

Richard Baxter  
(1615-1691)

**The Cure of Melancholy**  
**and**  
**Excessive Sorrow**  
**by**  
***Faith and Medicine***  
**1671**

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*Formatted, modernized, and annotated by*  
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## Note on Modernization

The King James language has been updated by replacing *thee* and *thine* with *you* and *yours*, etc. Baxter's parenthetical style has been made more orderly; run-on sentences have been parsed out. Awkward syntax has been adjusted. Missing or understood words are filled in; ambiguous pronouns are now explicit. His mixed singular and plural pronouns have been made consistent. Scripture references are supplied and super-scripted where they might be helpful; his own references are in parentheses. Roman numerals were largely changed to Arabic, and his numbering scheme has been corrected in places. Unusual words, word usage, and spellings have been modernized and Americanized. Where context or clarification was needed, I supplied an explanatory footnote. His excessive use of "and" has been curbed.

Based on its length, this sermon may have gone on for three hours, over multiple sessions. It doesn't actually provide the "cure" for depression (melancholy), so much as its *treatment*, a way back from the downward spiral which characterizes the malady: it progresses from a deep sense of sorrow, failure, oppression, uselessness, or helplessness, into despair, withdrawal, self-condemnation, self-hatred, and even self-harm. Sufferers need to escape this maelstrom as quickly as possible, by no longer looking inward, but looking upward to God. "*He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, From those who hated me, For they were too strong for me.*" Psa 18:16-17

So this is as much about our assurance of salvation, and confidence in God's love, as dealing with a mental and emotional breakdown. Melancholy, for believers, is also a *spiritual* battle, a *moral* contest, a *testing* of our faith — even though we're crippled in our capacity to engage the enemy. We need to admit to ourselves, and to others, that we *cannot* effectively fight in our own strength; we need Christ to intercede for us, and to uphold us under enemy fire. And we need other believers to come around us, to support, encourage, and provoke us. We may also bear some responsibility for perhaps entering the field of battle without donning the full armor of God. Thus Baxter comforts, but he also exhorts the reader — both those who suffer from melancholy, and those who care for them. He suffered from it himself, and overcame it. But for others, it can be a lifelong struggle, as it was for Charles Spurgeon.

The treatment? We need to be steeped in the truth of God; we need wise counsel; we need the body of Christ to draw around us in His name. We cannot and we must not go it alone. Wolves love to see a sheep separated from the flock, without sheepdog or Shepherd to protect it.

Baxter's counsel addresses such issues. He recognizes there may be a bodily debilitation as well — disease may have initiated, contributed to, or exacerbated our spiritual vulnerability. For Baxter, it was consumption. And so he offers medical advice concerning diet, general health, and medicine. Some was helpful, but some was not. So I've excised his formulas and recipes, lest someone concoct and imbibe them. Remember, the 17<sup>th</sup> century was an age of blood-letting, purging, and mercury potions — as likely to worsen the mental and physical state as to improve it. What remains is Baxter's biblical counsel, which is ever valuable.

**William H. Gross**

[www.onthewing.org](http://www.onthewing.org) Oct. 9, 2024

**The  
CURE OF MELANCHOLY  
and  
EXCESSIVE SORROW,  
by Faith and Medicine. <sup>1</sup>**

**Question.** — What are the best preservatives against melancholy and excessive sorrow?

*Lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up  
with excessive sorrow... 2Cor 2.7.*

The brevity of a sermon not allowing me time for any unnecessary work, I will not stay to open the context, nor to inquire whether the person spoken of here is the same one condemned for incest in 1Cor 5.1, or some other; nor whether Chrysostom had good tradition for it, that it was a teacher of the church, or was made such after his sin; nor whether the late expositor <sup>2</sup> is right, who gathers from this that he was one of the bishops of Achaia, and it was a synod of bishops who were to excommunicate him. He further held that this very congregation then had a bishop who was to be excommunicated in the congregation, that the people should not have followed or favored such a teacher; and that it would not have been a schism or sinful separation to have forsaken him.

All that I now intend, is to open this last clause of the verse. It gives us the reason why the censured sinner, being penitent, should be forgiven and comforted — namely, “lest he be swallowed up with excessive sorrow.” For this includes these three doctrines, which I will handle altogether:

1. That sorrow, even for sin, may be excessive.
2. That excessive sorrow swallows one up.
3. Therefore it must be resisted and assuaged by necessary comfort, both by others, and by ourselves.

In handling these, I will observe this order:

- I. I will show you when sorrow is excessive.
- II. How excessive sorrow swallows a man up.
- III. What are its causes.
- IV. What is the cure.

**I. When sorrow, even for sin, may be excessive.**

It is too well-known that excessive sorrow for sin is not the ordinary case of the world. A stupid, blackish disposition is the common cause of men’s perdition. The plague of a hard heart and seared conscience, keeps most men from all due sense of sin, danger, or misery,

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was written for the morning exercises at Cripplegate, but not preached. The omissions in the folio edition of Baxter’s works are inserted from the original edition of the sermon, in the “Continuation of Morning Exercise Questions, and cases or conscience, practically resolved by various ministers, in October 1682.”

<sup>2</sup> That is, Dr. Hammond.

and of all the great and everlasting concerns of their guilty souls. A dead sleep in sin deprives most people of the use of sense and understanding. They do some of the outward acts of religion as in a dream. For example, they are vowed to God in baptism by others, and they profess to stand to it themselves. They go to church and repeat the words of the creed, and the Lord's prayer, and the commandments. They receive the Lord's Supper. And they do all this as in a dream! They take it upon themselves to believe that sin is the most hateful thing to God, and hurtful to man. And yet they live in it with delight and obstinacy. They dream that they repent of it, when indeed, no persuasion will draw them to forsake it; and meanwhile they hate those who would cure them. They dream they are not as bad and mad as those who would see in them any effectual sorrow for what is past, or effectual sense of their present badness, or effectual resolution for a new and holy life. They must dream there is a judgment, a heaven, and a hell — for wouldn't they be more affected with things of such unspeakable consequence, if they were awake? Would they be wholly taken up with the matters of the flesh and world, and scarcely have a serious thought or word about eternity, if they were awake? O how sleepily and senselessly they think, and talk, and hear of the great work of man's redemption by Christ, and of the need of justifying and sanctifying grace, and of the joys and miseries of the next life — and yet they *say* that they believe them!

When we preach or talk to them of the greatest things, with the greatest evidence, and plainness, and earnestness that we can, we speak as to the dead, or to men who are asleep. They have ears, and do not hear; nothing goes to their hearts. One would think that a man who reads in Scripture, and believes the everlasting glory offered, and the dreadful punishment threatened — the necessity of holiness to salvation, and of a Savior to deliver us from sin and hell, and how sure and near such a passage into the unseen world is to us all — that he would be affected to moderate and bear the sense of such overwhelming things. But most men so little regard or feel them, that they have neither time nor heart to think of them as their concern. Rather, they hear of them as of some foreign land, where they have no interest, and which they never think to see. Yes, one would think by their senseless neglect of preparation, and their worldly minds and lives, that they were asleep or in jest when they confess that they must die — and think that when they lay their friends in the grave, and see the skulls and bones cast up, they were all this while but in a dream, or didn't believe their turn is near. If we could tell how to awaken sinners, they would come to their senses, and have other thoughts about these great things, and show it quickly by another kind of life. Surely awakened reason could never be so duped and drunken as we see the wicked world to be. But God has an awakening day for all, and he will make the most senseless soul to feel, whether by grace or punishment.

Because a hardened heart is so great a part of the malady and misery of the unregenerate — and because a soft and tender heart is so much of the new nature promised by Christ — many awakened souls under the work of conversion, think they can never have sorrow enough, and that their danger lies in hard-heartedness. They never fear *excessive* sorrow till it has swallowed them up. Indeed, though there is too much of other causes in it, if any of it is for sin, then they cherish sorrow as a necessary duty; or at least they don't perceive the danger of excess. Some think those are the best Christians who are most in doubts, and fears, and sorrows, and speak almost nothing but uncomfortable complaints; *but this is a great mistake.*

**1. Sorrow is excessive when it is fed by a mistaken cause.** All sorrow is too much where none is due, and great sorrow is too much when the cause only requires less. If a man thinks that something is a duty, which is not a duty, and then sorrows for omitting it, such sorrow is all too much because it is *undue*, and caused by *error*. I have known many who have been greatly troubled because they could not bring themselves to that length or order of meditation for which they had neither the ability nor the time. And many are troubled because they could not reprove sin in others, when prudent instruction and discretion was more suitable than reproof. And many are troubled because in their shops and callings they think of anything but God, as if our outward business must have no thoughts at all.

Superstition always breeds such sorrows, when men make religious duties for themselves which God never made for them, and then come short in the performance of them. Many dark souls are assaulted by the erroneous, and told they are in a wrong way and must take up some *error* as a necessary *truth*. And so they are cast into perplexing difficulties, and perhaps turn from the truth which they accepted before. Many fearful Christians are troubled about every meal they eat, about their clothes, their thoughts and words, thinking or fearing that all is sinful which is in fact lawful, and that unavoidable *infirmities* are heinous *sins*. All such things as these are troubles and sorrows without cause, and therefore they are excessive.

**2. Sorrow is excessive when it hurts and overwhelms nature itself, and destroys bodily health or understanding.** *Grace* is the due qualification of nature, and *duty* is the right employment of it; but neither of them must destroy it. As civil, ecclesiastic, and domestic governments are for edification and not for destruction, so also is *self-government*. *God will have mercy and not sacrifice.* <sup>Mat 9.13</sup> He that would not have us kill or hurt our neighbor on the pretense of religion, would not have us destroy or hurt *ourselves*, for we are bound to love our neighbor as ourselves. Just as fasting is a duty no further than it tends to some good — such as to express or exercise true humiliation, or to mortify some fleshly lust, etc. — so it is with sorrow for sin. It is too much when it does more hurt than good. But more of this next.

## **II. How excessive sorrow swallows one up.**

When sorrow swallows up the sinner, it is excessive, and it is to be restrained. Such as,

1. The passions of grief and trouble of mind often overthrow the sober and sound use of reason, so that a man's judgment is corrupted and perverted by it. In that case, it is not to be trusted. Like a man in raging anger, so is someone in fear or great trouble of mind. He doesn't think of things as they are, but only as his passion represents them — things about God and religion, about his own soul and his actions, or about his friends or enemies. His judgment is perverted, and usually false. Like an inflamed eye, he thinks all things are of the same color as itself. When sorrow perverts reason, it is excessive.

2. Excessive sorrow disables a man from governing his thoughts. And ungoverned thoughts must be both sinful and very troublesome. Grief carries them away as in a torrent. You may almost as easily keep the leaves of trees in stillness and order in a blustering wind, as to so keep the thoughts of someone in troubling passions. If reason wishes to stop them from perplexing subjects, or turn them to better and sweeter things, it *cannot* do it; it has no power against the stream of troubling passions.

3. Excessive sorrow would swallow up faith itself, and greatly hinder its exercise. The gospel calls us to believe matters of unspeakable joy. And it is amazingly hard for a grieved, troubled soul to believe anything that is a matter of joy, much less of so great a joy as pardon and salvation. Though it dares not flatly lie to God, it hardly believes His free and full promises, and the expressions of His readiness to receive all penitent, returning sinners. Passionate grief serves to feel somewhat contrary to the grace and promises of the gospel, and that feeling hinders faith.

4. Excessive sorrow hinders hope even more, when men think that they believe God's word, and that His promises are all true for others, yet they cannot hope that the promised blessings are true *for themselves*. Hope is that grace by which a soul who believes the gospel to be true, comfortably expects that the benefits promised will be his own; it is an *applying* act. The first act of faith says the gospel is true, which promises grace and glory through Christ. The next act of faith says, 'I will trust my soul and all upon it, and take Christ for my Savior and help.' And then Hope says, 'I hope for this salvation by Him.' But melancholy — overwhelming sorrow and trouble — is as great an adversary to this hope as water is to fire, or snow to heat. Despair is its very pulse and breath. Such people would gladly *have* hope, but they *cannot*. All their thoughts are suspicious and misgiving; they can see nothing but danger and misery, and a helpless state. And when hope — which is the anchor of the soul — is gone, it is no wonder that they are continually tossed with storms.

5. Excessive sorrow swallows up all comfortable sense of the infinite goodness and love of God, and thereby it hinders the soul from loving Him. And in this it is an adversary to the very life of holiness. It is exceedingly hard for such a troubled soul to apprehend the goodness of God at all, but much harder to judge that He is good and amiable to him. Rather, he is like a man in the deserts of Libya, scorched with the violent heat of the sun, and ready to die with drought and faintness. He may confess that the sun is the life of the earth and a blessing to mankind, but it is misery and death to him. Even so, these souls, overwhelmed with grief, may say that God is good to others, but seems like an enemy to them and seeks their destruction. They think He hates them, and has forsaken them; and how can they love such a God who they think hates them, and resolves to damn them, and has decreed them to this from eternity, and brought them into the world for no other end? Those who can hardly love an enemy that only defames them, or oppresses and wrongs them, will hardly love a God more, whom they believe will damn them, and has appointed them to it without remedy.

6. And then it must follow that this disorder <sup>3</sup> is a false and injurious judge of all the word and works of God, and of all His mercies and corrections. Whatever such a person reads or hears, he thinks it is all against him. He thinks every *sad word* and *threatening* in Scripture is meant for him, as if it named him. But he has no part in the *promises* and *comforts*, as if he had been excepted by name. All God's mercies are extenuated, and are not taken as mercies, as if God intended them all but to make his sin greater, and to increase his heavy reckoning, and further his damnation. He thinks God but sugar-coats what is poison to him, and gives it all in hatred

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<sup>3</sup> Originally *distemper*; at the time it meant an imbalance or disordering of the four humors: blood (sanguine, or optimistic), phlegm (phlegmatic, or calm), yellow bile (choleric, or hot-tempered), and black bile (melancholic, or sad). Per ancient Greek medicine, these four "humors" were believed to govern a person's health and behavior.

and not in any love, with a design to sink him even deeper in hell. And if God corrects him, he supposes it is but the beginning of his misery, and God is tormenting him before the time.

7. By this you see that sorrow is an enemy to thankfulness; it reproaches God for his mercies, as if they were injuries, rather than giving Him any hearty thanks.

8. And by this you may see that this disorder is quite contrary to the joy in the Holy Spirit; yes, and to the peace in which God's kingdom largely consists; *nothing* seems joyful to such distressed souls. Delighting in God, and in His word and ways, is the flower and life of true religion. But those whom I speak of can delight in *nothing*: not in God, nor in his word, nor in any duty. They are like a sick man who eats his food for mere necessity, and does it with some loathing and averseness.

9. All of this shows us that this disease is greatly contrary to the very tenor of the gospel. Christ came as a deliverer of the captives, a Savior to reconcile us to God, and to bring us glad tidings of pardon and everlasting joy. Where the gospel was received, it was with great rejoicing, and so proclaimed by angels and by men. But under this disease, all that Christ has done, purchased, offered, and promised, seems nothing but a matter of doubt and sadness.

10. It is a disorder that greatly advantages Satan to cast in blasphemous thoughts of God — as if He were bad, and a hater and destroyer even of those who would gladly please Him. The design of the devil is to describe God to us as being like him — a malicious enemy who delights to do hurt. And if all men hate the *devil* for his hurtfulness, wouldn't he draw men to hate and blaspheme *God*, if he could make men believe that God is even more hurtful? The worship of God, as represented by an *image*, is odious to God because it seems to make Him like a creature, such as that image represents. How much more blasphemous is it to imagine that He is like the malicious devils? Diminutive, low thoughts of God's goodness and His greatness, is a sin which greatly injures God — as if you thought He was no better or trustier than a father or friend, and moreover, to think of Him as disordered souls imagine Him. You would wrong his ministers if you described them as Christ describes the false prophets: as hurtful thorns, thistles, and wolves. And isn't it worse to think far worse than this about God?

11. This excessive sorrow unfits men for all profitable meditation. It confounds their thoughts and turns them to hurtful distractions <sup>4</sup> and temptations; so that the more they muse, the more they are overwhelmed.

- It turns prayer into mere complaint, instead of child-like-believing supplications.
- It quite indisposes the soul to God's worship, especially to a comfortable sacramental communion; and it fetches greater terror from it, lest *unworthy receiving* only hasten and increase their damnation. <sup>1Cor 11.27</sup>
- Too often it renders preaching and counsel unprofitable; say what you will, however convincing, either it does not change them, or else it is quickly lost.

12. It is a disorder which makes all sufferings heavier, as falling upon a poor diseased soul who has no comfort to set against it. And it makes death exceedingly terrible, because they

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<sup>4</sup> *Distraction*, as used throughout, means mental or emotional turmoil; it is such agitation, distress, or sorrow that it incapacitates us in whole or in part. It doesn't momentarily grab our attention; it more or less consumes us. — WHG

think death will be the gate of hell. So that life seems burdensome to them, and death terrible. They are weary of living, and afraid of dying.

*Thus excessive sorrow swallows one up.*

### **III. What are its causes.**

**Quest.** What are the causes and cure of it?

**Ans.** With very many, most of the cause is found in a disorder, weakness, and disease of the body. The soul is greatly disabled by this, from having any sense of comfort. But the more it arises from such a *natural* necessity, it is less sinful and less dangerous to the soul; but it is never less troublesome, only more.

#### **Three diseases cause excessive sorrow.**

1. Those diseases that consist in such violent pain as natural strength is unable to bear; but this not being very long usually, it is not now chiefly spoken of.

2. A naturally passionate nature, and a weakness of that reason which should quiet that passion. It is too frequently the case with *aged* persons, who are greatly debilitated, to be apt to offence and passion; and *children* cannot help but cry when they are hurt. But it is most troublesome and hurtful to many women (and some men) who are so easily troubled, and hardly quieted, that they have very little power over themselves. Even many who fear God, and who have very sound understandings and quick wits, have almost no more power against troubling passions, anger, grief, and especially fear, than any other persons.

Their very natural temper is a strong disease of troubling, sorrow, fear, and displeasement. Even those who are not melancholy, still have so childish, sick, and impatient a temper, that one thing or another still discontents, grieves, or frightens them. They are like an aspen-leaf, still shaking with the least motion of the air. 'The wisest and most patient man cannot please and justify such a person. A word, even a look, offends them; every sad story, news, or noise frightens them. Just as children must have all they cry for before they will be quiet, so it is with too many adults. The case is very sad to those around them, but much more to themselves. To dwell with the sick in the house of mourning is less uncomfortable. Yet, so long as reason is not overthrown, the case is not remediless, nor wholly excusable.

3. But when the brain and imagination are crazed, and reason is partly overthrown by the disease called *melancholy*, this makes the cure still more difficult. For commonly it is the aforesaid persons, whose natural temper is timorous<sup>5</sup> and passionate and apt to discontent and grief, who fall into crazedness and melancholy. And the conjunction of both the natural temperament and the disease, increases the misery.

#### **The Signs of Diseasing Melancholy**

Elsewhere I have often described the signs of such diseasing melancholy. Such as,

1. The trouble and disquiet of the mind that then becomes a settled habit; they can see nothing but matters of fear and trouble. All that they hear or do feeds it; danger is fixed before their

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<sup>5</sup> *Timorous*: naturally timid or fearful.



eyes. All that they read and hear seems against them. They can delight in nothing. Fearful dreams trouble them when they sleep, and distracted thoughts keep them awake. It offends them to see another laugh, or be merry. They think that every beggar's case is happier than their own. They find it hard to believe that anyone else is in their case, when some two or three in a week, or a day, come to me in the same case; it is so alike, you would think it was the same person's case which they all express. They have no pleasure in relations, friends, estate, or anything. They think that God has forsaken them, and that the day of grace is past, and there is no more hope. They say they cannot pray except to howl and groan, and God will not hear them. They won't believe they have any sincerity <sup>6</sup> and grace. They say they cannot repent, and cannot believe, but that their hearts are utterly hardened. Usually they are afraid that they have committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit. In a word, fears, and troubles, and near *despair* are the constant temper of their minds.

2. If you convince them that they have some evidences of sincerity, and that their fears are baseless and injurious to themselves, and to God, they have nothing to say against it. Yet either it takes away none of their trouble, or else it returns the next day; for the cause remains in their bodily disease. Quiet them a hundred times, and their fears return a hundred times.

3. Their misery is that what they think, they cannot help but think. You may as well try to persuade a man not to shake in a fever, or not to feel when he is pained, as to persuade them to cast away their self-troubling thoughts, or not to think all the enormous and confounding thoughts that they do. They cannot get them out of their heads night or day. Tell them that they must forbear long musings which disturb them, and they cannot do it. Tell them that they must cast false imaginations out of their minds when Satan casts them in, and that they must turn their thoughts to something else, and they cannot do it. Their thoughts, troubles, and fears are outside their power, and more outside by how much more melancholy and crazed they are.

4. When they have gotten to this point, they usually seem to feel something speak in them, as it were, besides themselves, saying this and that to them, and bidding them to do this or that. And they will *tell* you that now it says this or that, and will tell you when and what it has said to them. They find it hard to believe how much of it is the disease of their own imagination.

5. In this case, they are exceedingly prone to think they have revelations; whatever comes into their minds, they think some revelation brought it there. They say, this text of Scripture at such a time was set upon my mind, and at another time, that text was set on my mind. Often the sense they took it in was false, or they made a false application of it to themselves. Perhaps several texts were applied to contrary conclusions, as if one gave them hope, and another contradicted it.

And upon this, some of them are very prone to prophecies, and truly believe that God has foretold them this or that, till they see that it doesn't come to pass; then they are ashamed. Many of them turn heretical, and take up errors in religion, truly believing that God believed them, and set such things upon their minds. Some who have been long troubled, get quietness and joy by such changes of their opinions, thinking that now they are in God's way, which

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<sup>6</sup> In this context, *sincerity* means saving faith (sincere belief).

they were out of all this while; and this was the reason they had no comfort. Of these, I have known diverse persons be comforted, who have fallen into the clean contrary opinions. Some have turned papist, and superstitious; some have run too far from papists; some have found comfort by becoming anabaptists, some antinomians, some Arminians, some perfectionists, some Quakers. Some have turned from Christianity itself to infidelity; they have denied the life to come, and lived in licentious uncleanness. But these melancholy heretics and apostates usually cast off their sadness by doing this. They are not the sort that I will now deal with.

6. But the sadder, better sort, feeling this talk and stirring within them, are often apt to be confident that they are possessed by the devil, or at least bewitched. I will say more about this shortly.

7. Most of them are violently haunted with blasphemous interjections, at which they tremble, and yet cannot keep them out of their mind. They are tempted and haunted to doubt the Scripture, or Christianity, or the life to come, or to think some ill of God. Oftentimes they are strangely urged, as if by something inside them, to speak some blasphemous word about God, or to renounce Him. They tremble at the suggestion, and yet it still follows them; some poor souls yield to it, and say some bad word against God. And then, as soon as it is spoken, something within them says, 'Now, your damnation is sealed; you have sinned against the Holy Spirit; there is no hope.'

8. When it has gone too far, they are tempted to lay some vow upon themselves never to speak again, or not to eat; some of them have starved themselves to death.

9. And when it has gone too far, they often think they have apparitions, and this and that likeness appears to them, especially lights in the night around their beds. Sometimes they are confident that they hear voices, and feel something touch or hurt them.

10. They flee from company, and can do nothing but sit alone and muse.

11. They cast off all business, and will not be brought to any diligent labor in their callings.

12. When it becomes extreme, they weary of their lives, strongly followed by temptations to do away with themselves, as if something within them were urging them either to drown themselves, cut their own throats, hang themselves, or cast themselves headlong [off some height] — which, alas! too many have done.

13. And if they escape all this, when the disease is ripe, they become quite agitated.

These are the doleful symptoms and effects of melancholy. And therefore, how desirable it is to prevent them, or to be cured while it is only beginning, before they fall into so sad a state.

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### **1. Possession by the Devil**

Here it is necessary that I answer the question whether such persons are possessed with the devil, or not? And how much of all this aforesaid is from him?

I must tell the melancholy person who is sincere, that the knowledge of the devil's agency in his case, may be more to his *comfort* than to his despair.

First, we must know what is meant by Satan's possession, either of the body or the soul. It is not merely his local presence and abode in a man that is called his possession; for we know little of that — how far he is more present with a bad man than a good one. Rather, Satan's possession is exercising his power on a man by such a stated and effectual operation. Now, the *Spirit of God* is present with the worst of men, and He makes many holy motions to the souls of the impenitent. But He is also a settled and powerful agent in the soul of a believer. And so He is said to dwell in believers, and to possess them *by the habit of holiness and love*. Even so, Satan too makes frequent motions to the faithful; but he possesses only the souls of the ungodly *by predominant habits of unbelief and sensuality*.

And so also, Satan is permitted by God to inflict persecutions, and crosses, and ordinary diseases, on the just. But when he is God's executioner of extraordinary plagues, especially on the mind, depriving men of sense and understanding, and working above the bare nature of the disease, *this* is called his possession.

Just as most evil notions on the soul have Satan for their father, and our own hearts as the mothers, so most or many bodily diseases are by Satan, permitted by God; though there are also causes in the body itself. And while our own miscarriages, and moods, and the season, weather, and accidents, may be causes, yet Satan may be a superior cause by these means.

When his operations are such that we call them a *possession*, he may yet work by means and bodily dispositions. Sometimes he works quite above the power of the disease itself, as when the unlearned speak in strange languages, and when bewitched persons vomit iron, glass, etc. And sometimes he only works by the disease itself, as in epilepsies, madness, etc.

From all this it is easy to gather that,

(1.) For Satan to possess the *body* is no certain sign of a graceless state, nor will this condemn the soul of anyone if the *soul* itself is not possessed. No, it is likely there are few of God's children who are not sometimes afflicted by Satan, as the executioner of God's *correction*, and sometimes of God's *trials*, as in the case of Job. Whatever some say to the contrary, it is likely that the thorn in the flesh, which was Satan's messenger to buffet Paul, was some pain, such as a kidney stone which was not yet removed. And after praying three times, we find that he had a promise only of sufficient grace. <sup>2Cor 12.7-9</sup>

(2.) Satan's possession of an ungodly soul is a miserable case, which is a thousand times worse than Satan's possessing of the body. But every corruption or sin is not such a possession, for no man is perfectly without sin.

(3.) No sin proves Satan's damnable possession of a man, except that sin which the man loves more than he hates it, and which he would rather keep than leave, and *willfully* keeps it.

(4.) This is a matter of great comfort to those melancholy, honest souls, if they have but understanding to receive it: that of all men, none loves their sin which they groan under, so little as they do; indeed, it is the heavy burden of their souls. Do you love your unbelief, your fears, your distracted thoughts, your temptations to blasphemy? Would you rather keep them than be delivered from them? The proud man, the ambitious, the fornicator, the drunkard, the gamester, the time-wasting gallants who sit for hours at cards, and plays, and idle chats, the gluttonous pleasures of the appetite — all these *love* their sins, and would not leave them.

Just as Esau sold his birthright for one morsel, they will risk the loss of God, of Christ, and of soul and heaven, rather than leave a swinish sin. But is this *your* case? Do you so love your sad condition? You are weary of it, and heavy laden, and therefore you are called to come to Christ for ease. (Mat 11.28-29.)

(5.) And it is the devil's way, if he can, to haunt those with *troubling* temptations, whom he cannot overcome with *alluring* and *damning* temptations. He raises storms of persecution against them from without, as soon as they are escaping from his deceits. So too he troubles them from within, as far as God permits him. We do not deny that Satan has a great hand in the case of such melancholy persons. For,

1. His temptations caused the sin which God corrects them for.
2. His execution is usually a cause of the disorder of the body.
3. As a tempter, he is the cause of the sinful and troublesome thoughts, and doubts, and fears, and passions, which the disease of melancholy causes.

The devil cannot do what he will with us, only what we give him advantage to do. He cannot break open our doors; but he can enter if we leave them open. He can easily tempt a heavy, phlegmatic body to sloth, a weak and choleric person to anger, a strong and sanguine man to lust, one with a strong appetite to gluttony or drunkenness, and vain, sportful youth to idle plays, gaming, and voluptuousness — when to others, such temptations would have little strength. And so, if he can cast you into melancholy, he can easily tempt you to excessive sorrow and fear, and to distracting doubts and thoughts, and to murmur against God, and to despair, and to think you are still undone; and even to blasphemous thoughts of God. Or if it does not take this way, then to fanatical conceits of revelation, and a prophesying spirit.

(6.) I add that God will not impute Satan's mere temptations to you, but to Satan himself, however bad they are — as long as you do not receive them willingly, but hate them. Nor will He condemn you for those ill effects which are unavoidable from the power of a bodily disease, any more than he would condemn a man for raving thoughts or words in a fever, frenzy, or utter madness. But so far as reason yet has power, and the will can govern passions, it is your fault if you will not use the power, though the difficulty makes the fault less.

**2.** But usually *other* causes go before this disease of melancholy (except in some bodies that are naturally prone to it). And therefore, before I speak of its cure, I will briefly touch on them.

One of the most common causes is sinful impatience, discontents, and cares. These proceed from a sinful love of some bodily interest, and from a lack of sufficient submission to the will of God and trust in Him, and not taking heaven for a satisfying portion. I must necessarily use all these words to show the true nature of this complicated disease of souls. The names tell you that it is a conjunction of many sins, which in themselves are of no small malignity. And if they were the predominant bent and habit of heart and life, they would be the signs of a graceless state. But while they are hated, and do not outweigh grace, but our heavenly portion is more esteemed, and chosen, and sought than earthly prosperity, the mercy of God through Christ pardons it, and will at last deliver us from it all. Yet it suits even a pardoned sinner to know the greatness of his sin, so that he may not favor it, nor be unthankful for forgiveness. I will therefore distinctly open the parts of this sin which bring many into dismal melancholy.

It is presupposed that God tries his servants in this life with manifold afflictions, and Christ will have us bear the cross, and follow him in submissive patience. Some are tried with painful diseases, and some with wrong by enemies, and some with the unkindness of friends, and some with froward, provoking relatives and company, and some with slanders, and some with persecution, and many with losses, disappointments, and poverty.

(1.) And here impatience is the beginning of the working of the sinful malady. Our natures are all too regardful of the interests of the flesh, and too weak in bearing heavy burdens. And poverty has those trials which full and wealthy persons who do not feel them, too little pity. This is especially in two cases:

1st. When men have not only themselves to quiet, but wives and children in want.<sup>7</sup>

2nd. When they are in debt to others, which is a heavy burden to an ingenuous mind, though thievish borrowers make too light of it.

In these straits and trials, men are apt to be too sensible and impatient. When they and their families lack food, and clothing, and warmth, and other necessities for the body, and don't know which way to get supply — when landlords, and butchers, and bakers, and other creditors, are calling for their debts, and they do not have it to pay them — it is hard to keep all this from going too near the heart. And it is hard to bear it with obedient, quiet submission to God, especially for women, whose nature is weak, and liable to excessive passion.<sup>8</sup>

(2.) This impatience turns to a settled discontent and unquietness of spirit, which affects the body itself, and lies all day as a load or continual troubling at the heart.

(3.) Impatience and discontent set the thoughts on the rack with grief and continual cares, how to be eased of the troubling cause; they can scarcely think of anything else. These cares even feed on the heart; and to the mind, they are like a consuming fever is to the body.

(4.) The secret root or cause of all this is the worst part of the sin, which is too much love for the body, and for this world. If nothing were over-loved, it would have no power to torment us. If ease and health were not over-loved, pain and sickness would be more tolerable; if children and friends were not over-loved, their deaths wouldn't overwhelm us with inordinate sorrow; if the body were not over-loved, and worldly wealth and prosperity were not over-valued, it would be easy to endure hard fare, and labor, and want — not only of superfluities and conveniences, but even of what is necessary to health, and yes, to life itself, if God will have it so — at least to avoid such vexations, discontents, cares, inordinate grief, and a troubled mind.

(5.) There is still more sin in the root of it all, and that is, it shows us that our wills are yet too selfish, and not subdued to a due submission to the will of God. Rather, we would be as gods to ourselves, and be at our own choosing, and must have whatever the flesh desires. We lack

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<sup>7</sup> “Want” can mean a complete lack of something; but more often, as here, it means coming short of what is desired, expected, or needed. — WHG

<sup>8</sup> While this may sound sexist to the modern ear, women are indeed more susceptible to depression than men. Take into account the menstrual cycle, post-partem blues, and menopause; consider the burdens of childcare, and too often an absent, lazy, or unsympathetic husband. Then consider the age in which this was written, and the situation women found themselves in politically, socially, and financially. Such dependency and exclusion took their toll. — WHG

a due resigning of ourselves and all our concerns to God. We do not live as children, in due dependence on Him for our daily bread, but must be the keepers of our own provision.

(6.) And this shows that we are not sufficiently humbled for our sin, or else we would be thankful for the lowest state, as being much better than what we deserved.

(7.) And there is apparently much distrust of God and unbelief revealed in these troubling discontents and cares. If we could trust God as well as we trust ourselves, or as we could trust a faithful friend, or as a child can trust his father, how quiet would our minds be in the sense of His wisdom, all-sufficiency, and love?

(8.) This unbelief has a still worse effect than worldly trouble: it shows that men do not take the love of God and the heavenly glory for their sufficient portion, unless they may have what they want or would have for the body in this world — unless they may be free from poverty, and crosses, and provocations, and injuries, and pains. All that God has promised them here or hereafter, even everlasting glory, will not satisfy them. And when God, and Christ, and heaven, are not enough to quiet a man's mind, he is in great want of faith, hope, and love, which are far greater matters than food and clothing.

**3.** Another great cause of such trouble of mind is the guilt of some great and willful sin. When conscience is convicted, and yet the soul is not converted, sin is beloved, and yet feared. God's wrath terrifies them, and yet not enough to overcome their sin. Some live in secret fraud and robbery, and many in drunkenness, in secret fleshly lusts, either self-pollution or fornication. And they know that the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience for such things. Yet the rage of appetite and lust prevails; they despair, and sin; while the sparks of hell fall on their consciences, it changes neither heart nor life. Even so, there is more hope of the recovery of these, than of dead-hearted or unbelieving sinners who work uncleanness with greediness; being past feeling, they are blinded to defend their sins, and plead against holy obedience to God. Brutishness is not so bad as diabolism and malignity. But none of these are the persons spoken of in my text. Their sorrow is not excessive, but too little, as long as it will not restrain them from their sin.

Yet, if God converts these persons, the sins which they now live in may possibly hereafter plunge their souls into such depths of sorrow in the review of them, that it may swallow them up. And when men are truly converted, yet dally with the bait, and renew the wounds of their consciences by their lapses, it is no wonder if their sorrow and terrors are renewed. Grievous sins have so fastened on the conscience of many, as to cast them into incurable melancholy and distraction.

**4.** But among people fearing God, there is yet another cause of melancholy, and of excessive sorrowing, and that is ignorance and mistakes in matters concerning their peace and comfort. I will name some particulars.

(1.) One is ignorance of the tenor of the gospel or covenant of grace, as some libertines (called Antinomians) more dangerously mistake it. They tell men that Christ has repented and believed [*for*] them, and that they may question their faith and repentance no more than they may question the righteousness of Christ. So too, many better Christians don't understand that the gospel is tidings of unspeakable joy to all who will believe it; and that Christ and life are offered freely to those who will accept him; and that no sins, however great or many, are

excepted from pardon for the soul who unfeignedly turns to God by faith in Christ; and that whoever wills, may freely take the water of life; and that all who are weary and thirsty are invited to come to Him for ease and rest.

And they don't seem to understand the *condition* of forgiveness, which is but true consent to the pardoning, saving (baptismal) covenant.<sup>9</sup>

(2.) Many of them are mistaken about the use of sorrow for sin, and about the nature of hardness of heart. They think that if their sorrow is not so passionate as to bring forth tears, and to greatly afflict them, then they are not capable of pardon, even if they consent to all the pardoning covenant. They don't consider that it is not our sorrow for its own sake that God delights in, but the taking down of pride — it is so much of a humbling sense of sin, danger, and misery, that it may make us feel the need of Christ and mercy, and bring us unfeignedly to consent to be his disciples, and to be saved upon His covenant terms. Whether sorrow is much or little, if it does *this* much, then the sinner shall be saved.

As to the length of godly sorrow, some think that the pangs of the new birth must be a long-continued state. Whereas we read in the Scripture that the gospel was still received speedily and with joy by penitent sinners, as being the gift of Christ, and pardon, and everlasting life. Humility and self-loathing must continue and increase, but our first great sorrows may be swallowed up with holy thankfulness and joy.

As for hardness of heart, in Scripture it is taken for such a stiff rebellious obstinacy, that they will not be moved from their sins to obedience, by any of God's commands or threats. It is often called an iron sinew, a stiff neck, etc. But it is never taken for the mere want of tears or passionate sorrow in a man who is willing to obey. The hard-hearted are the rebellious ones. *Sorrow*, even for sin, may be excessive; and a passionate woman or man may easily grieve and weep for the sin which they will not leave; but *obedience* cannot be too much.

(3.) Many are cast down by ignorance of themselves, not knowing the sincerity which God has given them. Grace is weak in the best of us here. And small and weak grace is not very easily perceived, for it *acts* weakly and inconstantly, and is known only by its acts. Weak grace is always joined with too strong a corruption. All sin in heart and life is contrary to grace, and it obscures it. Such persons usually have too little knowledge, and are too unknown at home — unskillful in examining and watching their hearts and keeping its accounts. How can anyone, under all these hindrances, keep full assurance of their own sincerity? If they get some assurances with great effort, then neglect of duty, or coldness in it, or yielding to temptation, or inconstancy in close obedience, will make them question it all again. They will be ready to say it was all but hypocrisy. A sad and melancholy frame of mind is always apt to conclude the worst, and can hardly be brought to see anything that is good, or tends to comfort.

(4.) In such a case, there are too few who know how to fetch comfort from bare probabilities, when they cannot get certainty — and much less from the mere offers of grace and salvation, even when they cannot deny, but are willing to accept them. If none were to have comfort but

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<sup>9</sup> The Baptismal Covenant is a solemn agreement made at baptism between a believer, their congregation, and God, affirming their faith and commitment to living a life patterned after Jesus Christ. For infant baptists, like Baxter, that promise is made on behalf of the infant, by the parents, and later attested by the child's "confirmation." — WHG

those who have assurance of their sincerity and salvation, despair would swallow up the souls of most, even of true believers.

(5.) Ignorance of other men increases the fears and sorrows of some. They think, by our preaching and writing, that pastors are much better than we are. And then they think they are graceless, because they come short of our supposed measures. Whereas, if they dwelt with us, and saw our failings, or knew us as well as we know ourselves, or saw all our sinful thoughts and vicious dispositions written on our foreheads, they would be cured of this error.

(6.) Unskillful teachers cause the griefs and perplexities of very many. Some cannot clearly explain to them the tenor of the covenant of grace. Some are themselves unacquainted with any spiritual, heavenly consolations. Many have no experience of any inward holiness, and renewal by the Holy Spirit. They don't know what sincerity is, nor in what ways a saint differs from an ungodly sinner. Wicked deceivers make out that good and bad differ only a little, if not making out the best to be the worst. So some unskillful men place sincerity in things that are mere duty, as the papists do in their manifold inventions and superstition, and as many sects do in their unsound opinions.

And some describe the state of grace unskillfully and unsoundly. They tell you how far a hypocrite may go. This unjustly discourages and confounds the weaker sort of Christians who cannot amend such mis-expressions of their books or teachers.<sup>10</sup> Too many teachers lay men's comforts, if not their salvation, on controversies which are beyond their reach, and pronounce heresy and damnation against things which they themselves do not understand. Even the Christian world these past twelve or thirteen hundred years, is divided into parties by the teachers' unskillful quarrels about words which they took in several senses. Is it any wonder if the hearers of such things are distracted by them?

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**IV.** I have told you the *causes* of distracted sorrows. I will now tell you *what their cure is*. But, alas! it is sooner told than done. I will begin where the disease begins, and tell you both what the patient himself must do, and what must be done by his friends and teachers.

**1st.** Don't look at the sinful part of your troubles either as better or worse than it is indeed.

(1.) Too many persons in their sufferings and sorrow think they are only to be pitied, and take little notice of the sin that caused them, or which they continue to commit. And too many unskillful friends and ministers only comfort them, when a round chiding and revealing of their sin should be the better part of the cure. If they were more sensible of how much sin there is — in their overvaluing the world and not trusting God; and in their hard thoughts of Him; and their poor, unholy thoughts of His goodness; and in their undervaluing the heavenly glory which should satisfy them in the most afflicted state; and in their daily impatience, cares, and discontents; and in denying the mercies or graces received — this would do more to cure some, than words of comfort. When they say, as Jonah did, "I do well to be angry,"

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<sup>10</sup> One of my hearers fell distracted with reading some passages in Mr. Shephard's *Sincere Believer*, which were not justifiable or sound. [— referring either to Thomas Shepard's *Sound Believer*, or his *Sincere Convert*]



and think that all their denials of grace, and distracting sorrows, and wrangling against God's love and mercy, are their duties, it is time to make them know how great a sinner they are.

(2.) Yet, when they just as foolishly think that all these sins are marks of a graceless state, and that God will take the devil's temptations for their sins, and condemn them for what they abhor, and take their very disease of melancholy as a crime, this *also* needs confutation and reprehension, so that they may not cherish their passions or distress by such error.

**2nd.** Particularly, do not give way to a habit of peevish impatience! Though the damning sin is having carnal love for something, more than having love for God and glory, yet impatience must not pass for ignorance. Didn't you expect sufferings, and bearing the cross, when you first gave yourselves to Christ? And do you now think it strange? <sup>1Pet 4.12</sup> Look for it, and make it your daily study to prepare for any trial that God may bring you to, and then it won't surprise you, and overwhelm you. Prepare for the loss of children and friends, for the loss of goods, and for poverty and want. Prepare for slanders, injuries, or poisons, for sickness, pain, and death. It is your *unpreparedness* that makes it seem insufferable.

And remember that it is just a vile body that suffers, which you always knew must suffer death, and rot to dust. Whoever is the instrument of your sufferings, it is God who tries you by it. And when you think that you are only displeased with men, you are not guiltless of murmuring against God, or else His overruling hand would persuade you to submissive patience.

Especially, let your conscience beware a settled discontent of mind. Don't you still have much better than you deserve? And do you forget how many years you have enjoyed undeserved mercy? Discontent is a continued resistance of God's disposing will, not hesitating to speak some rebellion against it. Your own will rises up against the will of God. It is atheistic to think that your sufferings are not by His providence; and yet you dare to repine against God, and continue in such repining? To whom else does it belong to dispose of you and all the world?

And when you feel distracting cares for your deliverance, remember that this is not trusting God. Care for your own duty, and obey His command, but leave it to Him what you will have. Tormenting cares only add to your afflictions. It is a great mercy of God that he forbids you these cares, and promises to care for you Himself. Your Savior has largely, though gently, reprehended them, and told you how sinful and unprofitable they are — and that your Father knows what you need. <sup>Mat 6.25-34</sup> If He denies it to you, it is for just cause; and if it is to correct you, it is still to profit you; and if you submit to Him and accept his gift, He will give you much better than what he takes from you — even Christ and everlasting life.

**3rd.** Set yourselves more diligently than ever to overcome the inordinate love of the world. It will be a happy use of all your troubles if you can follow them up to their fountain, and find out what it is that you cannot bear the want or loss of, and consequently what it is that you over-love. God is very jealous, even when he loves, against every idol that is loved *too much*, and loved with any of that love which is due to Him. If he takes them all away, and tears them out of our hands and hearts, it is merciful as well as just. I do not say this to those who are troubled only for want of more faith, holiness, communion with God, and assurance of salvation. These troubles might give them much comfort if they rightly understood where they come from, and what they signify. For just as impatient trouble under worldly crosses proves that a man loves the world too much, so impatient trouble, for want of more holiness and

communion with God, shows that such believers are lovers of holiness and of God. Love goes before desire and grief. That which men love, they delight in if they have it; and they mourn for want of it, and a desire to obtain it. The *will* is the *love*; no man is troubled for lack of what he would not have.

But the most common cause of passionate melancholy is at first some worldly discontent and care — either wants or crosses, or the fear of suffering, or the unsuitableness and provocation of someone related to them, or disgrace, or contempt. These things cast them into passionate discontent, and self-will cannot hear the denial of something which they would have. And then, when the discontent has muddled and diseased a man's mind, temptations about his soul come in afterwards. That which began only with worldly crosses, afterwards seems to be all about religion, conscience, or merely for sin and want of grace.

Why couldn't you patiently bear the words, the wrongs, the losses, and the crosses that befell you? Why did you make such a great matter of these bodily, transitory things? Isn't it because you over-loved them? Weren't you in good earnest when you called them *vanity*, and covenanted to leave them to the will of God? Would you have God leave you alone in so great a sin as the love of the world, or in giving any of what is due Him, to creatures? If God should not teach you what to love, and what to set light by, and cure you of so dangerous a disease as a fleshly, earthly mind, then neither should He sanctify you, and fit you for heaven. Souls don't go to heaven against their inclination, like an arrow shot upward; but they go like a fire that naturally tends upward, and earthly downward, according to their like. So when holy men are dead, their souls have a natural inclination upward; it is their *love* that is their inclination: they love God and heaven, and holy company, and their old godly friends, and holy works, even mutual love, and the joyful praises of Jehovah. And this spirit and love is like a fiery nature which carries them heavenward. Angels don't convey them there by force, but conduct them like a bride to her marriage, who is carried all the way by love.

And on the other side, the souls of wicked men are of a fleshly, worldly inclination. They don't love heavenly works and company, and they have nothing in them to carry them to God. Rather, they love worldly trash, and sensual, bestial delights, though they cannot enjoy them; just as poor men love riches, and are vexed for want of what they love. Therefore it is no wonder if wicked souls dwell with devils in the lower regions, and make apparitions here when God permits them — and no wonder if holy souls are *not* liable to such descent. Love is the soul's poise (its weight) and spring, and it carries souls downward or upward accordingly.

Away, then, with the earthly, fleshly love. How long will you stay here; and what will earth and flesh do for you? So far as it may be helpful to holiness and heaven, God will not deny it to submissive children. But to *over-love* is to turn from God; it is the dangerous malady of souls, and the poise that sinks them down from heaven. If you had learned better to forsake all for Christ, and to account all but loss and dung as Paul did (Phi 3.8), you could more easily bear the want of it. When did you see anyone live in discontent and be distracted with melancholy, grief, and cares, for want of dung, or of a bubble, a shadow, or a merry dream? If you will not otherwise know the world, God will otherwise make you know it to your sorrow.

**4th.** If you are not satisfied that God alone, Christ alone, heaven alone is enough for you, as matter of felicity and full contentment, then go, study the case better, and you may be convinced. Go, learn better your catechism, and the principles of religion; and then you will

learn to lay up a treasure in heaven, and not on earth, and to know that it is best to be with Christ —and that death, which destroys all the glory of the world, and makes rich and poor equals, is the common door to heaven or hell. Then conscience will not ask you whether you have lived in pleasure or in pain, in riches or in want; but whether you have lived to God or to the flesh; lived for heaven or for earth? And what has had pre-eminence in your hearts and lives? If there is shame in heaven, you will be ashamed when you are there, that you whined and murmured for want of anything that the flesh desired upon earth; and that you went there grieving because your bodies suffered here. Study more to live by faith on hope, on the unseen promised glory with Christ, and you will patiently endure any sufferings on the way.

**5th.** Study better how great a sin it is to set our own wills and desires on a discontented opposition to the wisdom, will, and providence of God; and to make *our* wills, instead of *His*, like gods to ourselves. Doesn't a murmuring heart secretly accuse God? All accusation of God has some degree of blasphemy in it; for the accuser supposes that something of God is to be blamed. And if you dare not open your mouths to accuse Him, then don't let the repinings of your heart accuse him; know how much of religion and holiness consists in bringing this rebellious self-will to a full resignation, submission, and conformity to the will of God. *Till you can rest in God's will, you will never have rest.*

**6th.** Study well how great a duty it is to wholly trust God, and our blessed Redeemer, both with soul and body, and all we have. Isn't infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, to be trusted? Isn't a Savior who came from heaven into flesh to save sinners by such incomprehensible ways of love, to be trusted with what He has so dearly bought? Whom else will you trust in? Will it be in yourselves, or in your friends? Who has kept you all your lives, and done all for you that has been done? Who has saved all the souls that are now in heaven? What is our Christianity if not a life of *faith*? And is this, your faith, to distract yourself with care and troubles if God doesn't fit all His providences to your will? Seek first his kingdom and righteousness, and he has promised that all other things shall be added to you, <sup>Mat 6.33</sup> and that not a hair of your head shall perish, <sup>Luk 21.18</sup> for they are all numbered, as it were. A sparrow does not fall to the ground without His providence; <sup>Mat 10.29</sup> and does He set less by those who would gladly please Him? Believe God, and trust Him, and your cares, and fears, and grief will vanish.

O that you knew what a mercy and comfort it is for God to make it your duty to trust Him! If He had made you no promise, *this* is equal to a promise. If he but bids you to trust Him, you may be sure He will not deceive your trust. If a faithful and confidential friend who is able to relieve you, bids you to trust in him for your relief, you won't think that he will deceive you. Alas! I have friends who dared to trust me with their estates, and lives, and souls, if they were in my power, and they wouldn't fear that I would destroy or hurt them. And yet they cannot trust the God of infinite goodness with these, even though He both commands them to trust him, and promises that He will never fail or forsake them. It is the refuge of my soul that quiets me in my fears — that God, my Father and Redeemer, has commanded me to trust Him with my body, my health, my liberty, and my estate. And when eternity seems strange and dreadful to me, He bids me to trust him with my departing soul. Heaven and earth are upheld and maintained by Him, and shall I distrust him?

*Objection.* — But it is none but his children that He will save.

*Answer:* — True; and all are his children who are truly willing to obey and please him. If you are truly willing to be holy, and to obey his commanding will, in a godly, righteous, and sober life, then you may boldly rest in his disposing will, and rejoice in his rewarding and accepting will, for he will pardon all our infirmities through the merits and intercession of Christ.

**7th.** If you would not be swallowed up with sorrow, then do not swallow the baits of sinful pleasure. Passions, dullness, and defective duties have their degrees of guilt. But it is pleasing sin that is the dangerous and deep-wounding sin. O fly from the baits of lust, and pride, and ambition, and covetousness, and an unruly appetite for drink or food, as you would fly from guilt, and grief, and terror. The more pleasure you have in sin, usually the more sorrow it will bring you. And the more you know it to be sin, and conscience tells you that God is against it, and yet you go on, and *suppress* your conscience, the sharper your conscience will afterwards afflict you, and the harder it will be to quiet it when awakened to repentance.

Yes, when a humbled soul is pardoned by grace, and *believes* he is pardoned, he will not easily forgive himself. The remembrance of the willfulness of sinning, and how poor a bait prevailed with us, and what mercies and motives we suppressed, will make us so displeased and angry with ourselves, and to loathe such naughty hearts, as will not allow a speedy or easy reconciliation. Yes, when we remember that we sinned against knowledge, even when we remembered that God sees us, and that we offended him, it will long keep up doubts of our sincerity in the soul, and make us afraid lest we still have the same hearts, and would do the same again if we had the same temptations. *Never look for joy or peace as long as you live in willful and beloved sin.* This thorn must be taken out of your hearts before you will be eased of the pain, unless God leaves you to a senseless heart, and Satan gives you a deceitful peace, which only prepares you for greater sorrow.

**8th.** But if none of the forementioned sins *cause* your sorrows, but they come from the mere perplexities of your mind about religion, or the state of your souls — such as fearing God’s wrath for your former sins, or doubting your sincerity and salvation — then these foregoing reproofs are not meant for such as you. But I will now lay down *your* proper remedy, and that is, the cure of that *ignorance* and those *errors* which cause your troubles.

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**I.** Many are perplexed about DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSIES in religion. Every contending party is confident and has a great deal to say, which to the ignorant seems like truth, and which the hearer cannot answer. Each party tells them that *their* way is the *only* way, and threatens damnation to them if they do not turn to them. The papists say, ‘There is no salvation outside of our church’ — that is, none but the subjects of the bishop of Rome are saved. The Greeks condemn the papists, and extol their own church, as every party does. Indeed, some would convert them with fire and sword, and say, ‘Be of our church, or lie in prison;’ or they make their church itself a prison, by driving in the incapable and unwilling.

*Question:* — Among all these, how shall the ignorant know what to choose?

*Answer.* —The case is sad, yet not so sad as the case of the far greatest part of the world, who are quite in heathenism, or infidelity, or never trouble themselves about religion, but follow the customs of their countries, and the prince’s laws, so that they may not suffer.

It is some sign of a regard for God and your salvation, that you are troubled about religion, and careful to know which is right. Even controversy is better than atheistic indifference, if it would be on the upper side, whichever side that is. If you cast acorns or seeds among them, swine will strive for it; or if it is carrion, dogs will fight for it; but if it is gold or jewels, dogs and swine will never strive for them, but only tread them in the dirt. However, cast them before men, and they will grab each other by the ears to get them. Lawyers contend about law, and princes about dominion, to which others pay no mind. Religious persons strive about religion, and what wonder is this? It only shows that they value their souls and religion, and that their understandings are yet imperfect. But if you follow the plain directions below, controversies need not break your peace.

1. As to God's NATURAL REVELATION, see that you are true to the light and law of nature, which all mankind is obliged to observe. If you had no Scripture nor Christianity, nature (that is, the works of God) will tell you that there is a God, <sup>Rom 1.20</sup> and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. <sup>Heb 11.6</sup> It tells you that God is absolutely perfect in power, knowledge, and goodness; and that man is a reasonable, free agent made by him. And therefore, man is God's own, and at His will and government. It tells you that a man's actions are not indifferent; but some things we ought to do, and some things we ought *not* to do — that virtue and vice, moral good and evil, greatly differ. And therefore, there is some universal law which obliges us to the good, and forbids the evil; and this law can be none other than the law of the universal governor, who is God. It tells all men that they owe this God their absolute obedience, because he is their most wise and absolute ruler; and that they owe him their highest love, because he is not only the chief benefactor, but also most perfectly amiable in himself. It tells us that He has made us all sociable members of one world, and that we owe love and help to one another. It tells us that all this obedience to God can never be in vain, nor to our loss. And it tells us that we all must die, and that fleshly pleasures and this transitory world will quickly leave us. There is no more cause to doubt all or any of this, than to doubt that man is man. Be true to this much, and it will be a great help to all the rest.

2. As to God's SUPERNATURAL REVELATION, hold to God's word, the sacred bible, written by the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the sufficient records of it.

It is not divine faith if it does not rest on divine revelation; nor is it divine obedience if it is not given to divine government or command. Man's word is to be believed only as it deserves, with a human faith. And man's law must be obeyed according to the measure of his authority, with a human obedience. But these are far different from the divine. There is no universal ruler of all the world or church but God; no man is capable of it, nor is any council of men. God's law is only in *nature*, and in the *holy Scripture*. And that being the law by which He will judge us, it is the law which is the only divine rule of our faith or judgment, of our hearts and lives. Though all in the Scripture is not of equal clearness or necessity, a man may yet be saved who does not understand a thousand sentences in it; for all that is necessary to salvation is plainly contained there. God's law is perfect in its designed use; it needs no supplement of man's. Hold close to Scripture sufficiency, or you will never know what to hold to. Councils and canons are far more uncertain; there is no agreement among their subjects — as to which of them are obligatory, and which not — nor any possible way to come to an agreement.

3. Yet use with thankfulness *the help of men*, for understanding and obeying *the word of God*.

Though lawyers, as such, have none of the legislative power, you need their help to rightly understand the use of the law. And though no men have power to make laws for the church universal, yet men must be our teachers to understand and use the laws of God. We are not born with faith or knowledge; we know nothing but what is taught to us, other than what sense or intuition perceives, or reason gathers from there. If you ask, Who must we learn from? I answer, from those who know, and have learned themselves. No name, or title, or relation, or habit, will enable any man to teach you what he does not know himself.

- (1.) Children must learn from their parents and tutors.
- (2.) People must learn from their able, faithful pastors and catechizers.
- (3.) All Christians must be teachers by charitable helps to one another.

But teaching and law-making are two different things. To teach another is but to show him that same scientific evidence of truth by which the teacher knows it himself, so that the learner may know it as he does. To say, 'You shall believe that is true, which I say is true, and that this is the meaning of it,' is not *teaching*, but *law-giving*. And to believe such a person, is not to learn or to know, even though some human belief of our teachers is necessary to learners.

4. Take nothing as necessary to Christianity and to salvation, which is not recorded in Scripture, and has not been held necessary by all true Christians in every age and place. It is not that we must first know men to be true Christians, in order to know by them what Christian truth is. Rather, the plain Scripture tells all men what Christianity is, and by that we know whom to take for Christians. But if anything is new, and has arisen since the apostles' writing of the Scripture, it cannot be an essential point to Christianity. Otherwise Christianity must be a mutable thing, and it is not the same now as it was before — or else there were no Christians before this novelty came into the world. The church would not be the church, nor would any man be a Christian, if they lacked any essential part of faith or practice.

But here take heed of sophists' deceit. Though nothing is necessary to salvation except what all sound Christians have continued to believe. Yet it is not necessary, or true, or good, which all good Christians have believed or done — much less all which the tempted worse part of them have held. For though the *essence* of Christianity has ever and everywhere been the same, yet the *opinions* of Christians, and their *mistakes* and *faults*, have been no part of their imitable faith or practice. Human nature is essentially the same in Adam and in all men; but the *diseases* of nature are another thing. If all men have sin and error, so do all churches. Their Christianity is of God, but the corruptions and maladies of Christians are not. You must hold nothing except what Christians of old have held as received from God's word; but because those all have some faults and errors, you must not hold and do all those.

5. Maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace with all true Christians as such, <sup>Eph 4:3</sup> and live in love in the communion of saints — that is, with those who live in the belief of, and in holy obedience to, the Christian faith and law. By their fruits you shall know them. <sup>Mat 7:16</sup> The societies of malignants, who suppress true practical knowledge and piety, and hate the best men, and cherish wickedness, and bloodily persecute those who in conscience do not obey their usurpations and inventions, are *not* the communion of saints: wolves, thorns, and thistles, are not the sheep or vines of Christ.

6. In your learning or communion, do not prefer any odd or singular sect above the universal consent of the faithful, so far as the judgment of men is to be regarded.

Though we do not take our faith from the *number* of believers, and though most are usually none of the best, and a few are much wiser than most — and in a controversy, a few men of such knowledge are to be believed above the multitude of those with less knowledge — yet Christ is the head of all true Christians, and not of an odd sect or party only. He has commanded them all to live as brethren, in love and holy communion. In all the sciences, the greater number of agreeing men are more likely to be in the right, than some straggling persons, who otherwise show no more ability than they do. At least, whichever side you like best in less necessary points, you must always be in unity with all true Christians, and not differ from them unnecessarily.

7. Never set a doubtful opinion against a certain truth or duty. And do not reduce certain things to uncertain things; but on the contrary, make uncertain things certain. For instance, it is certain that you ought to live in love and peace with all who are true Christians, and to do good to all, and do wrong to none. Don't let any doubtful difference make you violate this rule; don't hate, slander, backbite, and hurt them for a doubtful, indifferent, or unnecessary thing. Don't set your mint, cummin, tithes or ceremonies, against love and justice, and against the great and certain things of the law. <sup>Mat 23.23</sup> It is an ill sect or opinion that is against the nature and common duty of Christianity and humanity.

8. Faithfully serve Christ as far as you have attained, and be true to all the truth that you know. Do not sin by omission or practice, against the knowledge which you have, lest God in justice gives up your understanding to believe a lie. <sup>2The 2.11</sup>

9. Remember that all men on earth are ignorant, and know but as in a mirror darkly, and in part. <sup>1Cor 13.12</sup> And therefore the best have many errors. No man knows the smallest grass or worm with an adequate, perfect knowledge. If God bears with multitudes of errors in us all, then we must bear with those which are tolerable in each other; it is well if men are humble, and teachable, and willing to know. As we have seen few more imperfect than the sects that have asserted sinless perfection, so we see few who are so fallible and erroneous as the Roman sect, which pleads their infallibility. When they tell you that you must believe their popes and councils so that you may come to an end of controversy, ask them whether we may hope here for any end of ignorance, error, and sin. If not, what hope is there of ending all controversies before we come to heaven, where ignorance is ended? The controversies against the essentials of Christianity were ended with us all when we became true and adult Christians, and the rest will be lessened as we grow in knowledge. <sup>2Pet 3.18</sup> Divinity is not less mysterious than law and medicine, etc., where controversies abound.

10. Yet do not stint yourselves in knowledge, nor say 'We have learned enough.' But continue as Christ's scholars in learning more and more till death; even the wisest know little, and may still increase. There is a great difference in excellence, usefulness, and comfort, between men of clear, digested knowledge, and those of confused undigested apprehensions.

These ten rules, *practiced*, will save you from being perplexed with doubts and controversies by all pretenders in religion.

**II.** But if your trouble is not about doctrinal controversies, but about your SINS, or WANT OF GRACE, and YOUR SPIRITUAL STATE, then digest well the following truths and counsels, and it will cure you.

1. God's goodness is equal to his greatness; even to that power that rules heaven and earth. His attributes are commensurate; and goodness will do good to capable receivers. He loved us when we were enemies; and He is, essentially, love itself.

2. Christ has freely taken on human nature, and made satisfaction for the sins of the world, as fully as answers his ends, and so full that none shall perish for want of sufficiency in his sacrifice and merits.

3. Upon these merits Christ has made a law, or covenant of grace, forgiving all sin, and freely giving everlasting life to all who believingly accept it; so that all men's sins are conditionally pardoned by the tenor of this covenant.

4. The condition of pardon and life is *not* that we sin no more, nor that we purchase it from God at any price, or benefit Him by our own works, or buy his grace — but only that we believe him, and willingly accept the mercy which He freely gives us, according to the nature of the gift. That is, that we accept Christ *as* Christ, to justify, sanctify, rule, and save us.

5. God has commissioned his ministers to proclaim and offer this covenant and grace *to all*, and to earnestly entreat them in His name to accept it, and to be reconciled to him. He has excepted *none*.

6. No man who takes this offer is damned, but only those who obstinately refuse it to the last breath.

7. The day of grace has never so passed by for any sinner, that he may not still have Christ and pardon if he wills it; if he *does not* have it, it is because he *will not* have it. The day of grace is so far from having passed by, that it savingly comes to all who are so willing; and grace is still offered urgently to all.

8. The will is the man in God's account; <sup>Joh 1.13</sup> and what a man truly would be and have, he is, and he shall have. Consent to the baptismal covenant is true grace and conversion, and such men have a right to Christ and life. <sup>Joh 1.12</sup>

9. The number and greatness of former sins is no exception to the pardon of any penitent, converted sinner: God pardons great and small sins to such. Where sin abounds, grace superabounds, and much is forgiven, so that men may be thankful, and love much. <sup>Luk 7.47</sup>

10. Repentance is true, even if tears and passionate sorrow are defective, when a man would rather leave his sin than keep it, and he sincerely, even if imperfectly, endeavors to fully overcome it. No sin shall damn a man, which he more hates than he loves, and would truly rather leave than keep, and he shows this by true endeavor.

11. The best man has much evil, and the worst have some good. But it is that evil which is *preferred* and *predominant* in the will, which distinguishes the godly and the wicked. The man who in his estimation, choice, and life, prefers God, and heaven, and holiness, above the world and the pleasure of sin, is a true godly man, and he shall be saved.



12. The best have a daily need of pardon, even for the faultiness of their holiest duties, and they must daily live on Christ for pardon.

13. Even sin against knowledge and conscience are too often committed by *regenerate* men. For they know more than others do, and their consciences are more active. They would be happy indeed if they could be as good as they know they should be, and if they loved God as much as they know they should love him, and if they were clear from all the relics of passion and unbelief which conscience tells them are their sins.

14. God will not take Satan's temptations to be our sins, but only our not resisting them. Christ himself was tempted to the most heinous sin, even to fall down to the devil and worship him. God will charge Satan's blasphemous temptations against him alone.

15. The thoughts, and fears, and troubles, which melancholy and natural weakness and disorder irresistibly cause, has much more of bodily *disease* than of *sin*, and therefore it is of the least of sins. Indeed, it is no more of a sin than to burn up or be thirsty in a fever — and no further than some sin caused the disease that caused the sin, nor further than some power is left in one's reason to resist them.

16. Certainty of our faith and sincerity, is not necessary to salvation; but sincerity of faith *itself* is necessary. The one who gives himself to Christ shall be saved, even if he doesn't know that he is sincere in doing it. Christ knows his own grace, when those who have it don't know that it is sound. Only a few true Christians attain certainty of salvation; for weak grace that is clogged with much corruption is hardly known, and usually joined with fear and doubting.

17. Probability of sincerity and trust in Christ may justly cause a man to live and die in peace and comfort, without proper certainty. Otherwise, few Christians would live and die in peace; and yet we see by experience that many do so. The common opinion of most church-writers for four hundred years after Christ, was that the un-continued sort of Christians might fall from a state of grace, in which (had they continued in it) they would have been saved. And therefore, none but strong confirmed Christians, at most, could be certain of salvation. Many protestant churches are still of that mind; and yet they do not live in despair or terror. No man is certain that he won't fall as heinously as David and Peter did. And yet, while they have no cause to think it likely, they need not live in terror because of the uncertainty. No wife or child is certain that the husband or father will not murder them; and yet they may live comfortably, and not fear it.

18. Even if faith is so weak as to assault us with doubts whether the gospel is true and there is any life to come, and even if our trust in Christ is not strong enough to banish our fears and troubles, *yet this faith will save us* if we see so much evidence of credibility in the gospel, and the probability of a better life hereafter, that it causes us here to fix our hopes and choice, and to resolve for those hopes — to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and to let go of all the world rather than sell those hopes; and to live a holy life to obtain it.

19. But God's love and promise through Christ is so sure a ground for faith and comfort, that it is the great duty and interest of all men to confidently and quietly trust Him, and then to live in the joy of holy trust and hope.

20. If any man doubts his salvation because of the greatness of his sins, the way to quietness is to be willing to quickly forsake them. Either the one who complains is willing to be holy and forsake his sins, or he is not. If you are not willing to leave them, but love them and would keep them, then why do you complain about them, and mourn for what you love so much? If your child were to cry and scream because his apple is sour, and yet he will not be persuaded to forbear eating it, you wouldn't pity him, but whip him as perverse. But if you are truly willing to leave sin, then you are already saved from its damning guilt.

21. If you doubt the sincerity of your faith and other graces, and all your examination leaves you uncertain, then the way to quickly end your doubt is by actually giving yourself to Christ. If you don't know whether you have been a true believer up to now, you may know that Christ is *now* offered to you. If you but consent to the covenant, and accept the offer, you may be sure that He is yours.

22. Bare examining is not always the way to gain assurance; but labor to excite and exercise the grace that you would be assured of. The way to be sure that you believe and love God, is to study the promises and goodness of God till *active* faith assures you that you believe, and to love God and glory, till you are assured that you love them.

23. It is not by some extraordinary act, good or bad, that we may be sure what state the soul is in, but by the predominant bent, and drift, and tenor of our heart and life.

24. Though we cry out that we *cannot* believe, and we *cannot* love God, and we *cannot* pray rightly, Christ can help us. Without his grace, we can do nothing; but his grace is sufficient for us. He does not deny his further help once he has made us willing; rather, he has bid us to ask for and have it. "If any lacks wisdom, let him ask it of God, who gives to all liberally, and does not upbraid for former folly, but gives His spirit to those who ask him." <sup>Jas 1:5</sup>

25. This sin called the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, is the sin of no one who believes Jesus is the Christ, nor of anyone who fears it, nor the sin of every infidel, but only of a few obstinate, unbelieving enemies. For it is only this: when men see such miracles of Christ and his Spirit as should or could convince them that he is of God, and when they have no other excuse, they would rather maintain that he is a conjurer, and wrought them by the devil.

26. Though *sinful* fear is very troublesome, and not to be cherished, God often permits and uses it for good: to keep us from being bold with sin, and from those sinful pleasures and love of the world, and presumption, and security, which are far more dangerous; and to reduce pride; and to keep us in a sensible, watchful state — for *proper* fear is made to preserve us from the hurt and danger feared.

27. He that goes fearing and trembling to heaven, will quickly be past all fear, and doubts, and heaviness, forever.

28. When Christ was in his agony for our sins, and he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was then nevertheless *beloved* by his father. And he was tempted so that he might succor those who are tempted; and he suffered such derision so that he might be a compassionate high priest to sufferers. <sup>Heb 4:15</sup>

29. By however much more the troubles, blasphemous temptations, doubts, and fears of a man are grievous, displeasing, and hateful to him, by that much more he may be assured that they will not condemn him, because they are not *beloved* sins.

30. All our troubles are ruled over by God. It is far better for us to be at His choice and disposal than our own, or our dearest friend's; and He has promised that all things shall work together for our good. (Rom 8.28)

31. A delight in God and goodness, and a joyful, praising frame of soul from the belief of the love of God through Christ, is far more to be desired than grief and tears (which only sweep away some dirt), so that love, joy, and thankfulness may enter, which are the true evangelical, Christian temper, and are like the heavenly state.

*Digest these truths, and they will cure you.*

**III.** But if melancholy has already gotten hold of them, there must be (besides what has been said) some other proper remedies used. The difficulty is great, because the disease makes them self-conceited, unreasonable, willful, and unruly. They will hardly be persuaded that the disease is in their *bodies*, but only in their *souls*. They will believe only that there is *reason* in all that they think and do; or if they confess the contrary, they plead disability, and say, 'We cannot think and do otherwise than we do.'

But supposing that there is some use of reason left, I will give them some further counsel yet. What they cannot do, their friends must help them do, up to their capacity. To this I will add:

1. Consider that it should be easy for you in your confounding, troubling thoughts, to perceive that your understanding is not now as sound and strong as other men's. And therefore do not be willful and self-conceited, and think that your thoughts are righter than theirs; but believe wiser men, and be ruled by them. Answer me this question, 'Do you know any minister, or friend, who is wiser than yourself?' If you say no, how foolishly proud you are! If you say yes, then ask the minister or friend what he thinks of your condition, and *believe* him, and be *ruled* by him, rather than by your crazed self.

2. Do you find that your troubles do you more good or hurt? Do they make you more fit or less fit to believe and love God, and rejoice in him, and praise him? If you feel that they are against all that is good, then you may be sure that they are from the devil's temptations, and are pleasing to *him*. And will you cherish or plead for the work of Satan, which you find is against yourself and God?

3. Avoid your musings, and for now, don't exercise your thoughts too deeply or too much. Long meditation is a duty to some, but not to you — no more than it is a man's duty to go to church, who has his leg broken, or his foot out of joint. He must rest and ease it till it is set again, and strengthened. You may live in the faith and fear of God, without setting yourself to deep, disturbing thoughts. For those who will not obey this counsel, their friends must rouse them from their melancholy musings, and call them away to something else.

4. Therefore you must not be alone too much, but always in some pleasing, cheerful company. Solitariness only favors musings. Nor should you be long in private prayer, but more in public prayer with others.

5. Let those thoughts which you have, be laid out on the most excellent things: do not focus them all on yourself and on your disordered heart; the best of us may find much troubling matter there. As millstones wear themselves out if they grind when they have no corn, so do the thoughts of those who do not think of better things than their own hearts. If you have any power over your own thoughts, force them to think most of these four things:

(1.) Of the infinite goodness of God, who is fuller of love than the sun is full of light.

(2.) Of the unmeasurable love of Christ in man's redemption, and of the sufficiency of his sacrifice and merits.

(3.) Of the free covenant and offer of grace, which gives pardon and life to all who do not prefer the pleasure of sin above it, nor obstinately refuse it to the last.

(4.) Of the inconceivable glory and joy which all the blessed have with Christ, and which God has promised with His oath and seal, to all who consent to the covenant of grace, and are willing to be saved and ruled by Christ.

These thoughts will cure melancholy fears.

6. <sup>11</sup> Don't get used to complaining talk, but talk most about the great mercies of God which you have received. Dare you deny them? If not, aren't they worthier of your discourse than your present sufferings? Don't let all men know that you are having troubles; complaining only feeds them, and it discourages others. Reveal them to none but your private counsellors and friends. Get used to speaking much about the love of God, and the riches of grace, and it will divert and sweeten your sourer thoughts.

7. Especially, when you pray, resolve to spend most of your time in thanksgiving and praise to God. If you cannot do it with the joy that you *should*, do it as best you *can*. You don't have power over your comforts; but don't you have power over your tongue? Don't say that unless you had a praising heart, and were a child of God, you are unfit for thanks and praises. For every man, good and bad, is bound to praise God, and to be thankful for all that he has received. And he is bound to do it as well as he can, rather than leave it undone. Most Christians lack assurance of their adoption. Must they therefore forbear all praise and thanksgiving to God? Doing it the best you can, is the way to be able to do it better. Thanksgiving stirs up thankfulness in the heart. But by your objection, you may perceive what the devil drives at, and what he *gets* by your melancholy. He would turn you away from all thankfulness to God, and from the very mention of His love and goodness in your praises.

8. When vexatious or blasphemous thoughts are thrust into your mind by Satan, do not entertain them, or be excessively troubled by them. First, use that reason and power which you have left, to resolutely cast them out, and then turn your thoughts to something else. Don't say, 'I cannot.' If you cannot otherwise command and turn away your thoughts, then rise up and get into some company or go to some employment which will divert you, and take those up. Tell me what you would do if you heard a nag in the street reviling you, or heard an atheist talking there against God. Would you stand still to hear them or talk it out with them? Wouldn't you rather go away from them, and disdain to hear or debate with such as they? In

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<sup>11</sup> Originally the typesetter misnumbered the remaining paragraphs as 5-8. – WHG

your case, when Satan casts in ugly, despairing, or murmuring thoughts, go away from them to some other thoughts or business.

If you cannot do this by yourself, tell your friend when the temptation comes; and it is his duty, who has care of you, to divert you with some other talk or works, or force you into diverting company.

Yet do not be too troubled by the temptation. For trouble of mind keeps the evil matter in your memory, and so it increases it, just as the pain of a sore draws the blood and spirits to the place. And this is the design of Satan: to give you troubling thoughts, and then to cause more by being troubled at those — and thus one thought and trouble causes another, and that causes another, and so on, as waves in the sea follow each other. To be tempted is common to the best of us. I told you what idolatry Christ was tempted to. When you feel such thoughts, thank God that Satan cannot force you to love them, or consent to them.

9. Again, still remember what a comfortable evidence you carry about with you, that your sin is not damning while you feel that you do not love it, but hate it, and are weary of it. Scarcely any sort of sinners have so little pleasure in their sin as the melancholy do, nor so little desire to keep them; only *beloved* sins undo men.

Be sure that you do not live idly, but in some constant business of a lawful calling, so far as you have bodily strength. Idleness is a constant sin, and labor is a duty. Idleness is but the devil's home for temptation, and for unprofitable, distracting musings. Labor profits others, and ourselves; both soul and body need it. Six days you must labor, and you must not eat the bread of idleness. (Prov. 31) God has made it our duty, and He will bless us in his appointed way. I have known grievous, despairing melancholy to be cured, and turned into a life of godly cheerfulness, principally by setting upon constancy and diligence in the business of families and callings. It turns the thoughts from temptation, and leaves the devil no opportunity: It pleases God if it is done in obedience; and it purifies the distempered blood. Thousands of poor people live in want, and have wives and children who must also feel it. One would think they should be distracted with griefs and cares, and yet few of them fall into the disease of melancholy. This is because labor keeps the body sound, and leaves them no leisure for melancholy musings. Whereas in London and other great towns, an abundance of women who never sweat with bodily work, but live in idleness — especially when from wealth they fall into want — are miserable objects, continually vexed, and near distraction with discontent and a restless mind.

If you will not be *persuaded* to business, then your friends should *force* you to it, if they can.

And if the devil turns religious as an angel of light, and tells you that work is but turning your thoughts away from God, and that worldly thoughts and business are unholy and fit for worldly men — tell him that Adam was, in his innocency, to dress and keep his garden; and Noah, who had the whole world, was to be a husbandman; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob kept sheep and cattle; and Paul was a tentmaker; and Christ himself is justly assumed to have worked at his supposed father's trade, as he went on fishing with his disciples. And Paul says that idleness is disorderly walking; 'he who will not work, do not let him eat.' <sup>2</sup>The 3.10-11 God made soul and body, and He has commanded both to work.

If Satan would drive you to unseasonably longer private prayer than you can bear, remember that even sickness will excuse the sick from that sort of duty which they are unable to perform; so will *your* disease; the unutterable groans of the spirit will be accepted. Rom 8.26

If you have privacy, away from others' hearing, I would give you this advice: that instead of long meditation, or long secret prayer, you might sing a psalm of praise to God, such as the twenty-third, or the one hundred and thirty-third, etc. This will excite your spirit to that sort of holy affection which is much more acceptable to God, and suitable to the hopes of a believer, than your repining troubles.

**IV.** But I am not yet done with the duty of those who take care of distressed, melancholy persons, especially husbands' duty to their wives (for it is much more frequently the disease of women than of men). When the disease disables them from helping themselves, most of their helps, under God, must come from others. And this is of two sorts:

- 1st. In prudent carriage towards them;
- 2nd. In medicine and diet; a little of both.

1. A great part of their cure lies in pleasing them, and avoiding all displeasing things, as far as this can be done lawfully. Displeasement is much of the disease; and a husband who has such a wife, is obliged to do his best to cure her, both in charity, and by his relative bond, and for his own peace. It is a great weakness in some men, that if they have wives who, by natural passionate weakness, or by melancholy, or crazedness, are willful, and will not yield to reason, they show their anger to their wives, to their further provocation. You took her in marriage for better and for worse, in sickness and in health. If you have chosen someone who, as a child, must have everything she cried for, and must be spoken to nicely, and was, as it were, rocked in the cradle or else her behavior would be worse, you must condescend to do it. You must bear the burden which you have chosen, so as not to make it heavier for yourself. Your passion and sourness towards a person who cannot cure her own displeasing carriage, is a more inexcusable fault and folly than hers, who does not have the power of reason you have.

If you know any lawful thing that will please them in speech, in company, in apparel, in rooms, in attendance, give it to them. If you know what they are displeased at, remove it. I don't speak of the distracted, who must be mastered by force, but of the sad and melancholy. If you could devise how to put them in a pleased condition, you might cure them.

2. As much as you can, divert them from the thoughts which are their trouble; keep them on some other talks and business; break in upon them and interrupt their musings; rouse them out of it, but with loving importunity; don't suffer them to be alone for long; get fit company to them, or get them to it. Especially, don't suffer them to be idle, but drive or draw them to some pleasing works which may stir the body, and employ the thoughts. If they are addicted to reading, don't let it be for too long, nor any books that are unfit for them. Let another read to them rather than read themselves. Dr. Sibbes' books, or some useful, pleasing history or chronicles, or news of great matters abroad in the world, may do something to divert them.

3. Often set before them the great truths of the gospel which are fittest to comfort them; and read informing, comforting books to them; and live in a loving, cheerful manner with them.

4. Choose a skillful, prudent minister of Christ for them, both for their secret counsel and public audience; one who is skilled in such cases; one who is peaceable and not contentious, erroneous, or fond of odd opinions; one who is judicious in his preaching and praying, rather than passionate (*except* when he urges the gospel doctrines of consolation; then the more fervently the better); and someone they much esteem and reverence, and will listen to.

5. Labor frequently to convince them how great a wrong it is to the God of infinite love and mercy, and to a Savior who has so wonderfully expressed his love, to think less of Him than they would think of a friend, or even of a moderate enemy, and so be less persuaded of that love which has been manifested by the most stupendous miracle. If they only had a father, husband, or friend, who had ventured his life for them, and given them all that they ever had, wouldn't it be a shameful ingratitude and injury to still suspect that they intended it all *against* them, and designed *mischief* for them, and didn't *love* them? How have God and our Savior deserved this? Many who say it is not God they suspect, but themselves, only hide their misery by this mistake, while they deny God's greatest mercies. And though they would gladly have Christ and grace, they will not believe that God who *offers* it to them will *give* it to them, but instead think He is one who will, without remedy, damn a poor soul who desires to please Him, and who would rather have His grace than all the sinful pleasures of the world.

6. Carry them often abroad into unfamiliar company. Usually they reverence strangers, and strange faces divert them, especially travelling into other parts, if they can bear the motion.

7. It is a useful way, if you can, to engage them in comforting others who are in deeper distresses than they. For this will tell them that their case is not singular, and they will speak to *themselves* while they speak to *others*. One of the chief means which cured my fears of my soul's condition, about forty-eight years ago, was often comforting others who had the same doubts, whose lives persuaded me of their sincerity.

And it would be a pretty diversion to send them some person who is in some error which they are most against, to dispute it with them, so that while they whet their wits to convince them, and confute them, it may turn their own thoughts from their own distress. Forester tells us that a melancholy patient of his, who was a papist, was cured when the Reformation came into the country, by eager and repeated disputes against it. A better cause may better do it.

8. *If other means will not do*, do not neglect **medicine**. And though they will be averse to it, believing that the disease is only in the *mind*, they must be persuaded or forced to take it. I have known a lady deep in melancholy, who for a long time would neither speak, nor take medicine, nor endure her husband to leave the room. With this restraint and grief, he died; and she was cured by medicine put down her throat with a pipe, by force.

If it were a possession of the devil, as some of them fancy, it is possible that medicine might cast him out. For if you cure the melancholy, his bed is taken away, and the advantage is gone by which he works. Cure the cholera, and the choleric operations of the devil cease. It is by means and humors in us that he works.

But choose a physician who is specially skilled in this disease, and has cured many others. Do not meddle with women, and ignorant boasters, nor with young, inexperienced men, nor with hasty, busy, overly-ambitious, venturesome men, who cannot have time to study the patient's temper and disease. Rather, choose experienced, cautious men.

Medicinal remedies and theological remedies used not to be given together by the same hand. But in this case of perfect complication of the maladies of mind and body, I think it is not unfit, if I don't do it unskillfully. My advice is that those who can have an older, skillful, experienced, honest, careful, cautious physician, should not neglect to use him, nor meddle with any of the medicines which I will mention, nor with any other prescriptions whatever, except by their physician's advice. For there is such a great diversity of bodily temperatures, age, and many incidentals, and of the roots and causes of the same symptoms, that the same medicine may cure one man and hurt another; or it may cure the same man at one time, which may hurt him at another. Skill in managing the medicine is much of the cure, and not the medicine without it.

Yet, because there are multitudes of persons so very poor that they cannot give a shilling to a physician, and the costliness of physicians and pharmacists so discourages those who have no money, that they don't seek help from anyone, except some women who will tell them of their concoctions. And as there are many in the country who are quite out of the reach of a skillful physician, and because there are now so great a number of empirics [quacks], and young inexperienced physicians, who rashly venture forth before thoroughly understanding the body or the disease; and because overdoing, and rashly risking, kills so many — for these reasons, I will add a few safe and cheap medicines, which the poor may make themselves, and which will not cause much upset to their stomachs, even if I risk the censure of some physicians. I am not one myself, but I see scores of them, much younger than I, who risk much more, once they have a license, to the great cost of the purses and bodies of their patients.

The disease called *melancholy* is formally in the spirits; its disorder unfits the spirits for their office in serving the imagination, understanding, memory, and affections. So, by the disorder of the spirits, the thinking faculty is diseased, and it becomes like an inflamed eye, or a foot that is sprained or out of joint — it is disabled for its proper work.

But sometimes persons who are sound, are suddenly cast into melancholy by a fright, or by the death of a friend, or by some great loss or cross, or some sad tidings, even in an hour which shows that it doesn't always come from any humor called *melancholy*, nor for any foregoing disease at all.

But the very act of the *mind* suddenly disorders the *passions*, and perturbs the *spirits*; and in time, the disturbed spirits vitiate the blood which contains them; and that vitiated blood, in time, vitiates the viscera and the parts through which it passes. And so the disease, beginning in the senses and soul, first draws the spirits, and then the humors, and then the parts into fellowship, and thus soul and body become sick together. <sup>12</sup>

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**NOTICE:** At this point Baxter offers page after page of diagnostics and recipes from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which were primitive, and potentially dangerous. I have therefore chosen to exclude them. But his exhortation to seek competent medical help, and to take the prescribed medications, remains valid. — WHG

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<sup>12</sup> Alluding to the ancient Greek concept of the four humors that govern our mental and physical health.



The devil has another cure for the sad and melancholy, than those which I have prescribed here, which is to cast away all belief of the immortality of the soul, and of the life to come, or at least not to think of it; and to take religion as a superstitious, needless fancy; and to laugh at the threatenings of Scripture; and go to play-houses, to games of cards and dice, and to drink and play away the melancholy. Honest recreations are very good for melancholy persons, if we could get them to use them. But, alas! this *satanical* cure is like the witches' bargain with the devil, who promises them much, but pays them with shame and utter misery. The end of that mirth is incurable sorrow, if timely repentance does not cure the cause.

The garrison of Satan in the hearts of sinners, is strongly kept when they are in peace. But when these sinners have fooled away time, and mercy, and hope, they must die, and there is no remedy. To go merrily and unbelievably to hell, after all God's calls and warnings, will be no abatement of their torment. To go out of the world in the guilt of sin, and to end life before they might know the use of it, and to undergo God's justice for their mad contempt of Christ and grace, will put a sad end to all their mirth. For "there is no peace for the wicked, says my God." (Isa 48.22, and 57.21) But Christ says to his mourners, "Blessed are you who mourn, for you shall be comforted" (Mat 5.4); and, "You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." (Joh 16.20) Solomon knew that the house of mourning was better than the house of feasting; that the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; and that the heart of fools is in the house of mirth (Ecc 7.2-4) — *but the holy joy of faith and hope is best of all.*