderly passions, but he does not discern himself so far as to loathe and abhor himself. As he sees not the exceeding sinfulness of sin, so he hath not a view of the dreadful plague of sin in his heart. In spiritual conviction a man's heart is dissected, and exposed to his view. He discerns that there is a total want of all good, and that his soul is the subject of all evil radically. That concupiscence or lust, which dwells in him, exerts itself in a most surprising variety of ways, — that his understanding is darkened, — that his will is obstinate and perverse, disinclined to holiness, and bent to sin, — that his affections are light, vain, corrupt, and disposed to unlawful objects. In a word, that he is in himself “as an unclean thing,” and that his heart is a fountain of impurity, and always hath been so; that he is flesh, and only flesh, the very contrary of that holiness and spirituality which the law of God requires. And that, therefore, it is impossible for him ever to recommend himself to the divine favour, or regain an interest in the divine approbation which he lost by sin. Hence,

5. He dies to the law, and gives up entirely all hope of ever being justified

by his own works in the sight of God. Until a man is slain by the Law, and becomes dead unto it as a Covenant, he is not prepared for, nor will he be disposed unto a reception of the grace of the Gospel. No person will renounce his own righteousness, in the business of his acceptance with God, without such an acquaintance with himself, such a perception of the extent of the holy law of God, and of the equity and justice of all its requirements, as a legal conviction never gives. This is the reason why the mind under that conviction, to what height soever it is carried, never embraces and acquiesces in God's way of justifying a sinner. A person may have a clear discerning of the truth of the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ, who is under a legal conviction; but as that conviction does not cause him to die to the Law, it will never dispose him to seek for life, and a happy immortality by the Gospel. Such a one practically contradicts those notions he hath of evangelical truths. The grace of the Spirit only disposes men to the embracement of, and an acquiescence in the grace of the gospel. A man must die to the Law, or else he will never live to God.

II. There is a vast difference between the knowledge of the gospel which a temporary hath and that of a real Christian, as such. I say as such, because he hath that knowledge, or may have, which the other hath; but that is not all, he hath also another kind of knowledge. The former is supposed to have the knowledge of the truth of the gospel in its diverse branches. That he may have in a degree, perhaps, beyond what some Christians have, through hearing, reading, and conversation; but he hath not that knowledge of the gospel, in any of its branches, which a saint of the lowest form hath. For,

He doth not understand the nature of evangelical truths. All he knows about them is, that they are true principles, and must necessarily be so because they are revealed of God, who is truth, and cannot express a falsehood. The spiritually enlightened person understands the things themselves, he knows the things of the Spirit, and those things which "are freely given to us of God."

1. He discerns the wisdom of God discovered in the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. That it is a method most fit and proper to bring poor sinners to the enjoyment of happiness. Reason in some measure discerns the fitness of what is commanded, but without divine illumination, the most rational cannot discover the propriety and fitness of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ.

The highest cultivation of our genius prepares us not one jot for a cordial reception of the gospel. Grace alone enables us to view the wisdom which is discovered in this admirable contrivance. Unless we receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation from God, to teach us the nature of heavenly

mysteries, we shall never understand them to our spiritual advantage and His glory.

2. A Christian views the wonderful display of the divine perfections, which there is in the gospel.

That Sovereignty gave rise to the design of our salvation, and is that foundation whereon it rests. That infinite wisdom contrived the way wherein sin is punished to the full, and yet freely pardoned. That God appears as displeased with sin, as gracious and merciful to the persons of sinners, in the method he has taken to acquit them of guilt and free them from punishment. That His justice shines with as bright a lustre as His mercy. And that His holiness is not less conspicuous than His love, in our redemption by the suffering and death of His Son. That His law suffers nothing by our deliverance from its curse, through the atonement of our blessed Redeemer. — That in the way of our justification the law is magnified, and exalted infinitely beyond what it could have been by our most perfect obedience to it, unto eternity.

On account of these things, the saints value the gospel of Christ. The world is not more mistaken in anything, than in this matter; they imagine that the gospel is embraced by the saints, merely because it is a scheme of principles calculated for their security; but the truth is, though Christians are thankful for that provision for their salvation, which they ought ever to be, that is far from being the only reason why they approve of the evangelical scheme; it recommends itself to their greatest esteem, because of that glory which arises from it to the Divine Persons, and unto all the divine Perfections. Real Christians are under the influence of a more generous principle, than unregenerate persons are acquainted with; and have far nobler views than their minds are raised up unto at any time, whatever their convictions, sorrows, joys, and endeavours may be. The glory of God, the honour of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, yield them the highest satisfaction and pleasure. And, therefore, as they clearly discern that God hath saved them in a way worthy of Himself, and becoming the purity, rectitude, and holiness of His nature, they rejoice and are exceeding glad. There is also this vast difference between legal conviction and spiritual; — the former excites a person to consult his own safety, and no more; — the latter directs the subject of it unto a concern for the glory of God also. Such whose minds have never, by all their convictions, been elevated above a regard to their own interest, it is no wonder that they think that there is no such openness in the souls of others. From hence spring all the calumnies that are cast upon us, for our attachment to the doctrines of the grace of God, by persons who are indeed in earnest about religion, but are destitute of spiritual light, and

are under the influence of legal convictions only.

3. Christ is discerned in his suitableness to our condition, as we are lost and miserable in ourselves. The merit of His blood, death, and sacrifice, is presented to the view of the spiritually convinced sinner, as the alone procuring cause of the remission of sin, which prevents the mind sinking into despondency, under a pressing sense of guilt. The merit of His obedience is discovered to the mind fully convinced of the impossibility of ever being justified by its own, for two reasons, first, because of sin already committed, which will prove an eternal bar to justification by works; secondly, because no duty can be performed in that perfect manner the law requires. And this view of the merit of Christ's righteousness, produces some degree of hope in the mind of the spiritually convinced sinner, of his acceptance with God, his righteous Judge. Again, the fulness of grace which is in Christ's hand, is shewn to the mind so convinced, and this encourages the soul to hope for all necessary and seasonable supplies of holiness, wisdom, strength, and support, in all times of affliction, temptation, and danger, and in order to the discharge of every duty, and the exercise of every grace, as the difference of his circumstances, in this changing state, may render needful. And the compassion, care, and power of Christ, are also discovered to the soul. This view of a Saviour much endears Him to the poor sinner, and he is filled with wonder, that such a Redeemer, so suited to his condition, should be provided for one in misery, and wholly so through sin, and be provided too by the Object against whom all his sins have been committed; this is grace which is above all degree of comparison astonishing, and the soul cannot but be amazed at it. Hence,

4. The poor sinner resolves that he will look to Christ, and to Him only, for salvation. Persons under legal convictions, place some degree of trust in the merit of a Saviour, but they do not confide therein alone, nor will ever be brought unto that. They seek for righteousness and life, partly by works, and partly by Christ; and what they account the grace of God, viz., a will to accept and reward men, for acting according to their present abilities, and those advantages which they enjoy. But the real Christian, in divine light, sees that there is no such grace in God, that this agrees neither with the first nor second covenant. That the first covenant, or the law, holds forth to the guilty creature nothing but curse, wrath, and eternal vengeance. And that the second covenant, or the gospel, is a revelation of salvation, by the blood, righteousness, and grace of Christ, without anything of the creature to be connected therewith, as the ground of its dependence and hope of life

and happiness. And the soul approves of, and acquiesces herein, as what is truly wise, holy, gracious, and upon all accounts most fit. A person who is

the subject of that conviction of which I speak, heartily acknowledges that it is proper for him eternally to own, that shame and confusion only are his due, for his manifold and great transgressions. And that it would be acting a presumptuous part in him ever to expect salvation in a way not honourable to God, and His infinitely glorious perfections. And as he sees that this is the only way wherein the glory of God can be exalted, this he chooses, delights in, and rejects all others. Legal conviction of sin, and the bare knowledge of the truths of the gospel, will never bring a person to this.

5. These views of Christ in His glory, and of the grace of God, in its freeness, riches, sovereignty, and eternal duration, produce in the soul, not only adoration and praise, but also spiritual and holy desires. Earnest desires of a conformity to Christ, and of obedience to the whole will of God. Grace influences a man not only to seek for a deliverance from the punishment of sin, but for salvation from sin itself. Self-love may put a person upon the former, but it will never carry him on to the latter. Some speak very contemptibly of good desires; but desires of grace are grace; that is to say, that they spring from a gracious principle, implanted in the heart by the Spirit of God; and this is an eternal truth. A desire of holiness is a holy act, and cannot spring up in the carnal mind, as it is corrupt; no holy acts arise from the flesh. If a desire to sin is a sinful act, then a desire to be holy is an act of holiness. Again, desire supposes an approbation of what is desired; for a person desires not that which he does not approve of. In a desire of holiness, therefore, is contained an approbation of the law of God, unto which a carnal mind will never become subject; and, consequently, that person in whom holy desires arise, is spiritual, holy, and born again. Moreover, what God produces in men by His gracious influences upon them must be holy; He is the author of holy desires, for He works in us to will, as well as to do, and both of His good pleasure. Besides, that which God approves of is certainly holy; He approves of a holy desire and will hear it. Herein consists the very essence of prayer. Our desires are the language of our souls, and desires of holiness God will graciously attend unto and fulfil. Blessed be his name for that abundant evidence which He hath given us of this matter, in many sweet and precious promises. Thought is a lower act than desire; and even that, when it is spiritual and holy, is graciously regarded by God. He hath "a book of remembrance written before Him, for them who think on His name." And He hears the desire of the humble; their sighs and groans, arising from a sense of their sinfulness and imperfections in duty, are acceptable to Him.

It is false to suppose that a man may be convinced of his misery, and desire salvation, (by fits and starts for many years) and yet be lost forever. Nothing more contrary to the tender love and care of Christ towards poor

sensible sinners can be asserted than this is. What! may a man see his misery, and desire salvation by Jesus Christ, and yet be lost forever? What is a desire of salvation by Christ, but a poor sinner's application to Him to be saved by Him? Will He then refuse to save him? Or are not His merit, and power, and fulness, equal to His compassion? Would He save him, but cannot?

Grace is an habitual disposition to holy acts; but in none is it always in actual exercise. The less it is interrupted in its actings, the better; and Christians ought to be careful about the exercise of it.

Our Saviour has taught us this doctrine, that happiness will attend the man who hath holy desires: — "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

In whomsoever a will is wrought to receive grace, life, and eternal blessedness, to him those favours shall certainly be granted; for with that gracious view was that desire and will produced in him.

Mr. Wesley advises a person not to account himself a Christian; no, not in the lowest degree, unless the Spirit of God bears witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God. That is to say, until he enjoys an assurance of an interest in the love of God, is an heir of Him, and a joint-heir with Christ. What if a man hath such an assurance? May he certainly conclude upon his everlasting enjoyment of God, of whom he is assured he is an heir? No, by no means, according to Mr. Wesley's opinion that there may be a final falling away: for grace in his heart may become extinct, as he thinks; and, therefore, this assurance cannot be a persuasion of a certainty of being happy hereafter; because that is not a thing certain in itself, at least, with respect to some, who really have true grace. For if a person may lose his meetness for heaven, how well soever he may be satisfied that he is at present the subject of that meetness, it is impossible that he should enjoy an undoubted hope of coming there. I beg leave to observe that it is not acting the part of a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, in giving advice to Christians not to rest satisfied with that measure of grace they have already received, to require them to conclude they have none at all, because it is not carried to that height, which all ought to desire it may be brought in to their souls, for the glory of God, and their greater consolation. Is it proper to persuade a man that he is not a babe in Christ, because he is not a father? Is it any wisdom to labour to persuade a person that he is dead in trespasses and sins, merely because he has not yet arrived to that degree of spiritual strength which it is desirable he may? Is it proper to deny such acts as certainly spring from a gracious principle in a person, to be of a holy, spiritual nature, because some farther acts of the same principle are yet wanting in him? Is this the way to strengthen and improve grace in the mind? On the contrary, is it not the

way to promote unbelief? It certainly is, and hath no other tendency than to bring a person of a lower measure of grace to conclude he has none; which is not a likely means of increasing it. The best have need of exhortation to seek after the increase of grace in their souls; but that is not a sufficient reason for calling upon any, in whom true grace is, though in a low degree, to conclude upon his being wholly destitute of it. That person who knows no better method of stirring up Christians to their duty than this, ought to stay till he is better qualified for a service of this kind, before he presumes to engage in it. But I return to the work before me.

III. There is a great difference in the obedience of a person who is the subject of a legal conviction, and that of a spiritual person. This difference is not in the external matter of it; for that, I grant, may be the same in both, as to abstinence from sin, and the practice of duty. The one may be as outwardly regular and religious as the other. But still there is a vast difference in the obedience of these persons. The person under a legal conviction, acts out of fear in what he does. He would not be what he is, was it not through terror of conscience which drives him to it. He obeys God, as a man obeys a tyrant, under whose power he is. Such obedience God abhors. The gracious soul attends to duty from a principle of love to it, and delight in it. Again, the man who acts under the influence of a legal conviction, proposes to make God a debtor to him by his obedience; and all the satisfaction he takes in what he does, arises from the consideration of the reward he expects for his care, diligence, and denial of his sins. His aim is his wages, and serving of himself, not God. This is also highly displeasing unto God. Whereas a spiritual person aims at God's glory, and humbly owns that his service is so far from deserving a reward from God, that it justly exposes his person to condemnation, because of those blemishes and imperfections that are found even in the purest part of it. Again, a person acting under the influence of legal conviction, is content with the performance of duty, but a gracious soul aims at spirituality and communion with God therein.

I shall conclude this subject with some observations.

1. Sometimes persons who give the best evidence of their being subjects of true grace, are in great concern, through fears and jealousies, that they are not. Because they are not that in degree, which the gracious principle in them causes them to long to be, they are fearful, that they are not that which in fact they are, viz., lovers of God, of Christ, and of holiness, and haters of sin, as sin. On the other hand,

2. It is often seen, that some) who have no reason to conclude that they are in happy state, have no scruple at all of the goodness of their state, and the safety of their condition. They are indeed other sort of men than they

once were, they have passed under a change, and they think all is well. But they know not themselves, nor sin, nor God, nor Jesus Christ; nor wherein the real happiness of a poor sinner consists, and are quite easy and content without it. They cry to themselves peace, though they know not the way to eternal rest and peace. They think that they are in the way to heaven, but in fact, they are on the road to hell and everlasting misery. There is another way which leads to death, besides that of indulging our sensual lusts, and neglecting the duties of religion, viz., a proposal to obtain life by our own works, in opposition to God's way of saving poor sinners, alone by the blood, righteousness, and grace of His Son. He, who thinks to acquire a right to heaven by his own works, and attends to duty upon that principle, will in the issue meet with a sad disappointment.

3. Not all that knowledge which a Christian hath of Christ, and heavenly things, is of a spiritual nature. His discernment of the truth of evangelical mysteries, may be clear and very extensive, and yet his spiritual acquaintance with them may be but small. He may be very conversant about them, as to their truth, connection and the harmony of the several branches of the gospel, and yet be but very little in the exercise of grace upon them. Let us, therefore, never form an opinion either of the truth, or of the degree of our grace, from our perception of the evidence of the truth of gospel doctrines. For, as a man may perceive that evidence, who has no grace at all; so a Christian may much increase in his acquaintance with the truth of evangelical principles, and be able to speak of them with great readiness, pertinence, and accuracy, and notwithstanding that, woefully decline in a gracious, savoury, and spiritual knowledge of the things themselves. It is not always that our growth in grace is equal to our improvement in light of this kind. And I must needs say, that it would be better for most of us more carefully to attend unto this consideration, than perhaps we do. A revival in the vital and experimental part of religion will be expected in vain, under our sorrowful decays, without it.

4. Hence we see what care and caution, as well as faithfulness, are required in a Christian minister. Great prudence, and a clear discerning of the difference between real grace in its nature, and the genuine actings of it, and a legal conviction, and of its effects are necessary, in speaking to their hearers on the important subject of the conversion of a sinner. Unskillfulness in treating on this point, may be attended with sad consequences, both to saints and sinners. The former may be discouraged, or weakened in their faith and the latter may be tempted to think that they are in safety. If, on one hand, we are not careful that our account of conversion exceeds not the nature of true grace in those effects which it produces; and if, on the other,

we see not to it, that our account of that work comes up to its real nature and genuine fruits. And therefore, how awful and how difficult a labour is that of the ministry! What compass of spiritual knowledge! What acquaintance with the workings of the minds of men under convictions and temptations! What a discernment of true grace in its nature, actings, and fruits, are necessary unto the discharge of this service, as well as an understanding of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ! What assiduity in study, not only in the holy word of God, but also what careful observations of our own hearts, in times of trouble, temptation, as well as in seasons of consolation and joy, is requisite! A well-taught of God Christian preacher, is the noblest and highest character a poor sinful mortal can bear. But unto this, what labour, what skill, what tenderness, what faithfulness, are absolutely necessary! And therefore, once more I observe,

5. It certainly behoves Christians to give all possible assistance and encouragement to ministers in their work, which in itself is so very difficult, and which in a proper discharge of it is of such importance to their advantage, in their best interest. This is one duty, among many others, too much neglected in these declining times. How many professors are unconcerned what difficulties and discouragements their ministers labour under? They live in plenty, and are rising in their circumstances, that is enough for them. They cannot but know, if they will allow themselves to think, that their ministers find great difficulty to provide things honest in the sight of men; and yet they are so far from affording them a little degree of sympathy under this circumstance, that they frequently insult them, however modestly they demean themselves. I think that man is blind, who discerns not some visible tokens of Christ's displeasure, with this sort of behaviour towards his ministers. But I forbear to add on so unpleasing a subject.

CHAPTER 5

On The Life Of Faith

INQUISITIVE and contemplative men who enjoyed not divine revelation, have written much concerning the happy life. They were greatly divided in their sentiments about it, and really were ignorant of that life. The holy Scripture plainly informs us what it is, and sets before us shining examples of it for our encouragement and imitation. That is a life of faith on Christ. The Apostle Paul acquaints us that such was his life, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." He not only was a subject of divine grace, but he lived in the exercise of it, without which no solid satisfaction and pleasure can be enjoyed, let our circumstances, as men, be ever so easy and affluent. In that life, we shall derive from the

glorious object of faith, full contentment, settled tranquility, and permanent joy, how much soever we are tried and afflicted. And, therefore, an enquiry into it may be instructive and beneficial to us.

I. The objects of faith are things invisible. Such as could not have been discovered without revelation, "They are things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, which have not entered into the heart of man." Hence the grace of faith is thus defined: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." The life of faith is taking a frequent prospect of them, and conversing with them. And this is to have our conversation in heaven.

II. This is a life above the delectable things of this world. There is not anything upon earth congruous in its nature to this noble and heaven-born grace, it is of a far more exalted and sublime nature than the most splendid of sublunary enjoyments. They are mere trifles in its esteem. And as this new creature wants them not for its support and nourishment, it covets them not for its diversion and pleasure. A person who is the subject of this principle, may indeed covet and be delighted with those gaudy toys, but not according to that principle. It is not grace in any man which thirsts after, and is fond of the glittering objects of time and sense, but the opposite of grace; for grace raises the soul far higher than this earthly globe, even to heaven itself, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. And, therefore, if we are strangers to an elevation of mind above the choicest terrene things, we are unacquainted with the only happy life, viz., that of faith. For in the exercise of that grace, we "enter into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered." And the prospects we take of those infinitely excelling objects, which there we view, cause us to disregard the brightest things the world can boast of.

III. Faith carries the mind above the afflictive and distressing things of this world. As it swims not upon a torrent of terrestrial pleasures, so it is not depressed by a heavy weight of worldly sorrows. It smiles not on the gayest things of this mortal state, nor hath it any sadness of countenance when it is deprived of all earthly enjoyments. Its language is: — "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and fly in the God of my salvation." Habakkuk 3:17, 18. In prosperity, it is humble and modest; in affliction, it is submissive and patient; because it is persuaded, "that all things work together for good, to them who love God, and are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28. "It glories in tribulation, which worketh patience, patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed; the love of God being shed abroad in

the heart, by the Holy Ghost.” Romans 5:3-5.

IV. It is a life contrary to the evil part of the believer, and above his better part. Faith is a combatant with the flesh in all its lusts, and is a holy resolution to gratify neither those of the sensual, nor intellectual kind; and it vehemently longs for the extirpation of both out of the mind. And as it is a life of opposition to sin, it is a life above itself. Faith feeds upon Christ, the heavenly and hidden manna, and it drinks of the pure delightful streams which flow from the river of God’s eternal love, whereby it is refreshed and much invigorated. If grace at any time looks upon its own beauty, it is not in order to self-contentment and admiration, but with an intention to raise the mind cheerfully to engage in the delightful service of adoration and praise to the lovely Redeemer, whose beautiful image it is. And it expects all supplies of wisdom and strength from the Father of Glory, in every needful season. Again, in the matter of consolation, it regards itself only as an evidence to itself of its divine original, as an encouragement to hope for succour in temptations, assistance in all difficulties, and renewed comfort in every trouble, from the gracious and Almighty hand which formed it in the soul. The source of its being is the origin of its joy, viz., the grace of God in Christ. This is, therefore, a life contrary to our fleshly part, and above our spiritual part. Faith places its trust in another, and derives all its peace, comfort, and pleasures from Christ, who is all in all unto every real Christian.

V. The life of faith supposes a frequent exercise of that excellent grace. A man’s life is the general course of his actions. A person is said to live a good life if his conduct in the general is good; an ill life, if his actions in the general course of them are evil. And so the Christian may be said to live a life of faith, if that grace is often acted, and his duties are discharged in faith. That alone denominates them the obedience of faith. If we multiply duties and keep up a regular practice of them, without the exercise of this grace therein, we bring no glory to God, nor do our souls receive any spiritual advantage by them. By this exercise of the grace of faith, I mean direct acts of it on the person, blood, righteousness, and fulness of Christ; and upon the grace, kindness, and mercy of God through Him. This frequent renewal of direct acts of faith is necessary to our spiritual peace, joy, and fruitfulness in good works, to the praise and glory of God. And, therefore, if we do not seek after this renewing of the acts of this grace, we may go on from month to month, and from year to year, in a low, withering, and starving condition of soul; which, it is to be feared, is the sorrowful condition of many professors at this time. It is not the bare discharge of duties, though ever so many, that will preserve our minds in a heavenly spiritual frame. Without the exercise of faith in them, they are only lifeless, dull, and formal performances, wherein

God is not honoured, nor our souls profited. It is well if the best are not guilty of too much overlooking this, to their great detriment in the highest interest we can possibly have, to seek after the advancement of, so long as we shall continue in this world.

VI. A life of faith may be maintained in a believer even under darkness, and the hiding of God's face. A ravishing sense of divine love does not always attend the exercise of this grace. It is sometimes acted when the cheering rays of the Sun of righteousness shine not into the mind, and the refreshing light of extraordinary comfort and joy is wanting. And hereby, the mind of a Christian is preserved tranquil and composed, though it hath not that degree of pleasure which springs up in it, from the affecting manifestations of divine love. Nor ought this serenity which is maintained in the soul to be censured as stupidity, or a carnal security, for it greatly differs therefrom, whatever some may think who seem to have no other notion of faith, than what consists in ravishment and ecstasy.

VII. This faith, is a dependence on the faithfulness God, to all his promises and engagements. As God exhorts the saints to stay upon Him, and trust in His name, "when they walk in darkness, and have no light." It is reasonable to suppose, that such is the condition of believers sometimes, because the exhortation would be needless, nor could it be. put into practice, if no such case ever attended them. In that circumstance to act faith, evidences the strength of it, and brings great glory to God. And when a Christian is enabled to trust in the Lord, and rely on His fidelity to His gracious promises, he walks with Him, and is concerned for His honour, and yields to him a becoming obedience, though he enjoys not that sweet delight which he does when he is favoured with the light of His countenance, and His love is shed abroad in his heart. And the foundation of this trust is firm and stable, and consequently, there is no danger of shame and confusion succeeding it. Divine love is immutable; divine faithfulness is eternal; and therefore, this holy confidence can never be attended with consequences prejudicial to its subject. This dependence is not without some renewed direct act of faith on God and Jesus Christ. Herein it differs from a carnal confidence, and dangerous presumption, which is never attended with real acts of faith.

VIII. This life is a desire and expectation of better things than can be enjoyed in this state. By those things, I do not intend what the world calls valuable, and which money may procure; but jewels and treasures far beyond all comparison, with the choicest of them, viz., those gracious visits and heavenly pleasures which the saints are sometimes favoured with in the present state, as an earnest of the full enjoyment of God in the world above. To be with Christ is far better. What is that which is excelled? Not the good

of this world, but the good of grace, between which and the good things of this world, no comparison can be made. Communion with God, and a view of Christ in His glory by faith, far transcend the enjoyment of all the honours, the riches, and the delights which this world hath to bestow on any mortal, notwithstanding the vain sons of men court these things; and when they attain a considerable share of them are elated with them, in the surprising manner they be. A poor despised believer who walks with God, is far happier than he who possesses most of earth, and is a stranger to heaven. But the future state of glory greatly excels the good of present grace, and present communion with God. And a life of faith is an expectation of that blessed Hope.

CHAPTER 6

Of The Assurance Of Faith

I. ASSURANCE may be considered objectively and subjectively. The former relates to the objects on which faith is supposed to act. This is a firm persuasion of the truth and existence of those objects. For instance, that the Son of God came into our world, and that by his obedience and sacrifice he secured the salvation of some men, or obtained eternal redemption for them. And this is necessarily supposed in all acts of recumbency and dependence on him for deliverance from sin, and the penal consequences of it. By the latter is intended a persuasion in the mind of a poor sinner of his particular interest in Christ, and in His salvation.

II. This latter is not essential to that faith which is of the operation of God, as I apprehend. Several reasons induce me to think that true faith may be, and is sometimes acted where this assurance is wanting.

1. Faith is sometimes expressed by such phrases as do not necessarily include it, viz., seeing of Christ, coming unto him, hoping in the Lord, and, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. An assurance of the object is plainly supposed in all these, but not the assurance of an interest in Him to whom application is made for help and relief.

2. There is little or small faith, which is attended with fears, jealousies, and doubting. "O! thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

3. There is a strong and a weak faith; the latter cannot well be thought to include this assurance in it; for if it does, it will be difficult to show wherein the difference lies, between the strong and feeble actings of this grace.

4. In Christ's family there are different classes of Christians. All are subjects of the same grace in kind, but not in degree. Some are babes, not grown up to any considerable pitch of knowledge, experience, and spiritual strength. And in His fold there are some lambs, who are to be dealt very

tenderly with; it does not seem very likely that these, at present, enjoy that strong consolation, which carries the mind above all discouragements and fears. Yet,

III. This favour may be enjoyed.

1. This may be argued with very strong evidence, from the nature of divine promises relating to salvation. A conditional promise of benefits neither ascertains the enjoyment of them, in fact, nor is a proper foundation for an assured persuasion of receiving them; but absolute promises ascertain the possession of that good they express, if the promiser is faithful to his word, and in promising exceeds not his power; and are a firm bottom for an assurance of the reception of it. All divine promises relating to salvation are absolute. I will, and they shall, is the form wherein they run; and therefore, they ascertain salvation, in fact, and are a solid basis of a steady assurance of it. Since their nature is suited to produce and support such a persuasion, God doubtless had this gracious end in expressing them. And if he had such an intention, that must respect either the world or the church. Not the world certainly, and, therefore, the church. Again, the church is triumphant and militant. These promises are intended, then, either to confirm and establish the faith of the church triumphant or militant. Not the church triumphant, and, consequently, this must respect the church militant. And as all generals consist of particulars, every particular is included in the general; hence it follows that all the saints have right to that strong consolation, which the promises of God are fitted in their nature to produce; and it is possible, in the nature of the thing, that they all may, and not to be doubted but some do, at least at some seasons, enjoy it.

2. God, in confirming His promises with His oath, had this gracious end in view, that those who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them, might have that strong consolation which attends or arises from an assurance of his favour to them, and their security in consequence thereof. Two things are clearly expressed in those words.

(1.) An act of faith on Christ, fleeing for refuge to Him; and this is supposed to be done antecedent to the enjoyment of that strong consolation. True faith, therefore, may be without it.

(2.) That they should enjoy strong consolation, who thus flee to Christ for safety and salvation from sin.

3. The witnessing and sealing of the Holy Spirit evidently prove that an assurance of an interest in the love of God may be enjoyed by the saints: Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:13. The latter text evinces the precedency of faith to sealing, as well as expresses this holy persuasion, through the influence of the Spirit upon the mind, as a witness, after believing. And the very same

point of doctrine is deducible from His operations, as the Spirit of adoption. He enables believers to address God as their Father, with boldness, liberty, and confidence, through Jesus Christ; and this He doth at some seasons, wherein they have the greatest sense of their guilt, pollution, and unworthiness.

4. Many of the people of God have expressed their persuasion of an interest in his love, and the glorious benefits springing from that fountain. “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?” “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” “Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” I might multiply testimonies of this kind, for they are very numerous in the Scripture. Nor is it to be apprehended that this was peculiar to persons inspired; for the apostle John expresses this matter in the name of Christians in general. “We have known and believed the love that God hath unto us.” If it is not one main design of that epistle to prove this point, it must be allowed that many things are therein delivered, which abundantly confirm it. And this cannot be peculiar to prophets, apostles, or inspired persons, nor arise from inspiration; because some have been inspired, who had no faith at all, as Balaam for instance, and holy persons have not always enjoyed it, when under inspiration. Inspiration and this holy persuasion, therefore, are distinct things, and the latter does not necessarily attend or arise from the former.

5. I am of opinion that this great and glorious privilege might be more commonly enjoyed than it is, if professors were wisely cautious in behaving themselves. It is by no means to be thought that this jewel is to be attained, without the diligent use of those means which God hath appointed for our increase and growth in grace; greater self-denial, watchfulness against sin and carnal pleasures, mortification to our worldly interests; with the assiduous practice of religious duties, viz., prayer, and reading the Word of God; instead of the fashionable books of our times; meditation, and a frequent review of our spiritual experience, and a conscientious attendance on the worship of God, are the appointed means of our advancement in heavenly knowledge. These are things to which many professors discover but little inclination. Let not such, who doubtless must be destitute of this assurance whereof we speak, dream of attaining it in their present frame of mind and course of behaviour; for if they do, their imaginations of this sort will certainly prove deceiving. dreams indeed.

6. All believers have a proper and certain evidence within them, of their interest in divine favour. Grace in the hearts of the saints, is an effect of God’s love to them, and His gracious purposes concerning them. And, therefore, from the being of grace in their souls, they may safely infer that they are objects of divine love, and interested in all those blessings which take rise

therefrom.

7. Some, through causeless fears and jealousies, are prevented enjoying this assurance. They are afraid, because sin is in them as an active and restless principle, that they have no contrary principle of holiness; and because in part they are still carnal, that they are not spiritual persons; because grace is but feebly acted in their minds, that they are void of it. And because for a season they enjoy not strong consolation, that they have no title to it, or any spiritual blessings. These jealousies and fears at least evidence a desire of grace, which certainly springs from a gracious principle, for the desire of grace is proper to grace. The want of skill in these persons to distinguish between the motions of the flesh and those of the Spirit; or of attention to both, within themselves, and of a consideration of the new covenant, according to whose nature God will always proceed towards them, are the occasions of their distressing fears.

IV. When this holy assurance is maintained in the souls of believers, it influences them unto a humble and close walk with God. Pride, carnality, and neglect of duty, are not attendants of the assurance of faith. If lusts, either of the flesh or of the mind, are indulged, and a man is careless and negligent in his conversation, let him not imagine that this favour is vouchsafed to him by the blessed Spirit; for when the Spirit of God operates as a Comforter He also does as a Sanctifier. This strong consolation is never enjoyed, without a heavenly constraint upon the mind to love God, and cheerfully obey Him. It is probable that some may mistake in this matter, and take a merely rational conclusion for this assurance, wherein the Holy Spirit has no concern, viz., Thus, a man reflects upon his past experience of divine goodness, as he thinks, in former seasons, and says within himself, this must have been the work of God upon me; I, therefore, am the subject of his grace, and interested in his love. But if he thus reflects, and thus reasons, when his condition and the general frame of his mind call loudly upon him to the duties of humiliation, and sorrow for sin, spiritual sloth, and criminal indulgences, he may assure himself, that in this the divine Sanctifier has no concern, and that the conclusion he has drawn contains nothing of that holy assurance in it whereof we now speak. There is, I think, such a difference between the merely rational actings of our own minds in this business, and the blessed guidance of the Holy Spirit in our reflecting upon his work on our souls, as is easily discernible to the saints; and they are greatly wanting to themselves, with regard to their spiritual peace and solid comfort, if they neglect to attend to that difference in this review of their past acts. In the former, only ease and quiet are sought after, in which consists carnal security in the latter, strength against sin, and a renewal of the vigour of grace which

has fallen under a decay, and present direct acts of faith are put forth in this latter, which are not in the former.

V. It is our duty to endeavour to obtain it. We ought to be thankful for the lowest measure of faith, but not content ourselves with a low degree of grace; because the being of grace in our hearts, though small, is an evidence of our safety. As far as anything of this nature is found in us, so far we have just cause well to examine ourselves, lest at last we prove mistaken in cherishing hopes of a real conversion. This can be no sign of it; for it is in the nature of the new creature to desire both its preservation and improvement; the neglect hereof can only arise from the flesh, its opposite and combatant. Nothing is more inculcated upon us, than this endeavour after an advancement in holiness and spirituality: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure;" "and, add to your faith, virtue," etc., "and let us go on to perfection;" with various other exhortations of the same kind, which plainly prove that this is a duty indispensably incumbent on us. But, alas! we are very defective herein, which is the cause of that slow progress we make in the knowledge of heavenly things, and to this is owing very much that want of the savour and relish of them, which too visibly appears in most professors at this day.

VI. Great advantages attend it. Spiritual peace, which greatly differs from that carnal security that usually is the concomitant of a backsliding frame. Joy in God, which causes us to despise those low and weak pleasures wherewith our corrupt minds are too apt to be delighted. Freedom and boldness in our addresses at the throne of grace. Thankfulness and gratitude to our heavenly Father, for all the good and inestimable blessings he is pleased to confer upon us. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us," etc. This strength of faith will enable us to give glory to God, even under such dispensations as are most trying to it. What difficulties will it not surmount; what afflictions will it not bear with calmness, submission, patience, yea, with triumph? Since such advantages arise to ourselves, and such glory to God from this faith, shall we think anything too hard a labour to attain it, or anything too dear and valuable to part with for its enjoyment? It is our folly if we do.

There is no inconsistency at all, between a persuasion of the necessity of a strict and regular attendance to duty, on our part, in order to the enjoyment of a sense of divine favour, and a belief that our growth in grace entirely depends on the efficiency of the Holy Spirit. As to the acknowledgment of the latter, and a steady regard to it as a precious and indubitable truth, I will not give place to any man in the world. But then, on the other hand, I am equally satisfied, that it is only in the ways of holiness that any have reason to hope for the benign influences of the Spirit of God, in order to the strengthening

and increase of grace in their hearts. A careless, negligent, and loose walk, will always be followed with dreadful effects. The bitter weeds, the briars and thorns of corruption of one kind or other will grow, and grace will decline. Sad instances of the truth of this our times abound with. All pretensions unto the present enjoyment of the assurance of faith in those whose conversation is unbecoming the gospel, are groundless, if they ever enjoyed that favour. In some, it is to be feared, that at last it will appear, that they never were by the Holy Spirit sealed unto the day of redemption, notwithstanding all that confidence with which they have expressed themselves.

This is an observation not intended for any who are mourning under a sense of their sins and sinfulness, whatever their revolts may have been through the violence of temptation and the strength of lust stirred up by it. Far be it from me to offer anything which hath the least tendency to break the bruised reed, and quench the smoking flax. But the condition of some, who are at ease in Zion, calls for awakening reproof, that at least, they may not have it to say that they were suffered to go down into the chambers of death, without any warning given to them of their danger.

Objection. Some perhaps will say, "This doctrine of assurance of safety and security, or a firm persuasion of an interest in Christ, and in His salvation, is not a likely method to promote holiness; for if a man enjoys a certain hope of being happy hereafter, what need he concern himself about the manner of his behaviour? His sins are pardoned, his person is justified, he is an heir of heaven, and his title to eternal life is unalienable; can it, therefore, be expected of him that he should watch, pray and fight, since his future welfare is a thing certain in itself, and he knows it to be so?"

Answer 1. Such who thus object, are of a different opinion from our Saviour, who plainly told some that their sins were pardoned. "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." And "her sins, which are many, are forgiven." Besides, as He predicted to Peter his denial of Him, He acquainted him with that interest he had in His prevalent intercession. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;" and expressly mentions his recovery: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." This objection, therefore, is levelled against the wisdom of our blessed Saviour; and if its force is admitted, it must be at the expense of His want of care about the suitable behaviour of His followers. This is a consideration sufficient entirely to sink the objection, and to cause its authors to blush, if they had the least degree of modesty left. But,

2. Who are the persons, that from an assurance of an interest in Christ, and in His saving benefits, can be supposed, upon that assurance, will grow remiss and careless about the practice of their duty? They must be either

unregenerate or regenerate persons. The unregenerate cannot have this assurance, and, therefore, they cannot abuse it in the manner the objection supposes. And, consequently, if it is thus abused, it must be by regenerate sanctified men. From what principle in them can this abuse of so precious a favour spring? It must be either from the flesh or from the spirit. That it cannot arise from the latter, is, I suppose, a truth evident to all. And what if the flesh is inclined to abuse this or any other divine truth, is that a sufficient reason for the rejection of it? Surely it is not. He who is insensible that there is that in him which is inclined to take occasion to sin from the commandment in the law, as well as from the promises of the gospel, is a stranger to the plague of his heart. But is it proper, for that reason, to part with either the law or the gospel? Certainly it is not. This is an undoubted truth, that, that in men which abuses the gospel, it will also pervert and abuse the law; and, therefore, if we admit this shameful objection, we can retain neither the law nor the gospel.

3. Since it is only the flesh which can be guilty of thus abusing the doctrine treated of, how absurd is it to imagine that a man can enjoy this assurance while he is pampering and gratifying the flesh? That man deceives himself who is confident of enjoying future happiness, which consists very much in a perfect freedom from all sin, who allows himself in the present practice of it. I utterly deny that that man desires to be free from sin hereafter, who does not desire to forsake it now. This assurance therefore, cannot in fact give the least encouragement to sin. It is an act of the spiritual part in a believer, which never gives any advantage to the fleshly part in him.

4. It is a sacred truth, and as such it is firmly believed by us, that faith without works is dead. This faith “purifies the heart,” and it produces good works in the life of him who is the subject of it. How then can this excellent grace be, where the genuine fruits of it are not found? This objection is no better than mere calumny, designed to traduce and reproach a precious evangelical truth. But this is nothing new nor strange. If some sort of men did not despise, reject, and slander divine truths, it would be a strong temptation for me to think myself mistaken, in esteeming them such. For the things of the Spirit of God will always be foolishness to some men.

5. Those who thus object, either express the part which they themselves would act, upon such a persuasion, or they do not. If they do not, why is it that they object after this manner? If they do, and are in earnest, I am not afraid nor ashamed to tell them that they are strangers to grace and holiness; and if they have no other principle than what at present influences and determines them, nothing is more certain than that they will descend into the bottomless pit, from whence there is no redemption. That man to whom

it would be a satisfaction to continue in sin, upon having an assurance of impunity, most certainly is in the broad road to destruction. He who desires not to be holy now, is dreadfully mistaken, if he imagines that he desires holiness hereafter. The eternal ruin of such sort of persons, whose real principle this objection expresses, is inevitable, without sovereign grace and mercy works a change in their hearts; and their everlasting damnation will be just. If any pretend unto an assurance of the pardon of their sin, and of the salvation of their souls by the blood and righteousness of Christ, who have no experience of hearty sorrow for sin, indignation against it, and against themselves because of their transgressions, they know nothing at all what that holy assurance is. They undoubtedly are “in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity.” Some such bold pretenders and impious boasters it may be there are; but their condition is most dreadful, for death, eternal death, in fact can only be expected by them. I am sure that heaven is not their choice, and that they have nothing to look for, but the fiery vengeance of a holy God. This I know is true, that assurance of pardon through the blood of the Son of God, never fails to produce in the mind the greatest abhorrence of sin, and the most earnest desires of its utter destruction.

CHAPTER 7

Of A Believer’s Growth In Grace

BY grace I do not intend a speculative knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity. That an acquaintance with the truth, connection, and harmony of Christian principles is not grace, sufficiently appears I think, from what has been before observed.

Nor gifts grace; neither an ability to explain, defend, and inculcate those doctrines, though it be in ever so serviceable a manner. A man may be furnished with eminent gifts, and greatly improve them by reading, meditation, and a diligent exercise of those talents, and at the same time dwindle in his graces. And he certainly will so do, if he aims not at the exercise of his graces in the exercise of his gifts. When it is thus with any who are employed in public work, however accurate their performances may be, a spiritual savour will always be found wanting in them. It is as necessary for a minister to look well to his graces as to his gifts, if he desires and designs an improvement in both. I fear that with many there is great neglect in this matter, if the best are not culpable of too much negligence herein.

As the Apostle Paul was very eminent in grace and holiness, so it was his earnest desire, that churches and particular persons to whom he directed his Epistles, might increase and greatly flourish therein. And in my opinion, we may easily learn wherein that growth of grace consists, by attending unto his

solemn prayers to God in behalf those to whom he writes; and by consulting the accounts which he gives us of his own gracious experience, relating unto this momentous subject.

I. Let us attend unto the consideration of what was the subject matter of his request unto God for others. Hereby our views will be much enlarged on this noble subject; and if there is anything of spirituality in our minds, we shall, under the blessing of God, be stirred up to make his petitions for others, our requests unto God for ourselves.

He prays for the enlargement of the saints' knowledge of heavenly mysteries. This favour he earnestly desires might be vouchsafed unto the Ephesians, Philippians, and to the Colossians. It is evident that he intends the most sublime and deep mysteries of the gospel. Doctrines which many through ignorance, pride, or it may be as to some, a contempt of them, would have them buried in eternal silence and oblivion; or if not so, will scarcely allow of an explicit mention of them in public; because, as they say, "they are of so abstruse, difficult, and perplexed a nature, that they are above the reach of vulgar and ordinary capacities;" and therefore not likely to be of any very great use to the interest of holiness and practical religion, which it must be the real and principal design of the Christian revelation to promote. And the dreadful effects of this blasphemous pretence against God and His sacred truths, under which the church at this time groans, and in many places withers and declines, in savour, spirituality, and experimental religion, are far more than I am capable of enumerating. The meanest Christian is able to conceive of the sublimest principles that are peculiar to the gospel, in that manner the apostle desired the dear saints to whom his epistles were inscribed, might understand them: that is to say, in a spiritual manner. Strong reason is not necessary to this, though strong grace is needful to a fixed and steady persuasion of them after a spiritual sort. The knowledge of technical terms, the use of which has become necessary in treating on those subjects, through learned men's subtle and quaint distinctions upon them, not out of love to the truth, but with a desire to curtail, corrupt, or entirely sink it, is not required to a spiritual understanding of them. Philosophy and logic are useless things in this matter. Neither are they of that advantage, even when soberly used, in the handling of evangelical doctrines, as some suggest they are. They cannot contribute anything towards the discovery of those truths. The reason is plain, they are no other than an artificial ordering of our conceptions concerning some natural truths, and inferring others from them, which naturally follow from thence. And what can that do towards the discovery of supernatural truths, or of the nature of those truths? Nothing at all. Persons who (in comparison with others) may be

accounted babes in the knowledge of earthly things, may have a clear and distinct understanding of the nature of the mysteries of Christianity, though they cannot discourse of them in that artificial way, which some with great readiness may do, who are us ignorant of the things themselves, whereof they speak, as a stock or a stone. God knows that human science is a poor foundation for human pride. Philosophy, even in her own sphere, is not so knowing in many instances, as her votaries represent her. She often puts us off, with ingenious conjectures only, though she vaunts, as if she gave us the most undeniable demonstration, and we are so foolish as to grow up into confidence without proof. It is enough for her to act this part. in natural things, let us never permit her to impose upon us in spirituals also.

This observation dropt from me before I was well aware, but since it has fallen from my pen, I shall not retract it, for I know it is truth, however mortifying it is to our boasted intellectual powers, which I could give proof of in various instances.

I. They are common Christians, for whose improvement in the knowledge of the mysteries of divine grace, the apostle prays; not such whose talents were above the ordinary degree. The evidence afforded in favour of their truth, is obvious in itself, and not beyond the reach of a common understanding, though it is much obscured by the studied distinctions, philosophical objections, and critical wrestings of many learned men. And as to the nature of those mysterious doctrines, reason merely, can never understand it. This I think may be received, as a certain rule in divinity, viz., that those principles, which as to their truth are above the discovery of reason, the natural understanding of men, how much soever it is improved, can never attain unto an acquaintance with their true nature. That is a supernatural gift. And the meanest capacity is as susceptible of this heavenly grace as the most capacious mind. And, therefore, the profoundest doctrines of Christianity may be profitably understood by persons of very small discernment and abilities in other things, as they are proposed to the faith of the saints in the Holy Scriptures, for their encouragement and consolation. This holds true even with respect to the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, predestination, satisfaction, and efficacious grace. Though they cannot dispute about essence and person, priority or posteriority, nor concerning subsistence in itself, or in another; nor of the divine decrees, in consistence with human liberty; nor of the foundation on which God proceeded in the business of satisfaction; nor of the certain efficacy of divine grace in the conversion of a poor sinner, in an agreement with the free agency of the subject of that effectual influence. I say, though they cannot debate those points with subtle objectors, they are capable of understanding these

precious truths, in such sort as they are revealed of God, with a gracious view to excite in their minds a holy adoration of Himself, and of His designs in their favour; and to engage them to exert acts of faith, hope, and joy in a glorious Redeemer, wherein alone consists that knowledge which will stand our souls in stead, in a time of trial, temptation, and more especially at the awful hour of death.

1. The apostle entreats that the knowledge of the Ephesians might be increased in the great things of God, viz.,

His relation unto Christ, as mediator, and unto His people in and through Him. This is implied in that character under which he speaks of God, in his solemn address to Him, "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ." And, that they might clearly view Him, as the Fountain and Author of blessedness and glory, signified by the other branch of His character, "the Father of glory." He communicates grace, which is a meetness for future glory; it is the first-fruits of it, and is of a glorious nature, and is called glory. An advance in grace is a transformation of the mind into the heavenly image, from glory to glory. The titles he gives to the blessed Spirit are very instructive, and suited unto the matter of his following petitions: "The Spirit of wisdom and revelation." He perfectly knows all the deep things of God, wherein His wisdom is in the fullest manner discovered, and is able to make us know them to our peace, consolation, and spiritual joy. Now follow his requests unto God for them, that their minds might be furnished with larger degrees of heavenly light: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened," whereby they would clearly discern what was "the hope of their calling." Vocation intends that holy calling, which is the fruit of God's purpose and grace, given us in Christ before the world began. The hope of it may respect either the object and foundation of the saints' spiritual expectations, or the good which grace in the soul is a hope of enjoying hereafter, which is expressed by "riches of glory," attributed to the heavenly inheritance. Somewhat of that glory we receive in this state; but the riches, plenitude, and perfection of it, are reserved for our enjoyment in the future state. Again, he desires that they might know what grace and power were displayed and exerted in that good work wrought in them, as the only preparative for a participation of that glorious state. His desire was that they might have a more enlarged apprehension of the cause of their vivification, when they were in a state of death in sin. Which cause is the infinite power of God. "The greatness of His power, yea, the exceeding greatness of His power, and the working of His mighty power, the same as He exerted in raising Christ from the dead." Some learned men, in order to evade the force of an argument taken from hence, in confirmation of the doctrine of the efficacious grace of God, in the conversion of a poor sinner,

observe, that it was the manner of the eastern writers to use strong language and bold figures; and that, therefore, some abatement of the force of their expressions may be made, consistently enough with the true intention of those authors. When criticism fails, this shift is to serve their turn. And no question but they compliment themselves very highly, on account of this invented evasion, by the help of which, they may sink the pompous language of a divine writer to as low a sense as they would have had him expressed, if they had dictated to him on those subjects. We see that other people, besides the Papists, know how to make the Scriptures a nose of wax. What if some others should act the same part? And why may they not, on what is said relating to the subject of future blessedness in this place and elsewhere; and maintain, that though lofty and grand expressions are used on that subject, yet no such grand and noble ideas are intended to be conveyed by those exalted modes of speech, as we imagine; and insist upon it that the future state of the saints is not such in grandeur, majesty, bliss, and glory, as those rising expressions in loftiness naturally lead us to conclude upon. What must we say to them? Surely this, — except we will content ourselves with low apprehensions of that blessed state, and lay aside our hopes of being hereafter so happy as we desire to be, — that they are bold corrupters of the Word of God, though they boast of superior learning and ingenuity, in interpreting it. Without the leave of these men, we shall still believe that when we read of God's inheritance in the saints, and of glory, and of God's glory, and of the riches of that divine glory, in relation to that inheritance, such blessedness is designed, as far transcends our present most exalted ideas of it. And when we read of God's power, of the greatness of His power, of the exceeding greatness of His power, and of the working of His mighty power, in effecting a saving change in our souls, we shall still retain a persuasion, (whether these men will allow us or no) of two things.

(1.) That this change requires the exertion of the infinite power of God to produce it.

(2.) That almighty power is certainly effectual in its influence on the hearts of sinners, and really converts them from sin to God. And since the knowledge of this, and the increase of it, among other things, were the matter of the apostle's request to God for the Ephesians, we are firmly persuaded that the belief of it is a necessary article of faith, and that it is what may be apprehended in a very useful manner by common Christians, and that a growth in grace necessarily supposes an increasing acquaintance with this, and the other things above mentioned. Let some call them speculative points of doctrine, which have little or no influence upon practice. It is true, indeed, they have no influence at all upon the minds and the behaviour of many; but

that is because they are strangers to Christianity, both in its principles and that holy conversation, which it recommends. Farther, the apostle prays that God, “according to the riches of His glory,” or of His grace, which is His glory, and he designs and desires that they might so account it, would strengthen them, “with might by His Spirit in their inner man.” The inner man only is the subject of a divine influence, and capable of receiving spiritual strength; the flesh, or old man, is not so; and it betrays great ignorance, both of grace and of the flesh too, to imagine that it can. Increase in grace consists much in the communication of an additional vigour to our spiritual part, whereby it exerts itself in a lively manner. Farther, he beseeches God that “Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith,” i.e., that they might be much conversant with Him in a way of believing, or in acting faith on Him, in his person, offices, work, and benefits; in the merit of His obedience, and of His sacrifice, and in the fulness of His grace, and the prevalence of His intercession, that “being rooted and grounded in love,” in a sense of a dear Saviour’s love to them, in their love to Him, and to one another, they might be equal to any of the saints, in a perception of the love of Christ; or in an acquaintance with that love in its dimensions, the “breadth, length, depth, and height” of it, know and be persuaded of it, as an affection which surpasses our most extensive ideas, and that they might “be filled with all the fulness of God.” Upon the whole, I think two things may fairly be inferred, from what is expressed by the apostle in a way of petition. First. That grace is a spiritual understanding of spiritual things, or heavenly mysteries. Secondly. That the increase of grace necessarily supposes the advancement of that knowledge.

And the apostle prayed that the Philippians might “abound in love” more and more, “in knowledge, and in all judgment.” Christian love is not a blind affection or passion; it is a spiritually discerning grace. And those things that are the objects on which the grace of love is acted, are discerned in some measure in their nature, in order to a spiritual delight in them. Hence it follows, that where there is not a spiritual understanding of spiritual things, there is no spiritual pleasure in them; and also that we are deceived if we think that we increase in love to heavenly objects, without a growing acquaintance with their excellency and glory. An advancement in divine love, cannot be without an improvement in heavenly knowledge. The more a Christian knows of the importance and glory of evangelical truths, the more will his heart be attracted after them, and the infinitely glorious objects to which they relate, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And therefore it is a folly greatly to be lamented, that men propose to raise and maintain in the minds of those to whom they minister, a holy affection, without endeavouring to furnish them with an understanding of the holy mysteries of the Christian

religion. For no object is loved, farther than it is apprehended and known. Love to God springs from the knowledge of Him, in the designs and actings of His grace, and the benefits accruing to our souls from thence.

In the doctrines of Christianity, two things are to be observed. 1. Their truth. 2. Their nature. A man may discern the former, who hath no perception of the latter. In the latter, an apprehension of the former is necessarily included; for the nature of evangelical truths cannot be known without the mind hath received a conviction of their verity; and consequently, the flourishing of the grace of love, supposes a growing acquaintance both with the truth and nature of these doctrines. But it may be needful to observe, by way of caution, that love only arises from a spiritual perception of the nature of those sublime truths; a bare conviction of their truth, however full it is, by an attentive consideration of the clear evidences given in favour thereof, will never beget any delight in the things themselves, for they are still unknown. Let none, therefore, content themselves with a discernment and persuasion of their truth, nor imagine that they are Christians because they have a knowledge of the truth of those principles; for men may eternally perish under the just condemnation of the law, who yield the firmest assent unto the truth of the gospel. Real grace is a spiritual understanding of spiritual things, and the soul's adherence unto them, and holy delight in them, as they are glorious, and exalt the glory of God in His persons and infinite perfections.

The Colossians were also interested in the prayers of the apostle; and for them he entreated of God an enlargement of their heavenly knowledge, or an increasing acquaintance with the will of God, i.e., His counsels and purposes of grace, concerning their salvation in its several parts, and in the infinitely wise methods wherein it is accomplished; which contrivance is the fullest, brightest, and most astonishing display of the wisdom of God. His wisdom shines in all His works; but in the affair of our redemption by Christ, there is such an exercise of mercy and grace towards sinners; and such a manifestation of divine wrath and indignation against sin; as will forever fill the minds of saints and angels with astonishment and delight. In this business the greatest evil is overruled by sovereign love, for bringing into view and everlasting enjoyment the highest good, viz., the treasures of God's kindness, grace and mercy; which otherwise had lain eternally hid and concealed. And it is especially to be observed, that it is a spiritual understanding of that so deep and sublime a mystery that the apostle intends, and that is the matter of his request to God on their behalf. That it is an acquaintance with the real and true nature of the doctrines of Christianity, not merely a perception of their truth, which never produces those effects that he ardently wished

might plentifully be found with them. Farther, that he designs an increase in the knowledge of the profound truths of the Christian revelation, will not, I think, admit of the least scruple, if we take into consideration that his desire was, that they might be replenished with the knowledge of “the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,” where is clearly proposed to their serious consideration, and consequently to their faith, what many nominal Christians pretend can be no article of the belief of common and ordinary saints, viz., the doctrine of the Trinity, or of the real distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit, their equality and their union. And that glorious mystery which these Three, alike eternal, wise, powerful, and good, were concerned in the contrivance of, even the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ. And it is worthy of notice that if there is anything in that scheme which deserves the name of mystery above other parts of it, the apostle desired that they might receive the largest and richest assurance of its truth, and that they might profess and own it as an article of their creed. Nor did the inspired writer, under the dictates of the Holy Spirit, pray for what is in its nature impossible. True it is, let learned men take it as they please, common Christians are full as capable of understanding the great things of God, as any of those who have the best title to that character.

And as Christ is the sum and substance of evangelical truth, or as all those truths meet in Him, their proper centre, a growth in heavenly knowledge is an increase of our acquaintance with Him, in the constitution of His person, offices, work, fulness, and benefits. Hence the apostle exhorts us to “walk in Him, as we have received Him,” which intends the renewal of acts of faith upon Him, as He “of God, is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” Nor is there any increase in grace and holiness, without renewed acts of faith on Him, for it is only by believing views of His glory, that we are changed into the heavenly image, from glory to glory.

II. If we attend unto the consideration of the apostle’s gracious experience as he relates it, in respect to this point, we shall see the truth of what is observed above, fully exemplified in him. He declares, that he lived a life of faith on Christ, in His love, the acts of His love, its nature, and the precious effects of it. And by a discernment of his excellency, beauty, and glory, ardent love to Him, delight in Him, and earnest desires of a clearer knowledge of Him, and of greater conformity unto Him, were produced in his soul.

1. He set no value on all his accomplishments and excellencies, which he had esteemed gain. The discovery he received of the glory of Christ, the Sun of righteousness, obscured and hid all the shine of his own glittering righteousness, which before was exceedingly pleasing to him, and in the

light whereof he had walked with great delight. He now saw that he had been involved in darkness, that caused him to be content in encompassing himself about with sparks, and walking in the light of his own fire; and that it was rich grace undeceived him, and prevented his lying down in eternal sorrow; which is the case of all those who are left to this dependence on their own services, however exact and shining they may be in their apprehension, for they are no other than an ignis fatuus, which will lead men into everlasting perdition.

2. He accounted all things, i.e., his extraordinary gifts, and their exercise for the benefit of the church, his grace, and the actings of it in all duties he discharged both as a Christian and a minister, but “loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.” The phrase is very observable, he doth not say for Christ, but for the knowledge of Christ. Such a value he put upon an acquaintance with Him, in His glory, in the glory of His person, righteousness and grace, as caused him to look upon all other things as comparatively nothing. And he freely, cheerfully suffered the loss of them all, and esteemed them but dung, dog’s meat, (as the Greek word signifies) for Christ.

3. In this low estimate of all these excellencies, he had respect to the righteousness of Christ for justification before God; and therefore, he casts no slight or contempt on grace and the fruits of it in itself, but rejects it in the business of his acceptance with God, for the righteousness of Christ, which is infinitely glorious and valuable, and hath infinite merit in it arising from the infinite dignity of His person, who is as truly God, as He is really man.

4. He expresses an intense desire to know Him, that is to say, to grow in the knowledge of His person, who is incomparably excellent and beautiful, and admits of no compare with the loveliest among angels or saints. His glory is like that of the sun, theirs but like that of the planets, which is borrowed, and inexpressibly inferior to that of those lucid bodies from which they derive it all. Every excellency centers in Him, and therefore, He deservedly is the object of the love, joy, adoration and delight of the happy saints and angels who encircle His throne in heaven. He is all beauty without blemish, all radiant glory, without so much as the least shade, or a feeble ray. As God, He is possessed of all infinite perfections. As man, He is the subject of purity untainted, and adorned with all the shining graces of the Holy Spirit in their plenitude and perfection. As God and man united, He is the most glorious effect of the immense wisdom of God; which constitution of His person was designed to answer ends respecting God and the church, which could not in any other way be effected.

Ends most interesting to the glory of all the divine perfections, and unto our peace, joy, and everlasting felicity. And, consequently, a spiritual view of

His person, will kindle in our hearts fervent love to Him, beget a holy delight in him, encourage us to exercise a holy trust in Him, and influence us to make the adoring song of the blessed angels who were the joyful messengers of His nativity, our own, and with pleasing accents cause us to pronounce their language on that most happy occasion: — “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good-will towards men.” If we attentively consider the grace, mercy, kindness, and wisdom discovered in the constitution of His person, we shall be at a loss to determine which most calls for our wonder, praise, and holy admiration. Again, the knowledge of the different states of our gracious Redeemer, must certainly strike us with amazement, and possess our souls with ravishing pleasure. Can we view this glorious person in the depth of poverty, laden with calumny and reproach, delivered up to suffering and death, yea, to an ignominious, painful, and accursed death, and that for our sins, and in order to our eternal redemption from misery, which we so justly deserved, without astonishment at the grace of God, and without shame, sorrow for, and indignation against sin and ourselves? Our hearts must be stone, if this prospect affects them not. On the other hand, can we see Him crowned with glory, and not feel the pleasing passions of love, delight, and joy arise in our breasts? It can never be.

5. The apostle earnestly desired a farther acquaintance with the power of His resurrection. That hath an influence into our justification, as it is an evident demonstration of the reality and completeness of His satisfaction; is God’s act of acquitting Him of our sins, and is His discharge of us from guilt, in Him, as members whom he represented. He was “raised again for our justification.” A surety’s discharge from his obligation upon payment made, necessarily infers the right to a discharge of the principal, whose surety he is. Again, the resurrection of Christ hath a powerful influence into our spiritual life, both in the principle and growth of it. One happy consequence of the Head’s rising again, is, the members partaking of a divine life from Him. We are begotten again by virtue of His resurrection. Once more, our resurrection to a state of blessedness, is a fruit of His vivification who died for our sins. This is a point largely insisted on by our apostle, in the fifteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians: — “Because Christ lives, we shall live also.” These are very momentous truths, and if faith is in a lively manner exercised upon them, our souls will be filled with solid peace, and holy triumph over all our enemies, and we shall set very light by all the things of this world, our minds and affections will be raised to things that are above, where our risen Lord is.

6. Grace is conversant about the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. His sufferings were great and of a penal nature, in our stead, and for our

redemption. We therefore, have fellowship with Him therein. He suffered as our Surety and Head, and we as debtors and members, were therein concerned. Hence, whatever benefits and advantages arise from His sufferings, they relate to us, and were intended for us: this, the very nature of the thing, and the grounds of that amazing transaction, abundantly testify. And how great and glorious are those blessings which spring from his agony and death! Pardon of sin, of all sin to those whose guilt He bore; peace and reconciliation with God; security from divine vengeance; victory over sin, death and hell. Since such eminent fruits arise from the sufferings of Christ, and since there is so much of the wisdom, grace, mercy, sovereignty, righteousness, and justice of God, discovered in that affair; and since faith discerns these things therein, what joy! what consolation! what adoration! must the prospect of them produce, and maintain in the souls of believers! And an intense desire to increase in the knowledge of those things, is a good evidence of a growth in grace. On the contrary, if we are content with a low degree of understanding in these important truths, and we are but little conversant with them, grace is under a decline: for these things are our food, our life, our all, as we are Christians or spiritual persons.

7. The apostle longed vehemently for a conformity to the death of Christ. By virtue of His death, His members are dead to the law, sin, and to the world. His death is the condemnation and death of sin, which is the procuring cause of death, curse, and wrath: and as faith views this, the saints die unto sin and live unto God, and serve Him on other grounds and considerations than what the law proposes, in a cheerful, spiritual, and heavenly manner, without legal terrors, which never produce an obedience that is acceptable to God. And they die to the world. That is to them as a dead carcass, wholly unfit for their entertainment and delight, even in the very best things it has to boast of. Its riches are not valued, its pleasures are despised, all its honours are trampled on as low and mean trifles, when faith is much exercised on a crucified Saviour. Hence, says the apostle “by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” The men of the world have no pleasure in grace, and grace hath no delight in the world; it considers all its delectable things not only as trifles, but as dead and lifeless objects, which have nothing amiable and attractive in them. A man would as soon embrace and hug in his bosom a stinking carcass, as grace choose and delight in the perishing vanities of this polluted world. If it hath not better and infinitely more glorious objects to converse with and exert itself upon, it will retire and remain unactive. And we may be certain of the truth of this, that grace is not exercised even if it is as a principle, in the minds of those who are immersed in worldly cares, carnal pleasures, and the empty titles this world can bestow

on men. Oh! how many professors give sad evidence of a carnal mind, by a pursuit after, fondness for, and delight in things which the name they bear obliges them to consider as dead, putrid, and rotten! How far are they from desiring a conformity to the death of Christ, who are for living in pleasure, and are never easy but when they are amusing themselves with one vanity or another, none of which afford them satisfaction; and therefore, they endeavour to supply their emptiness by their great variety, and run round in an amazing circle of unsatisfying newly-invented delights, to the loss of all their spiritual peace, joy, and it may be, unto the eternal ruin of their precious souls hereafter. And hence we may see, that it is a vain thing to hope for an increase in holiness and spirituality, without a growing acquaintance with Christ, in His person, the power of His resurrection, and in the fellowship of His sufferings; for conformity to His death is unattainable in any other way.

8. The apostle expresses the extent of his desire, which was of a vast compass, for it reached unto the summit of that glory God intends to bestow upon His people, at the resurrection of their bodies from the dead. This he longed after, kept in view, and joyfully expected, “waiting for the adoption,” or that blessedness and glory which belong unto the children of God, who are heirs of Him and joint- heirs with Christ; and this he explains by the redemption of the body, in that place. And elsewhere, he declares the same earnest longing for this happy state, wherein “mortality shall be swallowed up of life.” This was his aim, and the bent of his desire: — “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” His proficiency in heavenly knowledge, grace, and holiness was very great; but far short of what he aimed at: — “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect;” that is to say, I am so far from having arrived to that glory, that I am not yet perfect, or furnished with that knowledge, purity, and love, which the souls of departed saints are the subjects of. And therefore, he desired to depart and be with Christ, which is far better than the present state, but inferior in glory to that which will commence immediately upon the resurrection, when the saints will be rendered immortal, spiritual, and glorious in their mortal part; their glorified bodies be reunited to their perfect minds; and made capable of steadily looking upon Christ their Head in all His glory at the right hand of God, whose face shines as the sun in its full strength; when all the elect will be presented to the Father, in those heights of glory His everlasting love appointed them to the enjoyment of, as sons and heirs of Himself; when a complete victory over all their enemies, sin, Satan, death and hell, shall be enjoyed by them all. And when the divine Father will most clearly appear to be all in all. ALL to

Christ as the Mediator and Head of the elect body, “the church of the

first-born, whose names are written in heaven;” and ALL in every member of that body. And therefore, Head and Members will eternally unite in songs of praise, joy, and adoration for his gracious, sovereign, and infinitely wise purposes concerning them. Christ the Head will lead in ascriptions of glory to the Father, for the designs he formed about Him and His members in his eternal mind; and they will joyfully catch His adoring language, and express their gratitude for His redeeming love in the lofty strains of praise they will learn of Him in the world above. And the holy angels who encircle the church, placed near the throne of their exalted Head, with holy affection, delight, and wonder, will gaze upon the superior glory of the bride, the Lamb’s wife; as the result of sovereign goodness and immense wisdom, which will engage them all to ascribe salvation, glory, and power to God, and unto Him that sits on the throne forever and ever. This glorious state was ardently desired by the apostle, and he had it in prospect; and he followed after, or endeavoured to obtain the knowledge of this state. “If that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” Calling is unto God’s eternal glory, and it is a disposition to converse in a way of believing, with those objects which will always be viewed in that blissful state. He did not reckon himself to have apprehended; his knowledge, though very extensive, was not complete: but one thing above all others he did, “forgetting the things that were behind,” i.e., the world, on which he had turned his back, with an intention never more to afford it a smiling look in its most pleasing dress and forms; and as to the things he had already learned of a spiritual nature, he would not dwell on them, but as a person in a race, (to which he alludes) looks not back on the ground he has run over, but continues his course without stay or abatement of his pace, that he may win the prize for which he runs; so would he pursue his end in view; “reaching forth towards the things that are before.” Glorious and precious things he had enjoyed views of by faith; but not content with those prospects, his desires were intensely carried forth after new glories, which he knew would open to his clear, uninterrupted, and endless view in the better world, where he vehemently longed to be. “I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Effectual vocation is a high calling indeed: it is glorious in all its causes, viz., the impulsive, the rich grace and mercy of God; the procuring, the blood of Christ; the efficient, is the good Spirit of God. Its final cause, that God may be honoured and glorified by us. He forms us for Himself, that we may show forth His praise. And it is with a view to our enjoyment of God; for we are begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for us. And the nature of it is spiritual and glorious; its effects are all excellent and holy. It is the calling of God, and

that as in Christ Jesus, — as a new covenant God and Father in and through Him, to all those who are the happy subjects of this vocation. The prize is eternal glory and blessedness. The mark we must reach if we receive the prize, is Christ in His person, offices, work and benefits. For those who have not the Son have not the life of grace, nor shall possess the life of glory. The holy apostle pressed towards Christ, as his all in all. As the foundation of his hope of pardon, peace, and acceptation with God; and as his title to future glory. And as He, who alone could keep and preserve him to that state, and put him into the possession of it. The Father has given Him power over all flesh, that He might give eternal life to as many as He hath given Him. Oh! the holy ardour of this excellent saint and great apostle, to improve in spiritual knowledge, fervent love, and true wholeness; he was so intent on these things, that he regarded nothing else. And herein he proposes himself as an example to others. Could we imitate him, O how happy should we be!

I think it may not be improper to make some observations on the gracious experience of this eminently holy person. And,

1. Surely we must be convinced, that as the essence of grace consists in a spiritual knowledge of Christ, growth in it necessarily supposes an increasing acquaintance with His excellency and glory, as the Head and Saviour of the church. For if real grace is a perception of His beauty in His person, and of His suitableness to our condition in the character of a Redeemer, certainly an advancement therein must consist in more clear views of His glory, which never fail of changing our minds in a higher degree into the heavenly image, even from glory to glory. Hence is this exhortation given us: — “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.” A mind wholly destitute of the spiritual knowledge of Christ, is devoid of grace. For without this knowledge, the heart cannot be good. And where there is but low degree of it, there is but a small measure of grace. Only let it be observed, that it is an understanding of spiritual things themselves that is designed, and not merely a perception of their truth. Persons capable of the latter, may eternally remain incapable of the former. For this kind of knowledge is proper only to holy spiritual persons.

2. All endeavours after improvement in holiness, without mixing faith with the great doctrines of the gospel, whereof Christ is the sum and substance, will prove ineffectual. One important end of the Christian ministry is to promote spirituality and heavenly mindedness in believers; and this end cannot be answered but by proposing to their consideration evangelical truths, and their acting faith upon them. That ministry, therefore, which is most spiritual, is best suited to answer this great design. Such who act in that sphere in the church, under the influence of various motives,

may determine to say little, if anything, in the course of their ministry, on some points of doctrine; but as this is not to their honour, so it is not to the advantage of those who hear them. And to such a height is this prudential caution carried by many, as that very little is declared concerning the origin of our salvation, viz., the divine sovereignty on which it entirely rests, and into which it must wholly be resolved. Also concerning the certain efficacy of the death of Christ, because that is inconsistent with the corrupt notion of a general ransom; nor concerning unconditional justification, nor of the determining influence of the grace of God, on whomsoever it is exerted, in order to their conversion. The effects hereof are ignorance, and a lifeless formality in religion.

3. When we enquire into the state and frame of our souls, let us especially consider how Christ and evangelical doctrines stand in our esteem. If Christ is not precious, dear, and infinitely valuable in our account, we know Him not, nor have a just claim to the character of believers. Unto them that believe, He is precious. If He is in our estimation, fairer than the children of men; the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; — if His person is the object of our choice above all others, because of that transcendent glory we see in Him; — if His benefits are the matter of our delight, joy, and the ground of all our future hopes, in times of trial, temptations, and spiritual distress, occasioned by a sense of sin, deserved curse, wrath, and vengeance; and we place our confidence therein, let what will be the issue. — If our souls act thus, upon a conviction of the wisdom, fitness, and glory of this method of salvation; if the thoughts we have of Him, of His benefits, and His grace, afford us our chiefest pleasure; and if we lament that we know Him and love Him no more, and serve Him no better; if we value the gospel, as it is a revelation of Him, in what He is in Himself, in what He is of God made to us, we have reason to conclude that we are passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation; and that grace is growing in us.

4. Hence we may learn what is to be our aim under a declension, in order to a revival of our graces, and wherein that revival consists.

What saint soever is declined in grace, whether he is gone off from the practice of his duty or not, Christ and the truths of the gospel are less valued by him, than formerly they were. His thoughts are less employed on the person of Christ, and he hath not the same relish and savour of evangelical truths. He is not so much conversant with them, nor hath the same pleasure in them as formerly. His mind is entertained with other objects, and his affections are grown cool to heavenly things. If this is our case, as it certainly is the sorrowful condition of many professors in our days; and considering how general this is, it is very much, if it is not thus with us in some degree; let

us be persuaded of this, as a certain truth, that a revival under this melancholy decay, must begin where we were directed by the Holy Spirit at our first conversion, to begin in our actings God-ward, viz., in an application unto Christ, who is our life, our all, and in a renewed acceptation of the report of the gospel concerning Him, in His person, offices, work, and precious benefits. Without this, an alteration for the better is not to be expected; for if it is, we shall certainly meet with a sad disappointment. Grace when decayed will never recover its vigour, unless it is acted on those glorious objects, which it is a disposition to view and embrace with delight.

Mortification of sin is the other general branch of duty, whereunto true grace disposes Christians.

Sin dwells in them. When they would do good, evil is present with them. And of the flesh, or unregenerate part, these things may be observed, viz., that no good thing dwells in it. The nature of it is wholly evil, and it is entirely contrary to grace; and, therefore, no good can be educed out of it. Fire may as soon be struck out of ice, as good dispositions and motions be produced in the corrupt part of the regenerate. And it will never be prevailed upon to concur with the new principle in any of those acts which it puts forth; hence the mind of a believer is at no time wholly spiritual and holy in its acts; there is more or less of a renitency, or an impulsive resistance in his soul to what is holy, at all seasons. He is never so heavenly, as to have nothing of carnality arising in his mind; so that his purest actions are tinged with a sinful defilement; and he is not without cause of shame and self-abasement in his best moments. All his righteousnesses are as filthy rags. No persons are more remote from real holiness, than those who conceit that they have nothing of sin. It may be taken for granted that there is no true love to God in that man, who is confident that he hath no aversation of mind from God.

Again, as the flesh constantly opposes what is good, so it disposes the will to what is evil; and all its motions, as under its direction, are towards objects that are vain and carnal. Besides, the violence of it is sometimes very great, and it captivates the will and the affections, notwithstanding the opposition which grace makes against it. Farther, it is seated in the heart, and hath possession in all its powers. The understanding, the will, and the affections, are all subject to its cursed influence. Hence darkness, obstinacy, and vanity, are found in the minds of the best. Moreover, grace or the new creature is not more heartily engaged in the service of God, than the flesh is disposed to the service of sin; and it is as possible to bring the spiritual part into an actual rebellion against God, as to prevail with the unregenerate part to subject itself to His authority. And, therefore, though there are not two distinct rational principles of operation in a believer, there are two distinct

springs of action, in the one intelligent principle of operation in him, viz., in his mind; and one gives the will one direction, and the other gives it another, as contrary as can be; so that he acts according to one spring of action in one way, and according to the other spring of action in another way, and in both spontaneously; for those contrary actions are both voluntary, because the will is the subject of both these principles, sin and grace. It, therefore, chooses evil freely, and it voluntarily inclines to good. And unto neither is it wholly or only disposed. For the choice of evil is not made, without opposition from grace; nor is the choice of good, without opposition from sin. Hence it follows that though all the powers in a Christian are concerned, both in acts of sin, and in acts of holiness, yet none of his powers are wholly and only exerted in acts of either kind. The presence of sin, prevents the mind from being entirely spiritual and heavenly, in any of its acts; and the presence of grace, prevents its being wholly evil in any of its actions. And, therefore, there is a great difference in the manner of a regenerate man's sinning, and of the unregenerate man's, though the external acts may be the very same. The unregenerate are wholly evil in acts of sin, the regenerate are not so. For as the good actions of the saints have not the concurrence of the flesh with the spirit in them; so the regenerate part concurs not with the unregenerate part, in their sinful actions. Grace opposes sin, and sin opposes grace; and neither principle hath, nor can have the heart wholly at its direction, because it is the subject of both, as determining principles of operation of a contrary nature. And, consequently, there is such a war in the breast of a believer, as all unregenerate persons are wholly unacquainted with. They are strangers to that grief and pain, joy and sorrow, which are the effects of this combat between the flesh and spirit in the saints. They have not that will to good, nor that reluctance to evil, which regenerate persons experience within themselves, Mortification of sin is the great duty, and it ought to be the constant business of a Christian. With respect to it, we may observe, that it supposes not the extirpation of sin out of the heart; it will retain its being in the soul. This law is so deeply engraven on our minds, that we cannot efface it. The highest measure of grace we receive in this state, expels not this troublesome inmate, it keeps its residence in the heart. And its nature is not at all altered. It is still what it was, and all its motions and acts are the very same which they always were. Regeneration is not an amendment of our corrupt nature, but the implantation of a contrary principle in our souls. Nor hath the old man lost any of his members; he is complete in all his parts, though his dominion is taken away. The flesh in its disposition continues to be the very same it ever was, and therefore, the same thoughts, the same desires, and the same corrupt motions in the

affections, may arise and be stirred up, as were before grace was wrought in the soul.

Mortification of sin implies these things.

1. Abstinence from the practice of evil. Lust is very fertile in conception, and its aim is to bring forth every monstrous foetus with which it is pregnant. Grace is a check upon it, and stifles numerous of its productions, as soon as they are formed; they never see the light, nor become visible to any eye, but that of the soul itself, and unto the all-penetrating eye of God, who knows us far better than we know ourselves. And this watchfulness upon lust, lest it break forth, is extended to all its various branches, its sensitive, and also its intellectual part. Some who seem much mortified to sensual lusts, are greatly captivated by intellectual lusts. They are not swine indeed, or they do not wallow in the filth of uncleanness, drunkenness, and other fleshly gratifications; but they are full of pride, covetousness, envy, malice, and contempt of others; which are lusts as hateful as any an intelligent creature can indulge in. True grace opposes sins of every kind, not only those of the flesh, but of the mind also. That which is an opposition to sin, as sin, must be as extensive as sin itself is. It is the property of real grace not to connive at, or nourish any evil.

2. The regenerate part is an opposition to internal acts of sin, as well as watchfulness against the breaking forth thereof in external acts. Without which there is no purity of heart, or nothing of that holiness which is indispensably required to future happiness. Many seem to think otherwise; and, therefore, so long as lust breaks not forth into outward acts of sin, they are content, and think all is well. As for thoughts of folly, and the first motions of the will and affections towards what is evil, these give them no uneasiness at all. For they have worked themselves up into a persuasion that they shall not be accountable for their thoughts to Him who requires our hearts, and if we give Him them not, He receives nothing from us He values in the least measure. This was the case of the Pharisees, whom our Lord compares unto whited sepulchres, which are beautiful without; but within full of dead men's bones. Men may appear fair, whose hearts are full of filth and putrefaction. Evangelical mortification of sin not only respects the behaviour, but the heart; there it begins — the thoughts, desires, and affections, are principally the seat of it. Real grace is not content with regularity of conduct, — its aim is to introduce into the mind spirituality; abhorrence of evil, in the root and spring of it, love to God, and delight in a conformity of soul to His will. Where these things are not in some measure, there is nothing of that mortification which God requires of men. Lust is not killed, maimed, or rendered incapable of acting. Its life is continued, it remains entire in all its parts, and it exerts

itself, even in the most sanctified, in a surprising variety of ways, to their disturbance, vexation, and inexpressible grief, many times, and especially when temptations are permitted to assault their souls. Then it is kindled in the mind; and unless seasonable supplies of grace are immediately afforded, to assist against it, and check its violence, it will assuredly prevail in such a season, even in the most spiritual of the saints. Hence the apostle advises them to consider themselves, "lest they also be tempted." If grace in a believer is left to itself to struggle with sin under a temptation, lust will certainly get the better of it, and prevail to such a degree, as may be matter of sorrow to him all the remaining part of life. Sin is far from being dead, mutilated, or deprived of power for action. Still it is true that grace desires its destruction, and rejoices greatly because of that foundation it hath to conclude upon its expulsion out of the soul at death. Oh! says the Christian, that is worth dying for. Let this earthly tabernacle shake, decay, and be dissolved, that I may no longer, nor any more forever be distressed by this innate enemy, which continually annoys and assaults me, and sometimes with so much fury and violence, as strikes me with terror, and causes me to fear that I shall not be able to hold out in the combat. Sin is impatient of the restraints laid upon it by grace; and grace is uneasy with the motions of sin. Hence there is action and reaction continually in the mind of a saint. Sin inclines him one way, grace disposes him to another, even a quite contrary way. And, therefore, he cannot do what he would, and as he would, neither with respect to duty nor evil. The spiritual part is often prevented from performing duty in such a manner as it desires, through the opposition of the flesh. And lust is hindered of gratifying itself in that manner it seeks and endeavours to do, because grace opposes it, and sharply remonstrates against its motions and tendency. But of this opposition between sin and grace, holiness and unholiness, unregenerate persons have no perception at all. Nor do good men always express themselves on this subject of mortification, consistent with their own and the experience of other holy persons; whereby the faith and hope of gracious souls are sometimes weakened, and occasion is given to unbelief to prevail against faith. This is the effect of inadvertency, and of a want of due attention to the contrary workings of sin and grace in their own souls. Much skill and spiritual wisdom are required to speak on such subjects as immediately affect the experience of Christians; and these are not acquired but by the gracious instruction of the Holy Spirit, and a careful observance of ourselves. It is full as necessary for ministers to be diligent in reading their own hearts, as it is to be assiduous in reading of books. Without the former, they will not have the tongue of the learned, nor know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

3. The influence of the Spirit of God upon the principle of grace is absolutely necessary hereunto. The difference is very great between grace and sin, or between the old man and the new man, relating to ability for action. The flesh needs no external influence to quicken it to action. It is at all times capable of exerting itself, without assistance from without. It is a self mover; so is not grace; that depends upon an external cause to quicken and excite it. The saints can sin, without being acted by another; but they cannot act in a holy spiritual manner, without assistance from Christ, who is their Head of life and influence. Without Him they can do nothing. They are not sufficient of themselves, as of themselves, to think anything that is good and holy.

And, therefore, good men often pray for heavenly aid and assistance. Self endeavours to mortify sin will always prove ineffectual. The Holy Spirit is the sole Author of this work. And,

1. He gives us a sense of sin's evil nature, and maintains it in our hearts, without which we shall never be in earnest in an opposition to sin and its interest. And it is only in the light of divine grace that we discern its malignity and abominable nature, which discernment engages the soul to seek after its ruin.

2. The blessed Spirit of God suggests to our minds such considerations and motives to watchfulness against sin's encroachments, as are of the most persuasive nature, whereby we are awakened to use diligence in the business of opposition to sin.

3. He makes us sensible of, and warns us against temptations, which are great incentives to lust; and influences us to oppose them, and gives us strength against them, and by His all powerful assistance, we repel their force.

4. The divine Spirit communicates vigour to our graces, and maintains their exercise. Sin is no farther truly mortified, than grace is exercised in an opposition to 2. A bare abstinence from acts of sin may be without a principle of grace, and consequently, without the exercise of that principle in the minds of those in whom it is; but that is not that mortification the Scripture speaks of, and which is the incumbent duty of the saints. That is an abstinence from evil arising from a dislike and hatred of it, as it is displeasing to God, grieving to His Spirit, and prejudicial to our noblest part. And these things necessarily suppose the actings of the new creature in us, in a way of faith, hope, love, godly repentance, and self-denial. No unregenerate person really is engaged in the mortification of his lusts, nor is the regenerate man any farther exercised in this necessary work than as divine grace is in activity. That subdues and keeps sin under in the soul, which reigns in opposition to

it, through righteousness unto eternal life; which is grace, and nothing else.

And yet how many poor souls delude themselves with hopes of real mortification of sin, because it is, by various considerations, which are taken from the consequences of sin, prevented breaking forth into external acts! Within it rages and rules the mind, though it is, as to outward acts, laid under restraint by terror, occasioned and kept up in the breast through a sense of its direful effects. Conviction will not suffer a man to sin quietly, it will raise a dreadful storm in his mind, and compel him to think closely of what, according to the just constitution in the law, is the wages of sin, viz., eternal death. Hence he resolves not to indulge his criminal inclinations; but his will is not thereby turned off from evil, and towards holiness. The former is not his aversion, nor the latter the object of his choice and delight.

His conscience is against sin, as it is an unfit thing, and attended with dreadful effects; but his will is in the interest of sin, and he would make no difficulty of complying with its solicitations, provided it did not expose his person to danger and misery. Many, it is to be feared, owe all the denial of their vicious desires to this remonstrance the natural conscience makes against sin. The only reason why they refuse to gratify lust is, such gratification will destroy their peace, and involve them in trouble, which is not easy to be borne with.

The gospel furnishes believers with many very cogent motives to watchfulness against sin.

(1.) I begin with the almost exploded doctrine of election. That is an eternal, sovereign, and gracious appointment of men to a participation of real holiness in this state, and unto perfect holiness in the future. It is a purpose of everlasting date; an act which passed in the divine mind before the foundation of the world, whereby holiness in its beginning is secured to the objects of that decree in time, and complete holiness in eternity. This is a sovereign act. It is a free act of God's will; and not an act which proceeds on the foundation of right in the creature unto those blessings, it is a designation of its objects to the enjoyment of. The creature cannot reasonably be supposed to have a right to any favours from God, but such as are included in the first covenant, on the ground of its obedience. And the want of such obedience as that covenant required, is a forfeiture of all right to those privileges, which that covenant contains, and subjects it to all the inconveniences and miseries therein threatened. And, therefore, it is a senseless thought that the creature can acquire a right to such blessings as far transcend in excellency and glory, those which the first covenant promises. And where a right to favours can take place in none, sovereignty must be the foundation of a decree to bestow them on some. Again, it is a gratuitous

act, and the effect of mere goodness, grace, and mercy. A design to confer honour on such whose conduct justly exposes them to everlasting shame and disgrace; a resolution to make those forever happy, who, according to equity, are obnoxious to endless misery, can arise from no other cause than kindness and mercy. Such is the decree of election. And that it is a purpose of conveying holiness, the Scriptures plainly teach; under which notion, it is a precious doctrine to the saints, who know that holiness necessarily enters into happiness, and desire no other felicity than what is at least inseparably connected with a perfection of purity. With them it is a very engaging motive to endeavour after holiness, and a great encouragement ultimately to hope for a complete victory over all sin.

As for others who object to this doctrine, as of a discouraging nature to serious minds, who are in doubt whether they are elected or not; it may be observed, that they form the objection, without a due consideration of the nature of it, for it is a precious foundation of faith and hope to every man who hath the grace of it in the lowest measure. And if by serious minds they do not mean regenerate persons, then I affirm that they have no right at present to that consolation which the gospel provides. And with respect to such who may be easy under a prevalence of sin, from an imagination of their being elected, they are guilty of great impiety and senselessness too; for they discover no approbation of the design of election; or a desire that that design might take place in them; and, consequently, what pleasure they have therein, is not in the true nature of it; but in a false and impious notion of a doctrine that is according to godliness. On the other hand, those who content themselves in sinful neglects and criminal gratifications, because they cannot presently be assured of their election, and reproach the doctrine on that account, I would entreat the favour of them to spare their reproaches, at least till such time as they are truly desirous of being holy, for as yet they have nothing of holiness in them; and when in some degree they shall become truly holy, it is great odds if they do not change their opinion concerning this doctrine. Holiness is the fruit of it. And a good hope through grace of an interest in the blessings springing from that divine purpose, hath a most sweet and determining influence upon the minds of the saints to love, adore, praise, and yield obedience unto God in all things. Persons who rejoice in a humble hope of being chosen to holiness, can never, according to the same principle, take pleasure in sin. That which approves of the design of election, is the result of it. And where there is a true approbation of that design, there that design is in part already executed, and will be fully accomplished hereafter. If any think they should like to be holy in the next world, but are very well satisfied to remain unholy till the moment they depart out of

this, they only delude themselves in those thoughts. True grace is a desire of present purity. I confess that I am not solicitous about the encouragement of many sorts of persons, which some are. I think that no man hath a title to evangelical comforts, who is not the subject of evangelical dispositions. It is greatly to be wished that this was strictly observed, in endeavours to administer consolation to the souls of men.

If it were, it would quickly appear that there is no need to mince or conceal any doctrine of the gospel, lest such should be discouraged who give the least evidence of a right to divine consolation; nor any necessity of advancing anti-evangelical notions, in order to relieve and comfort spiritually humble souls under their sorrows. Nay, which is far more, it is true that no such notions, however plausible they may seem to some, are calculated to afford them encouragement and hope of obtaining salvation. It is a very easy work to prove that universal grace, which from its own nature is not effectual, is wholly unsuited to comfort humble and spiritually convinced sinners; and that it is only fitted to nourish the natural pride of men, which must be subdued, if their souls are ever saved. I am no more concerned for the consolation of a man who is not convinced that he is irrecoverably lost and ruined forever, in himself, than a physician would think himself obliged to administer medicine to a person in perfect health. Until men know that only hell or eternal damnation, according to righteousness and equity, can be expected by them, on the foundation of their own works, I shall never be solicitous at all about their encouragement and consolation. All such as are disposed to encourage a hope in sinners of enjoying heaven, without a sense of their misery and helplessness in themselves, have no warrant from God for what they act in this business. A man must first be convinced of his being obnoxious to divine wrath, and irrecoverably so, as to himself, either in whole or in part, before he will submit to God's appointed way of salvation. And to such the doctrine of predestination contains nothing of a discouraging nature in it, let some men cavil as they please. On the contrary, it is a precious foundation of solid hope and comfort to all such persons, who are the only men upon earth that have a right to evangelical peace, joy, and consolation. And in proportion to their spiritual acquaintance with this doctrine, will their spiritual and holy obedience be in the degrees of it. The notion of election to everlasting life may be abused; but the grace of it never can be; let all its adversaries reproach it as they will now, for which they must shortly be accountable to Him, whose this doctrine is; and which they are capable of knowing is His, by that clear revelation He hath given of it in His sacred Word.

(2.) Another engaging motive to abstain from sin, is the saints relation to

God. They are His sons and daughters; the consideration of which influences them not to touch the unclean thing, sin. Grace disposes them to reason thus with themselves: it is certainly most reasonable and fit that I who am so beloved, so dignified, and entitled to privileges so numerous and so great by God, and that in a way of mere grace and rich mercy, should abstain from all appearance of evil.

(3.) Redemption, or the pardon of sin by the blood of Christ, hath the same powerful influence on the mind. A sense of remission produces joy; an apprehension of the expensive price of pardon, excites in the mind a holy indignation against sin. He who pretends to the enjoyment of a sense of the forgiveness of his offences by the agony and death of Jesus Christ, without experience of a hatred of sin, is a stranger to that unspeakable privilege.

And what a man hates, he will certainly endeavour to avoid. This is the true reason why sin is not more subdued in us than it is; we are not, as we ought to be, employed in holy meditations on the sufferings of a dear Saviour in order to procure our pardon, and save our souls from wrath and hell. It is not possible that that man's thoughts can be much exercised on the sorrows, pains, reproaches, and the accursed death of Christ, with a view to his redemption from sin, who makes light of it, and is easy under its prevalence. Let but professors act faith much on a crucified Saviour, and I dare affirm that the work of the mortification of sin will be happily advanced in their souls.

(4.) The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers is a very persuasive motive to watch against sin. His presence with, and in the saints, is their honour and their security; and the consideration of His residence in their hearts, cannot fail of begetting and cherishing desires of purity and holiness. How piercing is the thought of acting a part that is grieving to Him!

This is a subject worthy of greater enlargement; but the limits which I have prescribed to myself will not allow of it. And, therefore, I shall close it with answering two queries.

Query 1. May sin prevail in some particular acts, where true grace is, since that is opposite unto sin, and seeing it hath such important and so many weighty considerations to quicken it to watchfulness, against all the motions of evil in the heart?

Answer. No scruple can reasonably be admitted concerning the possibility of the prevalence of sin in some particular acts, even where true grace is. For we have infallible evidence of the real conversion of some in whom the old man has gained the predominancy, as to particular acts. And, therefore, let none presume peremptorily to say that a man hath no grace who is overtaken in a fault, concerning whom he hath had reason to hope

well of. Some who have been so censorious in peremptorily judging another, have had sad occasion to change their opinion, by the advantage sin has obtained over themselves. Let all such beware that this prove not their own case. They have just cause to fear it may be, in such a frame of mind.

Query 2. How comes sin to prevail, since grace is always resident in the soul?

Answer. 1. A long interruption in the exercise of grace exposes the soul to numerous temptations and unto manifold snares, with the sad influence of each.

2. Sin in such a season gets great strength in the heart; and hence follow the breakings forth of it in the life, in some actions or other; sometimes in more, sometimes in fewer instances.

CHAPTER 8

On Declensions In The Power Of Godliness

Its Causes, Etc.

A real believer will never sink into a state of unregeneracy; or, grace in his heart will never become extinct: yet he may greatly decline, with respect to the liveliness, vigour, and exercise of grace, through various causes.

I. The Christian may suffer a suspension of the divine influences. There is always such an influx of divine power and grace as maintain the being of the spiritual principle of grace in the hearts of the saints; but they do not at all times enjoy the enlivening operations of the blessed Spirit on that principle, whereby its actings are interrupted for a season, their joy and consolation abate, and they become less conversant about spiritual objects. The flesh takes this advantage, and often acts its part with great violence; and the consequence is of a very sorrowful nature to the Christian, for he declines in the new man, and the old man gains wonderful degrees of strength.

Query 1. Why does God thus withdraw from His people, or suspend His comforting influences, which are so necessary to their close walk with Him?

Answer. 1. He may do this in a sovereign way, or without any cause in the manner of their behaviour towards himself.

2. It may be with a view to teach them more fully the knowledge of themselves, relating to the strength of corruption, and the weakness of grace in itself; and blessed fruits follow upon it, under His direction and guidance, though for the present it is distressing to the saints.

3. Sometimes it is in a way of awful rebuke for their miscarriages; and, when this is the case, they cannot well be insensible of it, for the cause is near to view. He will make them know that though He loves their persons, He hates their sins; that though He will not frown them into hell as an angry

Judge, He will correct them as an offended Father; and it may be long before He admits them to former freedom and familiarity. This is an awful, but a holy and righteous dispensation of God towards His disobedient children. Let us, if we are in this sorrowful condition, freely and heartily own the justice of the rebuke we lie under, and adore the favour that God draws not His sword against us, but in kindness and mercy uses His rod upon us, for our great good in the end.

Query 2. Can this withdrawalment consist with divine faithfulness, and God's care of the new creature?

Answer. Yes; for it is neither total nor final. He preserves the being of grace and He will revive it again, which two things comprise the whole of what is intended in those promises that relate to our perseverance in faith and holiness to the end.

II. Another cause of declension is the opposition that sin makes to grace in the souls of believers. That is ever present with them, and at no time is it inactive, whether we perceive it or no. The advantages it hath, through its power and force, treachery and deceit, cursed cunning, continual presence, the variety of objects upon which it acts, and the numerous temptations by which it is excited, are indeed inexpressible; as every one who carefully observes the various ways wherein it assaults us will soon and fully be convinced. But, alas! we are too apt to be inattentive to its serpentine windings and turnings, whereby we become great sufferers in our noblest part, before we are at all aware of it. This, this is a stupid folly in us, and it costs us dear. By this means we get a blot, our souls receive a deep wound, (and astonishing grace it is that it proves not mortal) our spiritual part languishes, and it would certainly expire, but that our gracious Father and compassionate Head preserves its being in our souls. No thanks to us that its existence is maintained, for sin has prevailed with us to act a part, through our inadvertency and extreme folly, that tends to our ruin and destruction. Grace never thrives where sin is nourished, for the interest of the flesh and of the Spirit cannot be promoted at the same time. If corruption is predominant in its actings in our hearts, we cannot reasonably be in doubt a single moment, whether we are flourishing or declining in grace; it may at once, and without any debate upon our condition, be determined that the opposition to sin declines in its vigour, and that concupiscence increases in strength.

Query 1. When may sin be said to be predominant in its actings in a believer, which is so very detrimental to grace?

Answer. It hath a predominancy in the mind when it fills the thoughts, entangles the affections, and prevails upon the will to choose such objects

as are agreeable to it. To instance, in covetousness, which is a thirst after the empty and perishing things of this world. If the mind is possessed with anxious thoughts about the increasing of our temporal estate; if our affections are ensnared, and pleasing images are formed in our corrupt fancies from that increase, sin is certainly predominant in a way of covetousness, pride, and a low ambition. And I think that professors in general have reason, remarkably at this time, to examine themselves closely as to this matter, for an eager pursuit after corruptible perishing things is manifestly in many as that which preys upon the vitals of religion; for while they are forming numerous projects to add to their earthly store, they starve their souls, and in religion appear mere skeletons.

Query 2. Can this prevalency of sin in the mind consist with true grace?

Answer. 1. Some would roundly assert that it cannot, and boldly pronounce every one in whom it is, to be an unregenerate person. But,

2. I dare not pass such a censure, nor affirm that there is no principle of holiness in a mind wherein sin gains such a predominancy in acting; there may be life where there is not growth and vigour. Yet,

3. This I am free to assert, that such a prevalency of corruption is inconsistent with spiritual peace, joy in God, and divine consolation. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." If love to the world fills the mind, there can be but a very small sense of divine love to us, and but a very low degree of love to God in our hearts. I am confident of the truth of this, let who will be affected by it. And I am persuaded that the number of such is, at this time, very great.

III. A languor in grace, may be occasioned by a neglect of duty. Various duties are enjoined upon us, with a gracious view on the part of our heavenly Father to our spiritual profit; and, if we do not practise those duties, we are unmindful of our own advantage, as well as of the glory of God, which negligence must be followed with loss to ourselves. Those duties are, — reading the Scripture, meditation on it, prayer, especially private addresses at the throne of grace, hearing the gospel preached, and the celebration of the holy institutions of Christ, all which are intended for our spiritual benefit; and a proper attendance to them is usually blessed of God, to the increase of heavenly knowledge, the establishment of faith, and indeed unto the improvement of every grace of the Spirit. This is that precious reward which God has given us grace to hope for, in keeping His commandments. On the contrary, we must expect Him to hide His face from us, if we seek Him not in those ways wherein He has promised to meet and bless us; for such neglect is both a violation of His command, and a regardlessness of our own good.

Some, perhaps, may say that they experience no reluctance to these exercises, but as the appointed seasons of such duties return they are ready to the performance of them, and cheerfully discharge them.

I would ask these persons if they aim at spirituality of mind, and a solemn treating with God himself therein? If that is not their aim, they may perform them without trouble and difficulty to themselves; but let them know this also, that it is without any honour to God. Such, whose attention it is not, in prayer, and other religious duties, to deal with God in them, will not perceive any disinclination in their minds unto them; they may therefore wonder at others, whose design this is, and who think that those duties are not performed to any good purpose without it, speak of such an aversion in themselves to duties which reason itself cannot but allow to be necessary. The only way of discovering this cursed aversion in our hearts to such exercises, is by an aim to perform them in a spiritual manner. If giving to God the lip contents us, we shall not find any difficulty to attend to that; but if we really desire to give Him our hearts, we shall quickly perceive that this, though a reasonable, is a most difficult service. The insensibility which many discover of the distance of the mind from God, in a great measure arises from a contentment in duty itself, without their hearts being raised up unto, and fixed on God in duty; without which, we do Him no honour, nor does any advantage accrue to ourselves by the discharge of it, — conscience may be quieted, but grace is not acted.

Readiness to the performance of social duties is not always an evidence of liveliness in a Christian, no, nor yet in a minister. A private Christian may not experience such a backwardness to prayer with others, as he finds in himself to that exercise in his closet. The reason is, when he speaks in the name of others, gifts have their exercise, his invention and memory are set to work in some measure, but in a private address to God gifts have less employ. The discharge of that duty alone, therefore, if it is performed in any tolerable manner to his sanctification, it must be by the exercise of his graces rather than the exercise of his gifts. A person may seem to be well-fitted for that duty, when he performs it in the presence of others, who, in reality, is but very meanly qualified in the frame of his mind for the practice of it by himself; and, therefore, let us rather judge of our condition by what we are in the closet, than by that which we are in the family, or in the church; for that judgment is most likely to be formed according to truth, because there is not the same danger of mistaking the exercise of gifts for the exercise of grace. And, thus, a minister may readily be disposed to the practice of those public duties that are proper to his station in the church, and to others he may appear to be zealous and lively in their discharge, when in fact, though

he exercises his ministerial gifts, his graces may be very little, if at all, acted therein. Both may be free to exercise their gifts, when they are not disposed to the exercise of grace.

With respect to the duty of meditation, it may be observed, that that is either the exercise of reason merely about spiritual things, or it is the exercise of grace upon them. The former is a close thinking of the evidences of divine truths in their connection and agreement between themselves, and in what language they may be most aptly expressed for the instruction and benefit of others, — and this is the proper business of a minister. Or meditation on heavenly subjects, is the exercise of the mind, as it is spiritually illuminated, in contemplating the nature of evangelical doctrines, — the glory that is in them, as they are glorifying to God. This latter is indeed the exercise of our reason; yet not that merely, but as it is sanctified by the grace of God. All meditation on spiritual things is not spiritual meditation, — we are greatly mistaken if we think it is. I humbly apprehend it is very necessary for ministers well to consider this, lest they be tempted to content themselves with merely rational acts of the mind, about and upon the doctrines of Christianity, which their honourable calling makes it their especial duty diligently to study. Unto the former we may be very well disposed, and, accordingly practise it with good advantage to others, but with no profit at all to ourselves, in a spiritual sense; because to our own benefits the exercise of grace is necessary in our meditations. Let not ministers, therefore, when they examine into the state of their own souls, proceed in their enquiry on, or with regard to their acts as ministers, but with respect to such actings of grace as are common to them with other Christians; if they do not it is very probable they may think more favourable of themselves than they ought.

IV. Criminal indulgencies are very prejudicial to grace. It may be taken as a certain rule, that by whatever means sin is increased, grace is impaired, and the flesh grows in strength, when and so far as it is gratified in its desires, — it increases in its demands as fast as they are answered, for it is of an insatiable nature. In vain shall we expect sin to abate of urgency in its pleas and arguings for gratification, if in any degree, or in any acts, we are prevailed with to give it countenance, — modesty and limits it has none. We shall always find it grow in impetuosity and violence by every act of indulgence, it is able through its artifice and cunning, to obtain. The only way of keeping it under, is refusing to hearken to its solicitations. If once it gains a small advance, it will not fail of making a great advantage to itself by our inadvertency and folly; and, in proportion to the increase of the vigour of sin, grace declines in its strength, darkness spreads itself over the mind, and an indisposedness to spiritual acts and duties is the certain consequence

of all sinful self-pleasing. There are lusts of the sensitive, and lusts of our intellectual part — indulgence to the latter is as dangerous and hurtful as indulgence to the former, though but few seem to be persuaded of its truth. Pride is as pernicious as intemperance, and covetousness is not less hurtful than incontinence.

If we follow after lying vanities of any sort, we forsake our own mercies. Backsliding is always attended with very ill consequences to ourselves, as it dishonours our heavenly Father. If our conversation is vain, frothy, and unguarded, we have no reason to wonder that we are lean in our souls, that our graces are languid, and that we are destitute of those spiritual comforts we formerly enjoyed. It is a dreadful delusion to imagine that we may pamper the flesh, and at the same time preserve the vigour of the Spirit. Grey hairs will certainly be found upon us, whether we are sensible of it or not, if the corrupt lusts in our hearts are suffered to break forth into act. Indeed, it is not in our own power to give spirit to the new man, but we can sorely wound the new creature in us, and bring it under a sad waste of spirits, by acting a part agreeable to the old man. The eruptions of lust will assuredly be followed with a melancholy decay in grace; for if we live after the flesh we shall die, i.e., we shall decay in the exercise of grace, lose our comforts, and bring our souls into such a condition as may render it very difficult to determine, upon inquiry, whether we are in the flesh or in the Spirit, dead in sin, or dead unto it. Oh! the egregious folly that many are guilty of, who feed the carnal part, to the great detriment of their spiritual part. If, indeed, they are true Christians, it must be confessed that their behaviour affords very little evidence of real Christianity.

V. The declension of Christians is sometimes owing to an unedifying ministry. The ministerial work is intended for the edification of the church; and it is very necessary that those, whose employ this is, should always keep that great end in view. As it is their proper business to feed the sheep and lambs of Christ, they ought to see to it that they set before them the wholesome savoury food of the gospel. And it is requisite that they should consider the various cases of the saints, — what is the condition of their souls; what kind of temptations attend them; what are their distresses; and what weaknesses they are encompassed with; whether they are growing or declining in grace. Without a due consideration of these, and other things, it is not likely that they should much assist the people of God, or help them in their spiritual joy. Moreover, it is very needful for them ever to remember this, that they may please when they do not profit. Real edification is often wanting in hearers, when the preacher gives them full satisfaction in his discourses, because it is neither his aim nor their desire, that they may

receive spiritual advantage. His intention is to approve himself rather to their reason than their grace. Hence he more studies accuracy than savour in his composures, and is satisfied with the character of being ingenious without the more amiable one of being spiritual. And many hearers applaud such kind of discourses, and especially if the preacher has the additional art of moving their passions, by the manner of his address in delivering them, both he and they are content, though the great ends of preaching are very little, if at all answered, by his laboured and pathetic performances; and, therefore, neither he nor his hearers make any advances in holiness and spirituality by those services, which are pleasing to himself, and gain their approbation. It is the matter delivered that edifies, and not the preacher's method, language, and air; these things have no influence at all into real edification. And, therefore, though a person may be much delighted with a minister's accuracy, charming language, and agreeable address, he may receive no more spiritual advantage in hearing than the forum on which he sits. That preaching which is calculated to feed the church of God, is not an address to the unsanctified reason, flighty wit, and blind passions of mankind, but to the gracious principle in the hearts of believers, which is only nourished by the doctrine of the grace of God and truths relating to Christ as a crucified Saviour. Without a minister determines, as the apostle did, to make Christ the subject of his discourses, he cannot justly expect that his hearers should improve in the knowledge of Him, and in that holy obedience to Him, which is the blessed fruit of a divine faith in His person, offices, benefits, and grace. Acceptable obedience springs from that holy principle of grace which is wrought in the souls of believers by the Spirit of God, and the vigour of that principle is maintained by evangelical truths; and, consequently, discourses that have little of the gospel in them are not calculated to render the Christian fruitful in faith, and in those good works which spring from it. I am afraid that the barrenness of many professors, is in a great measure owing to a defect of this nature in the ministry on which they attend. Persons may remain unfruitful, indeed, under means that are in the best manner fitted for the cultivation and improvement of their graces; and this is too often seen through their own criminal neglects and sinful indulgences; but, if a minister is careful to discharge his duty in presenting his hearers with the generous wine and nourishing milk of the Word, their leanness and decay in the vigour of grace is not the fruit of a culpable defect in his ministrations, — that must be owing to some other cause.

VI. Formality in religious exercises will have this sad effect upon us. The difference is not much as to this matter whether we neglect or practise those duties, if it be only in a formal manner; the bare performance may prevent

stings of conscience, but it will never contribute anything towards an improvement in grace; and that ease of mind which it gives, is nothing better than carnal security, which in many will be followed with endless destruction, to their great amazement. And very ill effects will attend a course of formal obedience, even in the real Christian, for such obedience is not the exercise of grace, and the heavenly principle in our souls declines by an interruption in its acts. And, therefore, if it is not our desire and aim in the discharge of duty, to exercise grace therein, we shall not be in any degree the better for the practice of it. As to spiritual advantage, such service will never promote that in our minds; and, yet, for want of a due consideration of this, and through the wretched aversion of our hearts to a close and solemn intercourse with God, in the ways of His appointment, how apt are we to content ourselves with doing acts of duty without a serious and diligent attendance unto the manners of their discharge! When this is our case, we honour God but little, and very small is that profit our souls receive from such performances. There is nothing of holiness in the obedience of the formalist; and God knows that sometimes there is but very little of it in that of the real Christian.

VII. Unprofitable and vain conversation brings on the same consequence. Society becomes either useful or the contrary, according to the nature of the subjects about which conversation is held. If the subject of discourse is weighty and solid, it is suited to entertain a grave and serious mind; but if it is trifling, though it is embellished with some agreeable turns of wit, the pleasure it gives is very little, and it affords no satisfactory reflection. Spiritual converse is calculated to warm the heart, and improve the graces of Christians. In this the weakest believer may bear his part, and that not without singular advantage, even to such who are far his superiors in discernment and abilities. Sometimes persons of inferior talents give happy evidence that they are best qualified for heavenly conversation. Though they have less of the rational capacity, they excel in spirituality and heavenly mindedness, which fits them for that kind of discourse that is most beneficial to the saints.

If we indulge ourselves in conversing about things that are carnal and pleasing to the flesh, we certainly prejudice ourselves, and it may be, we also spread injury among all who hear us. If our converse discovers that our minds are worldly, carnal, and vain, it is not improbable but it may render the minds of others so too, for that is its natural tendency.

CHAPTER 9

Of The Symptoms Of Declension In The Power Of Godliness

I. A drowsy and slumbering frame of mind is a sure sign of declension. Sluggishness and inactivity are certain evidences of a declining state in a

Christian. Though there may be life, still liveliness and vigour are wanting. Some ill habit of mind is contracted, if we are disposed to carnal ease, and are not prepared for spiritual exercise and communion with God therein. This is a very sad frame, and bitterness will be the issue of it. So it was with the church: I sleep, says she, but my heart waketh. It is the voice of my beloved, etc. If Christ finds us indisposed to give Him entertainment, when He graciously condescends to make us a kind visit, we may reasonably expect Him to withdraw from us, and teach us the evil of our ingratitude, by the want of His delightful presence; as He did the church, when in such a frame. It is very much to be lamented that ever such a wretched stupor should seize us, as unfits us for holding fellowship with a dear Redeemer; but this is sometimes our case, through the prevalence of the flesh. It is with us as it is with a person asleep, our senses are locked up, we neither see nor hear as we ought, nor are agreeably impressed by any spiritual objects; but are almost wholly taken up with things of a very different nature, to the great detriment of the gracious principle in us. Besides, then we suffer the enemies of Christ quietly to introduce noxious errors into His church. And this is remarkably true in our times. As there never was a season, at least since the Reformation, wherein corruption of doctrine was more artfully, violently, and generally introduced; so never with less opposition from those who profess to be the friends of sacred truth. As this is the shame of some, it is an occasion of glorying in others.

II. Loss of spiritual appetite is a sign of declension in grace. If we nauseate our heavenly food, we may be assured that it is the effect of some very bad disorder in our souls. For if the new creature is in a sound and healthful state, it will desire, feed upon, and digest with pleasure that elegant food which our heavenly Father hath provided for its support and entertainment. Our taste is grievously vitiated by sin, if we do not savour the things that be of God. If we prefer ashes to the hidden manna, grace must be under a melancholy decline, and corruption grown strong. If we do not hunger and thirst after the bread and water of life, there is reason to conclude that we feed upon husks, which are not food for the new creature; but its opposite in our hearts. When grace is lively and flourishing, the mind is disposed to seek after and embrace spiritual objects; but if the flesh hath the ascendant, we slight heavenly things, and our affections are fixed on earthly things. The want of a relish of spiritual food, and a hankering after what is agreeable to the flesh, arise from some dangerous distemper which hath seized the soul; and satisfying our disorderly desires, tends to fix that distemper, and to bring the new creature into a languishing condition.

III. Declension attends us, if our love to God, Christ, and to spiritual things

is abated. When grace flourishes, love is ardent, our affections strongly tend towards heavenly objects, and we take much pleasure in them. This is often the case at first conversion. The love of our espousals is fervent, and causes us to surmount those difficulties, which, when an abatement in the warmth of our affections takes place, we think insuperable. It is truly melancholy that we should lessen in our love to those objects which are infinitely amiable, and most deserving of our intense desire and highest delight; but so it is, through a variety of causes in ourselves, and numerous temptations which we meet with in the world; insomuch that it may be difficult to determine to our full satisfaction whether we are the subjects of this heavenly grace or not. And this decay of our love is generally the effect of negligence and want of caution to avoid sinful pleasures; or it may be occasioned by an anxious concern about the things of the world: either of these will damp our spiritual affections, and render our minds vain and carnal. This lukewarmness is very displeasing to Christ, who is recommended to our esteem by all that is charming and attractive. I suppose that none who think themselves concerned in matters of this important nature, can be wholly insensible of that coldness which almost universally is found amongst professors in our times. And though it is the subject of common complaint, but few seem inclined to lay it to heart, as we all ought to do, nor to betake themselves to proper methods for a revival of a holy affection in their souls. The aim of some is not, or at least it doth not seem to be, that Christ and His grace may become more precious to their souls; but they are striving after holiness, with little, if any regard, to the person, love, glory, and grace of Christ; hence they labour in the fire, and all their pains are to no purpose at all; their work is consumed, and they are totally disappointed of attaining real spirituality. The issue of all their labour is only a legal frame of mind, and such an opposition to sin as the flesh itself will join in, under the lash of the law, to whose conduct and rule they subject themselves. As these persons are much pleased with their imaginary success against sin, because the axe hath lopped off some of the branches of lust; so none are more inclined to censoriousness in judging others, who in fact are what they would be thought to be, but in reality are not so, viz., spiritual and holy. Every man will certainly be deceived, who shall think to introduce spirituality into his mind and affections, without acts of faith on the glory of Christ, for thereby alone is the mind changed into the heavenly image, from glory to glory. If, therefore, Christ is less precious to our souls than He has formerly been, in His person, offices, grace, and benefits, whatever we think of ourselves, we are assuredly declined in grace, let our opposition to lust be what it may, under the influence of other considerations.

Grace must certainly be declined, if our affections are chilled towards

Christ and heavenly things; if they are less in our thoughts, and are not so pleasant and delightful to us as they have been. Where there is intense love to any object, it will often make it present to the mind, and that will view it with pleasure, which increases the passion of love to the object. So it is in natural things; and in spiritual things it is the same. If our thoughts are but little employed about Christ, nothing is more certain than this, that we love Him but little. What! love Him much, and think of Him but little! It is impossible. Warm affections to a dear Saviour will frequently make Him present to the soul, and cause it to view Him with wonder and delight; and that pleasing prospect of Him will maintain a fervency of love to Him. For spiritual affections are a great help to spiritual thoughts, and spiritual thoughts promote spirituality in the affections.

Some persons seem to me to be almost utterly unacquainted with the true workings of grace in the heart, who yet profess it is their desire to improve in grace; for while they are labouring after holiness, or what is so in their apprehensions, they plainly manifest that they have forgotten, if they ever knew, how it is to be attained.

IV. Another symptom of a decay in grace, is an abatement of our zeal for the honour of God, and of a dear Redeemer. As the gracious principle in believers is an humble hope in divine mercy through a Mediator; so it is a concern for the divine honour. And if that principle is lively and vigorous, it will cause us to decline whatever reflects dishonour on God and His ways, and engage us cheerfully to practise those duties with a peculiar pleasure, that are most conducive to the glory of God, and which give the clearest evidence of our subjection to Christ, as King in Zion. If the new creature is preserved in a healthful state, it will influence us to bring forth much fruit to the glory of our heavenly Father; but if it falls under a decay in vigour and liveliness, our concern to glorify God will be very small. And this is evidently the condition of numerous professors at this time. Of this also general acknowledgment is made; but without the use of proper means for rekindling a holy zeal in our hearts for the honour of God and of a precious Saviour. Until other measures are taken than many pursue, it is not likely that this evil will be remedied; but it may be expected to increase, except where it is advanced so far already, as not to admit of any increase. This may be the dreadful condition of some who once made a fair show.

V. A thirst after, and fondness of the world, is a symptom of declension in grace. Lawful it is to desire as much as is really wanted, and we have ground to hope for the bestowment of such a share of the things of this life, in some way or other; enjoying that, contentment with it is our duty, if we never have more in possession. And it is of very little consideration whether we have

or not. It is even a reproachful thing to human nature, to be all pursuit after the transitory things of this fluctuating state. Various considerations may well make us ashamed, even as men, of our insatiable thirst after riches, and those advantages which they can procure us, viz., the brevity of human life; those advantages, therefore, “we cannot long possess. The uncertainty of our continuing in this state, the short time our feeble frame seems to be erected for, especially in the enjoyment of health and ease, without which nothing in the world can render us comfortable, as men. Again, we cannot enjoy much of this world, let us be entitled to ever so large a share of it. Great men have no more enjoyment of what their brawny servants luxuriously devour in their kitchens, than of what their horses eat at the manger, and drink at the pond. The gay liveries of their lackeys, and fine trappings which adorn the creatures of their ease, ambition, and pride, come not into the number of those things they enjoy, nor is it possible that they should. Besides, abundance makes us neither wiser nor better; and, therefore, that man is a fool, who thinks that an addition to his fortune increases his happiness. Moreover, riches are uncertain things, and possibly they may not be long kept. Once more, that respect which is paid us, in affluent circumstances, is seldom to ourselves, but to what we have about us; but men’s good opinion of themselves will not suffer them to discern the flattery of cringing dependents, and of such who intend, sometimes at least, to have the command of their purse.

There are other considerations which may make us ashamed, as Christians, of our thirst after, and fondness of earthly treasure, viz., God puts no value upon it. He throws it away as a thing of nought, on the very worst enemies He hath in the world. Again, it cannot do us the least degree of good, as we are Christians. Earthly treasure cannot increase our grace. Besides, we have infinitely better things to entertain our minds with, than magnificent dwellings, rich furniture, costly apparel, and sparkling decorations. He who hath not, is a stranger to happiness, how much soever his vain fancy is pleased with the splendid figure he makes; wherein he cannot justly compare with a butterfly or a tulip.

These things are so obvious, that no difficulty at all obstructs the sight of them; and yet even professors at this time are much intoxicated with this strong opiate, and seem to discover that they think they shall never have enough of this world, while they are permitted to live in it. A full evidence this is that they are but very little conversant, in a way of faith, with a better. No wonder, therefore, if they are much in doubt whether they are likely to enjoy that world, when they shall be obliged to leave this, at such seasons as they are compelled, by one means or other, to exercise their thoughts about so gloomy and terrifying a subject. Again,

VI. The want of watchfulness against sin, excited by a quick and tender sense of its evil nature, is a sure sign of a decay in grace. When the new creature is in a good plight, and is vigorously acted, sin is exceedingly hateful to the saints, because then they have a clear and striking apprehension of the malignity of its nature, which maintains in them a holy indignation against it. If the mind is much exercised in the consideration of that price which was paid for the remission of our guilt, viz., the blood of Christ, as a lively hope of pardon is thereby ingenerated, so a detestation of evil, whose pardon cost Him thus dear, certainly springs up in the mind from that consideration. And this is always attended with strict watchfulness against it. For the soul cannot bear the thought of countenancing that which was the procuring cause of such shame, sorrow, and pain, as a precious Jesus was put to, felt and endured, in order to our redemption from that misery to which sin subjected us. If any pretend unto an assurance of forgiveness on this foundation, without any experience of shame, sorrow, and hatred of sin, on account of its vile nature, I dare boldly pronounce such a pretension to be no other than a vain presumption, that is likely to be followed by an eternal loss of their immortal souls. Everlasting ruin will certainly ensue, if sovereign mercy interposes not to make them ashamed of this irreligious confidence. A sense of pardon, through the death of Christ, always produces a hearty sorrow for sin, and this influences unto watchfulness against all appearance of evil. And, therefore, the want of such caution must be an evidence of an interruption in the exercise of grace, if not of a total want of holiness in the soul.

VII. When we are more governed in our conduct by prudential, than spiritual considerations. By such considerations, I intend a view to our reputation and advantage, as men, and unto our own credit, in the character of professors. Indulgence in criminal lusts is attended with disgrace, at least among the sober part of mankind, — we can never gain and preserve an interest in their esteem but by a good behaviour. And, irregularity is followed with many pernicious effects in the circumstances of men; thereby a person not only tarnishes his character, but draws upon himself and his family very great inconveniences, — it prevents him making provision for their future prosperity; it wastes his present substance, and entails reproach on his name, and poverty on his descendants. If men even make a profession of religion, then a loose and unguarded conduct justly renders them the objects of slight and disregard in the religious character. Now, if our circumspection, sobriety, and attendance to the duties of religion arise from these considerations, and we are what we be as to these things, by the influence of such motives, we have not our conversation in the world, by the grace of God, but by fleshly

wisdom. Grace hath higher views and far nobler ends in all its acts; and it is a glaring proof of a sad declension in grace if we are acted by these considerations, rather than by views to the glory of God and the honour of Christ. A behaviour of this kind is not only most distant from true holiness, but it contains not anything of real virtue in it, for even that is the practice of morality, upon other and better considerations than these. The Lord, who searches the hearts of men, and is intimately acquainted with all our governing views, only knows what low degrees of holiness sometimes are found in us, even when our deportment is such as raises it above the censure of those who have opportunity of knowing us best. Let us thoroughly consider this awful truth, that there is no more of true holiness in us than there is of a single eye to His glory in the denial of our lusts, and the discharge of our duty in the civil and religious life. Oh! what need have we of the exercise of forgiving love, since our defects are so very many! and what necessity are we under to implore the divine aid to assist us in our obedience, without which not the least degree of real spirituality will ever be found in it! So far as we are influenced by a regard to our advantage as men, and our own credit as professors in our deportment, rather than to the honour of Jesus Christ, and His gospel, we fail of yielding that holy obedience to Him He requires of us. We are not under the direction and determining influence of grace in what we do, but merely prudential considerations and motives if we have not an eye to the glory of God in all we do.

VIII. When we are influenced not so much by evangelical as legal motives; for then, though there may be more show of holiness there is less of it in reality; and this will always attend an indifferency towards the pure and unmixed gospel of Christ. It is a great mistake to imagine that spiritual obedience will ever be promoted by legal principles. A declension in grace will always follow an abatement in a regard to the doctrines of grace, whether the Christian is sensible of it or no. He may regularly keep up the practice of religious duties, and on that account conceit that he is not declining; but a narrow and strict view of his heart and frame will soon convince him of a melancholy languor in his graces, in proportion to the abatement of his regard to the pure gospel of Christ. The reason is evident, the vigour of grace in the heart is only to be maintained by mixing faith with the doctrines of grace. Hence is owing that dry, formal, and sapless obedience which many professors satisfy themselves with keeping up. There may be as much as ever of the form of godliness, but the power of it is greatly wanting.

Query 1. Why is grace suffered to decline, and sin permitted to break forth into such acts as it sometimes has in good men?

Answer. Great modesty becomes us in a question of so much difficulty,

lest we “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” But some reasons for it may be assigned, viz. —

God may permit this with a view to exalt the glory of His grace in their pardon and salvation. This permission on His part is consistent with His righteousness and holiness; but if any commit evil that His grace may abound, it is a wicked and most impious way of sinning, yea, beyond what the devil is capable of, for he has no opportunity of sinning against God at this dreadful rate. Again,

To convince haughty sinners of madness in pretending to perfection. If the best saints have been guilty of committing the foulest sins, a pretence to perfection can have nothing to support it. That it is certainly true that none are justified by virtue of their own obedience. Moreover,

For our caution, not imitation, that we may learn what the power of sin is, where there is most grace.

Lastly, For the relief of humble souls under a broken sense of their guilt; or to encourage them to hope in divine mercy for pardon. And this is a wise, gracious and holy end of God in such permission.

Query 2. How may a Christian under declension arrive at satisfaction that he is the subject of true grace?

Answer. 1. If he is very much declined it may be difficult for him to attain a satisfying evidence of this matter, which is enough, one would think, to deter us from that carelessness and negligence which occasions it. That is a condition greatly to be dreaded, wherein a person can scarcely collect any ground of hope that he is in the way to heaven, but for ought he knows, at present, he may be in that path which leads down to the chambers of death. Is not this sufficient to make us tremble and start back from an act of sin, when we are solicited by the flesh and Satan to commit it? But alas! through the deceit and violence of lust under temptation, we are guilty of acting a most cruel part against ourselves; and if a dear Redeemer, against whom we offend, had no more compassion for us than we have for ourselves, perish we must, without remedy. Well it is for us, that God and a precious Saviour bear us greater love than we have for ourselves; without this our eternal ruin would be inevitable.

2. It may not be best for us always to attain to satisfaction in this point. In some frames it might prove a temptation, viz., when we aim not at present actings of faith and repentance.

3. The wisest part we can act in such a sad condition is, rather to desire and seek after acting grace now, than to enquire whether we have acted it before. And if it shall please God to enable us thereunto, we shall in some measure be able to discern an evidence of the truth of what we are desirous

of obtaining satisfaction about. For where such acts be as are proper to grace, there grace most certainly is. Besides, this is the only way of coming out of this sad condition, for a revival cannot be without renewed actings of grace in the soul.

4. Uneasiness with this condition, and a desire of being brought out of it, as it is what dishonours God, may be considered as the

breathing of the new creature, though labouring under much weakness, which sin has brought upon it, for this is a farther view than our own peace, and is the soul's tendency towards God, as the object of its choice and delight according to the regenerate part; and, therefore, where this is, there is ground of hope that the mind is not destitute of a principle of spiritual life, though it is fallen into a very melancholy decay. But,

5. Suppose the worst thou canst, believer, even this, which I know will be very cutting to thy soul, that as get thou hast never truly acted faith on Jesus Christ. Thou now seest thy need of Him, and of a communication of grace from Him, to make thee what thou fearest thou art not, viz., holy. Thy proper business at this time is to flee to Him for refuge, or to commit thy soul to Him to be sanctified and saved by Him; and doing this will be acting the best and wisest part thou canst in thy present condition. Fears of being mistaken in relation to past acts of faith should not prevent thee making a present application to Christ for help and relief in thy sorrowful state.

Query 3. What is included in a revival of grace? or wherein consists a recovery from backsliding?

Answer. A renewed conversion after backsliding is excellently expressed by David, after his grievous revolt, in Psalm 51, whereupon I shall make some observations.

1. He is solicitously concerned about the remission of his sins; and divine mercy is the ground of his hope and the matter of his plea, — not his surprisal into evil, nor his sorrow and contrition for it, though it appears it was very great, but mercy, goodness, and grace alone, without the consideration of any extenuating circumstances.

2. He speaks of his conduct, not in soft and qualifying terms, but in such language as was suited to its nature, and expressive of the just sense he had of it, and of indignation against himself on account thereof. He calls it transgression, or rebellion, sin, and iniquity, and expressly mentions the worst part of his miscarriage, blood- guiltiness. When repentance is truly acted, the soul abhors tender names for its sin, nor does it seek to cover and hide its iniquities. That which under temptation is thought no great offence, when truly repented of is accounted heinous. Sin, before its commission,

often appears to the mind as a very small evil, but true grace acting in a way of repentance for it, throws off all its false colourings, and views it in its dreadful malignity; and cannot bear to use tender and soft language about so vile and detestable a thing as sin is.

3. David considers God as the object against whom he sinned, and that he had done that great evil in His sight; wherein a variety of considerations are included which influenced his mind to an ingenuous sorrow, viz., what the Lord is in Himself, and what He was to him, and had done for him.

4. He confesses the sinfulness of his nature, — he traces up the stream to the fountain from which it proceeded, viz., the impurity of his heart. As acts of sin are discovered as flowing from that origin, when repentance is exercised, a person views that evil source with great humiliation and self-abasement. He discerns that he is, in his disposition, the reverse of that inward truth which God requires. The nature of sin is directly contrary to eternal truth, and in all its pleas and arguings it is a deception of the mind. Most properly, therefore, does David consider it as the very reverse of amiable truth.

5. He prays earnestly for holiness. Whenever sin is discerned in its malignant nature, holiness, its contrary, is seen in its excellency and beauty; and as sin is then the object of the mind's great aversion, holiness is the object of its choice and delight. There cannot be an abhorrence of sin, without pleasure at the same time, and in the same degree, in holiness. True repentance is not only a loathing of acts of sin, but it also is the soul's desire of being unprincipled with a disposition and temper of a contrary nature.

6. He deprecates the loss of God's gracious, spiritual, and immediate presence.

7. Prays for the enjoyment of divine consolation, and to be upheld in his walk by the good Spirit of God.

(1.) Grace influences the penitent heartily to acknowledge that he deserves to be cast away from the gracious presence of God, and forever to lie under His awful displeasure. The justice of so terrible a procedure is freely owned, but it is contrary to the nature of grace to be content without a sense of divine favour, and therefore a submission to the loss of God's gracious and glorious presence, is not required of grace; for that principle, whose nature it is to desire a sense of the favour of God, cannot be content with the eternal loss of it, — that would be acting contrary to itself; the supposition of the possibility of which is absurd. In nothing does the difference between legal and evangelical repentance more appear than in this, — the former dreads suffering under God's anger, the latter trembles at the thought of sustaining the loss of divine favour; and, consequently, it is not in the nature of grace to dispose a poor sinner to be willing to bear that loss. It confesses indeed that

it would be just with God to banish the criminal from Himself, but it can never consent to an eternal separation from Him. Nor does God require this of any, neither does he produce in the minds of His children a willingness forever to be banished from Himself.

(2.) David had enjoyed precious discoveries of divine love and goodness, and of an interest in God's salvation, which filled his soul with peace, consolation and joy.

(3.) Such manifestations had been withheld upon his evil behaviour. No man shall enjoy heavenly comforts while he continues in a backsliding frame and course.

(4.) He longs and prays for the restoration of those joys to his soul. Through sovereign and infinite grace there is proper foundation to hope for this signal favour; grace in the heart in some measure discerns this, and that encourages it to use freedom in its address to God for it. The seasons of the return of these heavenly visits, is wholly in the sovereign pleasure of God; and sometimes they are sooner, and sometimes later, just as it pleases Him to act by His disobedient children. Some He is pleased to surprise with melting discoveries of His goodness, mercy, and grace, immediately upon their sin, and thereby He breaks their hearts in love, and at once recovers them from their evil frame and way. This was Peter's case. And, sometimes He withdraws for a considerable space of time, and then the mind becomes either stupid through the continued prevalence of sin, or sorrowful under a sense of its shameful departure from God, and the bitter effects of that ungrateful carriage. The former seems to have been David's condition; but he is now awaked out of his lethargy, and the heavenly principle again vigorously exerts itself.

Query 4. May a Christian think he is declined in grace, and be mistaken in that matter?

Answer. I think he may, and that some gracious souls are mourning under such an apprehension without cause. For,

1. They have a fuller knowledge of themselves. One branch of the Spirit's work, is to furnish us with the knowledge of ourselves; and we never have right apprehensions of our nature, state, and condition until our dark minds are irradiated with the light of divine grace. According to the degrees of that light, is that acquaintance we have with our own sinfulness, weakness, darkness, and alienation of mind from the life of God. Grace, when increased, enlarges our views of our hearts, and enables us to look deeper into that gulph of iniquity which is therein. Hence, some, from a growing acquaintance with the various ways wherein sin exerts itself, are induced to think that they are waxing worse and worse; whereas this apprehension springs up in the

mind, not from the growing power of sin, but the increasing light of divine grace in the soul. Persons most sanctified, are always most sensible of their natural impurity. When grace is quickest in acts of opposition to sin, it is soonest discovered in its corrupt motions. Hence, saints who have been very eminent for holiness have most complained of their vileness, and the power of sin in their hearts. Where there is the largest measure of grace, there is the fullest knowledge of sin in its nature, being, power, and treachery; and we are never less spiritual than when we are least sensible of our natural carnality.

2. The self-displeasure of these persons is greater. Nothing is more natural to us than to be pleased with ourselves on account of some imaginary excellency or other. This vanity is often fed, even by such supposed qualifications, wherein real merit has not the least concern. This is one sad evidence, though overlooked by many, of the dreadful corruption of our nature, and is such abominable pride as calls for deep humiliation and self-abasement. Grace, when it thrives, brings us to a hearty and ingenuous acknowledgment, that we are so far from being possessed of advantages, which are a proper foundation of self-admiration and applause, that we are the unhappy subjects of every detestable quality, which is a just reason why a creature should shrink into nothing in its own esteem, and be content forever to lie in the dust. Without true grace no man is humbled to make such submissions in kind, as the state of every man calls for; and unless that holy principle is preserved by the good Spirit of God, in lively exercise, our natural pride will soon rise up to a considerable degree, and we shall fancy ourselves to be at least somewhat fair and beautiful. On the contrary, if grace flourishes, we shall clearly discern that we have no more just pretension to beauty, than a man who is covered from head to foot with filthy running ulcerous sores, the stench of which makes him even weary of his life, as it is offensive to all about him.

3. Sin is more hateful to them. Mere uneasiness under a sense of guilt, is no evidence of the being of grace in the soul. That which exposes to penalty, in a reflection upon it, will give pain to the mind, and produce heavy censures of a man's self. Love to sin is not inconsistent with great regret, when the mind hath a painful sensation of sin's demerit. The consequence of vice may be dreaded, even when a man is under the sway of vicious inclinations. Conviction disturbs him, and will not suffer him to enjoy peace, but it produces no dislike to sin, as sin. As sin is impatient of any restraint, there may be a strong contest between that and conviction, and this jarring of conviction and sin some take for real conversion, whereas it is quite of another nature. Grace brings the mind to detest sin in itself, upon a clear

perception of its vile nature. This is what a legal conviction will never do, let it be carried to ever so great a height; and it is a good evidence of an increase in grace, when the mind is much influenced to hate sin, because of its evil nature, and to resolve to forsake and oppose it under that consideration, whatever becomes of the poor soul, whether it is saved or lost. Nothing short of true grace will effect such a disposition of mind: and yet some humble persons go mourning who are the happy subjects of that disposition, but they shall be comforted.

4. They have a clearer knowledge of Christ, and He is more precious to them. Grace is a discernment of the glory, beauty, and excellency of the Saviour, in His person; and a perception of the value and preciousness of His righteousness, sacrifice, and fulness, which raises the highest esteem of Him in the mind, — it engages the soul to choose Him and delight in Him; and as this principle is more or less exercised upon Christ, the believer increases or declines in love to Him. If our spiritual views of Him are unfrequent, our affections will grow carnal, and our hearts will be much inclined to look after and embrace other objects. And this decay of spirituality in the affections, is attended with no small degree of insensibility; love is cooled, and the man takes little or no notice of it, — that is not the matter of his grief; he is playing the harlot with a variety of other lovers. I have nothing to offer for the peace and consolation of those who are in such a frame; their case requires not a cordial but a corrosive, to bring them out of their lethargy, for if they are possessed of a living principle, they are seized with a sad slumber. But the persons whose encouragement “I aim at, are such whose love is not in fact abated; but through causeless fears and jealousies they are apprehensive it is, which apprehension fills them with sorrow and bitterness, and that is a comfortable evidence of the reality and fervency too of their affection to this infinitely amiable object.

5. They are more spiritual in their obedience. A Christian may be sunk very low in grace, even when he is regular in the course of his obedience. Two things are necessary to evidence the truth of grace in the heart.

(1.) The practice of duty.

(2.) A spiritual principle in the soul as the spring of it.

Where the first is not, it will readily be granted that a person is graceless; but as to the second, neither the nature of it is understood, nor the necessity of it acknowledged by many, whose aim and endeavour, as they say of themselves, is to be as obedient and holy as they can.

(1.) A person must become dead to the law in order to live unto God. The law is dead to a Christian, and he is dead to that. “I through the law am dead to the law; that being dead wherein we were held.” It is the law that the

apostle speaks of, under the authority and condemning power of which we all naturally are; but grace brings us from under its yoke and disposes us to practise duty upon other considerations and motives than what the law is acquainted with, And there are duties, which though radically are contained in the law, they are not formally; wherein much of that obedience consists that is required of believers. Acts of faith in Christ, evangelical repentance, love to Him, and gratitude for His saving benefits. None of these branches of our obedience are formally contained in the law, though they are so radically, as it is a perfect and eternal rule of righteousness. The measure of the precepts of the law, as in the form of a covenant, is the truth it reveals, — legal obedience is founded on doctrines which are proper to the law; and, consequently, acts of faith in Christ, love to Him, and subjection to His authority in His complex character of a Mediator, are none of the duties of the covenant of works. Hence, it follows that they cannot be the immediate duties of such as are under that covenant. But this, by the bye.

(2.) Perfect holiness is required by the law. It allows of no defects or imperfections. Infinite perfection can never give an imperfect law. This seems to me so clear a point, that I think a man must offer violence to reason if he doubts of its truth: and yet some express themselves in such a manner concerning Moses' law, (as they term the law of God) which cannot easily be reconciled with it. But,

(3.) It is called the letter, in distinction from the gospel, which is styled the Spirit. "The letter killeth, the Spirit giveth life;" because the truths of the gospel excel in spirituality those truths that are proper to the law. The latter are glorious, but the former exceed in glory. And they are the foundation of a more spiritual obedience than what the law as a covenant is acquainted withal.

(4.) This is the reason why human understanding discerns, in some degree, the propriety of the doctrine of the law, and the reasonableness of that obedience which is built upon it. But it cannot discover any excellency in evangelical principles, nor the fitness of that obedience which is built on those principles as its foundation; and hence, unregenerate persons, what conviction soever they receive of the truth of the gospel in discharge of duty, they always act under the influence of the doctrine of the law, so far as they understand it, and not in the least measure agreeably to the nature and genius of the gospel. And, even in believers there is a propensity to this legal obedience. Their minds are not wholly evangelized. Sometimes, and in some instances, they are not actuated by the influence of evangelical, but legal motives. It is a good evidence of a growth in grace, when the soul attends much to the practice of those duties that are founded on the doctrine of the

gospel, and unto the discharge of all under the influence of that doctrine.

First, This spiritual obedience is without fear, that is to say, it arises not from a dread of punishment. He that obeys merely from the consideration of the dreadful consequences of disobedience, no more approves of the matter of duty, than a vassal approves of the command of a tyrant, — that is contrary to his own inclination, though he executes it, because he would not expose himself to his merciless fury. Such obedience cannot be pleasing to a man of an ingenuous open disposition; it can only be agreeable to him who makes his will a law to others, whether it be right or wrong. And, can we think that it will be accepted with God? No, surely! He abhors it, and must do so; for it supposes that a man either thinks himself called unto unreasonable service, or that his inclination is to violate the just and equitable command, if he durst; the former is a blasphemous reproach cast on God, the latter is the will's refusal of duty, and its choice of sin, provided it might be with safety to the man himself. It is just that sin should expose to penalty, but to avoid the commission of it merely to escape punishment, is far, very far, from that holy obedience which God requires of his creatures.

Secondly, Spiritual obedience is freely and cheerfully performed; not with reluctance, as men do, whenever they act under the influence of terror and dread. The law may drive a person to duty, but the gospel sweetly draws him. A sense of wrath may restrain sin, and prevent it breaking forth, but it will never produce a contrary disposition in the soul. Grace doth the latter, and when it is lively, obedience is the more voluntarily performed.

Thirdly, It is an evidence of spirituality when duties are the matter of our delight. The flesh may be compelled to practise them by various considerations, but never with the least degree of pleasure. Grace is a disposition to acts of duty, and therefore it is no unpleasing task, which it is unto the flesh. And if the new creature is lively and vigorous, the more spiritual any duty is, by so much the more is the mind of a Christian delighted with it. A readiness to engage in exercises wherein the proper business of the soul is to hold communion with God; and if that is the attractive unto those exercises, it is a sure sign of heavenly-mindedness. The persons whose consolation I here aim at, are happily disposed to those branches of Christian obedience, in an especial manner, wherein nearness unto God is to be enjoyed; and on that account they take pleasure in them: and yet, because they find within themselves a reluctance to those duties, arising from the flesh, they are sometimes greatly discouraged, and think that surely they are in a declining state; but, on the contrary, they are really flourishing in grace. We should not form our judgment of the being of grace in our souls, by a freedom from the being or actings of sin in us, that is not to be expected so long as we are

here; neither should we measure our grace by the opposition the flesh makes against it, but by the genuine actings of the gracious principle in us in acts of holy obedience, and its opposition to the motions of the corrupt part in our hearts.

The difference between a regenerate and unregenerate person is this, — the regenerate man is partly spiritual and partly carnal, in the disposition and acts of his mind; the unregenerate is wholly carnal in his dispositions and in all his acts, whether he is employed about what is materially good, or what is materially evil. For such as his nature is, such are all his actions, either in the matter of them or in their circumstances. No good thing is in the flesh, and therefore nothing that is good can possibly be brought out of it, either by the terrors of the law or the sweet and melting truths of the gospel. The difference between a growing and a declining Christian is this, — grace is much and vigorously acted in the former, but little and very weakly in the latter. Grace, when it is highest in its acts, never prevails with the flesh to unite with it in what is spiritual; that always, and in all instances, opposes the spiritual part; hence, every act of duty a regenerate person performs, is imperfect, and tainted with evil; and, where there is the most grace there is the clearest sense of the opposition it meets with from the law of sin, in that course of holy spiritual obedience, whereunto it disposes the Christian. And therefore the growing saint, for want of a due consideration of this, may conceive that he is under a decline, and walk mournfully on that account, when he hath the best evidence of true grace in his heart, and of its increase also.

One thing I would mention here, in a way of caution, and that is, what I have offered is not intended for the jocund and merry professor, such as our times abound with; let them not imagine that this is a cordial which God hath prepared for them. I would as soon present them with a cup of poison, while they continue in their present frame and course of behaviour, as with the consolatory truths of the gospel. Let them take care, though they please themselves with the doctrines of grace, as some of them do, that the law does not, by and by, seize them as its rightful subjects, in all its dreadful terrors; if it should, all their jollity will be suddenly turned into distress, and their catastrophe will be terrible beyond expression, and even thought too. Some may say, “What, would you have religion wear a melancholy gloom?” No such thing is intended. But this I know, that carnal mirth is not the fruit of real experimental religion. That produces pleasure of a far better nature, a joy that is solid and lasting.

CHAPTER 10

Of The Ways And Means Of Revival, Under Decays Of Grace

THE Holy Spirit, in a way of efficiency, is the sole cause of a happy revival, under decays of grace. It is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of God, that the work of grace is maintained and carried on in the souls of believers. And, therefore, the church in a declining state, and under a deep sense of it, makes application unto God for a revival. "Wilt thou not revive us again? that thy people may rejoice in thee." There is but little joy in God, when grace comes under a decline. Though the Holy Spirit alone can effect this desirable change in the frame and behaviour of withering, barren professors, still various means are appointed of God, which are subservient to this end; and if we neglect to use those means, no wonder that we still have reason to complain, and cry out, O our leanness, our leanness; for the treacherous dealers, even under all our complaints, are dealing treacherously; and, therefore, an alteration for the better cannot reasonably be expected. If we are thoroughly persuaded of this, we shall really desire a time of refreshing from God, to excite us to use diligence, in order that our graces may be revived, and to strengthen what remains that is ready to die.

Much labour and diligence are required unto this. It is not complaining of the sickly condition of our souls, which will effect their cure. Confessions of those follies that have brought diseases on us, though repeated ever so often, will avail nothing towards the removal of them. If we intend the recovery of our former health and vigour, we must act, as well as complain and groan. We must keep at a distance from those persons and those snares which have drawn us into the instances of folly, which have occasioned that disorder which is the matter of our complaint. Without this, we may multiply acknowledgments and expressions of concern for our past miscarriages, to no purpose at all. It is very great folly to think of regaining our former strength, so long as we embrace and dally with those objects, through whose evil influence we are fallen into a sorrowful decline. It is not our bewailing the pernicious effects of sin, that will prevent its baneful influence upon us; except we are determined to forsake that, to which our melancholy disorder is owing, never let us think of recovering our former healthful and vigorous state; for if we do, we shall certainly be deceived to our further prejudice: for such a frame of mind tends to ruin, nor can it be prevented, but by sovereign grace effecting a contrary disposition in us.

I. We must remember from whence we are fallen, and lay to heart the sad occasions of our declension.

Let us recollect what convictions of sin we have had, and what tenderness of conscience they produced. How fearful we were of acting anything that bordered upon evil, out of a regard to the glory of God, as well as the peace of

our own minds. What watchfulness against all baits and temptations which were laid in our way to ensnare us, we then exercised. Let us remember how precious Christ was then to our souls. The views we had of the value of those benefits which spring from His obedience, death, and sacrifice. In what manner our souls desired to be “found in Him,” and applied to Him for pardon, peace, righteousness, wisdom, strength, and indeed for all that is necessary to our present consolation, holiness, and future welfare. Let us remember how our souls admired and adored the grace of God, which formed the astonishing design of our eternal salvation from ruin which we so justly deserved; though to effect it, He must part with His own Son from His bosom, and deliver Him up to shame, sorrow, curse, and a penal death; His law and justice requiring it, that we wretched transgressors might be saved. And shall we not call to mind what pleasing wonder possessed our souls, from the consideration of the honour conferred upon us, viz., that God made us His sons, clothed us with the best robe, with fine linen, clean and white, a garment pure, spotless, and of infinite value; adorned our souls with precious jewels, the graces of His Holy Spirit, as tokens of His infinite love to our persons, and the earnest and first-fruits of eternal glory whereunto He called us? Shall we be so ungrateful to our heavenly Father, as to bury in forgetfulness the gracious discoveries of his kindness, grace, and mercy to our souls, when we were overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, curse, and vengeance, which we saw we had contracted, and whereunto we were exposed, without any ground of hope of relief and deliverance, but only from that infinitely glorious object against whom we had been sinning all our days? Let us remember how sweet the gospel was to us, what a rich treasure, and delightful food it was to our poor famishing souls; how we delighted in the ordinances of Christ, that we “sat under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to our taste.” The remembrance of these things, on the one hand, may produce joy; and on the other, shame, sorrow, indignation, and revenge against sin and ourselves, when we consider what a melancholy change we have passed under. Oh! surely with shame, blushing, and confusion of face, we must think of our present declension. What want of watchfulness against sin is now found in us, and what near approaches do we dare to make unto it! What a languor is there in our graces! How little is faith in exercise! And how is our love abated to God, to Christ, to His gospel, His ordinances, and His people!

We cannot wholly be insensible that we are without those gracious visits of divine love from our covenant Father, our only Saviour, our best Friend, and elder Brother, who was born for our help and relief in the worst of adversity, which in time past our souls enjoyed. And this distance between

God and our souls, is the consequence of our sin, sloth, negligence, and base ingratitude. Are our hearts affected with this as they ought to be? They are not, God knows. We are in a sad slumber, perhaps some are in a dead sleep, as we use to say, and nothing will wake and rouse them out of their wretched carnal security, but some shocking and terrible dispensation, which, whenever it comes, will put them into the utmost consternation and terror; and they may not be able to determine whether they are of the living in Jerusalem, or sinners and hypocrites in Zion; whose portion will be fearfulness here, and everlasting burnings hereafter, notwithstanding that flourishing profession they once made. Awful thought indeed! Should we not each of us say, What have I done to cause God to hide His face from me? Wherein have I grieved the Holy Spirit, which hath occasioned Him to withhold His benign comforting influences from my poor soul, through the want of which I am attended with darkness, deadness, loss of spiritual consolation, joy in God; and am at a great uncertainty, in my own apprehension, whether I am in the way to heaven, or in the broad road to hell and destruction! Oh! the bitter effects of sin!

II. Consider what Christ required of the church at Sardis, which many interpreters think is a representation of the church under the Reformation fallen into sad declension; and they apply it to our times. He requires them to “remember how they received,” i.e., with what joy they embraced His gospel, and received Himself as held forth therein, in His person, offices, work, and benefits. How they had received His sacred institutions and excellent laws, that they had celebrated the former with spiritual pleasure and great advantage; and submitted to the latter with holy reverence and zeal for His glory as King in Zion. Again, He calls upon them to recollect how “they had heard,” what attention they gave to His delightful voice in the promises He expressed, the warnings He gave against sin, temptations, and snares they would meet withal, in the course of their pilgrimage in this world; which suggests that they had been defective in this matter, which was the cause of their deadness and formality; so that they seemed not to have life; at least, no vigour or liveliness were discovered; but they were sunk very much into a dead formality, in the course of their behaviour. Moreover, Christ commands them to “hold fast,” i.e., His doctrine; this implies that they were in danger of having it either violently or artfully taken from them, by open or secret enemies. Very needful advice for us in our dreadful times. Some, with much cunning insinuation, and all the arts of address, endeavour gradually to lessen our regard to those important doctrines; the rescuing of which from Popish corruption, was the chief glory of the Reformation; and with daring insults, proud confidence, and matchless injustice, do many reproach and

vilify those doctrines. What need therefore, have we of this advice, and how well is it suited to our circumstances! Many are sunk into a neutral spirit, and discover no concern what principles are introduced, nor what doctrines are given up. They are but speculative points, (they say) and if they can but promote practical and experimental religion, for their parts, they are quiet and easy. Do not, then, evangelical truths enter into that religion they would advance? Are not those truths the foundation, life, and soul of it? If not, let us boldly renounce it, as no religion of the blessed Jesus; this is what our profession of being His followers obliges us unto, let these cowardly men take that renunciation how they please. If, indeed, they are the ground of that practical and experimental religion these persons pretend it is their design and endeavour to promote, why, then, are they unconcerned about what treatment those doctrines meet with? The introduction of other doctrines than those the Reformers boldly defended against the hellish fury and rage of Rome, brought into the Reformed Church that pride and contempt of spirituality, which have been, and still are nourished by those doctrines, which in the end, unless God prevents it, will prove our ruin, and render the Reformed Church, for corruption in principles, full as infamous, if not more so, than that of Rome, which Christ will “consume with the spirit of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming.” Never let us part with those things wherein is continuance, and by which we are to be saved, if saved we shall be, through the fawning and flatteries of these professed friends, but secret enemies of the gospel of Christ. Nor let us ever be frightened out of our faith by the rage, contempt, and scorn that open adversaries pour upon us, because of our regard to the doctrines of God’s sovereign and distinguishing grace; though, through the defection of many, but few may join us in an opposition to that tide of fury against those precious truths, which flows in upon us with great rapidity. Let us stand our ground, keep firm hold, “and quit ourselves like men,” in the defence of principles, which ought to be far dearer to us than the most valuable privileges we can enjoy of a temporal nature, yea, than life itself. For if those truths are rent from us, from what source, then, can we derive peace in trouble, strength in weakness, joy in sorrow, light in darkness, comfort in life, or hope in death? And on what may we build an expectation of happiness hereafter, if the doctrines of the Reformation are wrested from us? On nothing. Though multitudes now desert them, through one cause or another.

These doctrines are, — Efficacious grace in the conversion of a poor sinner, communicated on the foundation of eternal predestination to everlasting life. Complete atonement for sin, by the death and sacrifice of Christ. Justification by His righteousness, without any works of our own;

and received by faith, in order to our peace, joy, and hope of heaven. Final perseverance in faith and holiness, what shocks soever we may meet with from sin, Satan, or the world. These blessed truths are the only supports of a divine faith, and heavenly hope; and I am not afraid or ashamed to say, that he is no Christian who is ignorant of their sweetness, power, spirituality, and effectual influence to promote holiness in all its branches; let some clamour as long as they think proper, and charge these glorious truths with licentiousness. But I must acquaint them that there is a time hastening, wherein they will be obliged to give their account to Him, whose these doctrines are, and whose glory is much concerned in them, for all their ungodly and hard speeches against them. They will do well to consider what defence for themselves they shall be able to make. Reproach, slander, falsehood, and contumely, will not be suffered at His tribunal, though now they are permitted to practise these abominable vices, to run down truth, and propagate destructive errors.

III. We must do “the first works,” if we design a revival of our graces. This calls for humility and diligence, to both which our proud and slothful hearts are too much disinclined. We must be content to begin afresh, both to learn and practise, since through carelessness and sloth we are gone backwards in knowledge and practice too. It sometimes is with the saints as with schoolboys, who by their negligence are so far from improvement, that they have almost forgot the rudiments of a language or an art they have begun to learn; in which case it is necessary that they make a new beginning; this suits not with their pride, but unto it they must submit. So the Christian has sometimes need of being taught again, “what are the first principles of the oracles of God,” when for the time he has been in the school of Christ, his improvement ought to be such as would fit him for giving instruction to others in these plain and easy principle. But through negligence he has let them slip. And we must be content to pass through the very same lessons of conviction, sorrow, humiliation, and repentance, we long since learned of the Holy Spirit. Whatever we think of the matter, a revival cannot be without it. This is humbling to our pride, but our past negligence has rendered it absolutely necessary; besides, we must attend to those duties we formerly did, viz., prayer, reading, meditation, self-examination, hearing, and ordinances; if we do not, we may multiply complaints of our leanness, without adding anything to our vigour, strength, and fruitfulness. As we are, so we shall continue to be, or grow worse, if that can be, unless we use those means which Christ has appointed for our growth in grace. And we must reassume our former watchfulness against sin, and all occasions of it. Decline all those ways, and that sort of conversation which have proved

snare to our souls. This wise part we acted at first conversion, and a new conversion requires our acting the very same part. Perhaps some jolly, loose-walking, merry professors, who abound in our times, we may have contracted acquaintance with; and their discourse, with the manner of their behaviour, has insensibly tainted our minds at first, and caused us to remit somewhat of our strict watchfulness; this has been followed with those acts of backsliding, whereunto we owe that barrenness of soul we so justly complain of. If this is our case, we cannot by serious advice and a grave example reform them, then let us forsake their company, and get rid of a conversation, by the ill influence of which we may long suffer, if not to the day of our death. Grace will not long thrive under the droppings of a pernicious conversation, nor will it revive where it is sunk and decayed under that disadvantage. If we throw water upon a low fire, we must surely be sensible that it will not maintain and revive it. Vain conversation is to grace, what water is to fire.

Query. How can this declension consist with promises of growth?

Answer. Our increase in grace is often represented by the growth of plants, which in some seasons is interrupted. As in winter, through the sun's distance, nipping winds, and pinching frost, they lose all their beauty, but their sap abides in the root, and upon the return of the enlivening sun, through the influence of its quickening rays, the sap ascends, the plant which not long since afforded no pleasing prospect, salutes our eye with a delightful green; it presently buds, its blossoms open, and it yields precious fruits. So the Christian, when the Sun of Righteousness withdraws, and the north wind of temptations blows upon him, at the present he grows not, grace subsides, corruption rises, and the beauty of his profession is gone, and no fruit is brought forth to the glory of God. But, when the Sun of Righteousness returns, with the cheering rays of His all-quickening power and grace, the saint revives, his graces that have lain hid discover themselves again, he recovers his former beauty, "blossoms as the rose, grows as the lily," spreads his roots and bears much fruit to the glory of his Heavenly Father. Let us not then on a sudden, pronounce a person dead who is, it may be, now barren; he may have brought forth fruit. and though it is winter with him now, he may see a returning spring, and again afford us a lovely prospect; and for this let us wait and hope.

Lastly, let the saint recovered from backsliding and declension, adore the divine goodness, grace, and mercy discovered in his new conversion. If he takes into serious consideration, his provoking carriage, and God's patience, long suffering, faithfulness to His promises, and the immutability of His love to his person, under all his unworthiness: if he well considers from what a

sad frame he is delivered, and what advantages, divine pleasures, and signal favours he is again brought unto the enjoyment of: if he thoroughly considers what new honour is done him, by making him again fruitful in good works, to the glory of his Heavenly Father, and to the joy and usefulness of his fellow Christians, pleasure inexpressible must flow in his breast. Let him also remember that he is still in a state of imperfection, and snares, and dangers; and that, therefore, another declension may succeed: for as grace communicated to him at his first conversion, prevented not his former decay, which has been so much to the dishonour of God, and the grief of his soul; so neither may that grace bestowed on him, in this new conversion, preserve him from a future declension. In order to this, renewed supplies of grace are necessary, to keep him in a humble, watchful, and depending frame of soul on his Head of life and influence. Sin, upon this revival, is indeed much subdued; but he may possibly live to find it act again, with as much violence as ever it did; and grace may again subside, though it now advances and expands itself in the soul.

However spiritual he now is in his frame, he is not got beyond the reach of temptation, and he is still the subject of that, which under fresh temptations, will not only incline him, but prevail with him also, to act a part (unless divine grace interposes to his succour) that will involve him in the same sorrowful condition he is now emerged out of. It is enough to make one tremble to think what prevalency the flesh has gained, even after the most affecting discoveries of divine love and goodness, that have ever been vouchsafed to saints most eminent for holiness. Some have got their foulest blemishes, after they have received the most signal tokens of divine favour they were ever indulged withal.

Let this teach us humility and caution; they are, I am sure, the useful lessons we ought to learn by those awful dispensations under which some eminent saints have passed, with whom none of us are comparable in holiness and the power of religion.

CHAPTER 11

Of The Temptations Of The Present Age

TEMPTATION is exceedingly dangerous to us, because we have that in us which is fit matter for it to act upon. It is not with us as it was with our great Master, who had no disposition in Him upon which a temptation could fix itself, and therefore he repelled the force of all sorts of temptations, without their making the least impression on His mind. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." We are like unto a city besieged by powerful enemies, wherein there is a strong party within, who are on the

side of the besiegers, and who seek for an opportunity to give them entrance, and betray it into their hands; therefore we can never be safe, without a strict watch kept on these intestine enemies, as well as a resolute defence against the enemies without. Consider believer, what swarms of evil lusts there are in thine heart, which are always ready to join with any temptation, and thou wilt soon be convinced of the necessity of constant watchfulness against temptations, that without it thou canst never walk safely a moment. In an unguarded minute, the enemies of thy soul will find an avenue, get entrance and presently fire thy lusts, and cause thee to act a part which will fill thee with shame, sorrow, and fear, perhaps, all thy days. Consider likewise that not every guard in such time of danger will secure thee. It may be, thou thinkest that a regard to thy honour, or interest in the world, etc., will be sufficient security in temptation; but alas! when once temptation hath got access to thy soul, and lust is kindled by it, thou wilt find that it will break through all such restraints with as much ease as Sampson burst the strong cords wherewith the Philistines bound him when asleep. All such reasonings will prove like a bowing wall and tottering fence, before temptation when united with our lusts.

We enjoy our liberties as men and Christians. Separation from the Establishment is not deemed by our laws criminal, nor are we on that account subject now to any penalties. We live in the quiet possession of our property in safety and peace, and are protected in the free exercise of our religion by the laws of our country. So that we suffer no such hardships as our forefathers underwent, to preserve a good conscience. They suffered confiscation of goods, imprisonment, corporal punishment, and death, because they had the pious courage not to join with others in those acts of religious communion which they were persuaded were not agreeable to the institution of Christ. But as for us, though at some periods clouds have gathered, and dreadful storms have threatened us, still God, in his providence, has wonderfully appeared in our behalf, dissipated those clouds, and prevented the impending storms with which we were threatened: so that we have no experience of the sharpness and severity of persecution for conscience' sake, nor of the temptations which attend a suffering state on account of our profession. But our long ease, increase of wealth, and the great change which these pleasing circumstances, through the corruptions of men's hearts, have introduced in the temper and behaviour of numerous professors, have exposed us to temptations no less dangerous and threatening than the sharpest persecution. And multitudes have been hereby much ensnared. We are waxen fat, we are grown thick, we have forsaken the Lord that made us, and have lightly esteemed the rock of our salvation. What

loss of substance, of liberty, of ease, yea of life could not effect, that liberty, affluence, and worldly honour have done, in many among us, viz., rendered them carnal, careless, and loose, both in their principles and conduct, so that now we are but little like them whose descendants we are, in zeal for truth, in love, humility, and mortification to the world. And, these melancholy circumstances are growing upon us more and more. If men are not stark blind, or are not wholly disposed to take no notice of the state of things amongst us, they must be obliged to confess the dreadful truth. And what will be the issue, God only knows. It is very probable such, as very few, if any, have expectation of, or will at present be persuaded will be the result. Our present security in that deplorable condition into which we are sunk in a religious sense, is no symptom in our favour. God hath often brought the severest judgments upon a people, when according to political maxims, they have imagined themselves in the greatest safety. And if his treatment of us should not be such, I am sure it will be entirely owing to sovereign mercy, for our circumstances are of that nature as leave us without any other ground of hope. And how long it may be His pleasure in the dispensations of His Providence to act towards us on that foundation, is a secret in His own breast, and absolutely out of our view.

Our times may very justly be esteemed (*calepoi*) difficult, troublesome, and dangerous. For many, who are of the religious character, are manifestly under the influence of such vices as the apostle in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, enumerates. Some are captivated by one, and others by other vices. Some are proud, and others are envious or lovers of themselves, or of pleasures, are heady, high-minded, etc. It is not to be thought that all these vices are found predominant in any man pretending to religion; but take a number of those persons together, who have “a form of godliness,” and they fill up this dismal account, or afford matter for this charge in all its branches, sad and heavy as it is. One person is likely to prove an ensnaring temptation to us in one way, and another in some other way; and such a multiplicity of evil practices among professors, renders a strict watchfulness exceedingly necessary; without it, we shall soon find ourselves in such entanglements as will prove of very bad consequence to our souls. To maintain strictness of walk and conversation, when carelessness, indifference, sloth, and love to the world, with indulgence in those evils, which always accompany such a frame of mind, prevail among professors, is the privilege and happiness of but a few, because it requires more guard upon ourselves, more self-denial, and less conversation with such dangerous companions, than through the treachery of our hearts we are disposed to exercise. Sometimes we are sooner laughed out of our religion by men of this character, than we are

driven out of it, by the fierceness and cruelty of others who persecute us for our profession, but who make none themselves. In my opinion, those who make pretences to religion in words; but in their behaviour are any way irregular, are the most dangerous companions a good man can intimately converse with. Because he may be tempted to think that there is not much evil in this or that irregular practice, through a charitable judgment he forms of the persons addicted to those practices. Familiarity cannot, without great difficulty, be held with loose professors, but to the prejudice of grace in our own souls. For, alas! where watchfulness against temptations is wanting, the mind is certainly in a fit frame for falling in with them, as soon and as fast as they offer of what nature soever they be. And he that is insensible that evil conduct in others, may prove a temptation to the best of us, is unacquainted with the depravity of human nature.

I. Temptations levelled against our faith, by open and avowed enemies, are many. The gospel, since the reformation in England, never met with more violent opposition, in most of its branches, than at this time it does. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity; of the Incarnation of Christ; of His obedience to the law for us, in order to our justification before God; the great truth of His atonement and satisfaction for sin; the doctrine of the nature, necessity, efficacy, and effect of the Holy Spirit's operations on the minds of men; these all-important truths are the matter of the rude scorn of multitudes. Men seem determined to bear down those principles with supercilious and haughty airs, blustering language, and bold charges of absurdity and nonsense. And, therefore, our adherence to those sacred truths, forfeits in the esteem of these men, our claim to the character of rational, and much more to that of being wise and ingenious: to such a height are their insolence and pride swelled at this day. Formerly those who disbelieved those doctrines, were at no small pains and labour to advance objections against them, many of which were plausible; but now contempt, blasphemous reproach, noise and triumph, are the weapons used to batter down our faith and hope in the blood, righteousness, and grace of our precious Redeemer.

The reasoning of the present MOST CELEBRATED adversaries of evangelical truths, requires no great labour to answer. Impertinence, set off with the advantage of confidence and effrontery, is to do the execution intended. And it is not a little surprising how far this end is answered by that bluster which these men make. It is also very observable that they are exceedingly lavish in their complaints one to another, and liberally bestow encomiums one on another for their endeavours this way. And infidels seem to have learned this art of demolishing revelation, by sneer and banter upon it, rather than by advancing objections against it, in a sober manner, like real

inquirers after truth. And yet they put on the grimace of being passionately in love with truth, whenever and wherever they can discover it. While they pretend to be absolutely divested of all prepossession and prejudice, and to follow wherever reason leads, without the least reluctance, they give glaring evidence of their having thrown off all awe of God and regard to impartial reason too, in the manner of their treating inspired persons, their writings, and the doctrines which they have delivered. And by these unfair and unreasonable methods, they have been able to turn off many from a religious regard to the sacred pages; and have taught them to admire themselves for being profanely witty on what is sacred.

II. The secret enemies of divine truth are numerous, from whom many temptations arise.

1. Men of this character, especially if they are ministers, very rarely are open and frank in declaring their sentiments. They choose to lie concealed as to their notions, until such time as they have been able to ingratiate themselves into the good opinion of those whom they intend to bring over to their sentiments. And very watchful they are, for every opportunity and advantage which may offer that are favourable to their design, nor will they fail of improving them to the utmost. Doctrines which they have no relish for, it may be some in their congregations firmly believe; and therefore they dare not, at once, and in a plain manner, deny them; but by long silence about them, and now and then advancing principles not consistent with them, they insensibly instill them into the minds of their hearers, and draw them off from that regard they once paid to those other principles. It is very sad what influence such conduct hath had, and still hath in many places; I had almost said to the total subversion of Christianity. And in others this sort of demeanour is very likely to be productive of the same dreadful effects. May the good Lord have mercy upon His churches, and preserve them from being seduced by these men who lie in wait to deceive. If Christians are not excited to watchfulness against them, by their insinuations and address, whereof they are perfect masters, they will be in great danger of being drawn aside. For these men are competently qualified for that kind of disservice to the church of God, whereunto they have devoted themselves, and unto which they direct all their studies.

2. This sort of persons frequently declaim much against controversy in religion and against insisting on controverted points; because as they are pleased to say, that tends to fill men's heads with niceties and speculative notions, which have no great influence on their morals to make them better. And that it is certainly best to treat on plain and practical subjects, which are calculated to promote holiness. By this means they bring their hearers to

be content without discourses on the important truths of the gospel, until at length they become indifferent about them, and greatly prejudiced against them. Then,

3. The fit time being come for them to be open and unreserved, they then throw off the mask, and can dare to enter upon the stage of controversy, and with downright blows oppose those doctrines they never believed; but till now were shy of letting it be known. Now they become zealous defenders of the principles, which before they but whispered softly in the ears of some trusty friends. In this their success they glory, as if it was a very honourable achievement. Let them expect their reward from Him, whose servants they pretend to be.

III. Many persons carefully avoid the use of some terms and phrases, by which the most important doctrines of Christianity are expressed. For instance, you shall never hear them use the terms eternal, nor infinite, concerning our blessed Saviour, when they speak of Him; this silence about His eternity and infinity hath the effect intended, that is to say, it brings men to be unconcerned whether He is eternal or infinite, or not? Whether He always was, or once was not? Whether He is in His powers and perfections, unlimited or limited? In a word, whether He is God or a creature only.

Others, they decline the use of the terms sovereign and discriminating, when they speak of the grace of God. Grace, free grace, exuberant, boundless grace, are epithets they choose, and they are very serviceable, for some take them in a different sense from what they intend, which they like very well; while others understand them in their true sense; and so persons of different apprehensions on the subject of divine grace, are content with the artful preacher. But for never so much would he be prevailed with to use a mode of speech expressive of the absolute freedom and discriminating nature of the love of God to men.

Farther, the terms elect, election, predestinate, predestination, are with many grown obsolete; although they are Scriptural terms. The use of these terms is laid aside, it may be, lest some persons should be offended who disrelish the doctrine of predestination, and where that is the case, you may be assured the doctrine is not opened and inculcated; though it is the basis and origin of our salvation from misery. And by this means people become almost strangers to that doctrine, and many contract great prejudices against it.

Moreover, the use of the terms absolute and unconditional justification is discontinued. The righteousness and sacrifice of Christ are, it may be allowed, an influence into our pardon and justification; but something must be performed by us in order to an interest in, or title to the benefits arising

from His obedience and death; and this performance is not wholly owing to the operation of divine grace on our souls. Which is nothing better than the Popish doctrine or justification. But how sadly are some well-meaning people imposed on by this cunning of the preacher? They think his meaning is, that the blood and righteousness of Christ are the sole and entire causes of our remission and acceptation with God: whereas the artful preacher is at a great distance from any such meaning.

Again, the terms irresistible and effectual grace, are never heard. Aids, assistances, operations of grace, and divine impulses, are spoken of with great freedom. By this means, some who ascribe the whole of their Regeneration to the grace and spirit of God, are persuaded to think that so the preacher means; but it is wholly a mistake; and he has others about him who are well aware of it, and applaud his imposing art. They are fully sensible that he intends no more than this, that God assists us in turning from sin to Him; and that our choice of holiness is from ourselves, without the determining influence of divine grace upon our wills in that choice. And so the preacher gives satisfaction to the unwary Calvinist, and the Arminian also.

I add, these persons cautiously decline the use of the term merit; but the doctrine of merit they are advocates for, in that sense wherein it was understood by Popish writers. They disclaim merit of condignity; but maintain the doctrine of merit of congruity. That is to say, though they deny that, in strict justice, men merit favours at the hand of God; still they plead that it is fit that persons so and so qualified should become entitled to those blessings which are conditionally procured by the death and sacrifice of Christ. And thus, without the use of the term, they effectually propagate the doctrine of merit; and in that sense which the greatest adversaries of the grace of God towards men have desired it might be maintained. For no man, who acknowledges that human nature is ruined by sin, can ever contend for merit in a higher sense. Thus we have lost the chief glory of the Reformation, and the very life and soul of Popery greatly flourishes amongst us, to our great scandal and the satisfaction of the Romanists. This is the dreadful condition of a multitude of those who pass under the denomination Protestant Dissenters. And what will be the issue of these things, the Lord only knows. May we be prepared for the worst. Some terrible dispensations we may justly fear will befall us in our present situation, it is so exceedingly bad; nor is there any room, as yet, to hope for an amendment in our circumstances.

Another instance of the art of these persons is, they speak with great contempt concerning schemes and schematists. This is done with a design of broaching some erroneous opinions, without being called to an account; and for advancing principles inconsistent with the analogy of faith. Through

the weakness and inadvertency of some, and the supineness of others, this artifice, absurd as it is in itself, hath answered the intention of those who have used it in many instances. For they have been suffered to vent opinions contrary to the common faith of Christians, without any rebuke or check, from some, because they would not seem to be bigoted to any particular scheme or party. These artful men must know that religious principles are linked together and compose a scheme, notwithstanding they speak against schemes in religion and against religious schematists.

Thus the desired and intended effect hath been followed in many places by a total neglect of those solid and glorious truths wherewith the hearts of Christians formerly were warmed, and by whose kindly influence upon them, they meekly, patiently, and courageously suffered reproach, and almost all manner of evils, lived comfortably, holily, and died triumphantly even in the midst of flames. Add to these things, much art is used to persuade us that this and the other doctrine is not necessary to be believed, in order to salvation. With some, not the doctrine of Christ's Deity. With others, not His satisfaction, at least as proper, full, and ascertaining peace, pardon, and eternal salvation. With others, not the doctrine of justification by his righteousness. With others, not the doctrine of effectual and efficacious grace. Nay, with some, it is not thought absolutely necessary to believe that Jesus was the Messiah promised. They seem to think salvation is possible to an unbelieving Jew, provided that he is but honest and sincere. Indeed it is well if he hath not as much of Christianity in him as they have.

Once more, there is an opinion prevailing which is of a dangerous nature to the souls of men, dishonourable to God, and naturally tends to lessen our regard to the merit of a Saviour's blood, viz., that God is a benevolent merciful Being, and will make all reasonable allowances for the imperfections and follies of life. Are these moral imperfections? Are these sinful follies? If they be, what allowance is it reasonable for infinite rectitude and purity to make for, our being guilty of such imperfections and such follies? The supposition of the reasonableness of any such allowances, is a horrid reproach to the holiness and justice of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. May my soul eternally detest the thought. Is not this likely to beget light thoughts of sin in the minds of men? Doth it not tend to cause them to imagine that the remission of such offences is no great matter? Who will think themselves much concerned to look to the blood of Christ for the pardon of such small and unavoidable offences? But this is a foundation, it seems, whereon some lay a considerable stress: although it agrees neither with the religion of nature, nor yet with the religion of Jesus, nothing like it is contained either in the law or in the gospel of Christ. A deceased minister

of the Independent denomination, says, "My greatest concern is to have rational and solid expectations of future happiness. I would not be mistaken nor build on the sand; but would impress my mind with a firm belief of the certainty of the future world, and live in a practical preparation for it. I rely very much on the rational notions we have of the moral perfections of God, not only as a just, but a benevolent and merciful Being; who knows our frame, and will make all reasonable allowances for our imperfections and follies in life; and not only so, but — upon our repentance and faith in Christ, will pardon our past sins, though never so many and great." — Part of a Letter from Mr. Neal to Dr. Miles, of Tooting; as quoted by Dr. Jennings, in his Funeral Sermon for Mr. Neal.

The law makes no allowances for our defects and foibles; and the gospel gives us no ground to hope for the pardon of any sin, but through the atoning blood of the Son of God. Every imperfection and every act of folly, exposes us to the just condemnation of the law; and the blood of Christ alone procures our deliverance from that condemnation.

To this cause we owe the remission of our smaller and greater transgressions. No sin at all, is pardoned, but upon the foundation of Christ's atonement. Nothing more contrary to the strictness and purity of the law, and to the grace and justice of God in the gospel, can be advanced than this, that the remission of our lesser offences is an effect of divine benevolence and clemency, without respect to the blood of Christ as the meritorious cause thereof. Besides, salvation is not an effect of what is called benevolence and mercy in God; which we are supposed to have rational notions of, distinct from the Christian revelation, and whereon that is thought to be built. It is the result of mere sovereignty. God saves not sinners, because it was fit and proper he should save them, but because it was His pleasure. And consequently evangelical discoveries are not built upon, and super-added to our rational notions of God. Those discoveries are absolutely new, and in their nature wholly distinct from those truths which the Scripture contains, relating to sin and sinners.

Natural religion is no other than the doctrine of the covenant of works. That covenant promises the enjoyment of good to the innocent creature; but it threatens the transgressor with death and eternal misery, and it leaves him in that condition into which his guilt hath plunged him, without any foundation of hope of a deliverance from sin and its dreadful consequences. According to that covenant, nothing is to be expected from our righteous Judge; but curse, wrath, vengeance, and fiery indignation to devour us.

And therefore it is most false that the new covenant is built upon and super-added to any natural or rational notions we can have of God in His

moral perfections. The measure and rule of our natural notions of God, is the law; that is the religion of nature in its purity and perfection. And what is there in the law which only promises life and happiness to the innocent creature, and denounces vengeance and everlasting death to the sinner, that can furnish us with the least hope of the pardon of sin, and of the welfare of criminals? Nothing at all. Believer let me entreat thee to beware of this pernicious doctrine, which is nothing but a corruption of the religion of nature; and is falsely said to be the religion of Jesus. In fact, it is most remote from it. The Christian religion is not a diminution of the glory, authority, and extent of the law, in order to our recovery; but a full and effectual provision for its honour, in all its branches in our pardon and salvation. Better it were ten thousand times that we should perish forever, according to our desert, than that any slur should be cast on the holiness and justice of God in that way whereby our recovery is brought about. If once we imagine that our imperfections and unavoidable weaknesses in the present state, are pardoned, or that allowances are made for them by divine benevolence and mercy, otherwise than on the foundation of the bloodshedding and sacrifice of Christ, we shall soon conceit that there is less, far less of evil in those imperfections and foibles than in fact there is, and that the remission of them is a thing to be expected as of course. And, therefore, that sorrow, humiliation, and self-abhorrence for them will not be found in us, which certainly ought to be. This is the common doctrine of our corrupt times.

IV. Some act a neutral part, — appear on no side you cannot tell whether they are of this, or of the contrary opinion. This sort of persons have ends to answer, which are pleasing to themselves; and sometimes their views are accomplished, and when they are they congratulate themselves on the happy success of their caution and prudence, and look upon some others with contempt, for their folly in entering on the defence of unpopular opinions, whereby they have fixed an odium on their characters, and rendered themselves unacceptable to many who hold the others in admiration. But how do those persons endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, who decline coming into the field, and not dare to meet an enemy of

His in the gate, lest they become sufferers by it in their reputation or secular advantage? I am sure these are not times wherein we can please men in general, and preserve the character of faithful servants to Christ.

Opposition to His gospel is now become too common to allow of that. Through this neutrality of some, the interest of sacred truth declines, and erroneous doctrines are propagated without any check in many places. Those who think themselves concerned in matters of this nature, must in some measure be apprized of the truth of what is declared.

Many temptations attend us which are very likely to have an ill influence on our minds, relating to real holiness and the power of religion. The effect of a neglect of the doctrines of the Reformation, and embracing of contrary principles, hath not been such as it was pretended would follow that change of opinion. Holiness has declined in proportion to the degree of that alteration of sentiments. Let men pretend what they please, a departure from those principles will never be followed with good effects in the minds and morals of mankind. We are as far departed from that purity of conversation, which was the honour of the Reformers, as we are gone off from their faith.

1. A mistaken notion of holiness is now become general. Men imagine that to be holiness which is not so; and, consequently, they are content without it, and conceit they have it; but in fact they are ignorant of it and enemies unto it. Morality is thought to be holiness; and evangelical obedience is not accounted necessary. Hence, self- applause is maintained in such whose minds are void of true grace.

Regularity of conduct is esteemed all that is necessary to future welfare. Regeneration is so stated as will necessarily lead us to conclude that it is a change whereof some have no need; and that they cannot be the subjects of it; for, if it is no more than a reformation from vice and a dissolute course of life, which many affirm it is not, the sober virtuous part of mankind have always been what a regenerate person is supposed to be, and therefore they cannot pass under that change. As for faith in Christ, or a dependence on His blood and righteousness for pardon of sin, and acceptation with God, love to His person, delight in His presence, and a cheerful obedience to Him, arising from a sense of His saving benefits, they are things which have no other existence than in the imagination of mistaken minds, in the opinion of many. This is an open renunciation of all Christianity, and leaves us no other religion than that of corrupt nature somewhat improved, and reinforced at the best by those moral precepts and positive rites, stript of all their importance and significancy in the writings of the New Testament. These men are blind leaders of the blind, and unless God mercifully prevents it, those who lead, and those who are led by them, will both fall into the ditch; for they are entirely unacquainted with the nature of holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. It is a vain imagination that morality is that purity which the Christian religion requires as necessary to happiness; without we have more than that, nothing is more certain than our eternal ruin. But when evangelical doctrines are given up, gospel holiness and obedience must be rejected as imaginary things; and, therefore, those who deny the precious truths of atonement of sin by the death of Christ, justification by His righteousness, and the necessity of the effectual operations of His Spirit

on the souls of men, to make them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, they act consistently in rejecting the Scriptural account of holiness; for that cannot be supported without granting the truth of the principles on which it is built, which are those mentioned with others of the like nature. Take away the object of that faith which purifies the heart, and you necessarily destroy the very notion of its being; for that is a mere nullity, if its object is removed; and if the grace of faith exists not, holiness, which is supposed to spring from it, can have no real existence; and, consequently, we must sink into bare morality, and the Christian religion can be no more, no other, than a refinement of natural religion from corruption, and a reinforcement of it, which some of these men say it is: others of them are more upon their guard, they mean the same, but will not own it.

2. A selfish and worldly disposition hath taken deep root in the mind, and discovers itself in the conduct of many professors. The interest of this world engrosses so much of the thoughts, desires, affections, and time, of numerous persons under a profession, that religion can come in but for a very small portion of either. And, some whose business of life is so very urgent upon them, that they cannot spare a few hours from it to attend on the worship of God; are able to devote whole days, now and then, to recreation and diversion from that fatigue and hurry. And how many rack their invention to form schemes for increasing their earthly store, who scarcely are at the expense of a serious thought in what way they may promote the interest of truth, religion, or holiness, either in themselves or others! If this is not the case, why are meetings appointed for transacting the affairs of Christ in His house, so slenderly attended as they be; and occasional assemblies so seldom favoured with the presence of some, who no doubt could give their attendance, at least oftener than they do, if lukewarmness, and love to the world and the things of it, were not the cause of their absence many times? Unto such a height is this pursuit after the world grown in many, that it proves matter of discouragement to some, who are inclined not to pursue this world in such a manner as to leave no room for attending to things of infinitely greater moment. In a word, such are our circumstances, as to many, that, if a part of one day in seven, was not appointed to the service of God, I cannot tell whether any portion of time would be spent by them in divine service or not in a public way. "When will the Sabbath and new moon be over, that we may buy and sell, and get gain?" seems to be the inward thought of too many. Not only so, but other practices also discover this frame to have possession in the minds of many professors, which are sad blots upon their characters, and furnish the enemies of religion with abundant matter of reproach.

3. With many there is very little of self-denial as to carnal pleasures. This is found among those who are of advanced circumstances. Their affluence is dreadfully abused in the gratification of vain desires, and it seems as if it was without remorse. They can act as the world, and run in the same circle of vanity as they do. And such who do not choose to conform to the world, are the objects of their contempt on that account. Strictness of conversation, and separation from carnal men in the course of their conduct, is laughed at as needless scrupulosity and a foolish squeamishness. Men have long proposed to indulge themselves in sinful delights, and in the issue to lie down in safety; but it will never be; God forbid it ever should be.

He must lay aside His righteousness and justice, if the end of these ways is peace.

4. But few are careful to keep up family worship. There is reason to fear that it is very rarely practised, by many who would be thought to be Christians. They have not time to give God thanks for the mercies of the day, to confess their sins to Him, and entreat His protection in the night, in the presence of their children and servants. This was not always the case. Professors formerly did not behave themselves in this manner. We are much degenerated in our conduct, and shall we wonder if we have lost our comforts? That is nothing strange, it cannot be with us otherwise than it is, so long as we continue to behave in the manner we do. And thus it is with many of every denomination among us.

5. Another thing which is greatly to be lamented, is a trifling and vain conversation almost universally prevails among professors. The subjects of our converse are the affairs of this world, or what is far worse, evanid pleasures, which taint our minds and affections. Scarcely ever have we anything to say of God, of Jesus Christ, of the precious truths relating to Him, which are the life, comfort, and joy, of Christians now, and will be the matter of their contemplation forever, when they shall have done with this world and all things in it.

The motives to caution and watchfulness, lest we enter into, or be surprised by temptations of any kind, are many. I shall mention some: —

1. Our dear Saviour gives us this advice; “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” We cannot doubt of His kind intention therein, since we have such incontestable evidences of the reality and strength of his affection to us. Love always consults the good and welfare of its objects; and, therefore, it must be concluded, that our Lord designed our advantage in this advice. He will never abridge us, either of liberty or pleasures, which we may enjoy without injury to ourselves and dishonour to His Father and ours also, through rich grace. Shall we then fail heedfully, to attend to His counsel? If

we do, we shall have sad occasion to bewail our folly in that matter. It is well for those who have not had cause to confess the truth of this, from sorrowful experience.

2. If we consider the tendency of temptations, we shall see reason to shun them. They are many of them levelled against our faith, as has been observed. If we do not watch against temptations of that sort, we shall insensibly abate in our religious regard to those important truths, from whence we derive all our spiritual peace, joy, and consolation; the consequence of which will be leanness of soul. Some, who seemed once to have a delightful savour of the precious truths of the gospel, through a want of this necessary caution, are moved from their steadfastness, and are seeking the comfort in such a way as they will never find it in this world; and on a foundation which will not support their hopes in a dying hour, of the enjoyment of happiness in the next. Let us watch and pray, that we may not thus be shaken in our regards to those momentous principles, which have been sweeter to our souls than the honey, and the honeycomb. Again, let us consider what is the tendency of the temptations which attend us, relating unto an abatement of strictness in our conversation and walk. The sorrowful effects of them we may see in many; and if we have no experience of their baneful influence on ourselves, it is owing unto sovereign grace and mercy, which hath preserved us in the midst of so many dangerous snares that have been laid to entrap our feet in our Christian pilgrimage. Let us be so wise as to learn caution where there is danger, by the damage others have sustained through a want thereof; and be persuaded of the truth of this, without making the experiment, that we are as liable as others to suffer in our best interest, by being imprudently free with occasions of sin.

3. Let us consider well the treachery of our own hearts. They are full of lusts which are always ready to fall in with evil temptations of any kind, and, therefore, ought by no means to be trusted in dalliances with those objects, which in temptation are presented to the mind. If we are so foolish as to place any confidence in them, and flatter ourselves, that the temptation we may be under shall not carry us any great length, in that we shall contract great guilt; and it will be much if the flesh exceeds not those limits which in the beginning of the temptation it prescribed to itself. For whatever it pretends unto of that nature, its evil desires are, in fact, boundless. And, therefore, we may with as much safety trust gunpowder within the reach of fire, as our deceitful hearts with temptations. This is a cogent motive to watchfulness and prayer, to be kept by the power of God in these perilous times. If we are insensible of our danger through the want of necessary consideration, we shall not walk circumspectly, and it may be, that may be followed with

such effects as we shall have just reason to bewail and mourn on account of, so long as we have breath. That which is the case of some others may possibly become ours, if we, like them, should be so mad as to sport with folly. For, what are we more than others in ourselves? Nothing, as to holiness and strength against temptations.

4. We shall do well to consider what influence temptation hath had over the minds of some eminent saints; and what bitter effects it produced when they were left under its power. It evidently appears that persons most spiritual will fall an easy conquest to temptation, if they are not upheld by powerful grace when under it. If some have been overcome by the force of it, who have given evidence of being subjects of such a measure of holiness and grace, as not any, I think, will presume to compare with them therein, but such who have great reason to conclude that they have none at all; how cautious ought we to be, that we enter not into temptation! and what necessity of strict watchfulness is there, since we are surrounded with so great a variety of temptations, and such as arise from the conversation of some of all sorts of persons, and to whom it would even be a pleasure, to prevail with us to act as they themselves do, to the dishonour of Christ and the reproach of His gospel; for our corrupt times are not without professors of such an abominable and diabolical disposition as that is. They are loose in their behaviour, and they like to see others so too.

CHAPTER 12

Of Holy And Spiritual Communion With God

It is evident that communion and fellowship hath always subsisted between God and His saints. In every age He hath graciously condescended to give them intimations of His favour. Old-Testament believers enjoyed this inestimable privilege. We often meet with such modes of speech in the writings of the prophets as put this matter out of all doubt, and raise it far above modest objection, though the terms communion and fellowship are not used: what we intend by them for substance, is clearly and plentifully expressed. God lifted up the light of His countenance upon his people. Made His face to shine upon them. He granted to them the joys of His salvation. The Sun of Righteousness arose upon them with healing in His wings. God by His favour made their mountain to stand strong, and many other expressions equivalent to these, which convey no other idea than what is intended by communion with Him. And,

By this communion is designed, a spiritual perception of the glory of God in the Mediator Jesus Christ; and a comfortable sense of divine love to the soul, which begets holy joy, adoration, and an humble trust in the Lord. And

it is the gracious sovereign pleasure of each divine Person thus to manifest Himself to the saints, and to encourage them to put forth acts of faith and hope on Him, agreeably to that part He bears in their eternal salvation: which communion is founded on the new covenant, or covenant of grace. For God cannot have any fellowship with the violators of the covenant of works, on the foundation of that covenant. The reasons are these: — according to that covenant He holds them guilty. They have transgressed the terms of it, and, therefore, they must in relation to that covenant, be considered as guilty persons. And the nature of it allows of no familiarity and friendship between God and the guilty creature. It denounces a curse against sinners. “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” They are obnoxious to divine wrath and vengeance. All title to divine favour is forfeited irrecoverably, and that forever, according to the first covenant; and man is liable to eternal misery in a separation from God. Divine righteousness inflexibly requires a satisfaction to be made, if the sinner re-enjoys communion with God.

The old way of enjoying nearness to God is entirely cut off by sin. It is impossible that the person of a sinner can be accepted with God, by virtue of or according to a covenant by which he stands condemned in His sight. The acceptance of the person of man with God, was the foundation whereon he drew near to Him in the old covenant; and, therefore, as his crime rendered his person unacceptable to his Maker, it will be an eternal bar to his enjoyment of divine fellowship on the ground of the covenant of works. The new covenant is a gracious provision for the remission of our guilt, and the acceptance of our persons, in such a way as was wholly unknown to the old covenant. Now, as spiritual converse with God is founded upon the acceptance of our persons with Him, it necessarily follows, that our justification in His sight is prior, in order of nature at least, unto our enjoyment of a sense of His favour. I have thought, that it is in order of time, as well as in order of nature, prior thereunto; and I have not yet met with anything which convinces me of a mistake in that matter, and, as I suppose, I never shall. But however that be, I am persuaded that all such must allow that the acceptance of the person through the obedience and sacrifice of Christ, is prior in order of nature to gracious communion with God, who embrace the doctrine of the new covenant, because that follows upon and can never precede justification in His sight, either according to the old or the new covenant. Acceptation with God is the ground of communion with Him. In the new covenant an immoveable and everlasting foundation is laid for our enjoying fellowship with God.

1. He unalterably wills and engages to be our God, our Father, and

our Friend. "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." This resolution, engagement, and promise, wholly springs from sovereign goodness, grace, and mercy, which is a never-failing source of good to our poor souls. Oh! believer, thou mayest view this origin of thy blessedness with holy triumph, in the midst of all dangers and distresses, which at any time surround and invade thee. For, as it is not the effect of any external cause, nothing can move God to recede from this infinitely merciful purpose, nor bring Him to violate this gracious and free engagement to thee in Christ thy Head, in this covenant, which is ordered in all things, and sure. It is astonishing goodness, that such a solid and firm foundation should be laid for our lasting, yea, everlasting communion with God, who so justly deserve to be eternally driven by avenging justice, from His presence.

2. God promises to pardon all our sins. Guilt is an effectual bar to our enjoyment of a sense of God's favour in the first covenant; but it is not so in the new, because remission is promised therein; and a gracious method is provided for the removal and expiation of our sins, though they be many, great, and dreadfully aggravated. The language of God in this covenant is, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses, their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." It is on this foundation that grace is communicated in our regeneration; and on this ground it is, that all supplies of grace are conveyed to our souls afterwards to maintain that good work in us. The blood of this covenant cleanses from guilt contracted after conversion, otherwise the saints would be deprived of the benefit of communion with God; and instead of a comfortable sense of His favour, they would inevitably come under His terrible displeasure.

3. He graciously justifies their persons. They are "justified freely by His grace." And that is by the sovereign appointment of Christ's righteousness to be theirs, and the gracious imputation of that righteousness unto them. That He saves sinners is the greatest wonder we shall ever be acquainted with; but it is in such a way as magnifies the law, and makes it honourable. And, therefore, in this appointment He takes infinite delight. He is well pleased for Christ's righteousness' sake; and that everlasting righteousness is the everlasting foundation of the saints' communion with God. Their justification is the ground of their present communion with their heavenly Father, and of their most near fellowship with Him in the future state. "Whom He justifies, them He also glorifies." All our approaches unto God ought to be on this foundation, as our admission into heaven will be solely on this ground. Let us make mention only of the righteousness of our dear Saviour, when we draw near to our covenant God and Father; for in that alone He accepts of our persons; and because of that only it is that. He delights in and holds

communion with us while we are in this state of distance from His heavenly court, the seat of His immediate presence.

These precious truths are necessary to be well settled in our minds, as to our persuasion and spiritual understanding of them. If we are not convinced of them, if we discern not their importance and glory, if we acquiesce not in them, we shall find it impossible to think of an approach unto God, under a sense of guilt, pollution, and unworthiness, with the least measure of satisfaction, or boldness and liberty of mind; nor can we form any expectation and hope of God's meeting with and blessing us, except on these principles. Sinful men miserably cheat their own souls, who hope to enjoy an interview with God here, or hereafter, to their joy, who reject this new way of fellowship with Him. Death, misery, and eternal woe will be the consequence of such rejection, if it is final. Life, peace, consolation, and blessedness, are only to be received and enjoyed in the new and living way, which is peculiar to the new covenant. And, since a foundation is laid for lasting, yea, eternal friendship between God and our souls, how ought we to admire and adore His free grace, whose basis this is, and all the blessings that thereon rest!

First, The saints enjoy communion with God the Father. He is their Father in Christ. The affection He hath unto them, and the familiarity he permits them to use with Him, are suitable to a character so tender and expressive of kindness, compassion, and care.

I. They have communion with Him in His love, which is,

1. Eternal, and not of late date. All the transient acts of that love are in time, but itself is from eternity. Christ the Head was the object of the Father's love before the foundation of the world; and His people also as early were objects of His love. For the "Father hath loved them as He hath loved Christ: because He loved them with an everlasting love, therefore he draws them with loving kindness. Their present existence is not necessary to an existence in divine love, nor to any of the immanent acts of that love towards them, such as the choice of them to eternal salvation is, etc. Those whom God from the beginning chose to salvation, He loved.

As for that logical axiom, that a nonentity, or what is not, cannot be the subject of any affection, in divinity, and as applied to God's eternal acts of favour towards His people, it is no better than learned nonsense, which, if admitted, would overthrow the whole ground of our salvation. The certain future existence of the persons beloved and chosen to eternal salvation is plainly supposed, but not their present being in either of those acts. Divine love was fixed on the human nature of Christ before its actual subsistence, and divine favour was placed on the persons of all the elect before any of

them really existed, yea, before time commenced. And, as to the common objection, that then God must love His people in their sins, it is of no weight at all. What the objection expresses is true; if not, no design of saving them from their sins had ever been formed in the mind, nor would any divine acts have ever been put forth in order to that end. The distinction of God's loving their persons, and hating their sins, is easy and just. Besides, God's approbation of the work of grace in believers, is not his love to their persons, but it is quite of a distinct consideration from that love he bears to their persons. In general, professors are grown weary of the doctrine of God's everlasting love, and will scarcely allow of the mention of it, through I know not how many groundless fears, of ill consequences following upon it, which carnal and corrupt reason suggests. That our depraved nature may abuse this doctrine, I am sensible; and I also know, that it will take occasion to sin even from the commandment; but I do not think it is proper, on these accounts, to part with, either the law, or the gospel. Let not the children of God neglect His favour, because the children of the devil may dare to abuse the evangelical revelation of it, unto the just damnation of their souls.

2. Divine love is sovereign. God's approbation of the innocent creature, is according to right; justice requires it; but love to a guilty creature, must be an act of sovereignty. Right hath no place in that matter; it certainly is an act of God's free will, without all direction from justice. He loves not sinful men, because it is fit and proper for him to love them; but because He WILL, and for no other reason. He hath mercy, because He will have mercy; and he hath compassion, because he will have compassion. As there is nothing in Deity, whereunto our cursed nature is more opposite than divine sovereignty; so there is nothing in God, which true grace more cheerfully submits unto, and more humbly adores: Its language is, "Even so, Father, for it seemed good in thy sight."

3. The love of God is immense. His grace is, as He Himself is, absolutely without limits. The riches of divine mercy and goodness, in number far exceed the sand on the sea shore. Hence we read of the "Multitude of His tender mercies, of the riches of His grace, and of the exceeding riches of His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." These epithets are expressive of the boundless nature of divine love to the elect. And as such attributions are given unto it, so such acts and benefits arise from it, as will own no other than infinite mercy for their cause, viz., an eternal decree in God, to bring unworthy creatures to the enjoyment of the highest good and glory, their nature is capable of possessing, which was an act of the richest mercy and grace. Again, God has given us His Son, and His Spirit; grace and glory; nothing that is good divine love withholds from us. Since the grace of God

bestows upon us what is in its nature most valuable, and even that to the utmost capacity of our enjoying it; certainly it is in itself infinitely beyond our comprehension. We can as soon span the heavens, and grasp the earth, as form adequate ideas of that love, which is the fountain of our salvation and blessedness. And, yet how backward are we to receive what God freely gives, and kindly invites us to take at His hand, because we are conscious to ourselves of great unworthiness? Whereas, the bestowment of those favours, would not be grace, but only liberality, if we were the subjects of a fitness moving to the communication of them. We sometimes say within ourselves, when we are conversant about spiritual blessings, and our souls desire a participation of them: "Alas! these are favours my unworthiness forbids me to hope for the enjoyment of. Surely it will be deemed presumption, in such a one as I am, to hope for benefits of so glorious and exalted a nature." When we thus reason, we dishonour the grace of God, whose glory consists in conferring the most eminent blessings on the most unworthy. Never do we honour God so much as when lying in the dust, at His footstool, under a sense of our own vileness; we appropriate to ourselves the richest blessings his grace bestows, being encouraged thereunto by an apprehension of the absolute freedom with which they are given. Rich grace has not thought them too great to give, and we ought not to think them too great for us to expect, and hope for the enjoyment of.

4. The love of God is immutable. If its nature admitted of change, it might cease: and the cessation of divine love would be the drying up of the fountain, from whence spring all our life, peace, comfort, and joy. But this can never be. Love, which hath a beginning, may possibly have an end. But favour, which never began, will never, never end. God's love to his people, no more commenced, than His existence; nor will it cease, alter, or abate, any more than His being will discontinue. When he ceases to love His saints, He will cease to be. He intends to assure us of this most interesting truth, when He declares of Himself, that He is love. "God is love." Greater ground of security we need not, nor can have, than this is.

5. Divine love is inseparable. Immutability supposes the endless duration, and the equality of its intenseness at all times, without any variation. Its inseparableness seems to point out the absolute impossibility of any change, which may take place in the state, circumstances, or frames of those who are the objects of it, dividing them from that love. "Nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." As it will never decline, nor cease of itself, because its own nature is unchanging; so no temptation, (shall I say it? I will, and pronounce it boldly too) nor sin shall ever divide the saints from the love of God in Christ; "nor things present,

nor things to come,” whatever those things may be, and are. In one word, nothing which can come within the reach of language, or even imagination, shall divide believers from the heart of their heavenly Father.

Now, to have communion with God in His love, is to discern the nature of it, and act faith upon it, as it is revealed in the holy Scripture. Hence the apostle John says, “we have known and believed the love that God hath unto us.” Sometimes the saints are chiefly conversant about it in its properties, and rejoice and triumph in its eternity, sovereignty, immensity, immutability, and in the inseparableness of its nature. The Holy Spirit places them at the shore of this boundless infathomable ocean, and enables them to take a very far extended prospect of it, whereby their souls are possessed with delight, wonder, and adoration. He causes them to approach to that throne with pleasure, mixed with awe and reverence, from which this “river of the water of life” proceeds; and its rise, numerous streams, and constant flow, fill them with “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Sometimes they are delightfully engaged in viewing the great and manifold effects of divine love — effects which could only spring from such a cause, as they know it to be by the prospects they have been favoured with of its properties and nature, and both excite their praise, their joy, and their astonishment; and their hearts feel a holy flame of love kindled towards God. “We love Him because He first loved us.” Divine love manifested to our souls, never fails to produce a holy, sincere, and cordial affection unto God. His love to us is the powerful and resistless attractive of our love to Him. The reason why we love Him no more than we do, is, because we are no more conversant with His infinite love to us. The grace of love in us increases or declines, as we exercise faith on divine love in a higher or lower degree.

II. The saints enjoy communion with God in His counsels and purposes concerning their salvation. That design was an impenetrable secret in the divine mind. No created understanding could ever have discovered it. What grace purposes, and acts in favour of sinners, natural reason could never have so much as conjectured. This secret is with them who fear the Lord, and He shews unto them His covenant. His “deep things” He reveals to believers by His Spirit; and He gives them the knowledge of those things which are freely given unto them of God.

Secondly, Intimacy and fellowship is maintained between Christ and the church. His relation to the saints is the ground of His communion with them: they are His brethren, His children, His bride, His members, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. If, therefore, friendship should not subsist between Him and them, the great end of their union would not be answered; and the characters He wears would sink into empty and insignificant titles.

In the book of Solomon's Song, that intimacy and intercourse which Christ and the church hold with mutual delight and pleasure, is represented in a most lively and affecting manner.

Some of the church's expressions of Christ's beauty rise so high, and some parts of her language relating to her affection unto Him are so strong, as might induce us to conclude that it is designed as a representation of fellowship between Christ and her in heaven, rather than of their mutual friendship in the present state; but that there are some other things said and acted by the church, which will by no means allow us to understand it in that light, viz., her acknowledgment of her blackness: "Look not upon me because I am black: I am black but comely, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon." Which she will have no ground to say of herself when arrayed with shining robes of glory, and actually become the subject of holiness unblameable in the presence of her heavenly Father. And we find her conduct in some instances was such towards her Beloved as it can never be when she is taken by Him into His immediate presence. She was backward of receiving Him when He condescended to wait upon her, and in melting moving language called her to give Him entrance, chap. 5. Besides, sometimes, we find her sadly bewailing the loss of His presence, which she will have no cause for in heaven; there she will always have Him in her view, she will ever be near Him, and without any interruption hold the most sweet and delightful communion with Him. Add to these considerations, she was not in her present condition above the grieving censures and unfriendly rebukes of such, whose character and work required in them a very different behaviour towards her. "The watchmen that went about the city found me; they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me." These things forbid our understanding this book as a representation of that communion which subsists in the heavenly world between Christ and the church; and, consequently, even here, believers may enjoy very clear views of Christ's glory, they may be filled with a ravishing sense of His love to them and delight in them; and their hearts may glow with ardent affection to Him.

The church describes the beauties of the person of Christ; asserts her interest in Him, and His in her. She expresses a vehement desire of His presence, and the delight she took in His company. Again, she declares her enjoyment of it. And Christ, on His part, represents her beauty. Declares to her that she was the object of His love, delight, and complacency. He kindly invites her to come into His company, acquaints her that He desires to see her face and hear her voice, that her beauties ravished His heart. And that He valued none but her: or that none but she was the object of His affection

and love.

Thirdly, The saints enjoy communion with the blessed Spirit.

The part He bears in the economy of our salvation is, in general, the sanctification of our souls. For, we are “chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit.” His office, and work, is to reveal and apply to us what the Father hath given to us in the everlasting covenant, which is “all our salvation and all our desire,” and is what Christ hath obtained for us by His obedience and the oblation of Himself to God as a sacrifice, according to his engagement in that covenant. This includes the Holy Spirit’s residence in our souls, and His gracious influence upon us, whereby He gives being unto a spiritual principle in our hearts, and graciously excites that principle, as well as maintains and preserves it. He convinces, comforts, and gives testimony to the saints of their adoption, or of their standing in the near and honourable relation of sons to God. He subdues sin, and cherishes and promotes holiness in our souls; and He abides with us in the blessed character of a Comforter, notwithstanding we often grieve Him by our folly, sin, and base ingratitude. These benign influences of the Holy Spirit upon us, and those effects, which they produce, are boldly pronounced enthusiasm, by many, who wear a religious character and put in their claim for the name of Christians. But true it is, that in these things consists the very life of real Christianity; and he who is an absolute stranger unto an experience of their truth in himself, let him be what he may in other respects, a Christian he is not. The reason why men despise these things, as the effects of a warm and deluded imagination, is, they find them not in themselves. And, as they are not in them, they conclude, that they have no real existence in others. Nor is this to be wondered at, for the spiritual man, how well soever he is known, merely as a man, he is wholly unknown as he is spiritual, unto the carnal man; he discerns him not: The spiritual man is judged, or discerned of no man. (1 Corinthians 2:16). Hence it is, that love to a saint, as such, is a sure evidence of the spirituality of him, who is the subject of that. love. Grace only discerns, and values grace in another; Or it is only the image of Christ in one man, that discerns and esteems it in another.

Communion with the Holy Spirit consists in spiritual views of that office, which he graciously condescended to take upon himself in the economy of our salvation; and of his operations on us, as effects of that infinite love He bears to our persons.

And it is under his blessed guidance and instruction, that we enjoy fellowship with Christ: for “He takes of His things, and shews them unto us.” In prospects whereof, lie all the power, sweetness, and glory of real religion: let some graceless and unholy persons deride those things as they please.

And, therefore, I would, a little more particularly consider the important and delightful subject of communion with Christ, as it is represented, in that divine and heavenly book of Solomon's Song. And.

1. It is a very elegant description which the church gives of His person. Says she, "He is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." That is to say, there is none like Him, in beauty and glory. She may well be thought to have in view the constitution of his person, or, His two natures, divine and human as they are personally united: the purity of His human nature, and its bloody agony, unparalleled sufferings, and accursed death, whereby, her redemption from sin, curse and hell was effected. "His head is as the most fine gold; His locks are bushy, and black as a raven." Wherein she hath respect to the importance, purity, and glory of all His designs, which are formed with the highest wisdom, and, therefore, are unalterable, and cannot fail of their accomplishments. Besides, she intends His beauty and strength. He never declines in His vigour. Grey hairs are not, nor ever will be found upon Him. His beauty fades not, — His strength decays not. She adds, — "His eyes are as the eyes of doves, by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set." His eyes are piercing. He hath an exact knowledge of all things. "He is acquainted with all the troubles, temptations, sorrows, and wants of His saints. For He is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and tries the reins." Besides, He is chaste, tender, loving, and constant, in His care of the church. For His eye of love is immoveably fixed on her. Farther, "His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers." In him His dear saints find rest under weariness and fatigue, occasioned by sin, temptation, and a variety of afflictions, which attend them in this vale of tears; and revival, when they faint in their minds through the sharpness of their spiritual conflicts with the enemies of their souls. Besides, his fragrancy fills them with inexpressible delight. "His name is as ointment poured forth," which spreads an odour all around, and therefore, "the virgins love him: His lips, like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh." They are lovely beyond comparison; and all His words are sweet, precious, and expressed in a most graceful manner. He speaks, as never man spake. For "grace is poured into his lips. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl." All His works are glorious, for He is wonderful in working, both in providence and grace. "His belly is as bright ivory, overlaid with sapphires." Christ's affection to the church is pure, disinterested and permanent. "His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold." His strength is firm and durable: All His steps are graceful, and answer ends most valuable. "His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the Cedars." His appearance is grand, majestic and mild; it commands awe, and begets love. "His mouth is most sweet, He is

altogether lovely.” His speech is soft and winning; and He is all beauty and perfection.

2. Christ describes the beauty and glory of the Church. He commends her garments, which are “garments of salvation.” A robe of righteousness, of infinite value, and of everlasting duration, influence and efficacy as to her acceptance with God, and title to blessedness. The fragrant of this robe is great, “like the smell of Lebanon.” And its splendour is like that of the sun. The church in her justification is “clear as the sun,” though in her sanctification, she is but “fair as the moon,” not without spots and waning. The divine Father delights in the saints, as He views them in this white raiment, and pronounces them perfect herein. “Thou art perfect through My comeliness, which I have put upon thee. The Lord is well pleased for Christ’s righteousness’ sake, who hath magnified the law, and made it honourable.” Again the church’s Beloved delineates her beautiful features, and expresses how much her various graces delighted Him. That she had “ravished His heart with one of her eyes,” i.e., the eye of faith, which is very penetrating, and is capable of discerning objects at a great distance. It looks into the deep things of God; things which the eye of mere reason can never discover, nor discern the nature of: and it penetrates into the heavenly world, and views the glorious objects which are “within the veil, whither the Forerunner is for us entered.” And the eye of faith is chaste and pure. It bestows no amorous glances on earthly objects; nor looks to any but unto Christ, and His blood and righteousness, for pardon, peace, reconciliation, and acceptance with God: and unto his fulness for all supplies of grace, wisdom, and strength, in times of temptation, trial and affliction, yea, through the whole of the Christian’s pilgrimage in this world. These actings of the grace of faith on Christ, are exceedingly pleasing to Him, and greatly to the advantage of the saints; for hereby they become more and more like him, increase in love to Him, and by so much the less do they esteem the delectable things of this world. Acts of faith on the person, offices, and benefits of Christ, and on the glory of God through Him, never fail of elevating the mind above this earthly globe, and raising the affections to heavenly objects which infinitely transcend, in glory and grandeur, the noblest and most refined of terrestrial enjoyments. And, yet, alas! how much are the minds of many professors disposed to cast smiling looks on their own filthy rags, rather than look steadily on the infinitely glorious righteousness of Christ, in the great affair of their justification before God; and rather choose to view their own imaginary beauties, than the glories of the person of Christ! Besides, Christ commends the love of the church: “How fair is thy love!” The saints are subjects of a spiritual affection to Him. Others see no beauty or comeliness

in Him, why they should desire Him; in their esteem, He is a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; but, in the account of believers, He is fairer, infinitely fairer than the children of men. For they discern the Divine perfections which He possesses, and the purity of his human nature, which is richly adorned with all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, in their perfection. They view Him in the form of God, and as the brightness of the Father's glory,

and the express image of his person; which prospect ingenerates in their souls a holy reverence of Him, steady trust in Him, and a warm affection to Him. And, as they discern the purity of his human nature, and all the gifts and graces of the blessed Spirit therein residing, in their plenitude; and its union, or personal oneness with the Son of God, in order to bring about their eternal redemption, in a way honourable to all the attributes of God, His sovereignty, His grace, His mercy, His justice, His holiness, His truth and faithfulness, they cannot but adore the wisdom of this constitution, and take up their rest in this infinitely glorious object, who is the delight of the Father; admired and adored by the holy angels; and eternally will be the object of the highest delight, joy, and complacency of the church, in the world above, where she will behold Him in His glory at the right hand of the Father, without interruption for evermore.

The reason why we love this amiable person no more than we do, is, we are so little exercised in viewing His divine excellencies. If the eye of our faith was more frequently directed to Him; and we took spiritual views of His person, His love, His blood, His righteousness, and of His grace, we should not have that sad occasion, which most of us have, to bewail our want of love to Him. For no man can behold Him in His glory without his affections being strongly attracted towards Him, nor without delight and joy in Him. He who loves not Christ, never beheld His glory. And, he, whose views of Him by faith are unfrequent, and long interrupted, through carnality, a pursuit after the world, and indulgence in sin in any way, declines in his affection to a dear Redeemer. If the grace of faith is but little acted, the grace of love will not be fervent. Since Christ takes so much pleasure in our love to His person, how ought we to aim at the increase of our affection to Him! All the return we can make Him for His astonishing love to our persons, and the stupendous acts of it, is a cordial affection to Him, and obedience to His commands, springing from that affection, which he may justly expect of us.

3. The church's Beloved acquainted her with that interest she had in His tender, intense, and constant, affection, than which nothing is more entertaining and delightful to the saints. She expresses ardent desires after the

gracious tokens of His favour: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth; His love is better than wine." And He, in infinite goodness, condescended to grant her what she so earnestly requested of Him: "He brought her into His banqueting house, and His banner over her was love." Believers sometimes, are very jealous of Christ's love to them, which jealousy is attended with great anxiety and pain of mind. Others are afraid of His anger and wrath; but are content without a sense of His love. Nature trembles at an apprehension of His vengeance, because it is not to be borne: grace is a holy spiritual desire of a sense of His favour. Those jealousies which attend the saints concerning an interest in the love of a dear Saviour, often arise from a misapprehension about the nature of His love; or, at least, from a want of a due consideration of it. They are suspicious of Christ's kind regard to them, because of their unworthiness. They discern so much impurity in their hearts, so many imperfections in all their services, and are conscious of so many instances of backsliding from Him, that they fear it cannot be, that such unlovely, and unworthy creatures, as they know themselves to be, should have an interest in His kindness. These thoughts spring up in their minds from unbelief, and the want of a proper attention to the nature of the love of Christ, which is absolutely free and unattracted. If none were to be the objects of His favour, who are destitute of amiable qualities, or engaging excellencies, not one of the human race ever would be interested in His affection. It is in consequence of an interest in His love, that we become the subjects of such dispositions of soul as are pleasing to Him. His love to our persons is the cause, and not the effect of holiness in us.

It may be of use to the saints, well to consider what Christ's love to them is, and how it differs from His approbation of their graces, and the actings thereof; for they are distinct things, and ought not to be confounded. His love to their persons, is a will to do them good, with delight and joy therein: this is eternal, free, and immutable, or always the same, whatever their state or circumstances may be. His delight in their graces is not His love to their persons; but it is His approbation of what He works in them, as a fruit of that affection He bears to them. From hence Christians may collect that their unworthiness is no objection to their interest, in the kindness of a dear Redeemer. And this, if properly attended unto, will enable us to answer the cavils which are raised against the love of Christ to men, while they are under the dominion of sin. For if His love to the persons of men is distinct from His approbation or disapprobation of their temper and actions, certainly, it will follow that His kind regard may be extended to their persons, even while they are the subjects of no other than evil qualities, because an approbation neither of what they are, nor of what they act, is supposed in His love to their

persons. Blessed be God, that creatures most unworthy of His love, may be beloved by Him, without the least reflection on His holiness and purity; if that was a thing impossible, the salvation of the sons of men would be so too. All holiness in us springs from the love of God and Christ to our souls, and therefore, our interest in the love of both must be prior to the being of grace in our hearts. And, therefore, it is dishonourable to the love of Christ, to call into question our interest in it, because we are unlovely. He loves not His church because she is amiable, but he loves her while unlovely; and as an effect of His love to her, He makes her amiable, and adorns her with all the graces of His Holy Spirit.

But let none from hence imagine that they are objects of the love of Christ, who have not within themselves the fruits of His love. For though His people are beloved by Him, when they are not the subjects of His grace, they have not, nor can they have any evidence or perception thereof, while they are in a state of alienation from Him. The nature of His love is well fitted to encourage and comfort those that are mourning in Zion, under a deep sense of their guilt, impurity, and great unworthiness; but it gives not support to the presumption and confidence of such, who are at ease in Zion. Disconsolate saints sometimes are strongly tempted to entertain thoughts concerning an interest in the love of Christ, which agree not with its nature, as to its freeness and sovereignty, wherein they are to be corrected; but daring sinners subject themselves to heavy condemnation, who abuse this doctrine, and give full evidence that they have no ground at all to conclude upon an interest therein.

4. The church expresses the great pleasure she took in the enjoyment of the presence of Christ: grace in believers is a disposition to hold fellowship with the blessed Jesus. It desires a sense of His favour above all things. Nothing is so delightful to the saints as communion with Him: that fills them with joy and gladness, far beyond the increase of corn and wine. For that grace is a principle of love to the person of Christ, upon a perception of His incomparable excellencies and glory, and it seeks after and delights in His presence. It is not, nor can be, entertained with the tarnished glories, and trifling toys of a perishing world. It is not in the nature of the gracious principle to desire after, and delight in the painted beauties of fading time. For it is a disposition to view, converse with, and take pleasure in objects, infinitely more glorious, than the most eligible things that are under the sun. And a precious variety of important and ravishing subjects it is furnished with, whereon to exercise itself in holy contemplation, viz.

Christ in the admirable constitution of His person, who is truly God, and really man; and both united, in order to bring about the eternal salvation

of poor sinners, in such a way as exalts the glory of all the perfections of God, in a far higher manner than it is displayed in the works of creation and providence.

Again, the several relations wherein Christ stands to His people, are fit matter for the delightful meditations of spiritually-minded persons. Herein they at once discern their interest in His most tender affections, constant care, and their everlasting security; as well as that great honour, whereunto they are by sovereign grace and mercy advanced. He is the “first-born among many brethren.” He and they “are both of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Christ is the husband of the church; and that love which He bears to her is most intense, constant and invariable. He is a head unto her, and will always sympathize with His poor, suffering and afflicted members; nor will ever suffer any to rend them from himself; but will take care of, provide for, supply, and securely defend them in every time of difficulty and danger. Besides, He is a Father to the saints, and he will never be wanting in acts of kindness to them, which might be expected of Him to put forth in their favour, in a character so tender. All these relations are expressive of Christ’s love to, and delight in the saints, and of their safety and immortal dignity. Communion with Christ in His relations, consists in holy contemplations thereon, in adoring thoughts of the astonishing goodness which is therein discovered, unto such wretched and vile creatures as we are; and in acts of love to Him, trust in Him, in forming such expectations from Him in all our times of need, as the nature of those relations is a proper foundation of: and ineffable joy arises from fellowship with Christ, as standing in those relations to our poor souls.

Farther, a view by faith of His several offices greatly comforts the saints. For as He is in the office of a Prophet, we may hope for instruction from Him, in all things relating to the glory of God and our good. His priestly office is a precious ground of consolation: in that character He hath transacted, and doth transact all affairs between God and our souls, wherein our eternal redemption and complete salvation are concerned. And He is an High Priest who becomes us, i.e., every way fitted to officiate for us in that capacity, and “is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him.” As He is our King, — protection, honour and victory over all our enemies may be expected from Him. And, therefore, communion with Him, in His offices must be productive of peace, joy and triumph in the saints. Their spiritual consolation arises from a sense of His glory, compassion, union with them, and the offices He bears and executes, with a view to the glory of His Father, in an inseparable connection with their welfare and happiness. Wherefore, as the grace of faith is more or less exercised upon Him, their holy spiritual

joy increases or declines.

If our communion with Christ in His person, love, relations and offices is rare, and but little; we have but small experience of that joy, which is unspeakable and full of glory. Grace is not entertained, nourished, strengthened, or increased in us. For all our vigour, liveliness, and improvement in purity, depend on the actings of the grace of faith upon Christ, as our all in all. The graces of the Holy Spirit in us languish, and we become barren in our frames, in our walk and conversation, if we live not in the exercise of faith on Him; unless we “abide in Him, or walk in Him, as we have received Him,” we shall bring forth no fruit to the glory of our heavenly Father. Through one cause or another, too, too often we are prevented so doing, to the great detriment of our souls, and the prejudice of the new creature in us. So far as we are strangers unto a renewal of acts of faith upon Christ, we must be without that pure, spiritual and holy delight, which arises from believing views of Him, or gracious and intimate communion with Him. And, therefore, it ought to be our desire and aim, in all duties, and in all ordinances, to behold the King of Zion in His beauty. If He graciously condescends to sit at His “table” with us, our “spikenard will send forth a sweet smell,” i.e., our graces will emit a sweet odour, and our souls will rejoice in God our Saviour.

Moreover, communion with Christ in what He hath done for us, will greatly revive our graces, and cheer our minds. If we view that he hath finished our transgression, made an end of our sins, made reconciliation for our iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for us, in order to our justification before God; pleasure inexpressible will possess our breasts. If we act faith on the victory He hath obtained over all our enemies, sin, Satan, death and hell; and we behold Him as crowned with glory and honour, upon that conquest, our spiritual affections will be warmed, our minds will be raised above this vain world: God Himself will be the object of our joy, delight and adoration, who in the character of the God of all grace, designed, constituted, and gave to us such a gracious, glorious, and every way suitable and complete Saviour. And our souls will be much animated, and encouraged to fight the good fight of faith; nor shall we doubt of enjoying, in the issue, a full conquest over all our spiritual adversaries through Him that hath loved us. It is the want of this communion with our Redeemer, in what He hath done for us, that occasions us to go mourning in the manner we do, now we are conflicting with sin, Satan and the world. Acts of faith on Him, would enable us to triumph in the midst of our conflicts with the enemies of our souls.

Besides, fellowship with our blessed Lord in those precious benefits,

which He hath procured for, and effectually secured to us, by His mediatorial acts and sufferings, is a spring of heavenly joy to our hearts, viz., The most glorious robe of righteousness, which adorns our persons, renders us righteous eternally in the divine account, and gives us an unalienable right and title to future blessedness. The pardon of our sins, which is inclusive of our deliverance from condemnation, wrath and vengeance. His Holy Spirit, with all necessary supplies of grace, to revive the good work in us, to maintain it in our souls, in spite of all the opposition it meets with from sin and Satan, and to perfect it in glory. The enjoyment of communion with Him in these His benefits, must yield us the highest pleasure. No earthly possessions are comparable in importance, excellency and glory to these blessings, and therefore nothing in the whole world can give that pleasure to the mind, as prospects of them by faith always produce in the souls of believers. They say, as the church did with holy exultation, when favoured with this divine fellowship; "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

I add, the apprehension of that goodness, grace, mercy, wisdom, righteousness and justice, which shine gloriously in this admirable constitution, and appointment of Christ to be our all and in all, delights and ravishes the heavenly-minded person. An advancement in a spiritual understanding of these things, renders the soul more humble, more joyful, more holy, more mortified to the world; and, therefore, we cannot act a better part by ourselves, and we cannot do anything more glorifying to God, than seeking after this spiritual communion with Him, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Sad it is, that the flesh, that the empty, fading, and putrid things of time and sense, should ever prevent us of interrupt and make breaks upon a fellowship so spiritual, so sublime, so heavenly, and whereby our best interest is so much promoted. This it is that embitters life to spiritually-minded persons, and causes them earnestly to desire to depart and be with Christ, when no interruptions through any cause whatever, will attend their communion with Him. They sometimes say with Job, I loathe it, I would not live away. Their souls long for the enjoyment of that blissful state, wherein they will forever be near unto, and view with unmixed and increasing pleasure, the glory of God in the person of Christ, as it is displayed in all His mediatorial acts and sufferings, in order to bring them unto that glorious state. The sweetness of the first-fruits, which they have in present possession, makes them long for the delightful and plenteous harvest. The importance, glory, and great variety of spiritual things cannot fail of affording to a spiritual mind, satisfaction and delight.

As God designed no other mutters for the entertainment of the new-born principle, in the souls of His children, than those, and such like glorious truths, whereof Christ is the centre and sum; so no other than these things it desires, nor can it take up with; because they are not of a nature suitable and agreeable to grace, for that is wholly spiritual and heavenly. That noble principle raises the mind above earthly enjoyments and treasures, it leads the soul into heaven, and converses with those glorious objects that are within the veil, whither its Forerunner is for it entered. It takes a view of Christ in His glory, at the right hand of His Father, with pleasing wonder, and a holy rapture. The church invites the Daughters of Jerusalem to take this prospect: — “Go forth, and behold King Solomon, with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him, in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.” Grace exults with joy at the sight of Christ as crowned with glory, who was crowned with thorns for our sakes. It is fit that He who was reduced to the lowest state of humiliation, to promote the glory of God, in the salvation of the objects of His love, should be raised to that state of dignity He now enjoys at His right hand. No prospect can be more pleasing than this, to those who love our dear Lord Jesus. And if views by faith of the glory of Christ, afford us so much delight, oh! what pleasure must possess our grateful souls, when we shall enjoy the heavenly vision of the glory of our best friend?

5. The church sometimes was without the company of her Beloved: He withdrew from her, and though she sought Him diligently, she could not find Him. This not unfrequently is the sorrowful case with the saints. Such as are the children of light, sometimes walk in darkness, and are without the light of comfort and joy for a season. When clear and bright days are enjoyed, and the rays of the Sun of righteousness shine upon the Christian, especially at first conversion, he expects not, it may be, dark and cloudy seasons; much less nights of melancholy desertion and darkness; but unto his great sorrow he meets with them, and he may be tempted to fear, that all his comfort was illusion, and that that light wherein he formerly rejoiced, was fancied only. Which apprehension, so far as it is suffered to prevail, must be attended with distress and grief. “Weeping endureth for a night, but joy shall come in the morning;” for which let the Christian wait and hope. His business is to wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and to continue in waiting for Him, yea, to wait patiently for His gracious return unto his sorrowing soul. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” And though that precious seed may lie under the clods a considerable season, let not the saints faint, and grow weary of waiting for its springing forth, it will certainly shoot forth, and they shall again, in the appointed season,

enjoy what their souls are mourning for the want of. "The vision may be for an appointed time;" but it will speak, it will not lie; and though it tarry, (and, as they may think, though it tarry long) let them wait for it. Present want of the light of God's countenance, is no evidence, that the soul hath not formerly enjoyed that heavenly favour. Past experience of divine goodness, is a precious ground of hope of the re-enjoyment of that glorious privilege.

(1.) Christ may stand at a distance for the trial of faith; and to teach His people to live a life of dependence on His care of them, and love to them, and of His faithfulness to all His promises and engagements, when they enjoy not His sensible comforting presence with them. It is the duty of those who "fear the Lord, and obey the voice of His servant, when they walk in darkness, and have no light, then to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God." Such who dare affirm, that this is carnal security, are very unskillful in the word of righteousness: And are no better than bold intruders into the sacred office of the ministry. One considerable branch of the minister's work is to "comfort the mourners in Zion;" and if there are any such, they must be the persons whose consolation is now proposed.

(2.) Sometimes Christians are guilty of acting a part, which is offensive to their dear Saviour, and therefore, He withdraws from them. Darkness spreads itself over them, thick clouds interpose between Him and their souls, and they see not His smiling face. This was the case with the church, when she was inclined into carnal ease, rather than to rise and give her Beloved entrance. He quickened her desires after the enjoyment of His company, by an effectual touch upon her heart; but He withdrew, departed and, left her to bewail her folly, in her sinful neglect. Upon this her bowels were troubled, she arose and sought Him; but she found Him not. It is just with Him to hide Himself from us, if we are indifferent about the enjoyments of His delightful presence; and give us occasion to confess our ingratitude to Him, by the loss we sustain in consequence of it. His love in itself passes under no vicissitude, it is always the same; that is our security; but the manifestation of it to our souls, from which our peace, comfort, and joy spring, may be interrupted, through our negligence, sloth, and sin. A sense of it, when it is so, may well break our hearts; for there is no ingratitude in the world like it.

(3.) If this is the case with us, let us not content ourselves, without His presence; but, as the church did, continue in seeking after Him, although we find Him not for a season. Our ungrateful carriage towards Him, we may justly expect him to resent, and it is our duty to acknowledge our iniquity, wherein we have transgressed against the Lord: Nor should we think it any unkindness, that He shows Himself displeased with our evil conduct, by absenting Himself for a while. Let us hope for the returning visits of His love

to our souls, for He will not always chide, nor keep His anger forever.

(4.) If we have had a gracious experience of renewed discoveries of His love, after we caused Him by our evil behaviour to depart, surely we must be convinced that it will be our wisdom to conduct ourselves, with more caution for time to come, lest we should be again deprived of what we ought to value more, far more, than life itself, viz. Communion with Him, wherein our peace, our joy, and all our delight, as Christians, consist.

I would now consider our communion with God, in the course of that holy obedience which He requires us to yield unto Him, while we are in this mortal state. And I begin, —

First, with duties of a religious nature which are various.

1. Meditation. This is a duty that may be practised with singular advantage to our souls. If our minds are much exercised, in contemplation on divine subjects, we shall thereby become spiritual and heavenly in our desires and affections. Nothing is more conducive to our improvement in knowledge, and growth in grace, than a diligent attention to this duty. But, alas! through one cause or another, how few of the fleeting hours of our lives are filled up with this exercise! Our minds are sluggish, our avocations are many, and carnal pleasures, or a vain and trifling conversation with the men of the world, or it may be with lukewarm professors, waste so many of our precious moments, that we have but little time to spare from business and pleasure, for this heavenly work. Retirement is not the choice of many, which certainly is the best for this exercise. As to the subjects of a holy meditation, they are noble, grand, sublime, deep, and manifold. They are things whereinto the angels desire to look; and whereon we shall contemplate forever, if we arrive to heaven at death. Is not that enough to invite our thoughts, and fix our attention on those important things.

If it is not an engaging motive with us, in some measure, to employ our thoughts in this way now, what reason have we to think, that those glorious subjects will entertain our minds hereafter? Without it, we cannot have any evidence that the employment of heaven will be the matter of our choice and delight. If we take no pleasure in thoughts of the grace, wisdom, holiness, and justice of God, as displayed in the accomplishment of our redemption by Jesus Christ, we are deceived in imagining, that we are the fit subjects of that bliss, and that glory, which is possessed by “the spirits of just men made perfect.” For that, very much consists in an uninterrupted prospect of, and delightful contemplation on those momentous truths. If now we have no desire to exercise ourselves in holy meditation on the glories of the person of Christ, and concerning His grace, compassion, and benefits, why should we fancy ourselves at all qualified for, or disposed unto, that service

in another state? Real grace is conversant about the same objects, as glory is; (a delightful thought this) though it is not able now to discern them, in their full brightness, which it will be when sublimated into glory; and, therefore if we are wholly indisposed to this heavenly exercise now, let us not once think that it will be our choice, when with us time shall be no more.

2. Prayer is another branch of our duty, wherein we ought to aim at, and desire communion with God. O amazing goodness! A throne of grace is erected, and a mercy seat for us to approach unto, and present our supplications before. Nor are we without solid ground to hope for an audience, and a gracious answer to our humble and spiritual requests, let us ask what we will that is conducive to our good, and the glory of our heavenly Father for us to enjoy. And, therefore, the Christian under the influence of the spirit of grace and supplications, uses freedom, liberty, and confidence, in presenting unto God, through Christ, his petitions, for mercy and grace to help in every time of need. And sometimes, the saints are favoured with great nearness unto God, even under the deepest sense of their guilt, vileness, and misery, in themselves; and are enabled to plead the blood and righteousness of Christ before the divine throne, as the ground of their hope of pardon, peace, and acceptance with God; and He causes His face to shine upon them, in this exercise of prayer.

3. It is our duty to read the Word of God, and we ought to have in view communion with Him therein. The Holy Scripture is a standing revelation from heaven; and it is to be considered, as the voice of Christ speaking to us, no less than if He was actually present, and we heard His precious mouth express the heavenly truths therein contained. In that sacred book, what lofty sentiments are delivered! Doctrines are handed down to us thereby, that far surpass, in sublimity, depth, sweetness and glory, any discoveries, our shallow reason could ever have made. And how many sweet, gracious, and soul-reviving promises are therein expressed, which are adapted to all our circumstances, of what nature soever they be! Those promises are confirmed with Gods oath, that we might have strong consolation, arising from a view of our eternal security, which rests on the immutability of God's counsel concerning our salvation. Will not the importance of the principles revelation contains, invite to the study of it? Will not the gracious promises of it, which are expressions of the love of God to us, and of His unalterable designs about us, engage our attention? Will not the representation of the glory of Christ, in this glass of the Word, attract our eye, and entertain our minds? If not, our hearts are carnal, and we walk as men.

4. Attendance on the preaching of the gospel, is a branch of our duty, wherein, we ought to propose the enjoyment of communion with God. It is

to be feared that many hearers have too little regard unto this, although no usefulness, or spiritual advantage arises from hearing the gospel preached, without our souls attend unto it not as the word of man; but as it is indeed, the word of God. Curiosity and taste are the main things to be gratified with multitudes, in their heaving, and such cannot reasonably hope for the enjoyment of communion with God, — it is not their aim and desire; they are content without it, when they are charmed with the preachers' accuracy, reasoning, pathos, or address. The Lord only knows how many trifling hearers are found at this day, among the number of those who have so much of the form of religion, as rather to attend divine service, than spend the Lord's day wholly in sloth or pleasure. The gospel is a joyful sound — glad tidings of great joy. For it informs us of God's love to sinful men, of the mission and coming of Christ into the world to save them. And it gives us assurance that guilt is expiated, that divine anger is appeased, that a glorious robe is provided to clothe our naked souls, that riches immense are laid up for us, who were sunk into the greatest depths of poverty, that a kingdom is appointed to us, who were beggars sitting on a dunghill. To favour, relish and embrace these things by faith, is to enjoy communion with God in them.

5. The celebration of the institutions of Christ, is a duty wherein we may hope to enjoy fellowship with God. They were graciously appointed in order to the edification of believers. There is this great difference between the positive rites of the Old Testament, and those of the New Testament carnal, unregenerate persons were admitted unto the former, but they have no right to the latter. Faith was not required of any, in order unto circumcision, offering of sacrifices, or to any other acts of external worship, under that dispensation. Believers, and unbelievers, among the Jews, were admitted to all those ordinances. But it is not so with respect to the rites of the New Testament, baptism and the Lord's supper. Faith, and a discernment of the Lord's body, are required of such as are admitted unto them.

In those sacred institutions, Christ is represented to our faith, as suffering, dead, buried, and risen again for our justification. And, therefore, they are wisely and graciously appointed for the confirmation of our faith, the increase of our hope, love, and of every other grace. This is the great end we ought to have in view, in the celebration of them; and Christ hath given us ground to expect His presence and blessing in both. When He instituted baptism, He promised His presence, so long as that ordinance shall be administered: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

And as in His supper, He requires that we should do it in remembrance of Him; we have comfortable reason to hope that He will come into our souls, and sup with us, and that we shall sup with Him.

Some persons strip these institutions of all their importance, though they administer and celebrate them. They cannot, therefore, propose to enjoy communion with God, and a dear Redeemer in them. Those who deny that Christ was a proper sacrifice for sin, that real atonement is made by His death, and that His descending into the lower parts of the earth, or making His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, was required of Him by divine justice, as a necessary part of his humiliation for our crimes; and that his resurrection hath a causal and effectual influence into our justification; for what reasons they continue the use of the institutions of baptism and the supper, themselves best know. This is certain, if these principles are false, those institutions can have no relation unto any of them; and if they have not, it will be very difficult to show wherein their weight and significance consist, or what important ends respecting the advantage of our souls, can possibly accrue to us from the administration and celebration of them. Such who give up Christian doctrines, may without prejudice, also give up Christian institutions.

We are under obligation to design and aim at our spiritual improvement in these appointments. And we have great encouragement to hope for the presence of our heavenly Father, and of our blessed Saviour, in these ordinances, which are significative of such glorious and important things, wherein our peace, consolation, joy, and eternal welfare are so deeply interested.

Communion with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in those institutions, consists in holy adoring thoughts of the love of each. In views by faith of Christ, as suffering, dying, and descending into the grave, and rising again from the dead, in order to our remission, reconciliation with God, our justification in His sight, and a complete and everlasting conquest over all our formidable enemies. When grace is acted on these noble and transporting subjects, love to God and Christ is happily promoted, and an indignation against sin is cherished in the soul. Says the Christian, "O thou base, vile, most hateful thing, sin, which was the procuring cause of such dolorous sufferings, as my dear Lord Jesus endured in the garden, on the cross, etc. What stabs did my pride, my covetousness, my envy, my sensuality, and others of my sins, give my blessed Lord! And unto what grief was He put, in order to appease the justice of God for them! May I eternally hate them all, and let their ruin hasten." This is the language of grace in the hearts of the saints.

Secondly. Communion with God and Jesus Christ, may be enjoyed in the practice of the duties of the second table. Mark 12:31. If our minds were spiritual, holy and heavenly, we should know how to discharge our duty towards all mankind, in such a manner as would much glorify our heavenly

Father, and greatly honour our dear Redeemer.

1. In declining all words, and all actions, which tend to prejudice our neighbour. We are required to love our neighbour as ourselves. And love is the fulfilling of the law: it works no ill. Love is always friendly, kind and benevolent. It never acts a part injurious to its objects. Motives to an universal love of men are many, viz., the command of God; His bounty and liberality towards all, in the dispensations of His providence, the unjust as well as the just, the evil as well as the good; wherein we ought to imitate Him, and approve ourselves to be His children; the behaviour of our great Master, whose steps we ought to follow, will teach us meekness, gentleness and benevolence towards all, even towards our very enemies. If we take Him for our pattern, we shall not render evil for evil, but reward evil with good.

We shall be inoffensive, harmless, and the sons of God without rebuke; if we imitate Jesus Christ, who was holy, harmless, and without guile. And if our minds are influenced by these considerations, and others of the like nature, to decline everything that is prejudicial to our neighbour, and to act the kind, the sympathetic, the benevolent part towards all; our obedience is spiritual, holy, acceptable and pleasing unto God, through Christ, and therein we enjoy communion both with the Father and the Son. Nothing short of which is real holiness; a very necessary truth, and to be more considered than by most it is.

2. A spiritually-minded person is not without communion with God, in the duties of his calling. The despised mechanic and artificer, who labours with his hands, working the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth, is often far more happy than those who treat him with contempt. His mind is exercised upon noble and most excellent subjects, and he derives from them pure, holy and lasting joy; while the great and rich are squandering away their time in visits, in a vain pernicious conversation, and hurtful pleasures. As the world now is, a lower station of life is more eligible than advanced circumstances: the temptations attending greatness, unto pride, vanity, luxury, and a regardlessness of the power of religion, where the form of it is, are so numerous, from the growing corruption of our dreadful times. How many have fell down, wounded sorely, if not mortally, by the force of those temptations! Happy are the few who escape without injury, by possessing an abundance. A person who attends to the duties of his calling, as a part of the service of Christ, which all who profess to be His followers ought to do, not only honours his God, but reaps great profit to himself.

3. If we are careful to fill up our several relations and stations in life in a spiritual manner, we shall not be without communion with God, in those

duties, thereunto belonging, in the conjugal relation, the paternal, etc. Grace will teach us to practice the duties of every relation in such a way as will redound to the glory of God, and our good. Were we more holy, how pleasant and profitable would the discharge of the duties of our respective stations in life be! Nothing unjust, severe and cruel would be required by masters; servants would not be unfaithful, unruly, and disobedient to the reasonable commands of their employers. If we were under the powerful influence of Christian principles, love, meekness, humility, sympathy, benevolence, kindness, and everything that is commendable and praiseworthy, would adorn our profession; and our minds would be raised up unto God in our duties; peace, joy and delight would possess our breasts, and we should esteem the divine precepts concerning all things to be right.

But alas! how defective are we in every duty! How little of that spirituality is found in our obedience, which our profession calls for! And therefore we bring but little glory to our heavenly Father, do small honour to our blessed Redeemer, who lived a life of sorrows for us, suffered an accursed death for our sakes, and now He lives to make intercession for us. What need have we of His atoning blood to cleanse us from sinful mixtures, which are found in all the acts of our obedience! And how necessary are the quickening and sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts, to enable us to live and act in a holy, spiritual, and heavenly manner! And since pleasure attends all duties so far as we are spiritual in the discharge of them; then what delight will possess our souls, when we shall serve our God day and night, without fainting, weariness, or the least tincture of evil in any of our acts! And when our communion with the Father, Son and Spirit shall be most near, uninterrupted, and without end! To whom be everlasting honours ascribed. Amen.

ANALYTICAL INDEX

THIS Treatise is divided into twelve Chapters, and the subjects therein are discussed in the following order.

CHAPTER 1. Of the original purity of human nature. "Man was pure and holy in his Creation state; his affections were untainted; and no disorder attended him in his passions: no unlawful love, delight, or aversion, were implanted in the nature of man, by the great Author of his being." 1. He had a perfection of knowledge. 2. His disposition was such as God approved of. 3. His affections were untainted. 4. The objections of Socinian and Arminian writers, replied to.

CHAPTER 2. Of the present entire depravity of human nature. "Our

depravity is a subject very largely treated of in the Holy Scriptures.” 1. We are dead in sin. 2. We are under the dominion of sin. 3. Ignorance and darkness have overspread our minds. 4. Men are obstinate. 5. No unregenerate person acts agreeably to God’s holy law. 6. None of his actions, while in that state, are good and holy. 7. The carnal mind is enmity against God. — “A man is either regenerate or unregenerate.” Observations on this subject.

CHAPTER 3. On the Spirit’s work in Regeneration; and also in Conversion, and Sanctification. “Regeneration precedes, and may be considered as the foundation and spring of conversion and sanctification.”

1. Of the necessity of regeneration. 2. What is regeneration, conversion, and sanctification; or, wherein they consist. — Regeneration, the infusion of a new principle of spiritual life. — Conversion, the primary actings of the regenerate principle. — Sanctification, the secondary actings of grace.

CHAPTER 4. Of the great difference between real conversion, and the mere semblance of it. “This is a subject of very great moment, and one of considerable difficulty.” 1. There is a change which is not conversion. 2. Wherein lies the difference between this change, and real conversion; shown in various particulars. Concluding observation.

CHAPTER 5. On the life of faith. “The holy Scripture plainly informs us what it is; and sets before us shining examples of it.” 1. The objects of faith are things invisible. 2. The life of faith is above the delectable things of this world. 3. Faith carries the mind above the afflictive and distressing things of this world. 4. It is a life contrary to the evil part of the believer, and above his better part. 5. The life of faith supposes a frequent exercise of that grace. 6. It may be maintained in a believer even under darkness, and the hidings of God’s face. 7. That it is a life of dependence on the faithfulness of God. 8. It is an ardent desire, and a sure expectation of better things than can be enjoyed in this state.

CHAPTER 6. Of the assurance of faith. This important subject is handled, 1. Objectively and subjectively. 2. Assurance not essential to that faith which is of God’s operation. 3. That this favour may be enjoyed; argued in several particulars. 4. Of the influence attending this holy assurance. 5. Of our duty to endeavour to maintain it. 6. That great advantages attend it. Objections answered.

CHAPTER 7. Of a believer’s growth in grace. A negative definition, — “By grace I do not intend a speculative knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity.” 1. The prayer of the apostle for the saints’ enlargement in spiritual knowledge. 2. A consideration of the apostle’s own gracious experience on this point; and observations on that experience. 3. What is implied in mortification of sin. Two queries answered.

CHAPTER 8. On declension in the power of godliness, its causes, etc. The axiom. "A real believer will never sink into a state of unregeneracy; yet, he may greatly decline with respect to the liveliness, vigour, and exercise of grace, through various causes." 1. The Christian may suffer a suspension of divine influences. 2. The opposition that sin makes to grace in the souls of believers, often a cause of declension. 3. A languor in grace, may be occasioned by a neglect of holy duties. 4. Criminal indulgencies very prejudicial to grace. 5. The declensions of Christians are sometimes owing to an unedifying ministry. 6. Formality in religious exercises will cause a decline in the power of godliness. p. 131-141.

CHAPTER 9. Of the symptoms of declension in the power of godliness. 1. A drowsy and slumbering frame of mind, is a sure sign of declension. 2. Loss of spiritual appetite, is a sign of declension in grace. 3. Declension attends us, if our love to God, Christ, and to spiritual things, is abated. 4. Another symptom, is an abatement of zeal for the honour of God, and of a dear Redeemer. 5. A thirst after, and fondness of the world, is a symptom of declension in grace. 6. The want of watchfulness against sin, is a sure sign of a decay in grace. 7. Being more governed in our conduct, by prudential than spiritual considerations. 8. When influenced not so much by evangelical, as legal motives. 9. Queries answered. (1.) Why is grace suffered to decline, and sin permitted to break forth? (2.) How may a Christian, under declension, arrive at satisfaction that he is the subject of true grace? (3.) What is included in a revival of grace, etc.? (4.) May a Christian think he is declined in grace, and be mistaken in that matter? 10. The difference between a regenerate, and an unregenerate person.

CHAPTER 10. Of the means of revival, under decays of grace. "The Holy Spirit, in a way of efficiency, the sole cause of a happy revival." 1. We must remember whence we are fallen, and lay to heart the sad occasions of our declension. 2. A consideration of what Christ required of the church at Sardis. 3. We must do the "first works," if we design a revival of our graces. 4. Query. How can this declension consist with promises of growth? Answered. 5. Cautions to the saint on his recovery.

CHAPTER 11. Of the temptations of the present age; and cautions against them. "Temptation is exceedingly dangerous, because we have that in us which is fit matter for it to act upon." 1. Temptations levelled against our faith, by open and avowed enemies. 2. The secret enemies of divine truth, from whom temptations arise. 3. Of persons carefully avoiding the use of some terms and phrases, by which the most important doctrines of Christianity are expressed. 4. Some act a neutral part; they appear on no side; you cannot tell what their opinion is. 5. The motives to caution and

watchfulness, lest we be surprised by temptation.

CHAPTER 12. Of holy and spiritual Communion with God. "Fellowship with God hath always subsisted between God and His saints." 1. The saints enjoy communion with God the Father in his love, which is (1.) Eternal. (2.) Sovereign. (3.) Immense. (4.) Immutable. (5.) Inseparable. (6.) The saints enjoy communion with God in all his counsels and purposes concerning their salvation. 2. Intimacy and fellowship is maintained between Christ and the church; they being his brethren, his children, his bride, his members, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. 3. The saints enjoy communion with the blessed Spirit. Some experimental portions of Solomon's song illustrated. 4. The several relations wherein Christ stands to His people, a fit matter for delightful meditation to spiritually-minded persons. 5. The church is sometimes without the company of her beloved. The reasons why, are shewed. 6. and lastly. A consideration of our communion with God, in the course of that holy obedience which He requires us to yield unto Him, while we are in this mortal state. 1. Duties of a religious nature. (1.) Meditation. (2.) Prayer. (3.) Reading the sacred Word. (4.) Attending on the preaching of the gospel. (5.) Celebrating of the institutions of Christ. 2. Communion with God and Christ, enjoyed, in the practice of the duties of the second table.

The volume closes with a glance at the sacred delight which will possess our souls, when we shall serve our God day and night, without fainting, weariness, or the least tincture of evil in any of our acts; and when our communion with the Father, Son and Spirit shall be most near, uninterrupted, and without end.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE CHOICE EXPERIENCE OF

Mrs. Anne Brine; Sermon Extract John Gill.

Extracted from the Funeral Sermon preached on the occasion of her death,

BY JOHN GILL, D.D.

MRS. ANNE BRINE was the first wife of Mr. John Brine. She died, August 11, 1745. Dr. Gill's text at her funeral, was those glorious words in Romans 8:33, 34. And it is one of the greatest sermons of Gill's which ever appeared in print. The Doctor divides his discourse into two distinct heads. — "1. That no charge shall be brought against, nor any condemnation brought upon, the elect of God. 2. That the Father's justification of them; the Son's dying for them, His resurrection from the dead, session at the right hand of God, and, intercession on their account, are a sufficient and full security to them, from all charges and condemnation whatever."

The reader may form some faint idea of the Sermon, from the above

heads: and as Dr. Gill advocated “The glory of the church in the latter day;” so I cannot but conclude that this Discourse is a sort of specimen of the full notes of the Gospel trumpet, which will be sounded in those glorious days.

At its conclusion, the Doctor adds.

Thus have I endeavoured, to improve this passage of scripture upon the mournful occasion of the death of MRS. ANNE BRINE, late member of the church of Christ in this place, and late wife of the Pastor of it; at whose request I have preached from it to you; it having been of singular use to the deceased.

It may now be expected I should say something concerning her, which will be chiefly about the gracious experience she was favoured with. She was a daughter of MR. JOHN MOORE, of Northampton; an eminent preacher of the gospel, a minister of the Baptist denomination, of considerable abilities and learning, whom I had the honour to have a personal knowledge of, and acquaintance with. But though she had a religious education, her conversion, her knowledge of Christ, and experimental acquaintance with divine things, were not owing to that, but to the efficacy of divine grace.

By several papers of her own writing, put into my hands, it appears, how she came by the knowledge of salvation by Christ, and the great doctrines of the gospel; which were the support of her soul, and the foundation of her joy. These express the sight and sense she had of sin; her abhorrence and detestation of it; the view she had of the loveliness of Christ; of the necessity and suitableness of salvation by Him; and how she was enabled to cast her soul on Him; and trust in Him for eternal life and happiness. But among the rest, I find one paper, written little more than a year ago, when she took a review of her experience, led thereunto upon a supposition, that there were yet some very great troubles to come upon the Churches and servants of Christ, which put her upon considering, how it would fare with her in such a time of trial; and what evidence she had of her being a child of God: for which purpose she observed how it had been with her of late; what was her present frame of mind and thoughts of things, and how it had been with her heretofore, and whether her former experience was from nature or from the Spirit of God. As to the first of these, how it had been of late, and how it was with her then, her words are these: — “I have often thought my spots are not the spots of God’s children; I find so much sin bubbling up in my heart; so many sins of omission and commission, daily and hourly; I can say that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing; and such an evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God. Sure it is not with the saints as with me! At the same time I have some secret hope, which I would not part with for all the world: at times I have earnest desires after a full conformity

to Christ, and thirstings after Him. O! that I could love Him more; O! that I could serve Him better; O! that I found more love in me to His ways, His ordinances, and His people: but, O! wretched creature that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of sin? At some times I think I can say with the Apostle, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, who hath given me the victory. Those three scriptures have of late, upon various occasions, been sweet under a sense of sin, If thou wilt thou canst make Me clean. Matthew 8:2. To whom shall I go, but unto thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life, John 6:68. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, whither the righteous run and are safe, Proverbs 18:10. Though I am a vile, sinful, polluted creature, and, as I think the most vile of all thy creatures; yet, for such, for the very chief of sinners, thou didst suffer and die, and who knows but for me? I know this, that if thou wilt, thou canst make even me clean; and though I am thus sinful, to whom can I go, but to that God against whom I have sinned? there is no help any where else; no other name given, whereby any can be saved, but the name of Christ Jesus." She next proceeds to enquire, how it had been with her formerly when God first began to work upon her soul, and she set out in the way of religion; concerning which, she thus expresses herself: "Have I not experienced some things which natural men are strangers to? O! sure I hope I have. Upon a recollection of several parts of my former experience, I was warmed, and asked myself this question; did this or that flow from nature? no; nature is averse to it. Did education produce it? no; for if that could have had such an effect, it might as well have produced it sooner: for it was not any particular care of my parents, at the time of my awakenings, that was a means thereof; for some time before their care had been abated to what was usual; and my heart became more averse to God than ever. Did Sabbaths seem before this time delightful? and was I before convicted, instructed, edified or comforted, by the word preached? no; I too well remember the quite contrary of this; even when Sabbaths were burdensome instead of delightful; when if I was obliged to be present, I strove to keep from giving any attention to what was delivered. Had I love for the people of God? no; I had an aversion to many of them; nor did I love any for the sake of their being saints. Had I a sight and sense of sin; of its evil nature? no; I thought myself as good as others that talk more: I did not know that I was poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked then. Did I taste a sweetness in the scriptures? no; I thought them to be only the inventions of men, written with a design to keep others in awe. Did I ever see the absolute need of a Saviour before? no, I thought my own works were to save me, and reasoned thus sometimes; "I have not been guilty of murder, stealing, etc. and so am in as fair a way for a better world, if any such there be, as

others." Having put these questions, and resolved them in the above manner, she rightly draws the following conclusion. Then sure what I have met with and experienced, must be from the Spirit of God; as conviction of sin, of its heinous and aggravated nature; of original, as well as actual transgression; the curse demerited by it; the sense of my own inability to perform the thing that is good; the discovery of my need of a Saviour; my seeing Christ to be a suitable, all-sufficient, and able Saviour; my approving of Him, and application to Him, for my Saviour; my pressing desires towards Him, as my alone and complete Saviour; my admiration of the love of Father, Son and Spirit, manifested in the great concern of man's salvation; my discovering the harmony and agreement, the sublimity and sweetness of the holy scriptures; and the effects that many sweet and precious promises set home to my soul, have had on me; also my hungering and thirsting after Christ, His grace, and manifestation of His love and pardoning mercy; my abhorring my self for all that I have done; especially for those sins which I thought were committed against light and love; my love to young converts; my longing for the return of Sabbaths; the comfort I received under the preaching of the gospel, etc. These were things I was once an utter stranger to, and do believe the carnal mind is enmity against. Why then it must be from above; and if so, then he that hath begun the good work, will carry it on to the day of Christ. If the Lord had a mind to have had destroyed me, he sure would not have shown me such things as these; and if I am the Lord's then that promise stands firm, with the righteous it shall go well, Isaiah 3:10; and what if troubles should arise? what if I should suffer, or even fall, in the common calamity? if the Lord is pleased to support under, and give suffering faith, and suffering patience with suffering trials, then

'I can do all things, or can bear

All sufferings, if my Lord be there; Sweet pleasure mingles with the pains,
Whilst His left hand my head sustains.'

"I leave myself, my all, in His hands, and desire cheerfully to submit to His will in all things; and not be anxious about this, or the other trying dispensation of Providence; knowing that He can make hard things easy, and crooked things straight; hoping that these things He will do for me, and not forsake me."

This was the comfortable result of her thoughts, occasioned by a melancholy scene of troubles she had in view: but she is got safe to her father's house, and is secure from them all.

She was a person afflicted with frequent disorders of body, and which often came upon her on Lord s days; whereby she was prevented waiting upon the Lord in His word and ordinances, which were delightful to her;

and in which she received much spiritual advantage, This gave her a great concern of mind, and she would sometimes say, “she chose, if it was the will of the Lord, that she might have two days’ affliction, instead of one, on other days, could she be free on the Lord’s day, that she might have the opportunity of hearing the word which was so useful to her.”

Her last illness was very short, and it was not expected it would have issued in death. Under it she was very comfortable, resigned to the will of God, and trusting in Christ, and so “died in the Lord.” Wherefore, you, my brother, and the rest of the surviving relations, have no reason to mourn as those without hope, since “them that sleep in Jesus, God will bring with Him,” and her amongst the rest, when you will meet, and never part more; and “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

The editor has a more enlarged account of Mrs. Brine, written by her bereaved husband, and which contains some of her interesting letters; but he judged what Dr. Gill delivered at her funeral, being brief yet full, would interest perhaps beyond a lengthened detail. Still, there are two or three remarks in Mr. Brine’s account, which are so exceedingly pertinent, as almost to demand insertion. In one of her letters, she says, “I was for a considerable time, as it were, dandled on the knee of love. I seldom was a day without fresh and repeated discoveries of pardoning grace and mercy; which so melted my heart, and raised my affections, that I was, at times, in such transports of joy as cannot be expressed. I was ready to say with Paul, “nothing shall separate me from the love of God; nor interpose to hinder my enjoyment. But soon after this, the Lord was pleased to withdraw the light of His countenance; whereupon I began to question my interest in Him, and to fear that what I had experienced, was only a delusion from Satan, or some notions that I had imbibed, by giving more attention than usual under the word preached.”

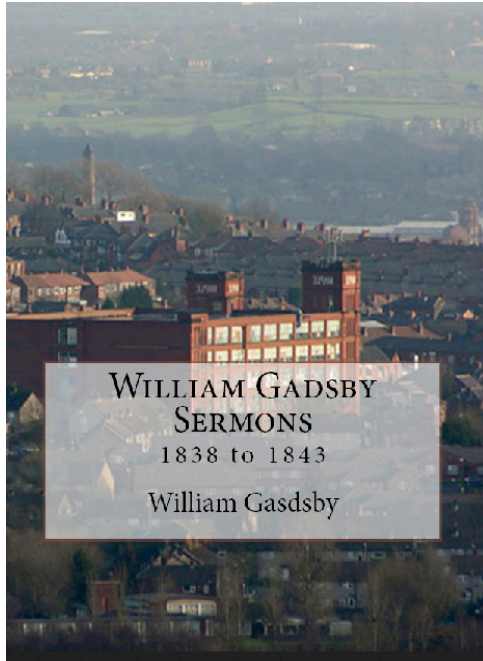
Her husband writes, — “She was a most judicious hearer. In forming her opinion of sermons, she closely considered whether the subject treated of, was properly attended to. If the genuine sense of the text was given. If the Scriptures brought forward in confirmation, were pertinent and applicable, and so calculated to benefit and instruct the hearers.” [O that ministers were more concerned to set before the people, only what God means in His sacred Word. — Ed.]

“She greatly valued the gospel of Christ in its purity.” Writing to a friend, she says, “I was once lulled into a lethargic frame of mind, through sitting under the ministry of one, who either from ignorance, or, I rather think, out of prudence! avoided preaching on those peculiar evangelical truths, which are the life of a believer; so that I became dull and lifeless, and a

common round of duties satisfied me. But, when I came back to my wonted place, where I had enjoyed the full gospel, and heard again the same sweet, comfortable, and soul-reviving truths delivered, O what did I feel!" She adds, — "This may serve as a caution to you, not to stay longer in a place than you are obliged, where you cannot have spiritual food for your soul."

Dr. Gill stated, that her last illness was very short. Her husband had conversation with her, about some sublime truths of the gospel, on the Saturday preceding her departure; and "on the Tuesday following, (which was August 6th, 1745) after two days' sharp pain, — without a sigh, or a groan, she stretched and soared away to glory!"

WILLIAM GADSBY SERMONS: 1838 TO 1843



Authored by William Gadsby,

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This volume contains a tribute of high esteem, given by J.C Philpot on the death of William Gadsby, in 1844 and contains series of sermons preached between September 1838 and 14th June 1843.

William Gadsby became a Particular Baptist minister in 1798 and went on to preach to many thousands of people. He later published Hymns, in a hymn books still used today by Particular Baptists.

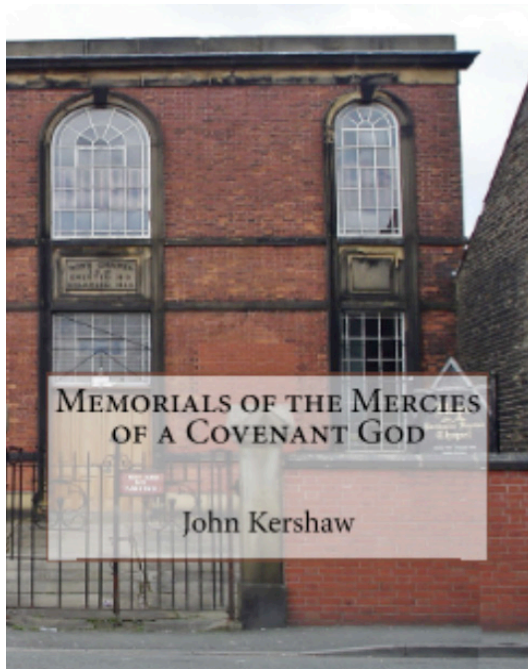
He was born in Attleborough, Warwickshire in 1773. He had little or no education. In 1790, he went to see men hanged, and the horrid spectacle had such an effect on his mind that he was never afterward like the same youth. His memoirs tell of the lengths of folly into which he ran prior to this time and were often related by him in his ministry These memoirs were published shortly after his death.

William Gadsy preached the distinguishing doctrines of grace that gave

all the glory to the Lord Jesus Christ for his salvation.

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Memorials of the Mercies of a Covenant God



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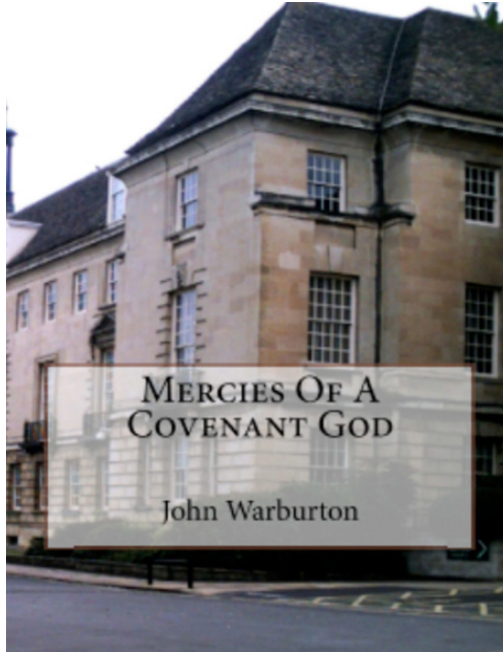
John Kershaw (1792-1870) was a Particular Baptists pastor for fifty-two years of Hope Chapel, Rochdale. He exercised a powerful ministry among the church, and became an influential preacher across the country. Few ministers remain faithful to a single congregation for an extended period—Kershaw committed himself to the same church he attended as a boy. This autobiography “Memorials of the Mercies of a Covenant God while Traveling through the Wilderness”, is one of the best written of its genre.

He preached and taught the doctrines of grace along with his contemporaries William Gadsby, John Warburton, J.C. Philpott.

These men were all Calvinists maintaining the bible to be the word of God and giving all the praise and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation.

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Mercies Of A Covenant God



Authored by John Warburton,
Created by Bierton Particular Baptists

List Price: \$8.00

8.5" x 11" (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

Black & White on White paper

132 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1976527562 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1976527562

BISAC: Religion / Christianity / Baptist

God be merciful to me a sinner was the cry of John Warburton on discovering and realizing he ruined lost condition before God. He knew and felt the condemnation of God against him. He knew of no way but to mend his ways, repent to find mercy. He could think of no other way to save his soul but by mending his life, doing his duty and pleasing God.

This book, "Mercies of a Covent God" tells the life story of John

Warburton, of his call by grace, and becoming a Particular Baptists ministry in England. This book is not dry or intellectual Calvinism but experiential Christian experience. Teaching the way of salvation as Gods way, Father, Son and Holy Spirit engaged in covenant to save not to propose salvation but call by grace. Faith alone in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, his atoning blood, and imputed righteousness are clearly taught be blessings of grace.

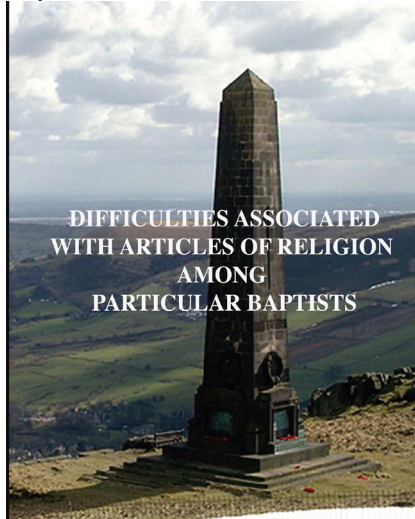
This is recommended read for Preterits as it is important, in order to have a correct understanding of Last things, we must have a correct view of first things, i.e. the beginnings to understand last things.

The Soteriology of John Warburton, like all Particular Baptists in the, is Calvinistic, but not textbook Calvinism. It is felt that a correct view of the way of salvation is important to understand eschatology, correctly and not in a dry textbook way. True religion is more than notion, Something must be known and felt.

This book also contains short bibliographies of the hymn writers that are quoted in this book

DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH ARTICLES OF RELIGION

Among Particular Baptists



By David Clarke

Articles of religion are important when dealing with matters of the Christian religion. However problems occur when churches fail to recognize there is a growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in any believer. When a person first believes in the Lord Jesus Christ they cannot possibly have a comprehensive knowledge of a church's constitution or its articles of religion, before solemnly subscribing to them. The author David Clarke has introduced the Doctrines of Grace to Bierton Particular Baptists Pakistan, situated in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan, and bearing in mind his own experience with articles of religion he has compiled Bierton Particular Baptists Pakistan articles of religion from the first Bierton Particular Baptists of 1831, of which he is the sole surviving member, the First London Baptist Confession, 2nd edition 1646, and those of Dr John Gill, in order to avoid some of the difficulties encounter by Particular Baptist during the later part of the 19th century and since. This booklet highlights the problem and suggests the Bierton Particular Baptists Pakistan is as step in the right direction.

Isaiah 52:8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

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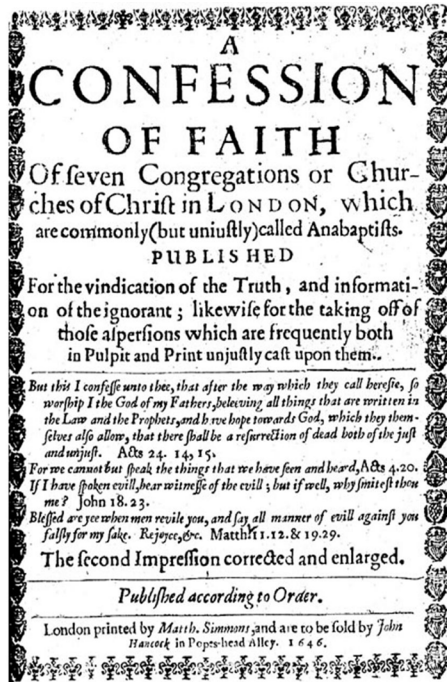
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**THE FIRST LONDON PARTICULAR BAPTISTS 1644-66
CONFESSION**

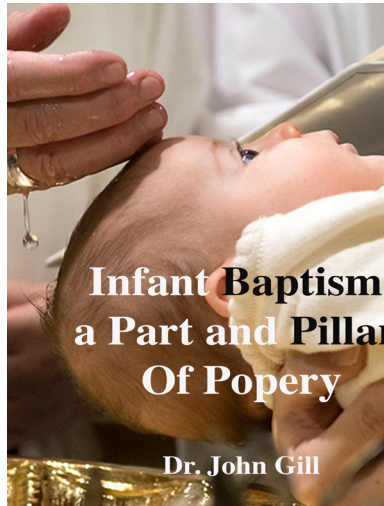


Compiled by David Clarke

1 FIRST LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH 1644
Subscribed in the Names of seven Churches in London

2 FIRST LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION 1646, 2nd EDITION

The Second Edition is better than the first confession as it is much less legalistic but strong in the teaching of salvation (soteriology) and predestination. This book included a set of recommended readings relating to Reformed theology



Dr John Gill

[Now available as an Apple iBook](#)

This republication to Dr John Gill's works on the subject of baptism was prompted by recent claims of those who practice infant baptism and argue that it is a sign of the Covenant and that it relates to circumcision.

Dr. John Gill argues that infant baptism is part and pillar of Popery.

It is certain that so called baptism of infants, or now the dedication of infants, does not make a person a Christian, nor does it benefit or remove original sin.

As the editor of this republication and my personal testimony relating to the matter on the 3 April 1949 I was baptized as an infant (4 months old) at St Barnabas Church, in Oldham Lancashire and the certificate issued state that I had been made a member of the Church of Christ. I relate the matter in my book '*Converted on LSD Trip*, Chapter 2, *My Early life* because I was not made a member of Christ's Church until I had been called by the Lord Jesus personally, and experienced the new birth, on 16 January 1970, at the age of 21.

Until that date I was dead in trespasses and sins.

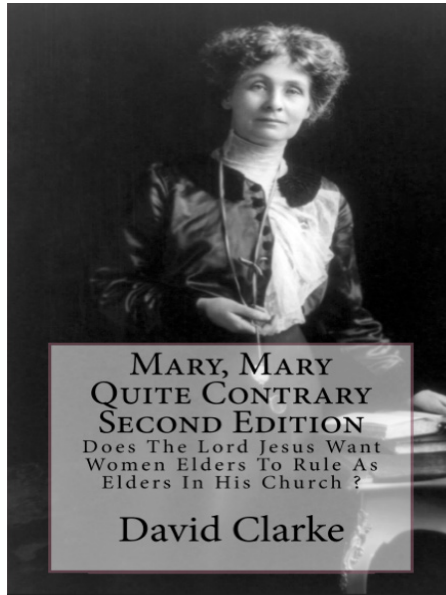
Dr John Gill was called upon, in a public manor to give full proof of of what he had said on the subject of Infant Baptism and so he readily agreed to explain him self and defend what he had written, but it will be proper first to recite the whole paragraph, which stands thus: "The paedo-baptists are ever restless and uneasy, endeavoring to maintain and support, if possible, their unscriptural practice of infant-baptism; though it is no other than a pillar of

popery; that by which Antichrist has spread his baneful influence over many nations; is the basis of national churches and worldly establishments; that which unites the church and world, and keeps them together; nor can there be a full separation of the one from the other, nor a thorough reformation in religion; until it is wholly removed:

In this publication we include access to our several libraries where access to reading materials on these various important subjects are available and , which are submitted to enable the reformation of the Christian religion to continue. All our library books may be accessed to read and made available as free PDF downloads from our website www.BiertonParticularBaptists.co.uk

Please view our libraries, provided for your use, on our website

MARY, MARY QUITE CONTRARY



Second Edition: Does The Lord Jesus Want Women To Rule As Elders In His Church ? ?

Authored by Mr David Clarke Cert Ed.

When treating the subject of women elders in the church we are not dealing with the affairs of a secular society and so it has nothing to do with women's rights, equality of sex or race in the world. This matter only relates to men and women in a Christian church. It is about the rules of the house of God, which is the church of the living God and rules for those who are members of the body of Christ and members of an heavenly country.

The Suffragettes

Emmeline Pankhurst (1858 -1928) was a Suffragette and worked very

hard to bring equal rights for women to vote as men. In the year of her death all women over 21 gained the right to vote. The Suffragette movement brought about many changes for the better in a secular society but not so for women seeking to follow Christian principles. One of her famous quotes was, "Trust in God. She shall provide". Terms which do not reflect Christian beliefs. We know God will provide and He is not a she.

In the USA and the UK, women's political rights were brought into general political consciousness by the suffragettes and since then there have been legal rights granted to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups, same sex marriages, along with the development of the feminist movement and the appointment of persons from the LGBT community to responsible positions in the Church of England. All of this has caused conflict in the Christian community due to different beliefs of right and wrong.

This book seeks to show what the bible has to say about the role of women in the church and family. Since these rules are taught by the Apostles of Christ they are the word of God to us and we should obey. The secular world may differ and turn from the narrow path taught in scripture but we should follow the word of God. This is our wisdom.

CONVERTED ON LSD TRIP

The Bucks Herald Second Edition

Not Weekly Sales 23,342
THURSDAY FEBRUARY 11, 1971 price 6d 32 pages

CONVERTED ON LSD TRIP

David Clarke who had a three-year career of undetected crime, experienced a "Christian conversion" whilst suffering from the effects of LSD, he told Aylesbury magistrates, on Tuesday. After wrestling with his conscience for a year, he confessed to 24 crimes, and gave information leading to the recovery of over £1000 worth of stolen property in court.

Seeking Truth
"Religion to me was rubbish, and for other people who could not stand on their own feet", he said.

result of taking the drug, and went on "I warn any young person who hears my testimony, 'The effects of LSD are so bad, and I warn you to stay clear'". While in this condition he said he, "Called on the name of Jesus" and his heaviest went from him.

Voice Of Christ
"Jesus Christ spoke to me as clearly as I speak here today saying, 'David, I am with you', he said. "What you have been going through is nothing compared to what hell is like".

Mr Murray, of Manor Crescent Windsor said he was habitually sceptical of sudden conversions, and preferred to put them to the test of time. The time, which had elapsed, since Clarke's profession of faith had convinced him that this young man would now be salt and light to society. "He is in truth, a new man, and had experienced what Christ called a second birth". Murray said Clarke now put himself out to be of assistance, read the bible intensely, always carried a New Testament, attended a wide circle of churches and would spend hours in discussion on spiritual things.

Difficulty
Clarke's difficulty during the months spent deciding how to make amends for his past had been the problem of accusing himself, without interfering on others.

Continued inside:



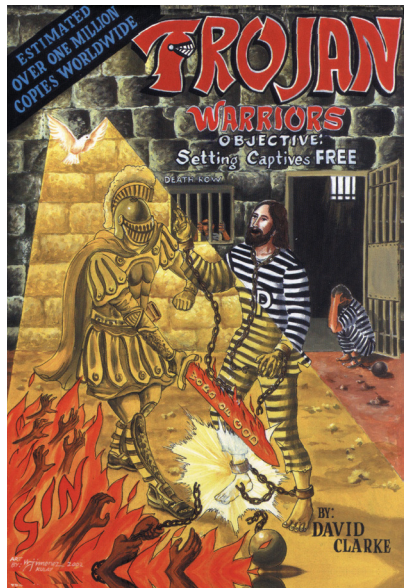
David Could these boys do any real wrong ? **Michael**

he pleaded guilty to charges of "Within my heart I was searching for truth, and a meaning to life". He had good prospects of getting on in life he went on but "I was not satisfied with what I had, I was greedy, selfish and boastful". Clarke had been using pop pills, and marijuanas since he was 16 and told the court, but it was after taking LSD that he experienced what he described as, "a major thing in my life". He described the "conversion" he suffered, as a

By David Clarke (Author)
3rd Edition Paperback – 3 Jun. 2020

This third edition of, '*Converted on LSD Trip*', is written to bring attention to the reality of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in changing the lives of David Clarke, whilst on a bad trip on LSD, on 16 January 1970, and the life of his brother Michael Clarke, some 30 years later, while a prisoner, in the Philippines, and making them evangelist workers seeking to teach the gospel of Christ to men. It is intended to use this book as a tool for evangelism in order to encourage others in the work of preaching the gospel of Christ to men. This is also intended to draw attention to the work of Jesus Christ now in Baguio City, Philippines, by William O. Poloc a former inmate of New Bilibid Prison. It is believed and stressed that it is important to teach the traditional Christian doctrines of grace, to combat the error of modern-day Godliness, unbelief, homosexuality, feminism, Islam and of the importance of teaching the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the infallibility of the word of God.

TROJAN WARRIORS



Setting Captives Free

Authored by Mr David Clarke Cert.Ed, Authored by Mr Michael J Clarke

Trojan Warriors is a true story of two brothers, Michael and David Clarke, who were brought up in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, England. They became criminals in the 1960's and were sent to prison for malicious wounding and carrying a fire arm without a license, in 1967.

They both turned from their lives of crimes in remarkable ways but some 25 years apart, and then they worked together helping other prison inmates, on their own roads of reformation.

David the younger brother became a Christian, after a bad experience on LSD, in 1970, and then went on to educate himself and then on to higher education. He became a baptist minister and taught electronics for over 20 years, in colleges of higher and further education. Michael however remained untouched and continued his flamboyant life style ending up serving a 16 year prison sentence, in the Philippines, in 1996, where he died of tuberculosis in 2005.

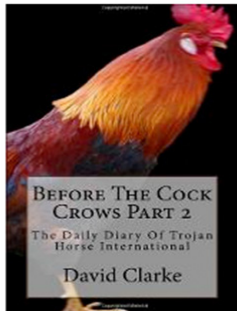
When David heard the news of his brothers arrest on an ITN television news bulletin he felt compelled to write their story. And then when he heard of his own brothers conversion from crime to Christ, after serving 5 year of his sentence, he published their story in his book, "*Converted on LS Trip*", and directed a mission of help to the Philippines to assist his brother.

They then worked together with many former notorious criminals, inmates in New Bilibid Prison, who too had become Christians and turned their lives around. This help was to train them to become preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ .

This book contains the 66 testimonies of some of these men who were convicted former criminals, incarcerated in New Bilibid Prison. They are the, "Trojan Warriors", who had turned their lives around from crime to Christ. Twenty two of these testimonies are men who are on Death Row scheduled to be executed by lethal injection.

Revelation 12 verse 11: And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony and they loved not their lives unto the death.

BEFORE THE COCK CROWS PART 1, 2 AND 3

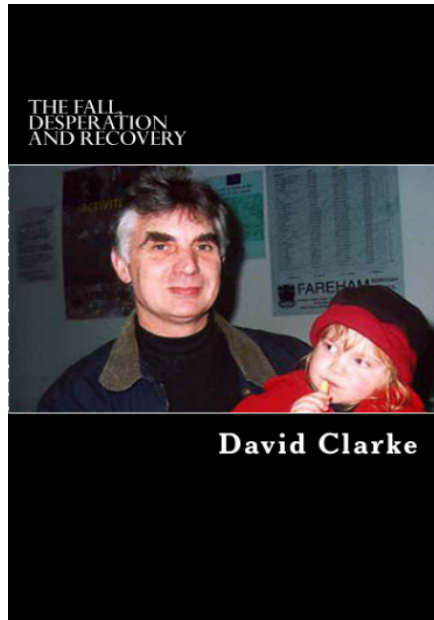


By David Clarke

David Clarke the Director of Trojan Horse International CM

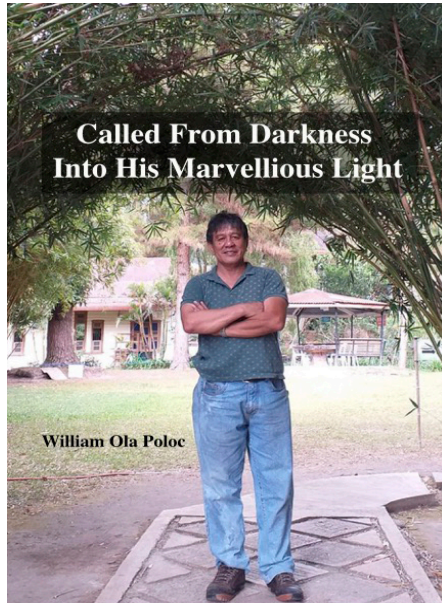
encountered remarkable opposition from various quarters in New Bilibid Prison, Muntinlupa City Philippines between October 2002 and July 2003. Most of those who opposed the mission were men from among Asia's most notorious criminals in the National Penitentiary, which is situated on the Reservation at Muntinlupa City, 1770, Philippines. If one were to judge the success of the mission by that amount of opposition that it experienced, then the mission was a remarkable success. Newton stated that to every force there is an equal but opposite one to oppose it and like Newton, David suggests that to every proactive work there is an equal and opposite reaction and so if this reaction were to be the measure of success, then the mission was remarkably successful. It also serves to demonstrate that God always triumphs. That God saves, not by might, but by His Spirit. That God puts to fight thousands of his enemies and empowers the one's and two's, who trust in Him in order to show that Salvation is truly of the Lord. This prison comprises of three Compounds and penal farms housing over 23,550 inmates, which are all under the control of the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Bureau of Corrections. (BUCOR). The Chaplaincy, headed by Msgr. Helley Barrido, is responsible for all religious groups and voluntary work done within the Prison. "Death Row" is in the Maximum Security Compound where over 1200 men are housed and they are all under the sentence of death. Some are doubly confirmed and due to be put to death by lethal injection. Trojan Horse International C.M. was established in the early part of 2001 and composed of a team of two from England-David Clarke and Gordon John Smith. The mission was set up as a Christian ministry, seeking to bring assistance to Michael John Clarke, David's older brother, and many inmates at the Prison. This was where Michael had been incarcerated, for a crime he did not commit, and was serving a prison sentence of 16 years. He had been baptised as a Christian. In an old 45-gallon US Oil drum, on the 16 September 2000 in the Maximum Security Compound. Michael, like his brother David, had been converted from crime to Christ whilst suffering the bitter effects of this form of injustice in the Philippines. However Michael's conversion was some thirty years after David who had been brought up in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire and had been converted from crime to Christ, at the age of 20 years old, on the 16 January 1970.

THE FALL, DESPERATION AND RECOVERY



By Mr David Clarke Cert.Ed (Author)

David encountered great conflicts of conscience whilst at the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists Church and seceded over matters of conscience. For two years he wondered what the future held for him and wondered about the direction that he should go. This led him to severe depression thinking that God had rejected him and then to a desperate state of mind resulting in him turning away from God and to open sin. This is the continuing story of David life as told in his book , “*Converted on LSD Trip*”, and relates the journey that led to his fall, his desperation, recovery and restoration to faith in Christ . He tells of the good news he received of his brother Michael and his conversion from crime to Christ, that took place 5 years into a 16 - year prison sentence, in the Philippines. This was 30 years after David ‘s own conversion from crime to Christ, which was the moving factor behind publishing his book, “*Converted on LSD Trip*.” David believes this book will be very useful for people of all ages who wish to see the hand of God at work and in particular for those learning the Christian faith.



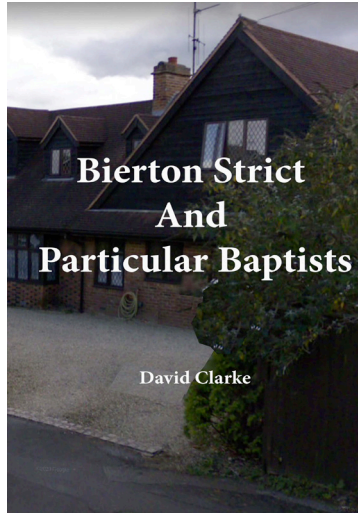
William Ola Poloc

William Ola Poloc, was called from nature's darkness into God's marvelous light, into the kingdom of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This was whilst he was a prisoner, in New Bilibid Prison, Philippines and serving a 14 year prison sentence.

After his conversion, from crime to Christ, he set out too to educate himself, with the aid of other inmates, who had become Christians and began teaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to men.

On his release from prisons, in August 2002, he returned to his own City in Baguio, Philippines, and was commissioned by Christian mission organisation in the United Kingdom, to preach and teach the gospel to inmates in Baguio and Benguet Provincial Jails. William and his wife Beth who too had become a Christian, worked together in gospel ministry and for these past 20 years have established many Christ Centred Churches throughout the Philippines. The book tells this story and relates how many others have been blessed to see the Lord Jesus Christ glorified and introduced to men by the ministry of William Ola Poloc.

BIERTON STRICT AND PARTICULAR BAPTISTS



David Clarke

This is a republication of , *‘Converted on LSD Trip’*, but with a different title in order to attract the attention of Strict Baptists Christians, as it has been realised people do judge a book not only by its cover but also by its title. It is written to bring attention to the reality of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in changing the lives of David Clarke, whilst on a bad trip on LSD, on 16 January 1970, and the life of his brother Michael Clarke, some 30 years later, while a prisoner, in the Philippines, and making them evangelist workers seeking to teach the gospel of Christ to men. It is intended to use this book as a tool for evangelism in order to encourage others in the work of preaching the gospel of Christ to men.

It also points to, *Let Christian Men Be Men*, and *Bierton Strict And Particular Baptists And the Association of Grace Baptists Churches*, which demonstrates that religious world get things wrong. This is also intended to draw attention to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ now in Baguio City, Philippines, by William O. Poloc, a former inmate of New Bilibid Prison. It is believed and stressed that it is important to teach the traditional Christian doctrines of grace, to combat the error of modern-day Godliness, unbelief, homosexuality, feminism, Islam and of the importance of teaching the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the infallibility of the word of God



David Clarke

This was originally published as *The Bierton Crisis* and is the personal story of David Clarke a member of the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptist church. He was also the church secretary and minister sent by the church to preach the gospel in 1982.

The Bierton Church was formed in 1832 and was a Gospel Standard cause who's rules of membership are such that only the church can terminate ones membership.

This tells of a crisis that took place in the church in 1984, which led to some members withdrawing support. David, the author, was one of the members who withdrew but the church did not terminate his membership as they wished him to return.

This story tells in detail about those errors in doctrine and practices that had crept into the Bierton church and of the lengths taken to put matters right. David maintained and taught Particular Redemption and that the gospel was the rule of life for the believer and not the law of Moses as some church members maintained.

This story tells of the closure of the Bierton chapel when David was on mission work in the Philippines, in December 2002 and when the remaining church members died. It tells how David was encouraged by the church overseer to return to Bierton and re-open the chapel.

On David's return to the UK he learned a newly unelected set of trustees

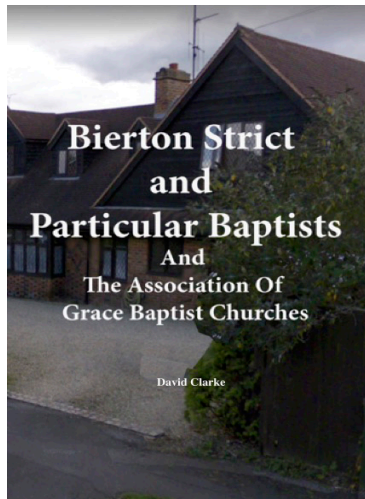
had take over the responsibility for the chapel and were seeking to sell it. The story tells how he was refused permission to re-open or use the chapel and they sold it as a domestic dwelling, in 2006.

These trustees held doctrinal views that opposed the Bierton Church and they denied David's continued membership of the Church in order to lay claim too and sell the chapel, using the money from the sale of the chapel for their own purposes.

David hopes that his testimony will promote the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, as set out in the doctrines of grace, especially Particular Redemption and that the rule of life for the believer being the gospel of Christ, the royal law of liberty, and not the law of Moses as some reformed Calvinists teach, will be realized by the reader.

His desire is that any who are called to preach the gospel should examine their own standing and ensure that they can derive from scripture the doctrines and practices they teach and advance and that they can derive the truths they teach from scripture alone and not from the traditions of men or their opinions however well they may be thought of.

BIERTON STRICT AND PARTICULAR BAPTISTS AND THE ASSOCIATION OF GRACE BAPTIST CHURCHES



David Clarke

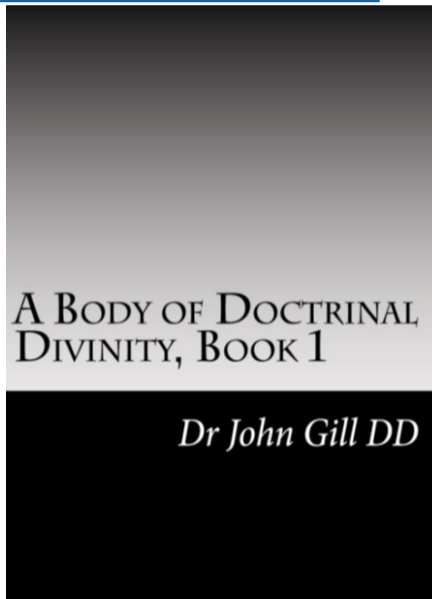
[YOUTUBE VIDEO \(Click to View\)](#)

This book is a personal account of the author and relates the difficulties connected with the closure of the Bierton Strict Baptists Chapel in December, 2002. The Bierton chapel belonged to the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists a Society of Strict Baptists formed in 1831.

Upon the closure of the chapel the Trust Deed was passed on to The Association of Grace Baptists Churches Ltd, who registered the trust deed in their name and sold the Chapel.

David Clarke is the sole remaining member of the Chapel, as told in his book, *Let Christian Men Be Men*, and maintains the Association of Grace Baptist Churches acted unlawfully as they were not elected by the Church according to the terms of the Trust Deed. David alone is entitled to register the chapel and Church in his own name as sole Trustee. This book relates the story.

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY BOOK 1



A System of Practical Truths

Authored by Dr John Gill DD

THIS IS BOOK 1

Treating The Subjects:

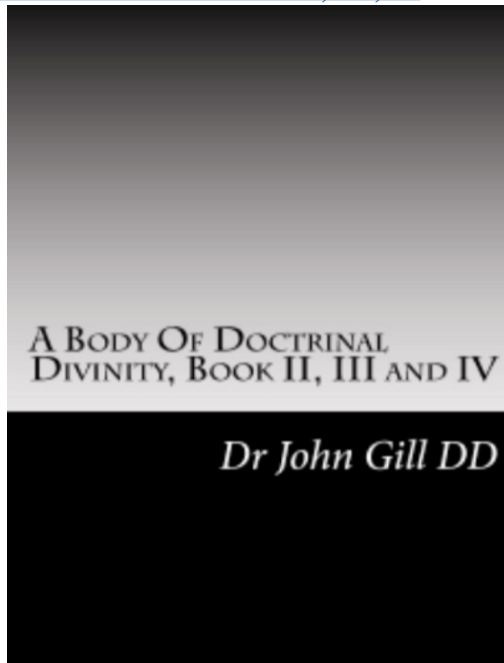
Of God, His Works, Names, Nature, Perfections And Persons. And Contains:

Chapters

1 Of The Being of God

2 Of The Holy Scriptures

- 3 Of The Names of God
- 4 Of The Nature of God
- 5 Of The Attributes of God In General, and of His Immutability In particular.
- 6 Of The Infinity of God,
- 7 Of The Life of God.
- 8 Of The Omnipotence of God.
- 9 Of The Omniscience of God.
- 10 Of The Wisdom of God.
- 11 Of The Will of God and the Sovereignty of It
- 12 Of The Love of God
- 13 Of The Grace of God.
- 14 Of The Mercy of God.
- 15 Of The Long suffering of God.
- 16 Of The Goodness of God.
- 17 Of The Anger And Wrath of God.
- 18 Of The Hatred of God.
- 19 Of The Joy of God.
- 20 Of The Holiness of God.
- 21 Of The Justice or Righteousness of God.
- 22 Of The Veracity of God.
- 23 Of The Faithfulness of God
- 24 Of The sufficiency and Perfection of God.
- 25 Of The Blessedness of God.
- 26 Of The Unity of God.
- 27 Of A Plurality In The Godhead, or, A Trinity Of Persons In The Unity of the Divine Essence.
- 28 Of The Personal Relations; or, Relative Properties, which distinguish The three Divine Persons In The Deity.
- 29 Of The Distinct Personality, and deity of The Father.
- 30 Of The Distinct Personality, and deity of The Son.
- 31 Of The Distinct Personality, and deity of The Holy Spirit.



A System Of Practical Truths
 Authored by Dr John Gill DD,

The contents of Book II treats the subject of the Acts and Works of God
 Chapter I Of the Internal Acts And Works Of God; and of His Decrees in General

Chapter II Of the Special Decrees of God, Relating to Rational Creatures, Angels, and Men; and particularly of Election.

Chapter III Of The Decree of Rejection, of Some Angels, and of Some Men.

Chapter IV Of The Eternal Union of the Elect of God unto Him.

Chapter V Of Other Eternal and Immanent Acts in God, Particularly Adoption and Justification.

Chapter VI Of The Everlasting Council Between the Three Divine Persons, Concerning the Salvation Of Men.

Chapter VII Of The Everlasting Covenant of Grace, Between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Chapter VIII Of the part which the Father takes In the Covenant.

Chapter IX Of the part the Son Of God, the Second Person, has taken In the Covenant.

Chapter X Of Christ, As the Covenant Head of The Elect

Chapter XI Of Christ, The Mediator of The Covenant

Chapter XII Of Christ, The Surety of the Covenant.

Chapter XII Of Christ, the Testator of the Covenant

Chapter XIV Of the concern the Spirit Of God Has in the Covenant Of Grace.

Chapter XV Of the Properties of the Covenant Of Grace

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Chapter 3 Of The Creation of Man

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Chapter 7 Of the Law Given To Adam, And The Covenant made with him in his state of Innocence; In Which he Was the Federal Head and Representative of His Posterity.

Chapter 8 Of The Sin And Fall Of Our First Parents.

Chapter 9 Of the Nature, Aggravations, and Sad Effects Of the Sin of Man.

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Chapter 6 Of The Resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Chapter 7 Of The Ascension of Christ to Heaven

Chapter 8 Of The Session of Christ at the Right Hand of God

Chapter 9 Of The Prophetic Office of Christ

Chapter 10 Of The Priestly Office of Christ

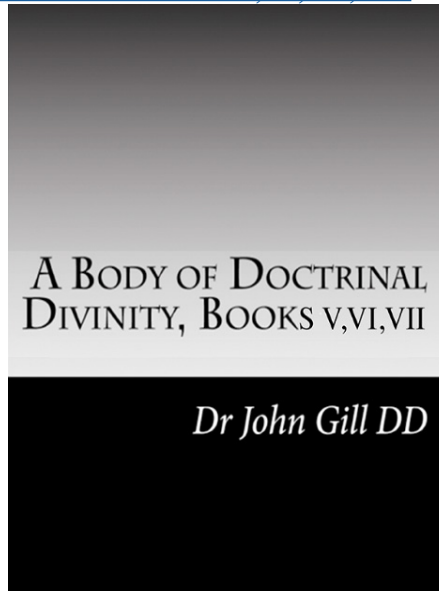
Chapter 11 Of The Intercession of Christ

Chapter 12 Of Christ's Blessing His People as A Priest

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Chapter 14 Of The Spiritual Reign of Christ

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY, V, VI, VII.



**A System OF Practical Truths
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Chapter 4 Of the Passive Obedience of Christ, or of His Sufferings and Death.

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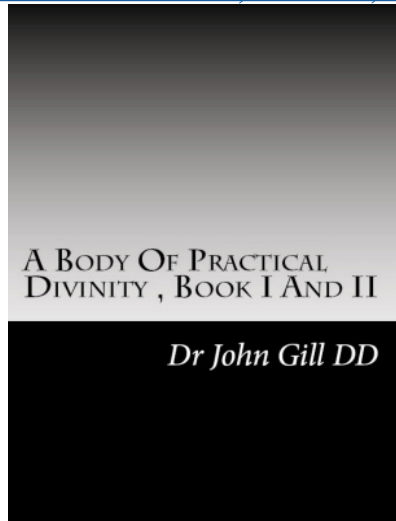
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A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY , BOOK I, II.



A System of Practical Truths

Authored by Dr John Gill DD,

Created by David Clarke Cert. Ed

This reproduction of Dr John Gill's *Body of Divinity* Book I and II of Practical Divinity of total of IV books.

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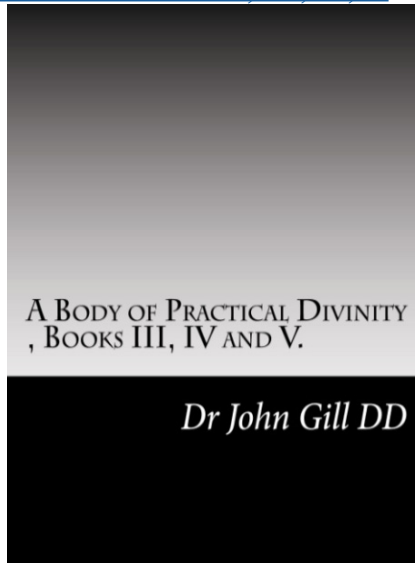
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A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY , III, IV, V.



A System of Practical Truths

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke Cert.Ed

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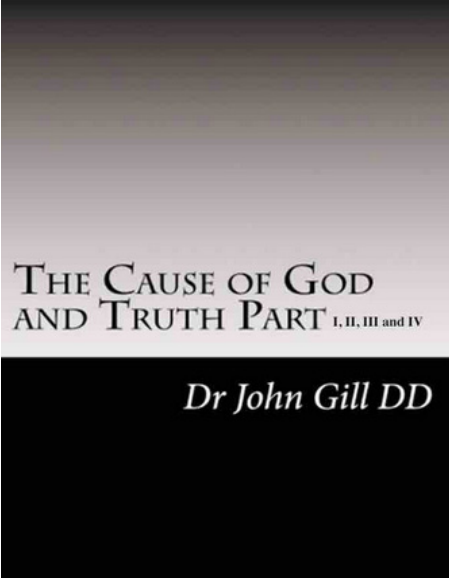
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THE CAUSE OF GOD
AND TRUTH PART I, II, III and IV

Dr John Gill DD

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

It should be known by the reader, that the following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time Dr. Whitby's *Discourse on the Five Points* was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject, in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and it was almost in the mouth of every one, as an objection to the Calvinists, Why do not ye answer Dr. Whitby ? Induced hereby, I determined to give it another reading, and found myself inclined to answer it, and thought this was a very proper and seasonable time to engage in such a work. In the year 1735, the First Part of this work was published, in which are considered the several passages of Scripture made use of by Dr. Whitby and others in favour of the Universal Scheme, and against the Calvinistic Scheme, in which their arguments and objections are answered, and the several passages set in a just and proper light. These, and what are contained in the following Part in favour of the Particular Scheme, are extracted from Sermons delivered in a Wednesday evening's lecture.

The Second Part was published in the year 1736, in which the several passages of Scripture in favour of special and distinguishing grace, and the arguments from them, are vindicated from the exceptions of the Arminian, and particularly from Dr. Whitby, and a reply made to answers and objections to them.

The Third Part was published in 1737, and is a confutation of the arguments from reason used by the Arminians, and particularly by Dr.

Whitby, against the above doctrines ; and a vindication of such as proceed on rational accounts in favour of them, in which it appears that they are no more disagreeable to right reason than to divine revelation ; to the latter of which the greatest deference should be paid, though the Rationalists of our age too much neglect it, and have almost quitted it ; but to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them. In this part of the work is considered the agreement of the sentiments of Mr. Hobbes and the Stoic philosophers with those of the Calvinists, in which the difference between them is observed, and the calumny removed ; to which is added, a Defence of the Objections to the Universal Scheme, taken from the prescience and the providence of God, and the case of the Heathens.

The Fourth Part was published in 1738, in which the sense of the ancient writers of the Christian Church, before the times of Austin, is given ; the importance and consequence of which is shown, and that the Arminians have very little reason to triumph on that account.

This work was published at a time when the nation was greatly alarmed with the growth of Popery, and several learned gentlemen were employed in preaching against some particular points of it ; but the author of this work was of opinion, that the increase of Popery was greatly owing to the Pelagianism, Arminianism, and other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation, This was the sense of our fathers in the last century, and therefore joined these and Popery together in their religious grievances they were desirous of having redressed ; and indeed, instead of lopping off the branches of Popery, the axe should be laid to the root of the tree, Arminianism and Pelagianism, the very life and soul of Popery.

This new edition, with some alterations and improvements, is now published by request.

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This work contains:

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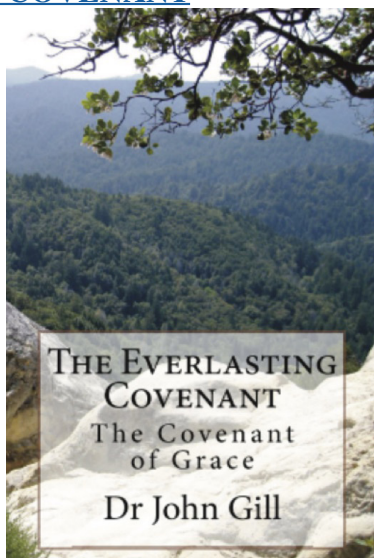
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THE EVERLASTING COVENANT



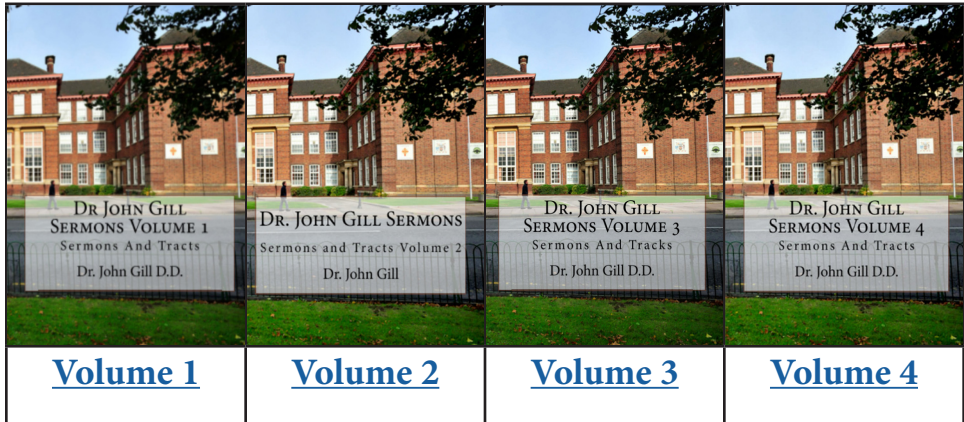
Dr. John Gill

Publisher Preface

The publisher is the only surviving member of the Bierton Particular Baptists and his story of conversion from crime to Christ is told in, '*Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists*,' advertised at the end of this book. At his conversion the publisher could hardly read. He educated himself by reading the bible and classical Christian literature and this book, '*The Everlasting Covenant*,' by John Gill, extracted from John Gill's, '*A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*,' was one of the writings that enabled him to understand the doctrines of grace and join the Bierton

Particular Baptist Church, in 1976. About the Author Dr. John Gill (23 November 1697 – 14 October 1771) was an English Baptist pastor, biblical scholar, and theologian who held to a firm Calvinistic soteriology. Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, he attended Kettering Grammar School where he mastered the Latin classics and learned Greek by age 11. He continued self-study in everything from logic to Hebrew, his love for the latter remaining throughout his life. In his biography of John Gill, Augustus Toplady states: “Perhaps, no man, since the days of St. Augustine, has written so largely, in defence of the system of Grace; and, certainly, no man has treated that momentous subject, in all its branches, more closely, judiciously, and successfully”. What was said of Edward the Black Prince, “That he never fought a battle, which he did not win”; what has been remarked of the great Duke of Marlborough, “That he never undertook a siege, which he did not carry”; may be justly accommodated to our great Philosopher and Divine: who, so far as the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel are concerned, never besieged an error, which he did not force from its strong holds; nor ever encountered an adversary, whom he did not baffle and subdue.”

DR. JOHN GILL'S SERMONS



Volume 1: Sermons And Tracts

Authored by Dr. John Gill D.D.

This is 1 of a 4 volume set.

This is volume 1 of 4 volumes of Dr John Gills sermons and are reproduced for the benefit of Bierton Particular, Pakistan with a view to promote the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the view of the publisher that Dr. J Gill is the clearest and most faithful in preaching and teaching the doctrines of grace. We dismiss the charges, that those who do not agree with him and call him a Hyper-Calvinist and ask you to read or your self and

learn from a master in Israel. Bierton Particular Baptists have republished the whole of Dr. Gills *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity, The Cause of God And Truth*.

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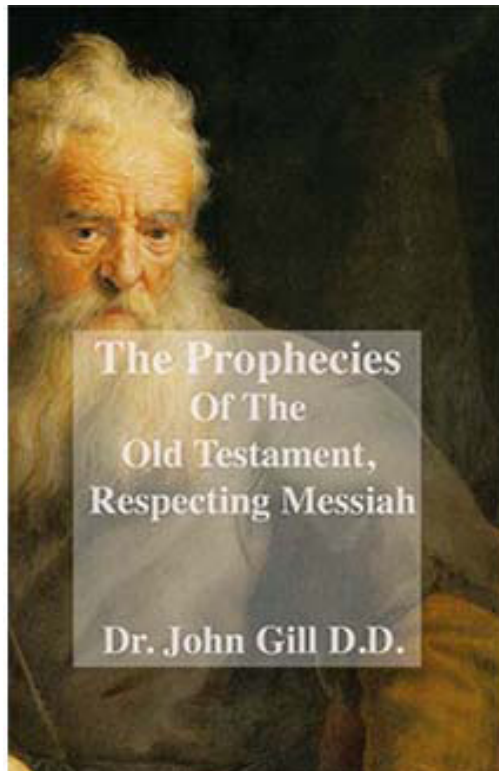
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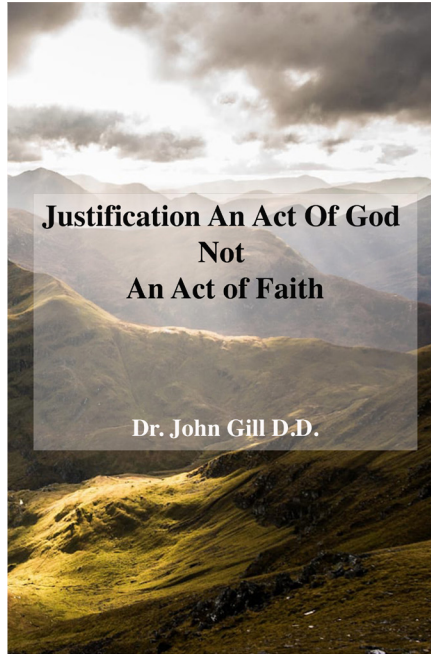
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JUSTIFICATION AN ACT OF GOD

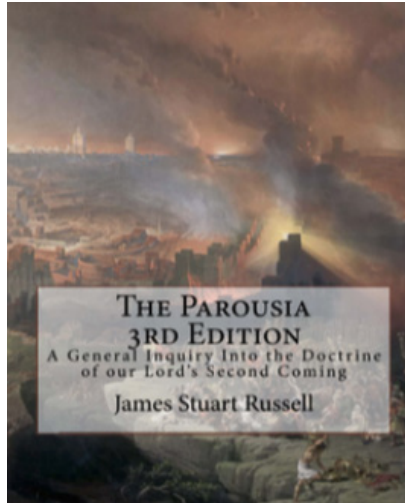


Dr. John Gill

John Gill (1697-1771) is known as a Bible expositor, theologian, and defender of Christian orthodoxy. He was a deep, thorough, and meticulous thinker, defending what he understood to be biblical truth. He often dealt with controversial subjects and sought to clarify in detail scriptural teaching on important doctrines.

One important and controversial doctrine that Gill thoroughly dealt with was the doctrine of justification. One controversial aspect of justification involves the timing of justification. This paper will argue that Gill held to justification from eternity, meaning justification actually occurred in the eternal decree of God to justify His elect. The importance Gill places on this particular doctrine can be better appreciated when it is understood how Gill arrives at his particular assertions. His view of justification from eternity will be approached by examining his definition of justification, his view of the time of justification, and how justification is applied. The conclusion will summarize why this subject was important to Gill.

THE PAROUSIA



James Stuart Russell

James Stuart Russell's, *'High Praise For The Parousia'*, is an excellent work that looks at the New Testament teaching of the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the book of Revelation tells of those events leading up to and including his coming. Luke 23, verse 28. But Jesus turning into them said. 'Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me, but weep for your selves and for your children. 29. For behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. 20 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains fall on us and to the hills cover us. 30. For if they do these things in the green tree what shall be done in the dry? The book of Revelation is a prophecy that Jesus gave to the Apostle John before the Neronic persecution in 66 A.D. He was told to write and inform the seven churches in Asia about those things that were shortly about to come to pass in his day. It relates to those things leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and immediately afterwards. It told of the judgment God, styled the Day of Vengeance, on the city called Babylon for her sins and breach of the first Covenant. This Babylon was the city of Jerusalem whose people and leaders had rejected the Lord Jesus Christ and turned their back on the Mosaic covenant. The day of vengeance was day when the cup of God's wrath that was poured out on her who was

called Mystery Babylon, The Mother of Harlots and this was to bring an end of rule of the Mosaic Law, bringing it to its fulfillment as Jesus had said I come not to destroy the law but to fulfill the Law and to bring in the New Covenant order called the law of Christ. It is impossible to understand the book of Revelation if one takes for granted that the date of its writing was after the fall and destruction by Titus, in 70 A.D. Most scholars assume the book was written about 96 A.D. 16 years after the event and so it has become impossible for them to establish a correct interpretation of the book.

Ed Stevens

FOREWORD BY EDWARD E. STEVENS

The word “Parousia” (**par-oo-see-ah**) is not a household word, but students of end time prophecy know it is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ. It comes from two Greek words (“**para**” beside, and “**ousia**” state of being) and literally means “to be beside” (present with someone). It came to be a more specific reference to important people coming for an extended (but not long-term) visit to one of their subject territories (a “visitation”). It can refer either to the initial arrival or the afterward presence. It is used in the New Testament almost exclusively of Christ’s Second Coming.

Russell examines every significant New Testament text about Christ’s return, to see when it would occur and what it would be like. Since he believed the Second Coming occurred in the first century at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, his view is labeled “Preterist.”

The word “Preterist” is another prophetic term with which many are unfamiliar. According to *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, a Preterist is “a theologian who believes the prophecies of the Apocalypse have already been fulfilled.” A Preterist is the opposite of a Futurist. Futurists teach that the three major end time events (parousia, resurrection, judgment) are still future in fulfillment, whereas Preterists teach these events have already been fulfilled. Some may wonder what difference it makes?

Everything crucial to Christianity is at risk. The Deity of Christ, the integrity of the apostles and prophets, and the inspiration of the New Testament is at stake. How so?

Jesus and the NT writers repeatedly make time- restricted predictions about His return and the other end time events. They do not merely suggest that Christ’s Parousia might occur in their lifetime, they unequivocally affirm it.

Liberals, skeptics, and Jewish/Islamic critics use those “time statements” to discredit Jesus and the New Testament. Inspired men cannot make mistakes. Since Jesus and the NT writers predicted Christ’s return to occur in their lifetime, and it supposedly didn’t happen, they assume Jesus and the

NT writers were mistaken.

Indeed, if we cannot trust their prophetic utterances, we cannot trust anything else they say. Christianity is totally discredited if those predictions failed to materialize exactly as they prophesied.

You might wonder what these “time texts” are? Matthew 16:27-28 is a good example. This book deals with every one of them. They were not mistaken when they predicted Christ’s return in their lifetime. It really occurred, at AD 70.

Theologians who study end time prophecy consider Russell’s book a classic defense of the Preterist view. It is this book, more than any other during the past 125 years, which has moved so many toward Preterism.

Many in the Reformed faith (e.g., R. C. Sproul, Sr., David Chilton, Gary DeMar, Ken Gentry, Gary North, Jim Jordan, et al) credit Russell’s book as having a significant impact on their eschatological views. R. C. Sproul, Sr. says he looks favorably at Preterism because it is the only view of prophecy which effectively counters the liberal-skeptic-critic attack. He has written much to recommend Russell’s book and encourage the spread of Preterism, even though he does not go as far as Russell does. In his Foreword to the 1999 Baker Books reprint of *The Parousia* (pp. ix-x), Sproul says:

Russell’s work is valuable chiefly for his analysis of the time-frame references of New Testament prophecy and his understanding of the main reference to the parousia. ...Russell’s book has forced me to take the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem far more seriously than before, to open my eyes to the radical significance of this event in redemptive history. It vindicates the apostolic hope and prediction of our Lord’s close-at hand coming in judgment.... I can never read the New Testament again the same way I read it before reading *The Parousia*.

Until this book appeared in 1878, Preterism had little systemization. This book began that process, and remains one of the most consistent and comprehensive explanations of Preterism available. The Preterist view flourished in Germany and Britain. But America, still recovering from civil war, took little notice. In global terms, its impact is still marginal, but it has seen significant growth in the past ten years, and the Internet is one of the big factors stimulating that. What the Gutenberg printing press did for the Protestant reformation, the Internet did for the Preterist reformation.

The Internet is the perfect place to publish helpful material like this. One of the first books to be posted on Preterist websites was Russell’s *Parousia*. Even though the electronic version has had many readers in the short five years it has been available, it has not diminished demand for printed copies. This book is destined to remain a Preterist classic.

Russell did a remarkable job of interpretation compared to previous centuries. He pointed the way in a number of areas that we are only just now beginning to develop further. He devoted over 170 pages to the book of Revelation. One of his best statements is there. He uses the “time” statements in the first three verses of Revelation to show how crucial the date of writing is to the interpretation of the book:

It may truly be said that the key has all the while hung by the door, plainly visible to every one who had eyes to see; yet men have tried to pick the lock, or force the door, or climb up some other way, rather than avail themselves of so simple and ready a way of admission as to use the key made and provided for them. (Parousia, p. 367)

Russell leaves no excuses for Futurism. His survey of all the “Parousia” (second coming) references is a tour de force in Preterist exegesis. This book was the first wave of what has become a whole storm of books defending the AD 70 fulfillment of end time prophecy.

Futurists and Partial Preterists for too long have hidden behind the excuse of wanting explicit “time indicators” before assigning a text to AD 70. Russell and modern Preterists have exhaustively shown that all NT end time texts have first century “audience relevance” written all over them, which functions as an implicit time indicator. The New Testament was not written to us originally. We are reading someone else’s mail. The primary task of a Bible interpreter is to discover what the original author intended to communicate to his original audience, not just to ask what it “could” mean to us today.

THREE DIFFICULT TEXTS SIMPLIFIED

There are three scriptures which most partial preterists think are yet to be fulfilled: Acts 1:11, 1 Cor. 15:20-57, and 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Russell shows that an AD 70 fulfillment is the most consistent interpretation of these texts. However, he does not deal very much with Acts 1:11. As a result, many Futurists and Partial Preterists have used this text to teach another major return of Christ still in the future. Modern Preterists have now shown that these three texts contain implicit time indicators and contextual clues which connect them inseparably to the Parousia and final consummation in AD 70. For a fuller explanation of these three texts from a Preterist perspective, see the three books written by this author (Stevens Response To Gentry, Questions 5 About The Afterlife, and Expectations Demand A Rapture).

In those books, we deal especially with the typological imagery of Christ’s ascension into the cloud- filled heavenly Holy of Holies to present His own blood to make final atonement, and His “second appearance” back out of the heavenly temple to announce atonement to His anxiously waiting

saints. The Acts 1:11 reference to the return of Christ is easy to apply to AD 70 when we realize it is speaking of the reverse of the visible ascent of Christ in Theophany form. His descent would follow the same Theophany pattern as His ascent, meaning that it would be visible like His departure. He ascended visibly with clouds and angels in the presence of a few disciples, and the two angels (Acts 1:10-11) promised that He would descend visibly “in like manner” in that same Theophany pattern to only those disciples whom He wished to see it. Both the going away and the return were “cloud comings” (Theophanies) accompanied by angels. He left the same way He would return (in clouds with the angels) to appear to his anxiously waiting disciples (“How long, O Lord?” and “O, our Lord, come!”). They expected His return before all of that generation died. Some of them were promised to remain alive until His return, and that they would literally “see” it before they all died (Matt. 16:27-28 and John 21:22f).

Even some partial preterists (e.g. Kenneth Gentry in his book, *Before Jerusalem Fell*) have agreed that Rev. 1:7 (which mentions a “cloud coming” or Theophany which “every eye would see”) was fulfilled in AD 70. Since most expositors connect Rev. 1:7 with Acts 1:11, it seems reasonable to assign both Rev. 1:7 and Acts 1:11 to the visible Theophany that was seen by the Jewish people just before the war in AD 66. Notice what R. C. Sproul, Sr. said about the angelic appearances in the sky in AD 66 and its connection to Rev. 1:7 –

“...the Old Testament prophets, when speaking of a real historical visitation of God in judgment upon cities and nations, used exactly this kind of language in a metaphorical way to describe that coming of divine judgment... As some 19th century scholars...Jonathan Edwards...B.B. Warfield and others have suggested, what Jesus is talking about here on the Mount of Olives [Matt. 24:3] ...is the end of the Jewish age. And that the coming that he’s talking about, and that he’s warning these contemporaries about over and over again... that was coming on that generation...was the judgment of God that was coming on Jerusalem and the temple in the year 70 AD.... Was Jesus visible? Did “every eye see him” [Rev. 1:7] and all of that? No. Although, one of the weirdest passages you ever read in ancient history is the paragraph that is found in Josephus [Wars, Bk 6, Ch 5, Sect. 3]. I quote it in my book [The Last Days According to Jesus, p. 124]... After talking about some remarkable, astonishing celestial events that some people had reported, he said, “Besides these a few days after that feast, on the one-and-twentieth day of the month Artemisius ...before the setting of the sun, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds...” ...The overwhelming testimony of the contemporaries

(and he was there as an eyewitness) was that people did see something in the clouds. And what is it they saw? They saw chariots. Is that the first time the chariot throne of God is seen in the clouds over Palestine? What took Elijah to heaven? What were the whirling merkabahs [chariots] Ezekiel beheld? Was not the basic symbol in the Old Testament of the movable judgment throne of God, his chariots of fire? And here we have the testimony of many, many people saying they saw these chariots running about the clouds right before the end of Jerusalem. ...It lends credence to the further application of Jesus' predictions of what would come in this judgment of the nation of Israel and of the city of Jerusalem..." [R. C. Sproul, Sr. "Last Days Madness" speech, 1999 Ligonier Ministries National Conference in Orlando. Bracketed material inserted by the author of this Foreword.]

Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, Bk 3, Ch 8, Section 5) quotes this same material from Josephus, and Tacitus (*Histories*, Book 5, "About The Jews") alludes to the same events. Sproul's comments stimulate several thoughts. If Rev. 1:7 was fulfilled by the appearance of angels and chariots in the sky at AD 66, and if Acts 1:11 is speaking of the same judgment coming (or cloud coming, Theophany) of Christ, then what text teaches a still future visible coming of Christ? If the angelic armies literally seen in the clouds at AD 66 were the fulfillment of "every eye shall see Him" (Rev. 1:7) as Sproul has allowed as a possibility, then it was also the fulfillment of Acts 1:11! In Matt 16:27-28, which R. C. Sproul, Sr. affirms is AD 70, it states that some of those disciples would not taste death until they saw Christ return. It therefore seems logical that the visible coming of Christ at AD 66-70 which is mentioned in Matt. 16:27-28 must be the same coming dealt with in both Rev. 1:7 and Acts 1:11.

The commander of the angelic hosts (Christ) was present with His angelic armies on that occasion (AD 66), just like Rev. 19:11-21 pictures for us. This was the visible return of Christ with His angels to judge His enemies and reward His saints, as both Rev. 1:7 and Acts 1:11 had predicted. Matt. 24:29-31 and Luke 21:25-28 also indicated there would be visible "signs" accompanying the return of Christ with His angels to raise the dead out of Hades, perform the judgment, and reward His faithful saints. This fulfills the "in like manner" terms of the Acts 1:11 text. Both Rev. 1:7 and Acts 1:11 fit the Matt. 16:27-28 "visibility" pattern.

It is also clear from the similarities between 1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thess. 4 that these two "parousia" texts are speaking of the same AD 70 return of Christ. Since both texts state that the resurrection will occur in connection with the "parousia" (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:15-17), and since the NT does not distinguish between two different parousia's separated by thousands of

years, and since this parousia is said to occur in the lifetime of some who would “live and remain” until it occurred (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15), then it is clear that these two texts were fulfilled in AD 70. This forces some adjustment in our concepts about the nature of fulfillment once we get the time of fulfillment straightened out. All three of these difficult second coming texts have been explained from a consistent AD 70 fulfillment. This leaves partial preterists nowhere to hide. We can thank Russell for pointing the way toward this approach to these three texts.

A LITERAL RAPTURE

Another area in which Russell greatly served the interests of future generations was the rapture. Four other scholars within a generation of Russell also taught the idea of a literal rapture in AD 70 (Milton S. Terry, E. Hampden-Cook, Richard Weymouth, and William S. Urmy). There are minor differences in the way each of these men described it, but all agreed there was a removal of some true Christians in connection with the return of Christ in AD 70. Modern advocates of a literal AD 70 rapture (such as Garrett Brown, Walt Hibbard, Arthur Melanson, Ian Harding, Ed Stevens, and others) go further to assert that all true Christians (and nothing but true Christians) alive at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem were “snatched away” to be with Christ in the spiritual realm. Russell suggested that only some Christians were caught up – a “partial rapture” with the sleepers or unwatchful Christians left on earth. But it seems from Jesus’ sharp criticism of that group in Matthew 25 (and in the book of Revelation) that the sleepers or unwatchful were not true Christians. The tribulation and apostasy eliminated the insincere. By the time of the rapture the only watchful, awake, and “worthy ones” were the true Christians. There would have been few (if any) pretenders and “mere professing Christians.” So in either view, the group of saints actually raptured is basically the same, whether we see it as only the watchful Christians, or as true Christians only.

The arguments we all use to establish the necessity of a literal rapture in AD 70 are exactly the same. The strongest arguments are the Biblical “expectation statements.” Scripture alone is our standard, not scripture plus history, tradition or anything else. The only authoritative material that we can use to make any final decisions about what did or did not occur in AD 70 is the Bible. If it says the Parousia was going to occur in AD 70, that should be enough. We shouldn’t have to be convinced by history or any external arguments. If the text of scripture says something is going to occur within a certain time frame, then we are bound to believe it, regardless of whether we can find external historical or traditional support for it, and regardless of whether our credulity is stretched to the breaking point. The

same thing happened in the field of archaeology in regard to the Hittites and Darius the Mede. The Bible was the only evidence we had for the existence of these people for a long time, yet that did not make advocates of sola scriptura doubt the veracity of the Bible. So for sincere believers, the question boils down to this: What did the NT writers believe, teach, and expect to see, hear, and experience at the Parousia? Did they expect to experience the Parousia in any conscious way? Did they expect to “know” it had occurred afterwards? Or did they expect it to happen totally in the invisible realm without being consciously aware of it in any way? It is these Biblical “expectation statements” that also need to be examined, not just the “time statements.”

We Preterists have pressed Futurists with the “time statements,” and rightly so, because they are “sola scriptura” arguments. They are Biblical statements that need to be dealt with. So are the “expectation statements.” What the “time statements” do for Preterism in general, the “expectation statements” do for the rapture view in particular. The time statements nail down the “time” of the parousia and its related events, while the expectation statements reveal the content and “nature” of those events in the experience of the Church.

Just because the Parousia may not have been validated historically in the way some might have preferred, it never stopped us from seeing it as a fulfilled “fact.” The “time statements” forced us to believe that it must have occurred, regardless of a lack of historical confirmation. Even if we are unable to find external historical proof for a literal rapture in AD 70, it does not invalidate the Bible’s affirmation of it. Our concern is simply, “What does Scripture actually teach?”

Rapture advocates have been accused of teaching a rapture based only on external historical “arguments from silence.” Not so! Scripture is the driving force. The expectation statements are Biblical arguments, just like the time statements. The time statements help establish the time of fulfillment, while the expectation statements help determine the nature of fulfillment. As you study the following list of Biblical passages, find the answers to these two questions: (1) What does Jesus say is actually going to be seen and experienced by His saints at the Parousia? (2) What do the NT writers and pre-70 Christians indicate that they were expecting to actually see and experience at the Parousia? (Matt. 16:27-28; 19:28; 24:31; John 14:2-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 2 Cor. 5:1-4; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; 2:1; and 1 Jn. 3:2). These texts show clearly what the first century Church expected to experience at the Parousia.

Paul said that when Christ would come to cast His enemies “away

from His presence” and gather His saints (2 Thess. 1:6–2:1), that the saints would “marvel at Him” in His presence and in the presence of all who have believed, and Christ would be glorified by their collective presence with Him “on that day.” That doesn’t sound like a very silent occasion to me. Did they fail to “recognize the time of His visitation” and remain silent (as if it had not occurred). They should have been celebrating and proclaiming the fulfillment of His Parousia (if they were still around). There is a strange silence here, at the very time when we would have expected anything but silence, when they said they would be marveling at Christ in His presence. Their silence does not match their expectations, unless they were doing those things in the heavenly realm (no longer on the earthly scene).

If all living Christians remained on earth after AD 70, why didn’t some of those who saw these incredible events in AD 70 say something about it? Why the silence, if they were still around? Russell and the other four scholars mentioned above proposed the literal rapture to explain that silence. Silence is not a significant argument all by itself. But as Sherlock Holmes would agree in the case of the dog that didn’t bark when a supposed outsider broke in, sometimes silence is significant, especially when the circumstances would force us to expect otherwise. Expectations demand our attention even in the case of silence, if the Bible clearly teaches us to expect something other than silence. And it does.

For more in depth studies of the rapture at the parousia in AD 66-70, see this author’s book entitled, *Expectations Demand A Rapture*, and the excellent series of articles written by Ian Harding.

THE MILLENNIUM

Russell was uncomfortable with any view of the Millennium which ended at AD 70 (p. 514). He considered such a short duration of the millennium (40 years or less) to be “so violent and unnatural that we cannot hesitate to reject it” (p. 514). He suggested the millennium only began at AD 70 with a limited “first” resurrection and judgment (of the righteous only), and is still ongoing in history and moving toward a yet future final resurrection and judgment of the rest of the dead (the wicked only – p. 518). It seemed to him that the Millennium was “introduced parenthetically” as an exception to the AD 70 time limits of the rest of the book (p. 514).

He noted that some people (such as myself) consider the idea of a Millennium after AD 70 as challenging the imminent time indicators throughout the book of Revelation. We would prefer a 40-year millennium (AD 30-70) which stays within those time limits.

Russell places a flashback to AD 70 at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:10), so that the white throne judgment in Rev. 20:11ff takes place in AD

70. Preterists who take the 40-year approach cannot disallow his flashback, since we insert one at the beginning of the millennium.

Russell's millennium interpretation deserves careful consideration. He acknowledged his understanding of it might not be perfect, and held out the hope that succeeding generations "will soon correct what is proved to be erroneous, and confirm what is shown to be right." (p. 535)

In conclusion, I have to repeat how impressed I am with Russell's exegetical work here. Many thousands of Bible students all over the world have been, and will continue to be, blessed by this book. We send this reprint forth with strong encouragement to seriously and objectively consider everything he has to say, and to "search the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so." (Acts 17:11)

Edward E. Stevens

Bradford, Pennsylvania July, 2003.

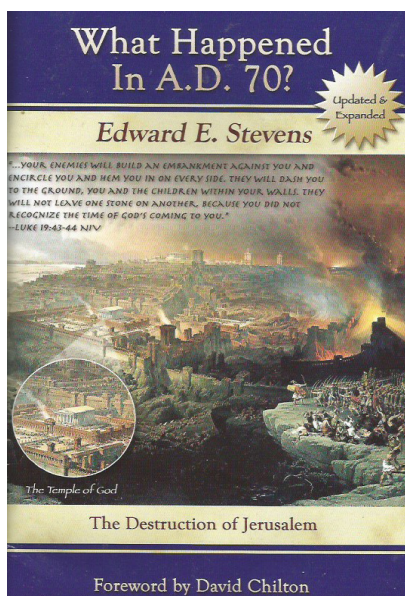
FOREWORD BY Don Preston

A reformation – indeed – a revolution of sorts is taking place in modern evangelical Christianity. And while many who are joining in and helping promote this movement are not even aware of it, the book you hold in your hand has contributed greatly to initiating this new reformation. This "new" movement is sometimes called full preterism, (Also, and preferably by this writer, Covenant Eschatology). It is the belief that all Bible prophecy is fulfilled. The famous evangelist Charles H. Spurgeon was deeply impressed with the scholarly, solid research in the book, although he did not accept the "final" conclusions reached by Russell. In modern times, this work has, and continues to impress those who read it. The reason is simple, the New Testament is emphatic and unambiguous in positing Christ's coming and the end of the age for the first century generation. To say this has troubled both scholars and laymen alike is an understatement of massive proportions. This book first appeared in 1878 (anonymously), and again in 1887 with author attribution. The book was well known in scholarly circles primarily and attracted a good bit of attention, both positive and negative. The public, however, seemed almost unaware of the stunning conclusions and the research supporting those conclusions, until or unless they read of Russell's work in the footnotes of the commentaries. Scholars have recognized and grappled with this imminence element, that is the stated nearness of the day of the Lord, seldom finding satisfactory answers. Scholars such as David Strauss accused Jesus of failure. Later, Bultmann said that every school boy knows that Jesus predicted his coming and the end of the world for his generation, and every school boy knows it did not

happen. C.S. Lewis also could not resolve the apparent failed eschatology. Bertrand Russell rejected Christianity due to the failed eschatology - as he perceived it - of Jesus and the Bible writers. As a result of these “skeptical” authors, modern Bible scholarship has followed in their path and Bible commentaries today almost casually assert the failure of the Bible writers - and Jesus - in their eschatological predictions. This is where Russell’s work is of such importance. While Russell was not totally consistent with his own arguments and conclusions, nonetheless, his work is of tremendous importance and laid the groundwork for the modern revolution known as the preterist movement. Russell systematically addressed virtually every New Testament prediction of the eschaton. With incisive clarity and logical acumen, he sweeps aside the almost trite objections to the objective nature of the Biblical language of imminence. With excellent linguistic analysis, solid hermeneutic and powerful exegetical skills, Russell shows that there is no way to deny that Jesus and his followers not only believed in a first century, end of the age parousia, but, they taught it as divine truth claiming the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as their authority. Russell not only fully established the undeniable reality of the first century imminence of “the end,” he powerfully and carefully shares with the reader that “the end” that Jesus and the N.T. Writers were anticipating was not the end of the time space continuum (end of the world). It was in fact, the end of the Old Covenant Age of Israel that arrived with the cataclysmic destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. Russell properly shows how the traditional church has so badly missed the incredible significance of the end of that Old Covenant Age. Russell’s work is a stunning rejection – and corrective -- of what the “Orthodox” historical “Creedal” church has and continues to affirm. The reader may well find themselves wondering how the “divines” missed it so badly! Further, the reader will discover that Russell’s main arguments are an effective, valid and true assessment of Biblical eschatology. And make no mistake, eschatology matters.

Don K. Preston.

WHAT HAPPENED IN A.D. 70



Edward E. Stevens

This book introduces a view of Bible prophecy which many have found extremely helpful in their Bible study. It explains the end time riddles which have always bothered students of Bible prophecy. It is a **consistent view** which makes the book of Revelation much easier to understand. It establishes when the New Testament canon of scripture was completed, demolishes the liberal attack on the inspiration of the New Testament, and is more **conservative on** most other issues than traditional views. And there is **no compromise** of any essential Biblical doctrine of the Christian faith.

The key to understand any passage of scripture has always been a good grasp of the historical setting in which it was originally written (**audience relevance**). Two thousand years from now our history, culture, politics and language will have changed dramatically. Imagine someone then having to learn the ancient language of “American English” to read our USA newspapers! If they saw one of our political cartoons with a donkey and elephant, what would they think? How would they go about understanding it? Not only would they have to study the language, but also our culture, history, politics and economics. The same applies to Bible study. If we are really going to understand what all the “donkeys and elephants” (beasts, harlots, dragons, etc.) symbolize in the book of Revelation, we will have to seriously and carefully study the language, history, culture and politics of the First Century. Of course, the truths essential for salvation are couched in simple language that everyone can grasp. But there are numerous scriptures

in the Bible which are “hard to understand” (cf. 2 Pet 3:16), and Bible prophecy is one of those things which must be approached with much more focus on the original historical art cultural context (audience relevance)

One of the main purposes of this book is to provide a closer look at the historical framework behind the New Testament. Many have found it helpful to lay aside (at least temporarily) the legion of speculative opinions about the book of Revelation, and look at a more historical alternative, which is that **the book of Revelation was written to the first century church and had primary relevance to them.** It warned of events that were about to happen in their lifetime, and prepared them for the tribulation and other events associated with the End of the Jewish Age.

Atheists, skeptics, Jew, Muslims, and liberal critics of the bible use the supposed failure of those end times events to occur in the First Century to undermine the integrity of Christs and the inspired NT writings.

Non-Christian Jews laugh at this supposed non-occurrence, and use it as evidence that Jesus is not the Messiah. Their forefathers in the flesh rejected Jesus in His first coming because He did not fulfill the Old Testament prophecies in the materialistic and nationalistic way that they were expecting, even though Jesus told them that His Kingdom was not of this world, and that it would be within them instead. Yet it seems that many futurists today are expecting that same kind of materialistic and nationalistic kingdom to arrive at a future return of Christ Are they making the same mistake about the Second Coming that the Jews made about His first coming? Jesus repeatedly said His Kingdom is “not of this world” and that it would “not come with observation.” It is a spiritual entity, and it has arrived We live in it. Both futurist Christians and non-Christian Jews need to realize this.

Christians are finally beginning to seek alternatives to the fatally flawed **futurist** interpretation. This book introduces the Preterist view.

“Preterist” simply means past in fulfillment It means that Christ has already fulfilled His promise to return and consummate redemption in Himself and His ongoing spiritual kingdom (the church). We should be like the noble-minded Bereans and “search the scriptures daily to see whether these things are true” You might want to have your Bible open alongside as you read.

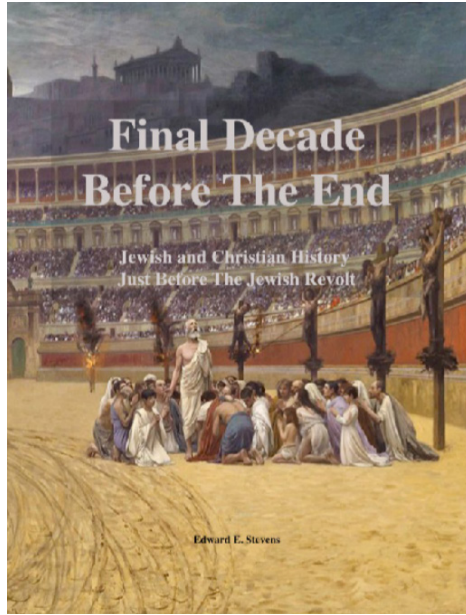
Edward E. Stevens

INTERNATIONAL PRETERIST ASSOCIATION

Bradford, Pennsylvania

April 17,2010

FINAL DECADE BEFORE THE END



Edward E. Stevens

Ever since the booklet, **What Happened In AD 70?** Was published in 1980, there have been constant requests for more detailed information about the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish, Roman, and Christian history associated with it. Over the years since then I have studied Josephus, Yosippon, Hegesippus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Eusebius, the Talmud, Midrash, Zohar, Pseudepigrapha, Church Fathers, Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish/Christian writings, trying to determine exactly what happened, when it happened, and the effect it had upon the Church.

Then in 2002, after I began to promote J. S. Russell's view of a literal rapture, the demand for historical documentation of the fulfillment of all eschatological events dramatically increased. That forced me to dig much deeper. So in 2007 I put together a 21-page chronology of first century events. Two years later in 2009, we published a more substantial 73-page manuscript entitled, *First Century Events in Chronological Order*. That helped fill the void, but it did not go far enough. It only increased the appetite for a more detailed and documented historical reconstruction of first century events.

The book of Acts does not give a lot of details about the other Roman and Jewish events that were happening while Paul was on his various missionary journeys. For those events, we have to go to the other contemporary Jewish and Roman historians such as Josephus and Tacitus. The closer we get to AD

70, the more important all of those Jewish and Roman events become. They form an important backdrop behind the Christian events, and show how all the predictions made by Jesus were literally fulfilled. Every High Priest and Zealot leader that we encounter from AD 52 onwards are directly connected with the events of the Last Days. Things are heating up, not only for the Christians, but also for the Jews and the Romans.

Paul on his missionary journeys was clearly following a plan which was providentially arranged for him by Christ: (1) to plant new churches among all nations and not just Jews, (2) appoint elders and deacons in every church (Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 4:17), (3) write inspired epistles to guide them, (4) instruct his fellow workers to “teach these things to faithful men who would be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2), and (5) establish the Gentiles in the Church and make them one united body with the Jews (Eph 4). Everywhere Paul went, he followed this pattern. We see this clearly as we study the historical narrative in Acts and Paul’s other epistles that were written during this time. These are essential patterns that the apostles evidently bound upon both Gentile and Jewish Christians, and which were intended to be the pattern for all future generations of the eternal Church (Eph 3:21; 2Tim 2:2).

We begin our study by looking at the most likely dates for Matthew (AD 31-38) and Mark (AD 38- 44), and then proceed to the first three epistles of Paul (Galatians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians), which were written on his second missionary journey (AD 51-53). Including these five books in our study allows us to date all twenty-seven books of our New Testament, and show how the NT canon was formed and completed before the outbreak of the Jewish War in AD 66. The study of New Testament canonization in itself is a good reason for reading this work, without even looking at the historical fulfillment of all of the end time prophecies that we document here.

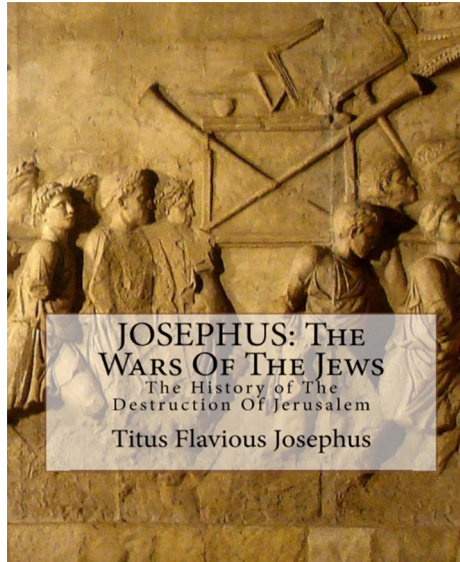
After looking at the dates for those first five books, we then move on into the third missionary journey of Apostle Paul which began in AD 54. It was during this final dozen years (from AD 54 until AD 66) when the birth pangs and signs of the end started increasing in both intensity and frequency, along with a quickening pace of NT books being written. We show how 19 of our 27 NT books (70 percent) were written during those last five years just before the Neronic persecution (AD 60-64). The Great Commission was finished, and the rest of the end time events predicted in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled during that time of “tribulation” upon the church and the “days of vengeance” upon the unbelieving Jews (Luke 21:22).

Edward E. Stevens

INTERNATIONAL PRETERIST ASSOCIATION

April 17,2010

JOSEPHUS: THE WARS OF THE JEWS



The History of The Destruction Of Jerusalem

Authored by Titus Flavius Josephus, Designed by Translated by William Winston

Josephus was an eye witness to those events that he records in this book, 'The Wars of The Jews', or 'The History of The Destruction Of Jerusalem'.

He records historic events that took place during and after the times of the New Testament scriptures.

The book of Revelation was a prophecy, given to Jesus Christ, and published by the Apostle John, about those things that were shortly to come to pass in his day.

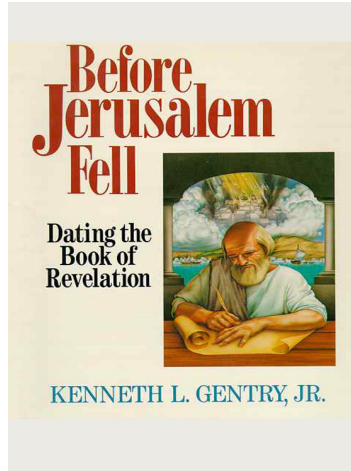
From the internal evidence of the book Revelation was written before the Neronic persecution, of A.D. 66 and before the fall off Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, in A.D. 70 This is because the book records that the temple in Jerusalem was still standing at the time the book was written and not around A.D. 95 as Eusebius mistakenly says.

The historic events that Josephus records are remarkable as they give evidence to the fulfillment of prophecy given by the Lord Jesus in his Olivet prophecy. In fact the book of Revelation was a prophecy of those events that were shortly to come to pass when Jesus spoke to John who wrote the Revelation. Jesus had informed his Apostles about future events and they lived in expectation of there fulfillment in their day.

Josephus gives the historic evidence of the fulfillment of those prophecies and that confirms scripture fulfillment.

We recommend the James Stuart Russell's book, *'The Parousia'* as a very good introduction to this subject and advertised at the back of this book in our Further Publications.

BEFORE JERUSALEM FELL



By Kenneth Gentry

"Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation" is a doctoral dissertation seeking to demonstrate that Revelation was written prior to the destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD 70 and that it was prophesying that event. It proves this early date for Revelation by providing both internal evidence from within Revelation and external evidence from Church history and tradition. It provides much exposition of the text of Revelation. A large part of the argument deals with the identity of the beast (666) as Nero Caesar, the first imperial persecutor of the Church.

