

A
TREATISE
ON
SPIRITUAL COMFORT.

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SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak comfortably to Jerusalem. Isa 40.1-2.*

*Although you say you shall not see him, yet judgment is
before him; therefore trust in him. Job 35.14*

*My heart trusted in him and I am helped: therefore my heart
greatly rejoices, and with my song will I praise him. Psa 28.7.*

EDINBURGH

1814

Sources: <https://archive.org/details/ATreatiseOnSpiritualComfort>
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Contents

ADVERTISEMENT.	3
Editor's Note	4
INTRODUCTION.	5
CHAPTER 1.	7
Spiritual Comfort in General	7
<i>Reflections</i>	22
CHAPTER 2.	27
The great importance and usefulness of spiritual comfort for the saints.	27
<i>Reflections</i>	36
CHAPTER 3.	39
The way in which believers lose their spiritual comfort.	39
<i>Reflections</i>	55
CHAPTER 4.	59
The grievous consequences of a believer's losing his spiritual consolation.	59
<i>Reflections</i>	73
CHAPTER 5.	77
The nature and signs of melancholy	77
<i>Sect. 1. Signs of melancholy, especially in a true Christian.</i>	77
<i>Sect. 2. Directions to Christians who are afflicted with melancholy.</i>	84
<i>Sect. 3. Advice to RELATIONS and FRIENDS of Christians afflicted with melancholy.</i>	90
<i>Reflections</i>	93
CHAPTER 6.	97
The designs of God in permitting some of His children to lose their spiritual comfort.	97
<i>Reflections</i>	110
CHAPTER 7.	113
The means which disconsolate believers should employ to recover spiritual comfort.	113
<i>Reflections</i>	133
CHAPTER 8.	143
The means which believers should employ to attain increasing comfort.	143
<i>Reflections</i>	163
CHAPTER 9.	167
Directions for attaining establishment in holy consolation.	167
<i>Reflections</i>	180
APPENDIX.	189
Verses which are most encouraging and consoling to a fainting soul.	189

ADVERTISEMENT.

It has often occurred to the Author, that spiritual consolation in this valley of tears is highly necessary to support and encourage the hearts of exercised Christians,¹ and to make them advance with alacrity in the love and practice of true holiness, as well as enable them to perform every particular duty with increasing cheerfulness and resolution. So too, they need to be instructed often in the unspeakable importance of such comfort, and in the means of attaining an increase of it.

Under the forcible impression of these sentiments, and from a desire to contribute his feeble endeavours to promote the consolation and edification of believers, the Author engaged in the following work. It has been his aim — at the same time that he endeavoured to avoid a plan which may be defective in its parts, or irregular in their distribution — to render his subject easy and intelligible, and thus adapt the work to the capacities even of the weakest and most illiterate Christians. He does not presume to have fully attained these objects. How far he has succeeded, and where he has failed in the attempt, it doesn't become him to say. The judicious and candid reader will determine that.

If anything contained in the following pages is rendered useful to but one disconsolate believer, by the blessing of Him who is the Consolation of Israel, the labour of the Author will be amply compensated.

LEITH,

February 18, 1813.

¹ This term, “exercised Christian” is found throughout this treatise. It has two levels of meaning, I think. On one level, it means *agitated*, disturbed, or discomfited. It is the state of a believer who has lost the comfort and joy of His salvation. **Psa 42:5** “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And *why* are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him *For* the help of His countenance.” But on another level, Dr. Colquhoun refers to the faith of such a believer needing to be *exercised* in Christ, *acted* upon — that Christ would be chosen above all other things he might desire. His earthly trial, his suffering and discomfort, is therefore a summons and an opportunity to take his eyes off the things of this world, and to look to Christ alone for his comfort and consolation. The “exercised Christian” is compelled to say to his Savior, “*You are my all in all. You are sufficient for me. You are my consolation.*” — WHG

Editor's Note

Dr. Colquhoun (pronounced *Colhoun*) has sprinkled copious Scripture references throughout this treatise. He uses many of them repeatedly. They not only *support* what he says, but *amplify* it. Most references were removed from the original footnotes, and superscripted instead. I chose not to link them to an online Bible, as that might be more distracting than helpful. But at times, I footnoted an entire verse for further insight, or provided additional Scripture references.

This modernization is not a paraphrase of his treatise. However, his sentence structure was often parenthetical, and his syntax overly complex, making it awkward to read. I simplified those. Many sentences were run-on; they've been broken into separate sentences. His punctuation was flooded with commas, colons, and semi-colons. Most were removed, or replaced with dashes or periods. Archaic words were updated (thee, thine, thou). I've added footnotes with a definition or explanation; those are marked with "–WHG." Other footnotes are Dr. Colquhoun's. Words that are now uncommon in usage have been replaced with more familiar ones. British spellings have been retained (honour, favour, Saviour). Most italics are original, but I added a few to emphasize his contrasts. Where I thought it was helpful for smoother reading, I also added a few contractions (don't, doesn't). My intent was to make it a bit less formal, and more engaging. This is, after all, his personal exhortation and encouragement to suffering believers in the church, at every level of maturity and education.

Although reformed doctrine is affirmed throughout, this text is very practical. I believe it should be read and digested by all Christians, not just those who feel inadequate in their walk, or somehow abandoned by God. It's as much about our assurance of salvation as about our spiritual comfort. Dr. Colquhoun repeatedly addresses our union and communion with Christ, as the cause and source of all our comfort, consolation, and joy. This is because our hope is in Jesus Christ *Himself*, not just in what He has *done* to save His people. There is an emphasis throughout, on particular atonement — "his warrant to trust in Christ for salvation for himself in particular." Election is not part of the gospel offer, but particular atonement ought to be. It contributes greatly to our assurance, and thus to our comfort:

"You *cannot* know that you have been elected, till *after* you have trusted in Him. Your election to salvation forms no part of your revealed warrant to trust in Jesus for salvation. ... Your ignorance of your election, then, cannot lessen that warrant; and your knowledge of your election cannot add to it. The offers and invitations of the gospel are not directed to men as *elect* sinners — but as sinners of mankind. Although you don't know if you are an elected sinner, you do know that you are a sinner of Adam's race. Therefore the offers and calls are addressed *to you*; and they afford you an authentic right to place the confidence of your heart in Christ, for all the blessings of salvation." (See chapter 7)

I pray that you are as blessed and fortified by this book as I have been. Perhaps you'll gain a better understanding of what it means for you to be *in Christ*, and the joy that flows from it.

William H. Gross

1/27/2023

INTRODUCTION.

The persons for whose use this treatise is more immediately intended, are those who have been convinced by the Holy Spirit of the guilt, malignity, and demerit of the sin which dwells in them, as well as of the iniquities that are committed by them; who have also been convinced of the utter insufficiency of their own righteousness for their justification in the sight of God; and who have been enabled to embrace Jesus Christ as their righteousness and strength. All who are of this description earnestly desire to advance in holiness. But many of them seem to be far from being duly sensible of the high importance of spiritual *consolation* to the love and practice of *holiness*. They soon apprehend danger if they feel iniquities prevailing against them; but they yield without alarm to that dejection of spirit which is often occasioned either by inward conflicts or outward trials. They don't consider that a disquietude of soul paves the way for despondency, and despondency for utter despair — all of which are injurious to the spiritual welfare of the soul. Trouble of mind, especially when it proceeds to the length of despondency, strengthens the unbelief and enmity of the heart against God. And so it disqualifies the Christian for performing *acceptably*, the duties incumbent upon him. Although God does not suffer any of his children to ever fall into the horrible gulf of *absolute* despair, some of them have brought themselves to the very brink of it. This greatly dishonours their holy profession, injures their own souls, and hurts the souls of many around them, who are always too ready to impute their dejection of spirit to the holy religion which they profess. Thus, they often discourage the hearts of some who are seeking Jesus; and they strengthen the prejudices of others, who are enemies to Him.

The sovereign antidote to that sinful and grievous distemper of mind, is the spiritual and holy consolation which is offered and promised in the gospel. Much of the sacred Volume was written for this end: that the saints might be comforted, and that “through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures, they might have hope.” Rom. 15.4 In the exceeding riches of His grace, God has given in his word, and confirmed by his oath, many great and precious promises, in order that all “who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them,” might not only have consolation, but *strong* consolation. He has spoken in his holiness, that they might rejoice; Psa 60.6 that they might be so “filled with all joy and peace in believing,” Rom 15.13 as to serve him with gladness; Psa 100.2 and to thereby recommend faith and holiness to all around them.

The Lord Jesus takes such pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, and He is so deeply concerned for their happiness, even in this valley of tears, that He has commanded them to “comfort one another,” 1The 4.18 “to comfort themselves together,” 1The 5.11 and especially to “comfort the faint-hearted.” 1The 5.14 And doubtless, if private Christians are bound to comfort one another, then much more is it the duty of ministers of the gospel to imitate the apostles of Christ in being helpers of their joy. 2Cor 1.24 Accordingly, this solemn charge is given to them, and repeated again, and a third time, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.” Isa 40.1-2

That I may therefore, in obedience to that high command, be instrumental in administering comfort to such afflicted and discouraged believers who may be disposed to read this treatise, I will endeavour, in dependence on the Spirit of truth:

First, to discourse about spiritual comfort in general.

Secondly, I will consider the great importance and usefulness of it to believers.

In the third place, I will show the way in which many of them lose the comfort which they formerly attained.

Fourthly, I will point out some of the sad consequences of their having forfeited their usual comfort.

In the Fifth place, I will briefly consider the nature and signs of melancholy.

Next, I will unfold some of the designs of God in permitting any of his saints to lose their usual consolation.

Afterwards, I will show how disconsolate Christians may recover their former comfort.

Next, I will point out the means which they ought to employ in order to attain increasing comfort.

And in the Last place, I will give some directions which, by observing them, exercised believers may become established in spiritual consolation.

CHAPTER 1.

Spiritual Comfort in General.

Comfort, in its generally accepted meaning, is that refreshing pleasure, or enlivening satisfaction of spirit, by which a man is upheld and strengthened against all evils, whether felt or feared. Or, it is that inward solace which supports and invigorates the heart under trouble of every kind. There are *three* sorts of comfort: natural, sinful, and spiritual.

Natural comfort is the refreshment of our natural spirits by the good creatures ¹ of God, the gifts of his bounty. When God “gives us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, he thereby fills our hearts with food and gladness.” ^{Act 14.17} There is comfort in every creature of God. When we are hungry, food comforts us; when thirsty, drink refreshes us; when cold, clothes warm us; and when in affliction or in want of advice, friends encourage us. But besides these common and necessary gifts of Providence, every sense has something peculiar to itself, which affords it comfort. The eyes have beautiful colours to give them pleasure; the ears, besides ordinary sounds, have melodious ones to delight them; the taste not only has the suitability of common food, but the sweetness of honey, to please it; and the smell, besides common aromas, has fragrant flowers to regale it.

Sinful, or unholy comfort, is the pleasure which sinners take in gratifying their lusts, or the delight which they have in abusing the gifts of Divine bounty. Sometimes the true Christian wonders how wicked men can feel comfortable at any time. But he has no cause to wonder, for their very commission of sin is a momentary comfort to their depraved nature. “It is like sport to a fool, to do mischief.” ^{Pro 10.23} “Scorners delight in their scorning.” ^{Pro 1.22} “Their soul delights in their abominations.” ^{Isa 66.3} Committing iniquity is agreeable to their sinful nature, and therefore it is a comfort to it. Indeed, were it not for the frequent opportunities they have to gratify some lust, either of the flesh or the mind, life would be an insupportable burden to them. “Evil men,” says Solomon, “do not sleep unless they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away unless they cause someone to fall.” ^{Pro 4.16} Ah! How inexpressibly dreadful is the condition of that man to whose heart it is a pleasure, a *comfort*, to sin against a holy and gracious God! Sinful comfort is also the pleasure which self-righteous persons take, either in relying wholly on their own righteousness, or relying partly on the righteousness of Christ and partly on their own, for their justification and title to eternal life. And it is the delight which hypocrites feel in reflecting on their counterfeit graces and attainments.

Spiritual or holy comfort, is that inward solace or satisfaction which supports, strengthens, and exhilarates holy souls. They have this comfort in and from the Lord Jesus, their Covenant-head, by the exercise of faith, hope, love, and the other graces of the Holy Spirit. ^{Rom 5.1-5} Or it is that spiritual delight, that holy joy, which cheers and invigorates the hearts of believers under all their inward and outward troubles. It is this alone that deserves the name of pure, solid, and durable consolation. If it is a comfort to the wicked man amidst all his afflictions, to gratify his carnal and ungodly lusts, then surely it cannot be but a real and even a *great* consolation to a holy man, under all the trials of life, to exercise his spiritual graces, and to perform his holy duties.

¹ *Creatures*: any of God’s created things or beings. – WHG

The word *Comfort*, in Scripture, is used in a *twofold* sense. It is sometimes employed to express that which gives consolation. But more frequently, it is used to signify the consolation itself which is received from it or enjoyed by means of it. *First*, it is employed in Scripture to express that which gives, or is a means of giving consolation to the soul of an afflicted believer — whether it is a person ^{Col 4.11} or a thing in which comfort is hidden by the blessing of Christ, and by which it is afforded. ¹ Or, it is a word or reason suggesting something of consolation to the mind of the Christian. ² Each of these is styled *comfort*, because it is a means or instrument of dispensing consolation to the saints. ^{2Cor 1.4} *Second*, the term is more frequently employed by the Spirit of inspiration, to express the consolation *itself* which believers receive, whether by means of persons, things, or reasons, and which they *feel* or enjoy in their souls. In this treatise, I propose to discourse about spiritual comfort chiefly in this *second* sense.

In order to illustrate the *general* nature of this inestimable blessing, I will present it to the view of the devout reader under the following particulars:

1. Spiritual comfort usually supposes *trouble* of some kind, either felt or feared; or, the prospect of some *difficult duty* which the believer needs to be encouraged to perform. It is under affliction, or uneasiness, that the heart of the Christian needs to be comforted. The Lord Jesus accordingly says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” ^{Mat 5.4} He made the first promise to his disciples of the Holy Spirit *as a Comforter*, when sorrow had filled their heart at the prospect of his departure from them. ^{Joh 16.6-7} “God,” says the apostle Paul, “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble.” ^{2Cor 1.4} And he styles him, “The God who comforts those who are cast down.” ^{2Cor 7.6} The soul must be quickened and humbled, so that it may be qualified for spiritual consolation. It is “the spirit of the humble, and the heart of the contrite ones,” that the high and lofty One will revive with holy comfort. ^{Isa 57.15} Indeed, the oil of spiritual joy is such that no vessel but a contrite heart can hold it.

The design of imparting Divine consolation is to cheer and invigorate the drooping spirit. The office of the Comforter is to relieve the disconsolate soul. ^{Lam 1.16} It is impossible for those who have never felt the uneasiness of a wounded conscience, to value or desire the joy of God’s salvation. The soul, that it may need and be prepared for true consolation, must not only be quickened and humbled, but be under some *affliction*, either felt or apprehended. Comfort, according to an apostolical direction, is to be administered to “the faint-hearted;” ^{1The 5.14} to those who are ready to stagger under the cross, and be overwhelmed by the temptations of Satan and the world; or who are discouraged because of the corruptions of their own hearts.

It is *trouble* that renders spiritual consolation necessary as well as desirable. If the believer were not feeble and incapable of being supported by a created arm, the office of a Divine Comforter would be unnecessary. If he didn’t have a painful, as well as spiritual sense of his want of heavenly consolations, earthly comforts would be more acceptable to him than they are. And if his heart were not prepared for them by being humbled as well as afflicted, they would no more refresh it than a shower of rain would refresh a rock. Accordingly, Christ seldom communicates sensible comfort to the saints, except when they are either in inward

¹ **Psa 119:76** Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, According to Your word to Your servant.

² **Psa 119:50** This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.

or outward trouble. It is by being troubled that they become disconsolate; and so they become fit for being consoled. And it is their sharpest afflictions that often serve to prepare them for the sweetest consolations. Therefore, He usually brings them into the wilderness before he speaks comfortably to them. ^{Hos 2.14} It may be proper here to remark that, just as Divine comfort is the opposite of trouble,¹ so it must be more powerful and effectual than either outward or inward trouble; for there is no prevailing, except by that which is stronger. It must be more forcible to raise up the dejected soul, than the grievance is to cast it down. Otherwise, it cannot be a comfort to it at the time.

2. There are *three degrees* of spiritual comfort: the lowest degree is peace of conscience; the next is joy; and the highest is triumph.

Peace of conscience is that inward serenity or tranquility of mind which arises from the faith and sense of being justified in the sight of God, or of being in a state of union with Christ, and of conformity to him. "Being justified by faith," says the apostle Paul, "we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." ^{Rom 5.1} The peace with which the God of hope fills the hearts of the saints, is *peace in believing*. ^{Rom 15.3} It also arises from the *sense*, or consciousness of peace with God. When the blood of Christ is applied to the conscience by faith, the conscience is purged by it from dead works; ^{Heb 9.14} and at the same time, the heart is also sprinkled by it from an evil conscience. ^{Heb 10.22} The subject of spiritual peace is a conscience that is purged. Purity and peace are connected together in the conscience; and they are both necessary to render it a good conscience. ^{1Tim 1.5} When the conscience is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, it is thereby set free from the dread of revenging wrath. The mind is not disturbed, as formerly, with alarming fears of God's indignation; nor is it disquieted by His judgments. ^{Pro 1.33} This is usually accompanied with a cordial ² acquiescence in the will of the Lord, founded on a persuasion of his wisdom and sovereignty, of his holiness and goodness. And so far as a man attains this holy acquiescence in the Divine will, he is secure from disappointment, and free from uneasiness. Now, this peaceful serenity of soul is the first degree of spiritual comfort. When the Lord Jesus would comfort his disconsolate disciples, he said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in me you might have peace." ^{Joh 16.33}

Joy is a higher degree of holy consolation. Spiritual joy is that gladness of heart which flows from the lively exercise of faith, feasting upon Christ in the offers and promises of the gospel. The apostle Paul prayed thus for the believers at Rome: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in *believing*." ^{Rom 15.13} And the apostle Peter said to the Christians of the dispersion, "*Believing*, you rejoice." ^{1Pet 1.8} Joy is a holy delight in living upon Christ, and walking in him. And it is effected by the Holy Spirit shedding abroad in the heart, like a fragrant perfume, the love of God. ^{Rom 5.5} When He graciously condescends to administer that reviving cordial, it elevates and enlarges the fainting soul. Arising as it does from the enjoyment that has begun, and from the hope of the full and endless enjoyment of God in Christ, it strengthens, and so it *comforts* the drooping heart. "The joy of the Lord," says Nehemiah, "is your strength." ^{Neh 8.10} Peace is negative comfort; joy is positive comfort. The

¹ Luther says, that 'All things come from Christ to his church, in contraries: he is righteousness, but it is felt in sin: he is life, but it is felt in death; he is consolation, but it is felt in calamity.' Augustine likewise observes that, 'the Christian's life runs on between these two: our crosses and God's comforts.'

² *Cordial*: (adj.) sincerely or intensely felt; (noun) whatever stimulates such a *sense* of God's truth. – WHG

former is like the calming of the storm; the latter is like the sun breaking through — the former is a mitigation of trouble; the latter is a sense of positive enjoyment. When a condemned criminal knows that he is pardoned, he has peace; but when (besides this) he is advanced to preferment, he has joy.

Triumph is the highest degree of consolation. The saints triumph when they so greatly rejoice, as to almost shout for joy on account of the victory given to them over their spiritual enemies. They triumph when, being more than conquerors through Him who loved them, they exult or rejoice in their almighty Redeemer, with rapturous delight. This was often the attainment of the holy apostle Paul and of his fellow-labourers in the gospel. “Thanks be to God,” he says, “who *always* causes us to triumph in Christ.” ^{2Cor 2.14} In Rom 8.31-39, he gives a lofty description of this triumph of theirs. How high that heavenly consolation rose in the soul of that holy apostle when he was writing that sublime passage! In like manner, the believer triumphs when, in his pursuit of more communion with Christ and conformity to Him, he is enabled to vanquish great opposition. In some happy moments of his life, his joy — like a river swelled by impetuous rains — bursts all its banks, and carries all the joys and all the sorrows of this world before it. It is especially *then*, that it may be styled “Joy unspeakable and full of glory.” ^{1Pet 1.8} It is glorious in itself; and it is attended with glorying in the Lord Jesus. When the heart of the Christian is elevated to this degree of consolation, he glories in the Lord. All that is in this world is brought under Him, so that the greatest calamities cannot daunt him. He sets Christ, and God in Christ, against all enemies and all evils, whether external or internal. This triumphant glorying in the Lord is like that of the holy Psalmist, who said, “My soul will make her boast in the Lord.” ^{Psa 34.2}

It is remarkable that these three degrees of spiritual comfort are mentioned by our apostle in a single passage. We have,” he says, “*peace* with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ ... we *rejoice* in hope; ... and not only so, *but we glory* in tribulations also.” ^{Rom 5.1-3}

3. According to the covenant of grace, spiritual consolation is given to believers by God the Father, by Christ the second Adam, and by the Holy Spirit. God the Father gives it by sovereign and judiciary authority; Christ the mediator, by gracious dispensation; and the Holy Spirit, by effectual operation. God the Father obtains it for his children; ^{Isa 26.12} Christ the last Adam, administers it; and the blessed Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, applies it to them.

Spiritual consolation is given to them by *God the Father*. None but Jehovah himself can pour consolation into a troubled soul. All true comfort is originally and fundamentally in Him. The apostle Paul styles him, “The God of all comfort, who comforts the saints in all their tribulation,” ^{2Cor 1.3-4} and “The Father who has loved them, and has given them everlasting consolation.” ^{2Th 2.16} He also calls Him, “The God of consolation,” ^{Rom 15.5} and “The Comforter of those who are cast down.” ^{2Cor 7.6} The Lord compares himself to a father pitying his children, and to a mother comforting with tenderest concern, her afflicted infant. ^{Psa 103.13; Isa 66.13} He charges his servants “to strengthen the weak hands, to make firm the feeble knees, and to say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear. Behold your God will come with vengeance, even with recompense; He will come and save you.’” ^{Isa 35.3-4} He suffered his only and beloved Son to be tempted in all points, as his people are, so that he might sympathise with and comfort them under all their temptations.

Comfort is administered to them by *Jesus Christ*, their Covenant-head. The Lord Jesus is the Trustee, the storehouse of all spiritual comfort to the saints. As the Hope set before them, they may derive strong consolation from Him daily. Hence he is styled, “The Consolation of Israel,” ^{Luk 2.25} He is the content of his people’s consolation; the Prince of peace, the true Noah “who comforts them, concerning the work and toil of their hands.” ^{Gen 5.29} It is part of his high office to which he was anointed by the blessed Spirit, “to comfort those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” ^{Isa 66.2-3} Therefore there is consolation in Christ.” ^{Phi 2.1} The consolation of the saints abounds by Him. ^{2Cor 1.5} They have it *in* Him and *through* him, *with* Him and *by* Him. His person, righteousness, fulness, and love are the source and substance of abundant consolation to them, against trouble of every kind. He is the one who gives peace to his people. And “when He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?” ^{Job 34.29} Nothing can comfort the heart without Christ. He removes from the soul all that is dismal, and bestows upon it all that is comfortable. He is the one who makes even the darkness of trouble itself, to be light before those who trust in Him. He is the Sun of righteousness, whose light, and warmth, and healing cheer their souls. When He grants his reviving presence to them, he leaves a delightful perfume of comfort behind him. Indeed, a man can never know what true pleasure is, till he knows Christ. The compassionate Redeemer therefore says to all who are weary, toiling in a fruitless pursuit of happiness — to all who are heavy-laden and oppressed with the servitude of sin, or bowed down under a load of misery, “Come to me, and I will give you rest.” ^{Mat 11.28}

Comfort is applied to the saints *by the Holy Spirit*. He is thus styled “the Comforter.” ^{Joh 15.26} Being the inestimable gift of the Father, through the mediation of the Son, he is “another Comforter.” ^{Joh 14.16} The adorable Spirit discharges this office of his, by testifying of Christ, or by taking from the things of Christ, and showing them to believers; by opening and applying the promises of the everlasting covenant to them; by enabling them to believe these with application to themselves; by shedding abroad the love of the Father and of the Son in their hearts; by witnessing their adoption to them, being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; by abiding in them as the seal, the earnest and the pledge of their eternal inheritance; and by dwelling in them as the Spirit of grace and of supplications.

The Holy Spirit, like Noah’s dove, flies with the olive-leaf of peace, to assure believers that “the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone.” He not only brings words of comfort to their remembrance, but opens their hearts to receive them. Comforts may be so applied as to be brought close to the heart. But if the heart doesn’t open for them, no consolation is experienced. The Spirit, therefore, not only opens and applies the promises to the heart, but opens the heart for the *comfort* of the promises; then He pours consolation into it. He also comforts the saints by enabling them to trust that in the Lord Jesus, they have righteousness and strength, forgiveness of sins, and a title to eternal life — as well as by renewing them in the image of the Son of God, thus uniting their hearts to the holy *will* of God. The original word, in the New Testament, which we have translated *Comforter*, likewise signifies an *Advocate*. One special way in which the Holy Spirit comforts believers is the exercise in them of his Advocacy, or intercession. ^{Rom 8.26} The more they are enabled to pray in faith, the more they “walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” ^{Act 9.31}

4. The spiritual consolation which is given to believers is *a part of eternal life*. “Believing, you rejoice.” ¹Pet 1.8 “He that believes in the Son, *has* everlasting life.” Joh 3.36 One part of the fruit of the Spirit, when he imparts spiritual life to the soul, is *joy*. Gal 5.22 But spiritual life in the soul, is eternal life begun. When God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began, eternal life to the second Adam for his spiritual seed, He promised him that, on the condition of His bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows, they would become heirs of everlasting joy, and heirs of himself as their exceeding joy. ¹ As the saving knowledge of Christ *in this world*, is the earnest and beginning of the beatific vision of God and the Lamb *in the heavenly world*, and as conformity to Christ in holiness *here*, is the beginning of perfect conformity to him *there* — so the consolation which the saints feel on some occasions in this valley of tears, is the first fruits or beginning of that fulness of joy which will constitute a part of their blessedness in that holy place on high. The joy of the Holy Ghost, which enters into them here, is the same in kind as the joy of their Lord, into which they will enter hereafter. It is therefore styled by one apostle, “Everlasting consolation,” ²Th 2.16 and by another, “Joy unspeakable and full of glory.” ¹Pet 1.8 It is joy that is full of glory, or glorious joy — the very dawning of the day of glory.

Holy consolation is glory *begun* in the soul — a bud which will open in heaven, and spread into ineffable and endless glory; a dawn which will shine more and more until the glorious Sun of righteousness brightens it into perfect and eternal day. All the joy of the saints below is but a spark, a *feeble* spark compared to that blaze of rapture which will burn intensely in their spirits above. It is but a slight foretaste, a small drop of that immense ocean of unmingled joy which they are to inherit in the mansions of glory. Although they are not far from the heavenly Canaan, their hearts are often ready to faint under their sufferings from without, and their conflicts with corruption from within. But a taste of the grapes of Eshcol, the first fruits of heaven, revives their spirit, rouses their zeal, and quickens their desire for that endless rest which remains for them there. Consolation keeps the holy soul on the wing, and increases her strength. It is the very *life* of the soul. When Naomi expresses the comfort Boaz would afford to Ruth, she said to her, “He will be to you a restorer of your life.” Ruth 4.15 If the contentment and delight of the heart is taken away, it dies. The souls of the wicked have an existence in hell. Yet because it is an existence without comfort, Scripture never says their state is a state of *life*, but on the contrary, a state of *death*. Accordingly, restoring comfort to mourners is called “reviving them.” Isa 57.15

5. The *grounds and sources* of holy consolation, are especially the following: God in Christ, with all his glorious perfections, as a God of love, grace, and mercy, and as the God and portion of the saints; Psa 142.5 Christ in his glorious Person, Phi 3.3 in His righteousness, Isa 61.10 fulness, offices, and relations, or Christ living in them, Gal 2.20 and living for them; Rev 1.18 the Holy Spirit as inhabiting, quickening, sanctifying, and sealing them, and as the earnest of their eternal inheritance; ²Cor 1.22 the covenant of grace, as well-ordered in all things and sure, according to which Jehovah — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — is their God, and they are His people, his peculiar people; Jer 31.33 the infinite atonement, Rom 5.11 continual intercession, Rom 8.34 supreme dominion, the inviolable faithfulness, and the gracious presence of the Lord Jesus, who is

¹ Tit 1.1-3; Luk 1.69-75; Act 3.19-23; Rom 16.25-27; 2Tim 1.8-11. This called the Redemptive Covenant. — WHG

given for a covenant of the people; and the ordinances, doctrines, promises, and offers of His gospel, with the peremptory commandment given to sinners, to believe in Him. ^{1Joh 3.23}

These are the leading and the immediate *grounds* on which, by faith, the saints build their comfort. At the same time, they are the *sources* from which, by the exercise of faith, they derive their consolation. Besides these, their faith and sense of the pardon of their sins, of the acceptance of their persons as righteous, of their adoption, of their sanctification, and of the witnessing of the blessed Spirit, are the matter of consolation to them. And so is the lively exercise of all the graces of the Holy Spirit, especially of faith, hope, and love. The comfort of *justification*, because it is founded on a righteousness which is perfect and always the same, is more stable and permanent than that of *sanctification*. The great things which believers have in possession, and the greater things which they have in hope, are the sustenance of their consolation. ^{Heb 6.18} The suitableness of those inestimable blessings to their hearts,¹ together with their sense of personal interest in them, affords them unspeakable joy. ^{Luk 1.47} As to their experiences and evidences of grace, these are not *grounds* on which they build their comfort, strictly speaking. ² But they are *proofs* of their saving interest in those grounds of consolation mentioned above, as well as *encouragements* to build their comfort upon them. And so they are a matter of consolation to their souls. ³ The most comfortable of the saints are those who trust at all times in the second Adam as given for a covenant to them; they can think of all dispensations, conditions, and duties with comfort.⁴ Those who have the love of Christ most constantly in their view, and most frequently warm in their heart, as displayed in the covenant of grace, are of all believers, the most free from perplexing doubts and fears.

6. It is both *the duty and the privilege* of true believers, to attain spiritual consolation. It is their duty, for it is required of them in the law; and it is their privilege, for it is promised to them in the gospel.

It is the *duty* of all the saints to be of good comfort. Their God, the God of consolation, would not have them disconsolate or gloomy at any time. And therefore, He expressly forbids them to fear, to be discouraged, to let their heart be troubled, or to yield to oppressive grief. He says to them, "Fear not, neither be afraid." ^{Isa 44.8} "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God." ^{Isa 41.10} "Fear not, for I have redeemed you." ^{Isa 43.1} And the Lord Jesus says, "Do not fear those who kill the body." ^{Mat 10.28} "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." ^{Joh 14.27} "Fear not; I am the first and the last." ^{Rev 1.17} "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer." ^{Rev 2.10} The apostle Paul forbids the believers in Thessalonica to sorrow for deceased saints, like others who have no hope. ^{1The 4.13} The Lord authorizes no sorrow, except *godly* sorrow, which is consistent with holy joy, and tends to increase it. He forbids to His people all oppressive grief, all desponding fear, and all perplexing trouble of mind, as hinderances to the exercise of love and the practice of holiness. He is displeased

¹ **2Sam 23:5** "Although my house is not so with God, Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, Ordered in all things and secure. For *this* is all my salvation and all *my* desire; Will He not make *it* increase?"

² **Gal 6:14** But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

³ **2Cor 1:12** For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

⁴ **Isa 26:3** You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind is stayed on *You*, Because he trusts in *You*.

when they let themselves be uncomfortable in His service,¹ when they sit in sackcloth in His gate. He commands them, on the contrary, to *rejoice* before Him. He has made it their indispensable duty to cast all their care upon Him; ^{1Pet 5:7} “to eat their bread with joy, and to drink their wine with a cheerful heart; to have their garments always white, and let their head lack no ointment.” ^{Ecc 9:7-8} He delights to see them joyful, and to hear them singing in His righteous ways.

And therefore His high command is, “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; for praise is beautiful from the upright.” ^{Psa 33:1} “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.” ^{Psa 32:11} “Delight yourself also in the Lord.” ^{Psa 37:4} “Let all those who put their trust in you, *rejoice*. Let them ever shout for joy, because you defend them. Let those also who love your name, be joyful in you.” ^{Psa 5:11} “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” ^{Mat 5:12} “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” ^{Phi 3:1} “Rejoice evermore.” “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, Rejoice.” ^{Phi 4:4} — as if the apostle said, ‘In the most earnest and urgent manner, I charge you to rejoice, not only at *some* times, but at *all* times; not only when you’re on the mount with God, but when you’re in the valley; not merely when the Lord shines upon you, but when He hides his face.’ Although no affliction is so hard to bear as the distress of soul, which a believer sometimes endures when he is without comfort — that is but little, very little indeed, compared to the sin of disobeying God’s authoritative command, by refusing to be comforted. ^{Psa 77:2} It is remarkable that although Asaph, time and again, offered reasons for comfort to his troubled mind (which appears from his soul’s refusing to be comforted), he persisted in refusing consolation — until he could say, “This is my *infirmity*” ^{Psa 77:10} — my *sin*, the distemper of unbelief in my heart. And then he ceased to refuse consolation any longer.

It is also the *privilege* of the saints, to have spiritual comfort. They have the beginnings of eternal life, and so they have joy as part of it. It is their inestimable privilege to have peace with God, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and to glory even in tribulation. They have joy which a stranger does not meddle with. ^{Pro 14:10} To them, wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” ^{Pro 3:17} “My mouth,” says the holy Psalmist, “shall praise You with joyful lips.” ^{Psa 63:5} “My lips shall greatly rejoice, when I sing to You; and my soul which You have redeemed.” ^{Psa 71:23} The apostle Paul speaks of having been filled with comfort; of having been “exceedingly joyful in *all* his tribulation;” ^{2Cor 7:4} and of having been sorrowful, yet *always* rejoicing. ^{2Cor 6:10}

“Blessed be the God of all comfort,” he says, “who comforts us in *all* our tribulation.” ^{2Cor 1:3-4} He doesn’t say, Who *has* comforted, or *will* comfort — who *can* comfort us if it pleases Him — but Who *comforts*; Who *always* comforts us. Nor does he say, Who comforts us in *some* or in *many* tribulations; but “Who comforts us in *all* our tribulation,” of whatever kind or degree. Indeed, the Lord always comforts His people in a greater or lesser measure. He gives them songs even in the night. ^{Job 35:10}

7. Believers always have *the seed*, or *principle* of spiritual comfort in them, but not always the *sense* or *feeling* of consolation. They have at all times a ground of consolation; and they *must*

¹ **Mal 2:13** And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive *it* with goodwill from your hands.

have it so long as the everlasting covenant continues to be established with Christ, and with them in Him. ¹ So likewise, they always have the seed and root of it in their hearts. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." ^{Psa 97.11} Gladness is sown for the upright in heart. Though it seems to be lost, like seed sown in winter, which lies long under the sod. Yet it is preserved; and in due season it will spring up to view, and yield a plentiful increase. Though the seed of consolation appointed for the saints may lie covered for a time, it is not destroyed. Believers at all times have the *seed* or *principle*, and also the *habit* of spiritual joy in their hearts. Even in their deepest dejection, they have a seed of comfort that will spring up. The fruit of the Spirit in them is joy and peace; and the Spirit as a Comforter abides with them forever. ^{Joh 14.16} But although they always have the *principle*, they don't at all times have the sensible *enjoyment* of comfort. They don't continually exercise the grace of joy. And therefore, they don't always see or feel in themselves the principle and habit of that grace.

It is when they are *exercising* any grace of the Spirit, that they commonly perceive it. Their sensible enjoyment of consolation in this life, is often interrupted by the remaining corruptions of their nature, and by the fiery darts of the wicked one, and by the hidings of God's countenance from them. They have a sinful hand in interrupting their own sensible comfort. ² Satan and his instruments have a malicious hand. ^{1Pet 5.8} And the Lord has a holy hand in order to manifest His sovereignty, to chasten them for their sins, to test and exercise their graces, to excite their more earnest prayers, and to teach them to improve for the future, their sense of His favour. ^{Psa 30.7} Hence, the believer is sometimes lively; and in his exercise of faith and love, he feels his heart aglow from heavenly joy. Yet at other times he is languid, cold, and disconsolate to a great degree. Like Hagar at the well, the believer's eyes are so held that he cannot perceive his grounds of comfort as he did formerly; and then his day of gladness is turned into a night of heaviness. ^{Lam 5.15}

8. The *peculiar seasons* in which actual and sensible comfort is commonly afforded to believers, are the following:

- The time of some special manifestation of redeeming love to the soul, after a dark night of desertion; ^{Psa 30.5}
- the season of God's appearing remarkably for His church; ^{Exo 15.1}
- when some heavy trial is approaching, in order to fortify their minds to endure it; ^{Act 27.24}
- in or especially *after* a time of deep affliction; ^{Isa 43.2}
- the time of tribulation for the cause of Christ and His gospel; ³

¹ **Isa 54:8-10** With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," Says the LORD, your Redeemer. ⁹ "For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; For as I have sworn That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, So have I sworn That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. ¹⁰ For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, But My kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," Says the LORD, who has mercy on you. **Eze 37:26** Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.

² Jer 2.17, 19; Isa 58.10.

³ Act 16.25; 2Cor 1.4-5.

Chap. 1. Spiritual Comfort in General.

- often, about the time they were first converted; Luk 15.22-24
- the season in which the ordinances of the gospel are administered to them with uncommon liveliness; Isa 56.7
- frequently, in a season of great humiliation, sorrow, ¹ and melting of heart for sin; ²
- the time in which they are more than ordinarily engaged in the exercise of grace and practice of duty, and especially when they are in great conflict with the corruptions of their heart; 2Cor 12.7-9
- after sharp conflicts with sin or temptation from which they came away victorious; Rev 2.17
- the season in which the Lord is calling them to some extraordinary service for which they need special encouragement; ³
- the time in which they see and find the *least* comfort in creatures, or in which they are destitute of creature-comforts, and enabled more than usually to despise them in comparison to Christ and God in him;
- the season in which the Lord confers on them some remarkable and unexpected favour; ⁴
- and the time in which they employ themselves in fixed and deep meditation on the adorable Redeemer, and His glorious grace. Psa 104.34

For the most part, these are *ordinary* seasons of sensible comfort to the saints. But as the Lord is infinitely sovereign, wise, and gracious in dispensing His blessings to them, there are also some *extraordinary* seasons of rejoicing — some ineffable glances of light on their souls, which penetrate, transform, and fill them with rapturous and inexpressible joy.

9. The comfort which the Lord bestows is, in every instance, *the most suitable* to the present needs of the believer. “As are your days,” says Moses, “so shall your strength be.” Deu 33.25 The Christian’s comforts are wisely and wonderfully adapted to the nature, degree, and continuance of his grievances. When he has the most discouragement without, he usually has the most consolation within. When the Lord Jesus gives him least of creaturely-comfort, He commonly affords him most of Himself *as the Consolation of Israel*. He seldom allows him at once, much of the riches of the earth, and also refreshment from above. Rather, when He shuts before him all doors of help from this world, He opens to him the doors of heaven. It was only when the Martyr Stephen saw nothing but death for himself in this world, that he saw “the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.” Act 7.56 When the Lord brings his people into outward straits, he commonly favours them with inward enlargements. When he puts a cup of affliction into their hands, He usually gives them a cup of consolation with it. “Will He contend with me,” says Job, “with his great power? No; but he would put *strength* in me.” Job 23.6 The Lord Jesus said to Paul, when he was afflicted by a thorn in the flesh, “My strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2Cor 12.9

¹ A good man lying on his sickbed, was once asked which were the most comfortable days that ever he enjoyed? He cried out in his artless manner, ‘O give me my *mourning days*; give me my mourning days again; for they were the most joyful days that I ever had.’ — Brooks’ *Cabinet*, p. 242.

² Dan 9.21-23; Jer 31.18-20.

³ Gen 13.15-16; 46.3-4.

⁴ 1Sam 2.1-10; Luk 1.46-47.

The time in which believers are most sensible of their utter inability to resist and overcome their corruptions or temptations, and are most engaged in relying on their great Redeemer for strength, is the season in which, by supporting and strengthening them, He usually affords them the most illustrious displays of the perfection of His strength. In proportion to their apparent weakness, His strength will appear perfect in comforting or strengthening their souls under that weakness. Accordingly, the apostle in another place says, “As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ.” ^{2Cor 1.5} The comfort afforded to the saints is admirably fitted and proportioned to their sufferings in conformity to Christ, and especially to their sufferings *for Him*. If the one abounded, so does the other, and that will be in the most suitable and exact proportion. If gall is dropped into their cup, a suitable proportion of sweetness will also be infused, so their affliction will be in measure. ^{Isa 27.8} If they are under various troubles, and trust in Christ, He has various comforts for them. If they labour under powerful evils, He has strong consolations; if they are under new afflictions, He has new comforts; if they are under small grievances, he has small degrees of support to bestow; if under great perplexities, He has great measures of consolation to impart; if in deep distresses, he has deep comforts— comforts that will sink to the very centre of the soul; and if under continued trials, whether external or internal, He has continued, indeed *everlasting* consolations to give them. He “will not allow them to be tempted above what they are able; but with the temptation, He will also make a way to escape, so that they may be able to bear it.” ^{1Cor 10.13} He will either reduce the trial to their strength, or raise their strength to the trial.

Accordingly, if their holy consolation is small at any time, it is because they are not then exposed, as they are at other times, either to outward temptations or to inward conflicts. So long as believers are liable to yield to the prevalence of their unbelief, pride, indolence, an inordinate attachment to earthly things, and a legal temper, the Lord is pleased to bestow or suspend, to restore or increase, spiritual consolation *at such seasons*, and *in such degrees*, as He sees most suitable. This is to prevent or control those evils, and to promote the increase of holiness in their souls. ^{Eze 34.16} Seeing that true comfort is an inward strengthening of the soul against trouble that is felt or feared, it must (as hinted above) be stronger than the trouble, or else the act of comforting will not follow. If the comfort is not above the uneasiness, then it is no longer comfort. No comforts, therefore, except those which are Divine, can refresh the holy soul under trouble, because in all other comforts, the disease is above the remedy. Believers should never be discouraged in the prospect even of the highest degree of affliction; for the spiritual comfort will be so adapted to the trouble, as to rise above and prevail over it. ^{Psa 94.19} It is therefore better for them to have the consolation, than to be exempted from the trouble and thus lack the consolation. This is one special advantage to the saints, of an afflicted condition: that the Lord Jesus pities them most, and comforts them most, *in that condition*. It is commonly when Satan, or the world, or the flesh, is most bitter to them, that the Lord and his grace are sweetest. Indeed, His sharpest dispensations would often be His sweetest, if they knew better how to employ them.

10. The spiritual comfort of the saints *is according to their faith*. “According: to your faith,” said the Lord Jesus, “be it unto you.” ^{Mat 9.29}

It is according to *the strength of their faith*. If a man’s faith is weak, his consolation is weak and unstable. In some happy moment, he may indeed feel a sudden transport of joy; but he

still has very little solid or lasting consolation. Doubts, fears, and perplexities will often prevail against the peace of his mind. “Why are you fearful, O you of *little faith*?” Mat 8.26 What usually stands between a Christian and the joy of God’s salvation, is his unwillingness to come anew to Christ, *as a sinner*. So long as this is the case, any small degree of consolation that he may have, will rise and fall according to his frames or feelings. But if his faith is strong, even though he may not have rapturous joy, his consolation will usually be strong; Heb 6.18 if stable, his peace of conscience will also be stable. “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established; he shall not be afraid.” Psa 112.7-8 Faith is not only a spiritual grace, but it is the spirit of every other grace, and especially of joy. Spiritual joy is “the joy of faith,” Phi 1.25 for it proceeds from faith as its principle. It is the office of faith to take and to hand comfort to the soul — to bring peace into the conscience, and joy into the heart. If direct and firm reliance on the Saviour increases, slavish fear subsides, and settled comfort ensues. *Sense* looks upon the face, the *external* conduct of Jesus Christ; but *faith*, especially strong faith, looks upon his *heart*, as revealing itself in the sure and unchangeable promise. It sees inward affections of love and mercy, even under outward expressions of displeasure. Faith, when it is strong, can look through a thick cloud of desertion, and discern the affection of a Father under the appearance of an enemy.¹

It is also according to *the exercise* of their faith, that believers are comforted. If the Christian seldom exercises his faith. his consolation is proportionately small. If he exercises it frequently, because it is his *duty* and not merely because he is impelled to it by a painful sense of *need*, his holy consolation is great in proportion. The more frequently and simply he acts faith with Christ as its object, who is the Consolation of Israel, and with “good tidings of great joy to all people” as its ground, the more he will have the comfort of being conscious that he has the grace of faith. Besides, the more cordially and frequently he exercises faith, the more spiritual pleasure he will enjoy. For to trust cordially that *Jesus loves and saves me*, and that *He will save me with an everlasting salvation*, is in itself a delightful and cheering persuasion. Moreover, faith is the instrument by which the believer received consolation at first, and by which he continues to receive it still. It is by trusting daily in the Lord Jesus for all his salvation — of which holy consolation is a part — that the Christian derives daily, renewed supplies of spiritual consolation from His fulness. The more frequent, simple, and lively his actings of confidence in his gracious Redeemer are, the more holy comfort he will receive in every time of need.

To feel comfortable when he is conscious that he has clear evidences of his vital union with Christ, is a *duty*. But to take his comfort fresh from the Fountain, by the direct application and particular trust of faith, is a still greater duty. It is a duty by which he glorifies his faithful Redeemer more, and receives an increase of pure and solid consolation. Hence, these are cheering passages of Scriptures: “I would have fainted, unless I *believed* that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living;” Psa 27.13 “I have *trusted* in your mercy; my heart shall *rejoice* in your salvation;” Psa 13.5 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, *believe* also in me;” Joh 14.1 “Now may the God of hope fill you with all *joy and peace in believing*.” Rom 15.13 “We who have *believed*, enter into rest.” Heb 4.3

¹ **Isa 8:17** And I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him. **Job 13:15** Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.

Although the sight of his evidences of grace is indeed pleasant to a holy man, the sight of Christ in the offer and promise, should be much more delightful to him. Unbelief and a legal spirit will dispose a man to always look for something *in himself* as his ground of comfort. But a holy faith will deal with none but Christ. Nothing is such a delight to the Lord Jesus, because nothing honours Him so much as direct and unsuspecting confidence in Him for salvation. Whereas, looking to Him or upon him, through one's own graces and frames, reflects much dishonour upon Him. The man who so looks upon him, is like someone who sees the sun reflected by water, which appears to move or waver as much as the surface of the water does.

11. The *properties* of spiritual consolation, by which it is distinguished from the joy of the hypocrite, are these:

- True comfort comes by the word of God, and that must be rightly understood;^{1Joh 1.4} but delusive joy comes either by impressions *outside* the word, or by a misunderstanding of the word.
- True consolation is *real* and *solid*. The sadness of the believer is, as it were, only seeming sadness; whereas his joy is real. “As sorrowful,” says Paul, “yet always rejoicing.”^{2Cor 6.10} The hypocrite, on the contrary, is joyful only in appearance; while in reality he is gloomy and sorrowful.^{Pro 14.13}
- Spiritual comfort goes to *the heart*, and inspires it with holy delight. It is solid, and dwells more in the heart than in the countenance. But delusive joy floats on the surface; it makes a loud noise and is therefore compared to “the crackling of thorns under a pot.”^{Ecc 7.6}
- True comfort, with regard to its object, rejoices more in the manifested *amiableness* and *excellence* of *Christ*, than in the manifestation of those joys.^{Phi 3.3} But counterfeit joy rejoices more in the manifestation itself, than in the excellence of the Divine object who is manifested.
- The true Christian rejoices most in the holy and amiable nature of the things of Christ. The formalist delights most in his own pretended interest in those things. What delights him is not so much the beauty of the *Lord*, as the beauty of his own *experience*.
- The delight which the believer takes in the Lord and in his word, is his *chief* delight, his *exceeding* joy.¹ The dearest delights of nature are, in his estimation, infinitely below Christ, and God in Him. The presence and enjoyment of Christ will, in his esteem, supply the lack of all other comforts. But the chief delight of the hypocrite is not in the Lord, but in some other object.
- True consolation usually accompanies, or follows, *godly sorrow* for sin.^{Mat 5.4} But the joy of the empty formalist springs up quickly and without contrition of heart.^{Joh 16.20} If the hypocrite but offers to mourn for sin, it will effectually hinder his rejoicing in God.²
- The godly sorrow of the believer will be a matter of *joy* for him. He rejoices more when his heart is melting for sin, than he would, even if he had all the carnal delights in the world. On the contrary, the delusive joy of the formalist will be a matter of *sorrow* to him, either in time or in eternity.^{Pro 14.13}

¹ Psa 43.4; 4.6-7; 19.10.

² This is evidenced by his remorse for sin's consequences, rather than his joy for God's grace. – WHG

- True comfort is *hidden* from unregenerate men. ^{Pro 14.10} It is as far out of the reach of worldly men to discern the spiritual joy of a saint, as it is out of their power to prevent or remove it. The consolation of the sincere Christian is *unspeakable*; ^{1Pet 1.8} and no wonder, for the matter and importance of it are incomprehensible. But the greatest joy of the hypocrite and the worldling can easily be told. It can, without difficulty, be expressed to the utmost of its value.
- True consolation is *glorified* or *glorious* joy. ^{1Pet 1.8} It has the highest and most glorious object; and it is the beginning as well as the earnest of glory in the soul. Counterfeit joy, on the contrary, is base and inglorious.
- The consolation of the believer is *holy*. It has a holy, sanctifying influence on his soul.¹ It disposes him to practise universal holiness willingly and cheerfully. It strengthens, encourages, and enlivens his heart in holy obedience. ^{Neh 8.10} It invigorates him for it; it excites him to it. But the joy of the hypocrite is *unholy*: it leaves his heart as carnal, and his life as unholy as ever — indeed, it strengthens his lusts, and it encourages him in sloth and in the practice of some secret iniquity. ^{Luk 11.21}
- True comfort *humbles* the sincere Christian, and lays him in the dust at the footstool of a God of infinite holiness, and sovereign grace.² But counterfeit joy puffs up the empty formalist with pride and self-conceit. ^{Isa 58.2-3}
- Pure consolation is accompanied with a constant *fear of displeasing* the Lord. ^{Gen 39.9} But delusive joy is connected with no fear except that of *suffering* from Him.
- Spiritual comfort cannot be maintained without a holy *tenderness of conscience*, and a constant *struggle* against all manner of sin. ^{1Joh 3.3} But carnal and hypocritical joy is preserved without either one.
- True consolation renders every sin more and more hateful.³ But counterfeit joy leaves the hypocrite under the reigning love of all iniquity, and especially of some darling sin.
- Holy comfort disposes the believer to frequent impartial *self examination*. ^{Psa 26.1-3} But delusive joy inclines and encourages the hypocrite to neglect that exercise. ^{Joh 3.20-21}

In a word, true consolation is *permanent*. ^{Joh 16.22} It is so fixed in the heart by the Holy Spirit, that it can never be wholly removed. And it is so strong, that it swallows up almost all matter of unwarrantable fear and grief. Indeed, when the believer has lost all sight of his personal interest in the Saviour, he cannot (as formerly) exercise his joy in God. And in such a case, he cannot help but lose his *sense* of that joy, even while the principle and habit of it still remain. But though the hypocrite's persuasion of his pretended interest in the Divine favour continues, his joy ceases. His sense of that interest becomes insipid to him. ⁴

12. In proportion to the *degree* of holy consolation that is afforded the believer, *his duty is his delight*. Being renewed in the spirit of his mind, the more clearly and spiritually he discerns the loveliness of God in Christ; and the more cordially and firmly he believes His love for him;

¹ 2Cor 3.18; Phi 3.3.

² Job 42.5-6; 1Cor 15.10.

³ Rom 7.22-24; Psa 119.128.

⁴ **Job 20:5** The triumphing of the wicked is short, And the joy of the hypocrite is *but* for a moment.

the more he loves God.^{1Joh 4.19} And the more he loves God, the more he delights in Him. Also, in the same proportion that he spiritually discerns the infinite amiableness of the holiness and other perfections of God, and believes with application His redeeming love, he approves God, and the manifestations of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. And the more he approves, or is pleased with God as gloriously manifested in Christ, the more delight he takes in Him. Add to this, that the more he is enabled to cordially trust that God in Christ *loves* him, and is *not* his enemy, but rather his Friend and Father, the more spiritual comfort he will have. And the more of that holy consolation that he has (which is a rejoicing in the Lord), the more he will delight in Him as his own God and Father. Now, as the believer is enabled to *love*, be *pleased with*, and *rejoice in* God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, he is proportionally enabled at the same time, to delight in the infinite *holiness* of God, as his God in Christ, and in all the illustrious displays of it which are afforded him, especially in redemption. ^{Psa 138.5}

And because the moral law, in the hand of the glorious Mediator, is a fair transcript of God's holiness, and a declaration of His will, the believer also delights in that law according to the inward man. ^{Rom 7.22} He loves it because it is holy and just;¹ and he consents to it, because it is good. ^{Rom 7.16} In the same degree, then, in which a holy man is delighted or comforted by a spiritual discovery of the transcendent loveliness of Jehovah, and by a firm belief of His infinite love to him,² he delights in His holy commandments. But the more he delights in the commandments of the Lord, the more pleasure he takes in spiritual and universal obedience to them. ^{Psa 19.7-11} His heart is united to the will and to the glory of his redeeming God. And the more he is refreshed by the holy consolations of the gospel, or enabled to rejoice in Christ Jesus and His great salvation, the more he will delight in evangelical obedience to His will,³ and in holy activity for His glory. The more his heart is comforted, the more it will be a comfort to him to mortify sin and to practise holiness; also, the more uniformly he will rejoice in all opportunities to do good; and the more ardently he will seize them. ^{Pro 3.17}

Beholding the transcendent beauty of the Lord, and trusting that in Christ, *this* God is *his* God, and that He loves him with an everlasting love — the believer delights to think and speak of Him, to adore and serve him, and in all things, to resign himself to His blessed will. Anointed with the oil of gladness, and refreshed with the sweetness of redeeming mercy, he delights in imitating his great Redeemer, and to do the will of God. And he accounts no pleasure under the sun, equal to that of doing good. If he could be more holy and spiritually minded, it would please him better than to be possessed of all the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world. The more his holy soul is invigorated with spiritual consolation, the more active and cheerful he is in all his duties. For in proportion to his delight in them, they are easy for him.⁴ Indeed, holy living usually begins with comfort, and is maintained by it. The method of grace revealed by the gospel, is to comfort our hearts, and thereby to establish us in every good word and work. ^{2The 2.17}

¹ Psa 19.7-10; 119.97.

² "Love to" — this means having a love *for* him, that is expressed *to* him, in tangible ways. — WHG

³ *Evangelical obedience*: personal obedience to God's commands, not for merit, but as evidences of faith. — WHG

⁴ Psa 35.13; Mat 11.30.

13. Finally, the Lord usually dispensed *consolation and affliction alternately* to His people, so that they may neither be too depressed, nor too elated. The apostle Paul informs us that “lest he be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations” which had been afforded him in an extraordinary manner, he was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.”¹ In order that he might not be elated with an unbecoming conceit of himself through the vanity and deceitfulness of his heart — as if he were better than other apostles, because of the abundance of the revelations with which he had been favoured — the Lord employed the most effectual means to keep him humble. He permitted Satan and his instruments to afflict him, either in his soul or body, or perhaps in both. And that was done in a manner very abasing and grievous to him. But that the holy apostle might not be too downcast by this painful affliction, the Redeemer, in answer to his prayer, comforted him with this gracious promise: “My grace is sufficient for you.”² 2Cor 12.9

We also read that the Lord showed David great and sore troubles at one time. But He enabled him to trust that, at another time, He would quicken and comfort him on every side. ^{Psa 71.20-21} A Prophet, personating the ancient church in her captivity, says, “you have lifted me up and cast me down.” ^{Psa 102.10} The believer, then, while he is in this world, has cloudy and clear days, tempestuous and calm seasons. He is at one time in the valley of tears, and at another on the mountain of joy. His gifts, his prosperity, and in consequence of these, his danger of carnal security, are sometimes so great, that the Lord, in order to prevent his being intoxicated, sees it necessary to mingle water with his wine. He sees, it may be, that when the outward path of the Christian is smooth, he is not fit to be trusted with inward consolation except in a small measure. Therefore, in His infinite wisdom and love, He varies his dispensations to the believer. By a wise interchange of adversity and prosperity, he sets trouble and comfort, for the most part, against one another,² that the one may be a foil to the other — that the Christian may find a short, easy, and safe passage between them; that in adversity he may weep as though he did not weep,” and in prosperity “rejoice, as though he did not rejoice.”¹ 1Cor 7.30 Indeed, so long as sin remains in the believer, he must, in order to grow in grace, have distress and comfort, either alternately or both together — to the end that when he is sorrowful, he may not be cast down too low, and that when he is rejoicing, he may not be lifted up too high.

Reflections

ARE Christ and God in Christ, together with His grace, mercy, and truth, as said above, the *primary grounds* of a saint’s comfort and hope? If so, I infer from this that his manifold infirmities and deficiencies in his exercise of grace, and in his performance of duty, should *at no time discourage him*. Believer, your remaining darkness, deadness, carnality, weakness, and indisposition of spirit for holy exercises, should indeed occasion in your soul much godly sorrow and self-loathing; but they should never discourage you in your holy endeavours, nor cause you to despond. They should not make you distrust your faithful Redeemer, nor doubt about any promised blessing. This is because your title to grace and glory is not founded on your own performances, but on the consummate righteousness of the Lord Jesus; and your *exercise* of hope, should be suitable to the *grounds* of your hope. Do not be disquieted, then,

¹ 2Cor 12.7.

² **Ecc 7:14** In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing *that will come* after him.

even though you feel the corruption of your nature is strong and active; and while you find at the same time, that your renewed nature is striving in opposition to it, and mourning under a painful sense of it. Unbelieving discouragement, arising from a sense either of sins or of wants, of desertions or of temptations, will weaken your hands, and indispose your heart for spiritual obedience.¹ It was when Peter began to *fear*, that he began to sink in the water.

Does the Lord Jesus usually afford inward and *sensible* comfort to his children, about the time of their first conversion? They may see in this an illustrious display of His manifold wisdom, as well as his redeeming love to them. One thing that he designs by this, is that they may perceive as early as possible, the inexpressible advantages that they have gained by the gracious change which His Holy Spirit has produced in them — and thereby be encouraged, as well as inclined, to so run the race that is set before them, as to attain the prize of inexpressible and endless joy in His immediate presence. For having marrow and fatness in their Father's house, instead of husks in a far country — spiritual and substantial delights, instead of pleasures that are carnal and empty — they cannot help but acknowledge, even at the beginning of their Christian course, that they are already unspeakable gainers.

Is spiritual joy *required* of believers in the law, and *promised* to them in the gospel? And is the Lord *displeased* when they appear uncomfortable in His service? Let them learn from this, that it is their *duty*, at all times and in all conditions, to be of good comfort; and that it is their sin to neglect this part of their duty at any time, or on any account. Consider, believer, that you are *commanded* to “be of good courage,” yes, to “rejoice in the Lord always.” ^{Phi 4.4} Rely then, upon the promise of the gospel, in order to obey this precept of the law. Trust firmly that Jesus, the Consolation of Israel, according to His promise, will comfort you in every time of need. And in the faith of the promise, as well as in obedience to the precept, endeavour frequently to rejoice in Him, and in God as your God through him. ^{Joh 20.17} Exercise daily, in dependence on the promise, the grace of holy joy — not so much because it will afford pleasure to yourself, as because it is a duty which you are commanded by your God and Redeemer, to always perform. If you allow yourself to neglect any duty for a season, and especially *this* duty, you must not be surprised if you soon lose your present comfort.

Is spiritual consolation or joy, a part of *life*, of *eternal* life? Then from this I may justly infer that it slanders true religion to say or insinuate that it *deprives* persons of the comfort of life. Nothing can be more fake. None in the world has such good reason to rejoice, as the true Christian. If a holy man appears at any time to be sad, it is not because he is religious, but because he is not *more* religious. The more holiness he attains, the purer consolation he enjoys. It is true, he will take no more pleasure in sin; but instead of that, he will have peace with God, and the joy of His salvation. It is far from Christ's design, to deprive him of pleasure; but only to determine and enable him to consult his own happiness, in subservience to the glory of God, so as to exchange sinful and mean pleasures, for spiritual and noble ones. ^{Pro 3.17} Accordingly, he experiences such delight in the ways of holiness as he never enjoyed, nor could enjoy, in the ways of sin. “A stranger does not intermeddle with *his* joy.” ^{Pro 14.10} The believer knows by experience that there is more joy, even in penitential mourning for sin, than

¹ 1Sam 12.20; Heb 12.12-13.

in all the mirth of the most prosperous sinner. He finds such a secret sweetness in his godly sorrow, that instead of *desiring* the removal of that sorrow, he rather *fears* it.

Is the comfort with which the saints are favoured, spiritual and holy comfort? Then let no man conclude that he is a true Christian merely because he has felt on some occasions, *natural and sensible* consolation.

- Natural, outward, and sensible consolation is one thing; spiritual, inward, and holy comfort is another, and a very *different* thing.
- The former is natural, and is common both to saints and sinners; the latter is spiritual, and is peculiar to the saints alone;
- natural comfort is outward and sensitive, proceeding under common, providential influence from a man's natural constitution of body; spiritual comfort is inward and holy, and is effected by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, dwelling in the soul.
- Spiritual consolation, as well as natural consolation, is sometimes sensible; or rather, spiritual might be styled (as it sometimes is) *sensible consolation*; and natural, *sensitive delight*.
- Spiritual comfort delights chiefly the rational and inward faculties of the soul; natural comfort pleases only its outward and sensitive faculties; namely, the imagination, the natural spirits, and even the external senses.
- The former is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, according to the word; it is spiritually understood and believed. The latter is often produced by the external manner of the reader or preacher of the word, such as his elocution, tone, and action.
- Persons of a soft natural constitution of body have this sensitive delight more often, and in greater measure, than those of a contrary temperament. When the one is enjoyed by the saints, they commonly can assign some reason for it; when the other is felt by persons of any description, they usually can give no reason for the delightful sensation, but only that *something* (they know not what) has made a pleasing impression on them.
- Spiritual comfort is the opposite of trouble of mind on spiritual accounts. Natural comfort is the opposite of melancholy, which is a bodily disease. The former, as I already observed, is the special work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of sincere believers; the latter proceeds from natural and external causes, and is often raised by Satan in order to confirm sinners in their delusion and hypocrisy.

The hypocrites in Zion, mentioned by Isaiah, “took delight in approaching to God;” Isa. 58.2 and the hearers compared by our Lord to the stony ground, “immediately received the word with gladness.” Mar 4.16 Thus it appears that thousands of men and women, whose unholy lives demonstrate that they are utter strangers to spiritual and holy consolation, have nevertheless, on some occasions, much natural and sensible delight. Let no man therefore conclude that he is a true Christian, merely because he has felt much sensible and even transporting joy — for his joy may be nothing but a natural sensation.

ONCE MORE: Is holy consolation *peculiar* to holy persons? Then it does *not* belong to unholy men. The same spiritual comfort that the saints have received is offered freely in the gospel to you who live in the love and practice of some known sin. And the authentic offer affords you a warrant to receive it — but no warrant to receive it separate from Christ, nor otherwise

than by *receiving Him*, with his righteousness and salvation. Indeed, it affords you a right to trust in the Lord Jesus for all His salvation, and for holy consolation as a part of it — but no right to trust that He will give you comfort apart from salvation; no warrant to trust that He will afford you spiritual consolation in the love and practice of any iniquity. You “cannot rejoice for joy, as other people,” for you have no personal interest in Jesus, the Consolation of Israel. Alas! there is not, and never was, the smallest drop of spiritual consolation in your heart. You have comfort from the *creature*, but none from the *Redeemer*. You cannot have it from Him, for you delight in sinning against Him. The Lord says to you, and to all the other servants of sin, “Behold, my servants will eat, but you will be hungry. Behold, my servants will drink, but you will be thirsty. Behold my servants will rejoice, but you will be ashamed. Behold, my servants will sing for joy of heart, but you will cry for sorrow of heart, and will howl for grief of spirit.” *Isa 65.13-14* You now love vanity, and rejoice in iniquity; but the day is coming when, if sovereign grace does not prevent it, “your laughter shall be turned to mourning, and your joy, to heaviness.” *Jas 4.9*

Ah! how depraved is your heart, when it can take pleasure in sin, but no pleasure in Christ or in holiness! What a reproach it is to your understanding and will, to love darkness rather than light, to choose death rather than life! How deep is the corruption of your nature, when you can love sin, which is altogether hateful, *infinitely* hateful, and yet hate Christ and holiness, which are altogether lovely! When you can take delight in the worst of things, but none in the best! What ignorance and enmity against God you have shown up to now, by standing aloof from holiness, lest it deprive you of your delight in sin! You now say about the holy exercises of private and public worship in which the saints enjoy delightful communion with their God and Saviour, “Behold what a weariness it is!” *Mal 1.13* But take heed, lest you provoke the holy Majesty of heaven to cast you into that place of eternal torment, where you will have sufficient cause to be weary.

O sinner, the Lord Jesus, who is infinitely excellent and amiable, immensely full of grace and consolation, now offers Himself and all that he is and has, to *you* as an undone sinner of mankind. And with inexpressible tenderness, He invites you to accept Him, and to trust and delight in Him. He says to sinners in common, who read and hear His blessed gospel,

“Come, buy and eat; yes come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price. Harken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” *Isa 55.1-3*

It will be impossible for you to experience true consolation until you comply with this gracious, cheering invitation.

CHAPTER 2.

The great importance and usefulness of spiritual comfort for the saints.

The high importance and utility of spiritual consolation in qualifying believers for the lively exercise of their graces, and for the spiritual performance of their duties, will be apparent if the following particulars are considered:

1. It is of such unspeakable consequence to them, that the eternal Father has, in the greatness of His love, sent his only begotten Son into the world with a commission to *purchase* comfort for them. The Father, according to his eternal covenant with the Son as the last Adam, sent Him in order that He might bear their griefs and carry their sorrows; and might — at the infinite expense of his unparalleled anguish, agony, and death — purchase for them the comfort which they had forfeited in the first Adam. He sent his only, his dear Son, to endure the pains of eternal death for them, that in union with Him, they might enjoy the comfort of eternal life; that they might enter into Zion with songs of triumph in their lips and everlasting joy on their heads. The Lord Jesus himself has declared that the comforting of mourners in Zion was a principal object of His mission into the world. “The Spirit of the Lord God,” he says, “is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted; ...to comfort all who mourn; to give to those who mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Isa 56.1-3 The Father has also exalted Him, in his human nature, to universal dominion, with the purpose that He might dispense the comfort of salvation to all who would believe in Him. Accordingly, when He was about to leave the world, the legacy he left to his disciples was *comfort*.¹ He promised that their sorrow would be turned into joy; and that *in Him* they would have peace, while *in the world* they would have tribulation. Joh 16.20,33

So great is the importance of Divine consolation to the saints and to the glory of God in their salvation, that the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to apply it to their souls. The Spirit accordingly testifies of Christ, Joh 15.26 witnesses their adoption into the family of God, and seals them unto the day of redemption. Eph 4.30 In performing these offices, He invigorates and cheers their hearts. Indeed, so important, so excellent is spiritual comfort in the estimation of God, that God the Father assumes this title, “The God of consolation;” Rom 15.5 “The God of all comfort.” 2Cor 1.3 God the Son is styled, “The Consolation of Israel.” Luk 2.25 And God the adorable Spirit is distinguished by this cheering title, “The Comforter.” Joh 16.7 In a few words, so high is the value which the Lord sets upon holy comfort, that He gives this solemn charge to the ministers of his word: “Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.” Isa 35.3-4 Do men set such a high value on *earthly* comforts, as to pursue the enjoyment of them with unwearied diligence? With what incomparably higher esteem should believers regard heavenly consolations, in which the infinite excellence of redeeming grace is displayed with transcendent lustre! ²

2. Spiritual consolation is of such high importance as to form *an essential part of that eternal life* which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began. That it is part of eternal life,

¹ **Joh 14:27** "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

² **Job 15:11** Are the consolations of God too small for you, And the word *spoken* gently with you?

was evinced above. Comfort or joy is so essential a part of eternal life in heaven, that in scripture, heaven itself is styled *Joy*. ^{Mat 25.21} To enter into heaven is to enter into joy — the joy of the Lord Jesus. If fulness of joy is a necessary part of eternal life as consummated in heaven, then doubtless joy in an inferior degree, is yet part of that same eternal life, as begun on earth. Now, does spiritual consolation form a part even of eternal life? Is it necessary to holiness and happiness, not only as a means to the end, but (by a nobler kind of necessity) as part of the end itself? How unspeakably important, then, how divinely excellent it must be! It is supernatural, spiritual, and Divine. And therefore it is of a nature inconceivably more pure, sublime, and ennobling than any natural delight, any earthly joy. Instead of corrupting and debasing the soul, as carnal joys frequently do, it beautifies and dignifies it. So highly important in our view is even *earthly* comfort or joy, that as Chrysostom says, ‘We do all, in order that we may joy.’ But creature-comforts, though enjoyed in the utmost variety and in the highest degree, in comparison to Divine consolation even in the lowest degree, are like the glimmering taper before the meridian sun. Holy consolation is a commodity of heaven, that distant country, not to be imported except by faith and prayer. It makes a man inexpressibly happier than any earthly comforts can do. One smile of the Redeemer, one glance of heaven, as the sure portion of the holy soul, yields more contentment and comfort than all the delights of this world. What are any, what are *all* earthly joys, compared with the joy of someone who rejoices in the Lord! Indeed, as Luther says, ‘to comfort the heart is more than to create a world.’ How inexpressibly powerful and grateful is heavenly consolation to the distressed soul! When David had been under great trouble, when a flood of bitter waters overflowed his soul, the Lord let fall a drop or two of heavenly comfort — all was turned to sweetness. ^{Psa 94.19} O the inconceivable excellence, the unparalleled sweetness of Divine consolation!

3. The high importance of spiritual comfort will also appear if we consider that it is the pure delight which saints have *in common with holy angels*. The pleasures of sense are what believers have in common with irrational creatures; the pleasures merely of reason are what they attain equally with other men. But the delights of communion with God are what they enjoy in common with the angels of light. They are not indeed the same in *degree* as the joys of angels, but they are the same in *kind*. They are the pleasures of a soul, and not of bodily sense — the delights of a holy soul, and not a carnal mind. The pleasures of true religion immediately affect the soul, that part of a holy man by which he is allied to the world of spirits. And therefore, they are to be regarded as the only sublime, the only true pleasures of a man. When holy souls are comforted, they are entertained as with angels’ food. Their consolation is not only spiritual, and therefore suitable to a holy and immortal spirit, but it is substantial and satisfying, heavenly and glorious. ^{1Pet 1.8} Their joy is, in its own nature, unspeakably glorious; and it is accompanied with glorying in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is truly honourable, and it is the earnest of glory in their souls. When sinners have “come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling,” they “come to an innumerable company of angels.” ^{Heb 12.22,24} Thus, in some measure, believers participate with them in that sublime, that celestial delight which they always enjoy in the presence of God and the Lamb. They then begin to imitate the holy and blessed angels in delighting in objects of the greatest worth, and especially in the will and the glory of God in Christ.

4. Spiritual consolation is of such consequence to believers and to the glory of God in their salvation, that every part of sacred Scripture *contributes to promote it, and is intended to do*

so. “Whatever things were written beforehand,” says the apostle Paul, “were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope;” ^{Rom 1:5.4} — as if he had said, ‘Whatever things were written in the Old Testament by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were left on record, not only for the instruction of our ancestors, but for ours likewise. This was in order that we might be excited and encouraged by means of them, to exercise patience under all our afflictions; and that we might be partakers of the joy of faith, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, so as to attain the sure hope of grace to bear them, and of glory to crown them.’ All the types and prophecies, histories and examples, laws and doctrines recorded in the Scriptures, were designed to increase the consolation of believers under their various troubles. Accordingly, in the hand of the adorable Spirit, they all serve either directly or indirectly to advance their comfort. The Old and New Testaments were written for this end, that they might, like breasts of consolation, be suckled by the children of God. ^{Isa 66.11}

The blessed word is, in all its parts, a magazine of comfort to the saints. Even those parts of it which seem least adapted to afford them comfort, promote their consolation and their delight, notwithstanding. The strictest of its commands prescribe delightful work to them. ¹ The severest of its threatenings deter them from wandering out of those ways which are ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. The law as a covenant, is subservient to the gospel, and both of them serve to bring the believing soul to holy comfort. ^{1Cor 14.3} One commendation of the statutes of God is that “they rejoice the heart.” ^{Psa 19.8} The holy word of God in all its parts, is inexpressibly sweet to the exercised Christian. “It is the joy and rejoicing of his heart.” ^{Jer 15.16} The most delicious honey is not so gratifying to the palate, as the holy Scriptures are to the spiritual taste. ^{Psa 19.10} How unspeakably important and useful, then, must this spiritual consolation be, when it is the great design of *every* part of sacred Scripture, to advance it in the souls of believers!

5. So important is this comfort, that all the dispensations of *Divine grace and providence are continually concurring* to increase it in the saints. “We know,” says an apostle, “that all things work together for *good*, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”² The *good* mentioned here, means the *spiritual and eternal happiness* or welfare of the saints. But the spiritual and eternal happiness of the saints consists in spiritual *joy*, as well as in spiritual knowledge and true holiness. All things, then, all dispensations and occurrences of providence — however diversified, however afflictive — even now, under the special influence of the overruling wisdom and grace of God, cooperate with one another in all their diversified connections and consequences, to promote the spiritual joy, the holy consolation, of those who sincerely love Him. All hands in heaven, on earth, and in hell, are presently and continually at work in order to increase, either directly or indirectly, the comfort of those who delight in the Lord. And if *all things* continually work together *for* their consolation, then *nothing* remains to work *against* it. ³ How important, then, how useful must

¹ Psa 119.140; Rom 7.12.

² Rom 8.28.

³ The Jews tell us (Sanhedrim Fol. 108. 2.) that, one Nahum a Jew, was usually called *Gamzu*; because, of every event that happened to him, he used to say, *Gam zu letobah*, ‘This also is for good;’ and they give instances of several afflictions, that befell him, which, after he had often used those words, proved, in the issue, to his advantage. How much more reason, has the true Christian, to say of everything which befalls him, however afflictive, ‘This also is, for my good!’ What honour it would reflect on his great Redeemer; and what consolation it would afford to his own soul!

the consolation of believers be, to subserve the purposes of the Divine glory in their salvation, when all things in the universe are continually employed in advancing it! — when all persons, all dispensations, all events, are incessantly concurring to promote it!

Prosperity and adversity, whether in things internal or external, work *together* and under gracious and providential influence, to form a curious checker-work which will afterwards, in the light of glory, be contemplated with unceasing admiration. If the Lord brings his people to his holy *mountain*, it is that He may make them joyful in his house of prayer. ^{Isa 56.7} If He brings them into the *wilderness*, it is with a view to speak comfortably to them. ^{Hos 2.14} If their sufferings abound at any time, it is in order that their consolation may also abound. ^{2Cor 1.5} The sufferings of others are conducive to the increase of their consolations; and the comforts of others are *also* for their consolation and salvation. ^{2Cor 1.6} By afflictions, the Lord empties, humbles, and melts them, so that they may be vessels fitted to receive a *larger* measure of grace and comfort. ^{Psa 119.71} Their loss of other comforts commonly results in their being favoured with *more* of spiritual comfort; and therefore it is profitable for them. The Lord Jesus wounds them in order to heal them. He casts down when he designs to raise them up. And he brings death, as it were, upon their feelings, wishes, and prospects, when he is about to grant them the desire of their souls. When he told his disciples that he was soon to depart from them, and so removed from them the greatest earthly comfort they ever enjoyed — which was his bodily presence — sorrow filled their hearts. But he assured them that this loss would be expedient — or as the original word also signifies, *profitable* for them — in as much as it would make way for a still greater mercy: the coming of the *Comforter* to abide with them forever. ^{Joh 16.6-7}

Believers may then assure themselves that the all-compassionate Saviour will at no time, and on no account, take away from them any of their comforts, except with a view to give them *better* comforts. He will usually be sweetest to them when their lot in the world is bitterest. For the sharper their trials are, the more they will serve to prepare them for His sweetest consolations. If even thick clouds intercept the cheering light of his countenance from them for a season, those very clouds will occasion this light to break forth again upon them, with *brighter* splendor. Whether their troubles are external or internal, in the hand of the Holy Spirit they serve to show them how much they need to trust constantly and solely in the Lord Jesus for sanctifying and supporting grace. And the more they trust in Him, the more comfort as well as holiness they will receive from His fulness.

6. Spiritual comfort is of much consequence to believers, for it serves, in a very high degree, *to heighten, and sweeten all their temporal comforts*. It renders every outward blessing a real and substantial comfort to them. Spiritual consolation is that which makes them capable of relishing, and enjoying their external comforts. ^{Ecc 9.7} Were a man to possess everything under the sun that is delightful and splendid; everything that could please his eye or gratify his taste, and yet he did not enjoy the favour of God with it, he would still be poor and wretched. ^{Rev 3.17} To think that the almighty Jehovah is an infinite enemy to him; that his temporal comforts may be followed by endless torments; and that by all that he eats and drinks, he may only be fattening himself for the day of slaughter — this will be like wormwood and gall mingled with all his delights. What can it avail him, though all the world smiles upon him, if he is under the infinite, tremendous frowns of almighty God? They cannot for a moment screen him from the

impending storm, nor secure him from the consuming fire. A troubled conscience renders every comfort of life insipid and unpleasing, while on the contrary, a peaceful conscience makes even the meanest morsel sweet. ^{Pro 15.15-16} It infuses an additional sweetness into every other comfort. When a man is enabled to cordially trust that the Lord Jesus loves and saves him, and that He will perfect whatever concerns him, his joy and peace in believing cannot fail to impart a heavenly sweetness to all his earthly joys. By trusting in the blessed Redeemer, he tastes that He is good to him; and so he enjoys Him in all his inferior enjoyments. Whoever places all his confidence and all his delight in the Lord, will have a double relish for every earthly comfort — because he will see the hand of his gracious Redeemer providing and bestowing it. He will possess Christ in everything while he has it; and possess everything in Christ after it is taken from him. ^{2Cor 6.10} As it is the absence of his blessed Redeemer that embitters all his temporal blessings to the believer, so it is His presence, *cheering* his heart, that improves and sweetens them all. Thus we see that spiritual consolation is of high importance, because, while it is in itself the greatest of all comforts, it is that which serves to heighten all other delights.

7. This comfort is of unspeakable importance to the saints, for it not only heightens all their other comforts, but it *alleviates all their calamities*. It makes their heaviest afflictions light. ^{2Cor 4.17} When the spirit of the believer is without comfort, the smallest trial becomes a burden. But when his heart is glad, the greatest appears light and easy.¹ The weight of an affliction is to be estimated by the impression it makes on the spirit, rather than by anything in its outward appearance. The smallest affliction will be so heavy as to overwhelm a holy man, if he is left to struggle with it in his own strength, and if he is without the presence of Christ to comfort him. But if Christ is graciously pleased to pour consolation into his soul, it will be so exhilarated and strengthened, as to induce him to count even the greatest burden light, and the longest trial but for a moment. A sweet and lively impression of the love of Christ in redeeming him, accompanied with a true sense of the sin and misery from which he is redeemed, will render him not only submissive, but even *joyful* in his affliction.

And while he is rejoicing in hope, though the flesh may still have its uneasy feelings, the spirit will triumph over them. Though a sense of pain may not be taken away, it will be overcome by the faith and sense of redeeming love. Paul and Silas, in the prison at Philippi, felt more pleasure than pain, more joy than sorrow. It was the sweetness of Divine consolation that caused one of the martyrs, when the flame first reached his ear, to say, “What a small pain this is, compared with the glory to come!” What is a drop of vinegar when put into an ocean of wine! It was this that, as another of them said, made their prisons into their delectable orchards. Favoured with heavenly consolation, many of the saints in ancient times took the spoiling of their goods not only patiently, but *joyfully*. ^{Heb 10.34} When the Lord Jesus speaks peace to the holy soul, He so refreshes and consoles it that no afflictions, however painful, have any real bitterness in them. One drop of that consolation which He dispenses from heaven, will suffice to sweeten a whole sea of external trouble, and to fill the believing soul with inexpressible joy. ^{Psa 94.19} He has graciously promised to be, in a special manner, present with His people in their afflictions; and to administer such comfort to their souls, as will greatly alleviate them. “When you pass through the Waters,” He says, “I will be with you; and

¹ Act 16.25; Rom 5.2-3,

through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burnt; nor shall the flame scorch you.” Isa 43.2 And again, “In me, you may have peace, while in the world you will have tribulation.” Joh 16.33 When he comforts them with a lively sense of his love to them, it turns their wormwood into sweetness, their sorrow into joy. So comforted, they can rejoice and even glory in tribulation. Rom 5.3 This is plain evidence of the high importance and excellence of spiritual consolation: that it overcomes the pains of sense, takes out their sting, and takes away their terror. Holy comfort makes believers so delight in all the will of God, as to take pleasure even in the hardest things, considered as His doing. 2Cor 12.10 How sweet that must be, then, which can sweeten even the wormwood and the gall! Of what consequence that must be, which can make the heaviest burden light! The delights of sense forsake us when we are in trouble and have the greatest need of them. Job 33.19-20 But it is *then* that the comforts of the Spirit have the sweetest relish, and the strongest influence. Psa 119.59 They are like the tree “cast into the waters of Marah, which made them sweet.” Exo 15.25 How much those people are to be pitied, then, who are drinking deep from the bitter waters of affliction, and have nothing of Divine consolation to sweeten them!

8. It is spiritual consolation alone, which *can effectually remove* that greatest of all afflictions: *trouble of spirit*. The delights of sense to someone who is deeply wounded and dejected in spirit, are like “singing songs to a heavy heart.” Pro 25.20 Instead of yielding the smallest relief, they become quite insipid, and even nauseous. For notwithstanding the possession of them, even in the highest degree, “who can bear a wounded spirit?” Pro 18.14 But spiritual consolation, especially when it is strong, not only alleviates but effectually *removes* that most intolerable of all afflictions. When the Lord graciously returns to the disconsolate believer after a dark night of desertion, and lifts up the light of His countenance upon him. He thereby puts gladness in his heart, far surpassing that of worldly men when their corn and their wine increase. Psa 4.6-7 By so doing, he puts off the sackcloth of the exercised Christian, and girds himself with gladness. Psa 30.11 No sooner does Christ comfort those who mourn in Zion, than “he gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Isa 61.2-3 If they “have gone forth and wept, bearing precious seed.” Yet no sooner does He impart consolation to them, than “they come back with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.” Psa 126.6 “In His favour is *life*. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy (*or* shouting) comes in the morning.” Psa 30.5 How valuable, then, how unspeakably important Divine consolation must be to exercised Christians, when they consider that it is the *only* cure, the *sovereign* cure, for dejection and anguish of spirit!

9. The great importance of spiritual comfort also appears in this: that it serves to *overbalance* everything in true religion which seems *difficult and unpleasing*. Not regarding here either the misrepresentations of some men, or the misapprehensions of others concerning the way of holiness, I will only refer to the *chief* difficulties and grievances which the Scripture itself represents as occurring in that way. The Lord Jesus, that faithful and true witness, informs us that the way to heaven “is a narrow way;” Mat 7.14 or as the words might be rendered, a *strait* or *distressful* way; a way in which the saints have to pass, through much tribulation, into the kingdom of God. Act 14.22 Beside the multitude of imaginary difficulties which appear to the slothful man when he says, “There is a lion in the way, a lion is in the streets,” Pro 26.13 there are some *real* difficulties in the way to heavenly felicity. Believers, as well as other men, are commanded to exercise repentance daily. And so they are to weep, mourn, and loathe

themselves for their iniquities — to crucify the flesh, and so to mortify the members of the body of sin in them, which is as painful as cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye. It is to deny themselves; to renounce the world as a portion, and thus abandon forever all the pleasures of sin; to take up their cross; and to load their account with manifold afflictions. At the same time, believers are to fight the good fight of faith, to wrestle against the principalities and powers of darkness, to endure hardness, to run with patience the race that is set before them, and to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. ^{Rom 12.11}

Now, though these and others which might be mentioned, are in themselves real difficulties which seem very unpleasant, and from which even eminent believers are often ready to shrink, holy comfort is sufficient to overbalance them, *much* more sufficient. It serves in the hand of the blessed Spirit, to render wisdom's ways, "ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace" to the saints, ^{Pro 3.17} notwithstanding all the difficulties and grievances which occur in them. Indeed, so sweet and so powerful is spiritual consolation, that in proportion to the degree in which it is bestowed, it makes even those painful exercises pleasant, and those difficult duties easy. ^{Mat 11.30} It renders it very pleasant to the Christian, to be without the pleasures of sin. It adds much more to the pleasantness of a holy life, than it is possible for any sufferings or grievances in this world to ever take from it. These sufferings are but human; the *comfort* is Divine. Believers know by experience, that in proportion to their trust in Christ, the times of their greatest affliction are usually seasons of their strongest consolation. ^{2Cor 1.5} And therefore, even the most dejected and sorrowful of them, would not for a thousand worlds exchange conditions or pleasures with the most prosperous of those who are servants of sin.

10. Holy consolation *removes*, in proportion to the degree of it, *the terror of death and judgment*. Spiritual consolation is that which, in the hand of the blessed Spirit, takes away the terrors and alleviates the pains of death. Though death is the friend of grace, it is still the enemy of nature. A dislike and fear of death, therefore, in no way proves that one is not a true believer. We are not in general fond of handling a serpent, even if we know that its sting is plucked out. But when the faith of a Christian is strong, and his hope of salvation is lively, the joy of his faith and the rejoicing of his hope, take away in his view, the frightful appearance of death; and they bestow upon it an amiable, an *inviting* aspect. Living comforts, in his dying moments, make a Christian even "desire to depart and to be with Christ," the blessed fountain of everlasting consolation. ^{Phi 1.23} It is the joyful hope of a blessed resurrection, that makes the saints think without fear of resigning their bodies to the gloomy grave. It is the cheering prospect of "a house not made with hands," that makes them willing without dismay, to leave their earthly tabernacle. When the Lord Jesus would comfort his disciples in the prospect of his departure from them, he said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again*, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also." ^{Joh 14.2-3} If death were to come *alone* to the saints, its ghastly countenance could only be terrible to them. But when they believe, and rejoice in the assurance that their living Redeemer will, according to his faithful promise, come along with it to sweeten it for them — and will conduct them safely through the dark valley of the shadow of it, ^{Psa 23.4} to the heavenly mountain of their Father's house — the prospect is no longer dreadful, but delightful.

How consoling are these words of the great Redeemer! He doesn't say that merely *comfort* will come in that time of need, but that *He himself*, the glorious fountain of consolation, will

then come and receive them to Himself. It is the comfort of such a promise, when believed with application, that relieves them against the dread of endless torment, and so it raises them above the slavish fear of dying. When the apostle Paul says that Jesus died, speaking at the same time of believers, he says that they only *sleep*, and sleep in Him. ^{1The 4.14} One reason why he varies the term is this: Jesus endured death in all its terrors, in order that it might become a quiet and sweet sleep to those who believe in Him. “It is *Christ* that died.” ^{Rom 8.34} The suffering of death was bitter to Christ, so that the sleep of death might be sweet to them. So then, when they are enabled to rejoice in the well-grounded hope that death for them will only be a dissolution, a departure, a falling asleep in the arms of their dear Redeemer, the dread of it is thereby removed. People in general are not afraid to lie down in bed to sleep. Ah, how contemptible is that pleasure which is damped at the view of death and chased away at the prospect of judgment! But how important, how excellent is that joy which, instead of being abated itself, lessens and even removes the terror of that last enemy!

11. The high importance and excellence of it will further appear if it is *compared with the delights of sense*. Earthly and sensual joy is easily told, and utterly void of glory. But the joy in believing, is “unspeakable, and full of glory.” ^{1Pet 1.8} The greatest of worldly joys are mean and empty, and their highest amount may be easily expressed. Indeed, much more is frequently thought and said about their value, than is deserved. They are never, from experience, found equal to the notion which worldly men have of them, nor to the expectation which they form from them. But spiritual joy is far above the highest conceptions that either men or angels can form of it, and the loftiest descriptions they can give of it. Earthly joys too, are empty and inglorious. Even the most plausible of them can never fill or satisfy the soul. They are far below the excellence, as well as the high capacity of the immortal soul. But the joy of faith, the comfort of communion with Christ, just as it is substantial and satisfying, so it is excellent and honourable. It is that of which none needs to be ashamed; and it is heavenly glory itself, begun in the soul.

- Spiritual joy is pure and sublime, while sensual and sinful pleasure is sordid and mean.
- The one is ennobling to the soul; the other is debasing;
- the former is elevating and enlarging; the latter is degrading and enslaving;
- *that* is satisfying; *this* is surfeiting;
- the one increases and improves with its use; the other fades with use, and leaves to those who place their happiness in it, a piercing sting behind it;
- the former is pleasing to the Lord; the latter is offensive to Him;
- *that* will issue in perfect and everlasting joy; *this* will end in direful and eternal anguish.

Those of the Israelites in the desert who could not form a right estimate of the milk and honey of Canaan, doted on the onions and garlic of Egypt. So it is with the *carnal mind*, which does not know and love spiritual delights — it relishes and prefers above them, the sordid pleasures of sense. In proportion to a man’s experience of the sweetness of spiritual pleasures, those which are sensual and ensnaring will become insipid to him. They now have no sweetness in comparison to the sweetness which excels. Indeed, it is impossible to express how low, how contemptible the joys of sense, and especially of sin, appear to those who are rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

12. Finally, the inexpressible importance of spiritual comfort appears chiefly in this: that *it promotes in an eminent degree, universal holiness* of heart and life.

It revives and invigorates the *graces* of the Christian. It excites and encourages a holy man to trust cordially and constantly in Christ for sanctification; to love Him and God in him, with ardent affection; and to so love His manifested glory, as to perform every duty in faith, from love and for the glory of His holy name. He cannot love God supremely, nor delight in doing His will, unless he himself is delighted and cheered by trusting that God loves him. ^{1Joh 4.19} No arguments will persuade a man to commit his way to the Lord, or to cast his care upon Him, if he does not believe that the Lord cares for him. It is a sense of redeeming love, warm on the heart, that captivates the soul, conciliates the will, and engages the affections. ^{2Cor 5.14-15}

A comfortable persuasion of the love of Jesus to the soul, will be operative in it as a torch in a sheaf — it will gradually destroy its remaining enmity against Him. It will enlarge the heart with ardent love to Him, and elevate the affections above the world. The soul, in order to be kept from lusting after earthly and carnal pleasures, must — by an appropriating faith — take pleasure in the Saviour and in His love. Holy comfort embitters sin to a man, and disposes him to strive against it with a deep abhorrence of it. It tends greatly to melt and humble the heart for sin. ^{1Cor 15.9-10} The firmer a holy man's comfort is, the softer his heart is. The more "his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord, so as not to be afraid of evil tidings," ^{Psa 112.7} the more disposed he is to fear the evil of *sinning* against Him. ^{Act 9.31}

Spiritual comfort also inclines and encourages the saints to ardently follow after universal holiness of life, and to constantly long for the perfection of it. "The Spirit of the Lord God," says Messiah, "is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me ... to comfort all who mourn; to grant those who mourn in Zion — to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified." ^{Isa 61.1-3} It disposes believers to frequency and impartiality in self-examination; ^{Psa 26.1-3} and it excites them to diligent endeavours to increasing communion with God in every duty. ^{Psa 63.1-8} It is employed by the Holy Spirit, to render them active, resolute, and cheerful in the spiritual performance of all their various duties. ^{Psa 119.32,166} Godly sorrow indeed disposes them to be *serious*; but it is holy joy that renders them *active*. It is "the oil of gladness" that makes the wheels of their voluntary obedience move forward with ease and speed. Some measure of holy comfort is necessary to the practice of evangelical holiness.

In the natural world, summer is necessary as well as winter. The very nature of the duties and exercises of the true Christian is such that they require comfort of heart for their acceptable performance. A holy life commonly *begins* with comfort, and is *maintained* by it. ^{Psa 26.3} The way to be kept from carelessness and formality in spiritual exercises, is to so trust in Christ for salvation, as to cease to despond; for the soul grows *careless* by desponding. The sorrow of the world, and the fear of hell, enervate and benumb all the faculties of the soul. A man can perform no *spiritual* obedience without some degree of spiritual joy, as well as true love. The former is as much the fruit of the Spirit, as the latter. ^{Gal 5.22} The Christian cannot be encouraged to pray to God unless he is consoled with the hope that God, for Christ's sake, will graciously hear and answer his prayer. ^{Psa 86.7} He cannot cordially praise God unless he is enabled to trust that God will glorify the perfections of his nature, and magnify the promises

of His covenant in his eternal salvation. It is in proportion to his heart being comforted, that he will be truly thankful to the Lord for the smallest favour. It is holy consolation that makes every act of grace, every instance of duty, every part of spiritual service, however secret it is, pleasant to a good man. In a word, it is this consolation that so exhilarates and so constrains him, as to make all his affection run out to the Lord Jesus, and all his strength run out *for* him. So much for the importance and usefulness of Spiritual comfort to every believer.

Reflections

From what has been advanced here, we may infer that no comforts are *so excellent, so sweet, and so desirable, as spiritual comforts*, While these form a part of eternal life, and promote in an eminent degree, the love and practice of holiness, they are the same in kind as the delights of holy angels, and of ransomed spirits in the holy place on high. They are the pleasures of a holy soul, and they heighten the relish of every outward comfort. The light of God's gracious countenance, shining upon the soul, is better than life and all its most valued enjoyments. An Israelite was to be cut off from his people if he had in his house a perfume like that of the Tabernacle. ^{Exo 30.38} Surely, the Lord will not hold someone guiltless who persuades himself that any other perfume can be so fragrant, so delightful, as that of the house of God — that any other joy can be so excellent, so ennobling, so cheering, as the joy of God's salvation.

Is spiritual joy of such high importance to the holiness and happiness of the saints, in this world, where it is far from being perfect? *Then how highly it will contribute to their felicity in the heavenly world*, where it will be full and overflowing through all eternity! O how transcendently great, how inexpressibly glorious, will the holiness and blessedness of the redeemed be in the immediate presence of God and of the Lamb. There they will attain "fulness of joy," and perhaps an eternal increase of rapturous delight! If spiritual consolation, even when it is small, impels believers to unwearied efforts in holy worship and spiritual obedience, then we need not wonder that the four living creatures round the throne, are represented in the visions of John as not resting day and night, as never ceasing to thank and praise the Lord — "saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." ^{Rev 4.8} If even a small measure of pure consolation is of such advantage to a holy man now, as to encourage his heart, to invigorate his grace, to excite his holy activity, and to heighten all his outward comforts, then of what unspeakable gain will the fulness of joy, and the perfection of endless delight, be to him hereafter!

Is holy consolation of such inestimable value to the spiritual seed of Christ, that in the immensity of his love, He came down from the realms of light to purchase it for them? Then believers may learn from this what *infinite obligations* they are under to their incarnate Redeemer. Christian, your dear Saviour has, at the infinite expense of his own unparalleled obedience, anguish, and death, purchased and secured everlasting consolation for you. He was troubled in spirit, that you might be comforted. He was encompassed with the sorrows of eternal death, that you might enter into the joys of everlasting life. He was arrayed in the spirit of heaviness, that you might be clothed with "the garment of praise." He who was from eternity the delight of his Father, "rejoicing always before Him," endured for you the hiding of His Father's countenance, and the sense of His infinite wrath, that you might, unto eternity, *joy in God through Him*. Hasn't he done and suffered enough to show you that he is willing

to enrich you with consolation, that he cares for your comfort, and that he gives you sufficient cause to always be of good comfort? He takes such pleasure in comforting you, that were it not for something in your heart which requires the discipline of his covenant, you could at no time be disconsolate. You are therefore infinitely bound to love Him ardently and supremely, to glory in His cross, and to delight in doing His will.

From what has been said, we may also learn that in proportion to a man making Christ and holiness *his choice*, he will find them to be *his delight*. The more communion that he has with Jesus Christ, and the more conformity to Him that he desires and attains, the more he will experience delight in Him, and in God through him. The more his heart is set upon growing in holiness, and the more willingly and resolutely he performs all his duties for the glory of his God and Redeemer; the more he will know by experience, that the comforts of religion overbalance its difficulties. In proportion to his taking pleasure in spiritual exercises and holy performances — from love to Christ, and for the glory of God — the most laborious exercises of religion will become pleasant to him, and the most difficult duties will become easy. Holy consolation, in the hand of the blessed Spirit, makes *everything in holiness* a pleasure to him. And the closer he walks with God, the God of all comfort, the stronger and sweeter his consolation will be.

If spiritual comfort is of such importance and utility to believers, as has been shown, then surely it is the duty of every believer *to use diligently*, the appointed means of attaining a gradual increase of it. The apostle Paul exhorted the believers in Corinth to “be of good comfort” ^{2Cor 13.11} — that is, to be so diligent in receiving, by the frequent exercise of faith, the comfort offered and promised to them in the gospel, so as to attain more and more of the *joy* of faith, and of a good conscience. Nothing will carry a Christian through the inward and outward difficulties of religion, but its inward supports and delights. Every believer, therefore, should constantly endeavour to attain, as early as possible, *much* of the comfort of the Holy Spirit, so that he may more easily and cheerfully surmount every difficulty, and be more resolute in the practice of universal holiness. The hypocrite will not “always call upon God,” because he will not “*delight himself in the Almighty.*” ^{Job 27.10} Were he to delight himself in the Almighty, especially as a God who is infinitely *holy*, he would no longer be a hypocrite, and he would always call upon Him. If the true believer would at all times persevere in spiritual and cheerful obedience to the commandments of Christ, then in the strength of promised grace, he must labour to attain more and more of the comfort of communion with Him in his righteousness and fulness. For the more his heart is comforted, the more “he is established in every good word and work.” ^{2The 2.17} He always needs spiritual comfort in this valley of tears, to strengthen him for his spiritual conflicts and holy performances. And therefore, under an abiding sense of his need of it, he should daily employ the means of receiving fresh supplies.

Once more: Is holy consolation of such consequence to the saints? Then it is evident that their loss of it must be *a very great and grievous loss to them*. Indeed, the loss of lively and pleasant feelings, though grievous, is not usually a very great loss to the exercised Christian. But the loss of that *ordinary* comfort, or tranquility of mind, which he has enjoyed up to now, is both a very great and a very grievous loss to him. He may for a season be without sensible and lively impressions, and yet not be deserted by God in respect to his habitual comfort or serenity of mind. For it is not an intervening cloud, nor even a partial eclipse of the sun that

occasions night, but the *absence* of the sun. So too, it is not the lack of a lively impression or a pleasant frame, ¹ but the loss of peaceful tranquility of spirit which the believer was used to enjoying, that causes darkness to cover his soul. The loss of this is an unspeakably great and grievous loss to him. If Christ, the Sun of righteousness, is graciously pleased to shine upon him, then all is well. But if He hides his countenance, the smiles of the whole creation can afford him no solid comfort. Believer, take heed that you do not provoke the Lord to withhold influences of holy comfort from your soul. Do not — by carnal security, or self-confidence, or earthly mindedness, or any other iniquity — provoke Him to turn the reviving smiles of His countenance, which you now enjoy, into killing frowns. Your soul is no more self-sufficient than it is self-existent. If the Lord ceases to refresh it with His cheering smiles, it cannot but languish and faint. ²

¹ That is, a pleasant frame of mind; a sense of well-being, tranquility, or “felicity” (comfort & joy). – WHG

² *Cannot but*: an old phrase meaning *cannot help but*, or *can only*, or *must unavoidably*. – WHG

CHAPTER 3.

The way in which believers lose their spiritual comfort.

A holy man cannot for a moment lose that *principle* of comfort or joy, which the Holy Spirit has implanted in his heart in regeneration. Nor yet can he lose that *entire habit* of joy which He has implanted there in sanctification,. Yet he sometimes loses the *sense or feeling* of it. At times he is deprived of *sensible* comfort, or of the joy of God's salvation. By losing spiritual consolation, I don't mean his falling from a pleasant into an unpleasant frame of spirit merely for an hour or a day; for his frames are almost perpetually changing. But I mean his being more or less deprived of the sense of God's peculiar favour toward him, or of the sensible possession of spiritual comfort, and to be deprived for a considerable time. When the God of all comfort continues for a season to withhold the cheering light of His gracious countenance from his soul, he cannot help but be disquieted and disconsolate. ^{Psa 30.7}

Though the Lord may withhold sensible comfort from believers for a time, this is to display His wisdom and sovereignty. It is to test the graces of believers — to mortify their pride, and teach them the necessity of adventuring, as sinners, to trust simply in Christ for all the grace of the promise. Yet for the most part, He does it in order to *chasten* them for their sins against Him as their God and Father. ^{Isa 59.2} At the same time, it is not for *every* sin of infirmity that He suspends consoling influences from their souls. Otherwise, because they can never so much as think a thought without polluting it by some degree of sin, He would be afflicting them with the lack of comfort at all times. Rather, it is for some peculiarly aggravated transgressions; or for relapsing often into the same sin. It is their iniquities and backslidings that procure trouble of mind for them. ^{Jer 2.19} Such is God's love to them, and His care of them, and such is His abhorrence of their sin, that He cannot but make even his dear children feel that He is displeased with them when they backslide from Him.¹ His faithfulness to his word also moves Him to do so, for which he threatens trouble as a fatherly chastisement. He even promises it to them as a blessing in disguise. ^{Psa 119.75} And though the sins of some particular believers may not in every instance be the procuring *cause* of their loss of comfort, as in the case of Job, they are at least the *occasion* of it. ^{Jer 31.18}

All what I further propose to do in this Chapter is to point out some of the leading sins and ways of sinning, by which believers provoke their heavenly Father to suspend for a time, that degree of holy consolation from them which they formerly enjoyed.

1. In the first place, they provoke Him to do this by allowing themselves to continue, in a culpable degree, *ignorant of His covenant of grace, and of their warrant to come as sinners* and trust in the Lord Jesus for their own particular salvation. These are objects in which the comfort of true believers is at all times intimately concerned. The spiritual and distinct knowledge of this is necessary to qualify them for deriving continual supplies of grace and consolation from the fulness of Christ. ²

If believers then allow themselves — surrounded as they are by the clear light of the blessed gospel — to retain their ignorance, or to cherish mistakes respecting the covenant of Jehovah's

¹ Heb 12.6; ;Amo 3.2

² 2Sam 23.5; Joh 17.3 and 6.40.

peace, ^{Isa 54.10} and respecting the infinite fulness and freeness of His *grace* treasured up in Christ, the glorious Trustee of that covenant — then they thereby undervalue the only doctrine on which all true comfort depends. And so they provoke their heavenly Father to suspend the consolations of His holy covenant from their souls. The gospel is an exhibition of God's covenant of grace, to lost sinners of mankind; and therefore it is “good tidings of great joy to all people.” ^{Luk 2.10} To then be willingly ignorant of that gracious contract, is the same as being willingly ignorant of the glorious gospel; and to retain mistaken notions of the former, is the same as erring concerning the latter. When true Christians satisfy themselves with superficial and indistinct views of the covenant of grace, or with knowing little more than the first principles of the doctrine of that august contract, they so far *despise* the doctrine of redeeming grace — the joyful tidings of a free salvation — and so they *lose the joy* of that salvation.

Moreover, in the administration of that everlasting covenant, Christ is freely and fully offered, with His righteousness and fullness, to sinners of mankind in common. And sinners, as such, are graciously invited — yes, and peremptorily commanded — to believe in His name.¹ The authentic offer, call, and command, founded upon the infinite intrinsic value of the righteousness of Christ, and addressed to every sinner who hears the gospel, afford to every one of them a full warrant to trust in Christ for all the salvation promised in the covenant. If Christians then allow themselves to remain, in great measure, ignorant of their *warrant* as sinners themselves, to place direct confidence in Christ for all their salvation, or if they cherish mistakes concerning it, then they provoke the Lord to withhold from them that peace and joy which are found in believing. For He is jealous for the honour of His covenant and of His word of grace. At the same time, they indirectly invite Satan to tempt them to conclude that they have no warrant whatever to trust that Christ will save them. If believers were to attain a clearer and more spiritual understanding of the eternal covenant and its authentic offer than they commonly do,² they would see that, in the word of grace,³ they have a full and unchangeable warrant to trust at all times in the Lord Jesus for their own particular salvation. And so they would live a holier and more comfortable life than they commonly do. They would in that case clearly see that it is warrantable for them, and therefore lawful and reasonable for them, to trust in their faithful Redeemer with full assurance of faith. Ah! how sinful it is, how displeasing to the God of all comfort, to treat with neglect His holy covenant, and the warrant which He graciously affords sinners of mankind to take hold of it! And how effectually that will mar the comforts of one's own soul!

2. They provoke the Lord to suspend influences of consolation from them, by often yielding to *disbelief and distrust* of Jesus Christ. An apostle says, “We who have believed, enter into rest.” ⁴ “You will keep him in perfect peace,” says the prophet Isaiah, “whose mind is stayed on You; because he trusts in You.” ^{Isa 26.3} And again, “If you will not believe, surely you will not

¹ Joh 6.32; Rev 22.17; 1Joh 3.23.

² ‘It was a saying of an eminent Minister, on his deathbed, that he had much peace and quietness of mind, not so much from a greater measure of grace than other Christians had, or from any *immediate* witnessing of the Spirit; but because he had a clearer understanding of the covenant of grace than many others had, having studied it and preached it for so many years, as he had done.’ Brooks’ *Cabinet*, p. 113.

³ Originally, “word of grace without them...” — WHG

⁴ Heb 4.3

be established.” Isa 7.9 If a Christian frequently neglects the exercise of trusting in Christ for fresh supplies of grace and comfort — if he often trusts to the grace that is in *himself*, instead of trusting in his infinitely faithful Redeemer, with all his heart and at all times, for the grace which is *in Him*, and brought near in the promise — then by doing so, his heart departs from the Lord Jesus, the only Fountain of consolation. Jer 17.5 He places that confidence in his own renewed nature, which he is commanded to place in his Divine Redeemer. By so doing, he *idolizes* the new creature; he trusts in his own heart; he leans on his own understanding; he makes a saviour of his own created grace. Thus he provokes his heavenly Father, who is a jealous God, to hide His face from him, and to eclipse his evidences of grace from his view. It is now necessary for the Lord, who “will ever be mindful of his covenant,” Psa 111.5 to perform this promise in a higher degree than formerly: “I will cleanse you from *all your idols*.” Eze 36.25 Accordingly, in order to chasten him for his idolatry, and to teach him the necessity of living continually by faith, God withholds consolation from his soul, and ceases to shine upon his evidences of grace. The consequence is that the believer now not only discerns no grace in his heart to trust in, but he begins to doubt if ever he had any. He formerly looked for comfort to the *principle* of grace which he discerned in himself, rather than to the *fulness* of grace which is in Christ. This is contrary to this high command: “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.” 2Tim 2.1 But now that he can see and feel nothing in his heart except deep and strong corruption, nothing but a body of sin and death, he becomes at once discouraged and disconsolate.

Christian, you never have greater need to trust simply and firmly in your Divine Saviour, than when your graces are most *lively* and most discernable. For then self-confidence is most ready to prevail against you, so as to provoke a jealous God to withhold spiritual comfort from your soul. If you desire to retain holy consolation, repose the unsuspecting confidence of your heart solely and constantly in your faithful Redeemer. Apply, trust, and plead His promises. If you distrust Him, if you yield to suspicious and hard thoughts of him, ;then you transgress against him without cause. In His ways of grace and providence, the Lord Jesus has never dealt with any soul so as to give him cause to be suspicious of Him. Ah! what dishonour you reflect upon the glorious Immanuel, by refusing to trust solely in Him! Do not be grieved that you have nothing to trust to for your salvation beside Christ and the promise. Rather, rejoice that you *need* nothing besides. Psa 62.2,5,6 Pray often and earnestly that the Holy Spirit may convince you more deeply of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and especially of the greatest of all sins — unbelief. Joh 16.3,9

3. They lose their holy comfort by making their graces, duties, or lively frames, their *warrant or ground of a right* to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. These are indeed great *encouragements* to continue trusting in the Saviour; but they form no part of a man’s warrant to renew his actings of trust in Him. They are fruits and evidences of saving faith; but they are no part of the *ground* for it. To make them the ground, or even a *part* of the ground of our right to confide ¹ in Jesus for salvation, would be as preposterous as it would be, when transplanting a young tree, to set the top-branches of it in the ground, instead of the roots. The faith of a believer must be grounded on faithfulness in the word, and not on feelings in the heart. If the Christian, then, instead of making the authentic offer, call, and

¹ *Confide in Jesus*: place your confidence in Him; *rely* on Him; *trust* Him in every circumstance. — WHG

commandment to *believe*, his warrant to renew his exercise of trusting in Christ for all his salvation, which are all addressed to him in the gospel as a sinner of mankind; if he thinks so highly of his *experiences* or *evidences*, as to make *them* his ground of right to do so — then he is guilty of presumption. He sets aside the warrant which the Holy Spirit affords him in the word, and presumes to trust in Christ on the ground of something *in himself*, which is indeed the *fruit* but not the *root*, the *evidence* but not the *ground* of faith.

Thus, instead of a true confidence, he places an unwarrantable confidence in his Redeemer; and hereby he reveals the pride and self-righteous propensity that remain in him.¹ Sensible that his holy qualities and performances can give him no right to *salvation itself*, his legal spirit prompts him to conclude that they will afford him at least a right to the *Saviour*, a right to exercise particular trust in Him for salvation. Hence, when he discerns his *evidences* of personal interest in Christ, he can freely trust Him. But when these are eclipsed and cannot be seen, he counts it unwarrantable and presumptuous to confide in Him. Now, seeing it is pride or a legal spirit that disposes the Christian to think that his graces and evidences can give him a right to apply and confide in Christ; and seeing that the immutable design of God is to exalt the Saviour and humble the sinner, God withholds the comfortable sense of his favour from the believer. ^{Psa 138.6} He ceases to shine upon his graces and evidences. He not only leaves him, it may be, to fall repeatedly into some known sin, but He permits Satan, and the man's own proud and unbelieving heart, to persuade him that he now has no right at all to trust that the holy Jesus will save such a sinner as he is. Thus he has procured for himself the loss of his comfort.

But even this loss, however great and grievous it may be, is almost less than nothing in comparison to the infinite dishonour which he has reflected upon the Lord Jesus, by presuming to substitute his own graces and attainments in place of the authoritative offers and calls of the gospel, as his warrant to trust in Him — and also by not venturing to rely upon Him for grace, unless he sees grace already in himself to give him a *right* to place his confidence in Him. Believer, if you would retain spiritual consolation, take heed that you never build your faith upon the reports of your senses. Build it only upon the sure, the unchangeable record of God who cannot lie. Do not substitute sense in the place of His true and holy word. Build your faith and your comfort upon Christ in the word, and not upon your experiences. Do not live upon Christ as *felt* in the heart, but upon Christ as *offered* in the gospel.

4. They procure for themselves the loss of spiritual comfort by *discontent and impatience arising from the inordinate love* of some earthly comfort. This happens when a good man, instead of placing all his happiness and all his hope in Christ, and in God as his God and portion, places much of them in some *external* comfort. So that he is often disposed to say, 'What would become of me, or How uncomfortable I would be, if it were not for *this* comfort!' He thereby provokes the Lord, who is always readier to *profit* than to *please* His children, and to tear the idol from their embrace. ^{Eze 36.25} If he begins to "make gold his hope, and to say to the fine gold, you are my confidence;" ^{Job 31.24} or if "he trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, so that his heart departs from the Lord;" then under the chastening of his heavenly Father,

¹ **1Cor 4:7** For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?

he will be for a season, “like the heath in the desert, and will not see when good comes, but will inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.” ^{Jer 17.5-6} “The broken reed on which he leans” will not only fail him, “but it will go into his hand and pierce it.” ^{Isa 36.6} His comforts will be diminished; his hopes will be disappointed; his schemes will one after another be frustrated. His idol, whatever it is, will either be torn from him, or be turned into a source of daily grief to him. The Lord will break his cisterns, and send a worm to his gourds. “For the iniquity of his *covetousness*” says Jehovah, “I was angry, and struck him; I hid myself and was angry; and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.” ^{Isa 57.17}

The inordinate and immoderate love of any temporal benefit, upon the loss of that benefit, commonly produces discontent, impatience, and fretfulness, which have a natural tendency to wear down the spirit. If the Christian were to bear his loss of outward comforts, in the exercise of faith and of resignation to the holy will of God, he would still continue to experience inward consolation. But when he presumes to fret and murmur, as if the Lord had wronged him, or had been unkind to him, saying, ‘Alas! My afflictions are very uncommon, and peculiarly severe,’ he thereby procures for himself, in addition to his outward losses, the loss of inward consolation. Such behaviour as this, forms a combination of various sins, all of which are inconceivably heinous and exceedingly sinful. Discontent inclines a man to be impatient under afflictions. Discontent and impatience set his mind as on the rack, and torment it with distracting cares about how to be delivered, or how to have his loss retrieved. The secret root of these is an inordinate love of the body, and of worldly enjoyments. ^{Jas 4.4} This again, arises from a lack of due resignation to the holy will of God, and of satisfaction with *Him* alone as an all-sufficient portion for the whole man. ^{Psa 113.5} And it is usually attended with much disbelief and distrust of His promise. The Lord says to every believer in His gracious promise, “There no evil shall befall you.” ^{Psa 91.10} ‘No,’ says the fretful Christian, ‘what has befallen me *is* evil; otherwise I would not have been disquieted by it.’ But on the contrary, shouldn’t it even *delight* the Christian to find that the Lord is drawing away provision from his worldly lusts? Knowing that he must shortly die, ah! why is he so fond of temporal and transitory enjoyments? Why so anxious to acquire them; so eager to embrace them; so disquieted by the loss of them?

Believer, your Covenant-God is all-sufficient for you; and He allows you to call Him *yours*. Why then do you go begging to creatures for supply? Consider that it is a much greater felicity to desire nothing earthly but what you have, than to have all that you desire. Do not any longer provoke the Lord by obstinate or sullen grief for any outward loss, “lest a worse thing come upon you.” Only then are you in a right frame, when God in Christ is enough for you. Know that it is in the absence or contempt of earthly comforts, that the Holy Spirit is most a Comforter. Remember that God is never to be blamed for depriving you of things which would carry away your heart from Himself as your sure and all-sufficient portion. Do not let your life, even for a moment, be bound up in any worldly enjoyment. O “take heed and beware of covetousness” ¹ — it is *idolatry*; and “their sorrows shall be multiplied, who hasten after another god.” ^{Psa 16.4}

¹ There are two words in the Greek Testament, which are rendered *covetousness* in our version. The one laterally signifies, *The love of money*; the other, *A desire for more*. The senses are indeed coincident: for no man would desire

5. They lose their spiritual comfort *by entertaining vain thoughts*. By vain thoughts, I mean empty, frivolous, foolish, unprofitable, groundless, proud, ostentatious, deceitful, impure, and revengeful thoughts; and also, wandering thoughts in prayer, and in other religious exercises. ¹ These thoughts, and others like them, are vain. They are contrary to the holy law of God, and exalt themselves against it. "I hate vain thoughts," says the holy Psalmist, "but Your law I love." Psa 119.113 Now, when a believer, instead of hating and repelling vain thoughts, allows them to *lodge* within him; Jer 4.14 when he entertains them, and allows them to continue unresisted in his heart, he thereby provokes the displeasure of his heavenly Father. The mind of the Christian should always be well-furnished with proper subjects of thought, and should habitually exercise itself upon them. Thus, under the influences of the Holy Spirit, the mind will be secured against the frequent incursion of a multitude of vain thoughts which otherwise will consume much of his precious time, defile his conscience, and expose him sooner or later to a multitude of perplexing, solicitous, and sorrowful thoughts. Psa 94.19 Nothing but the frequent exercise of true faith and repentance will commonly prevent, in such cases, his sin from being inscribed in legible characters on his chastisement. His vain thoughts, if entertained, will procure for him perplexing and uncomfortable thoughts.

David experienced much perplexity of conscience in consequence of his vain thoughts; and he prayed earnestly that the Lord would "cleanse him from secret faults." Psa 19.12 The Christian, if he would retain his holy comfort, must "keep his heart with all diligence." Pro 4.23 He must watch his thoughts, strictly, and constantly, as well as his words and actions. It will be necessary for him to walk circumspectly in *private*, as well as in public. If he allows himself to indulge empty and proud thoughts, he will grieve the Holy Spirit of God, Eph 4.30 and provoke Him to withhold influences of consolation from his soul. Believer, if you would keep up the comfort of, and communion with a holy God, then trust in the Lord Jesus at all times for sanctifying grace, to enable you daily to mortify the members of the body of sin in your heart. Do not allow your thoughts to wander in prayer, or in any other act of devotion. When you are about to pray, consider on the one hand, the greatness and variety of your wants; and on the other, the omniscience and holiness of Jehovah, to whom you are to send up your supplications. He has said that he "will be sanctified in those who come near to him." Lev 10.3 Guard, especially in private prayer, against coldness and indifference. If vain thoughts that intrude in acts of Divine worship are not entertained, but on the contrary, are hated, resisted, and lamented by you, they will seldom be permitted to rob you of your spiritual comfort. But if you love them, or yield to them, or allow them to quietly lodge within you, they will soon occasion such a mist of darkness in your soul, that you will not be able to discern the graces which dwell there.

6. Believers procure for themselves the loss of holy comfort *by mistaking* blasphemous and other evil thoughts injected by Satan, *for sins of their own*. Satan sometimes, in a furious assault, suddenly and swiftly throws in upon the souls of many of the saints, temptations to blasphemous, atheistic, impure, revengeful, and despairing thoughts. Such horrible injections are termed by the apostle Paul, "*the fiery darts of the wicked one*," Eph 6.16 because,

more of what he does not love and just as someone who loves silver cannot be satisfied with the silver that he already possesses, he will of course desire more.' Newton's. *Works*, vol. 6, p. 473.

¹ Eph 6.18; Jas 5.16.

like the sharp and envenomed darts of a cruel enemy, flying swiftly and invisibly, they penetrate the soul before it is aware. And they hurry it on to hard and blasphemous thoughts of God and of the Saviour. These violent and sudden temptations, like poisoned darts, pierce and inflame the holy soul with anguish and horror. They not only fill it with the greatest uneasiness, but if they are yielded to for a moment, they produce the most unbecoming suspicions about the grace and word of God. ^{Psa 77.7-9} Blasphemous and atheistic thoughts do, indeed, often arise from the depravity that remains in believers themselves. For our Lord says, “Out of your *heart* proceed evil thoughts, ... blasphemies.” ^{Mat 15.19} When exercised Christians do not resist, but on the contrary, *yield* to blasphemous and other evil thoughts, in that case they should consider them as arising out of their own hearts, and charge themselves with them, as sins of their own. But if they strike their minds violently and suddenly; ^{Mat 16.22-23} if being assaulted with them vexes and grieves them; ^{Psa 73.21-22} and if their souls tremble at them and resist them with deep abhorrence; ^{Psa 73.15} then they should not charge them upon themselves as *their* sins, but upon Satan as *his*.

Now, it is because believers do not distinguish, as they should, between those blasphemous and evil thoughts which are injected by the devil, and those which proceed from their own hearts, that they are often imposed on by Satan to mistake the former for sins of their own. And so they are deprived of the consolation which is allowed them in the gospel. There is a great difference, indeed, between a man being *tempted* to blaspheme, or to doubt the truth of the Divine testimony, and *actuality being guilty* of blasphemy, or of doubting the truth of Scripture. It is only by *complying* with temptation, that he becomes guilty. Believer, you have much reason to be thankful if you have not been left to take pleasure in those suggestions, or to frame arguments in support of them. Satan may be permitted to overpower, for a moment, the apparent exercise of every grace in you, by a torrent of blasphemous imaginations. But, “resist him, and he will flee from you.” ^{Jas 4.7} “Take up the shield of faith.” Trust that the Lord Jesus, your Saviour and your shield, ^{Psa 28.7} will graciously enable you “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one,” and according to your faith, it will be to you. All Satan’s attempts to hurry you into sin will be as effectually disarmed of their force by that shield of faith, as fire is disarmed of its strength by being quenched. To *distrust your almighty Redeemer*, or to *doubt that you are a true believer*, only because you are thus harassed by Satan, is a much greater sin than all his suggestions put together, however numerous they may be.

7. Believers diminish their comfort much *by not habitually watching against corruption within, and temptation from without.*

A good man loses much of his holy comfort by not observing cautiously and constantly *the motions of sin in his heart*. When he doesn’t accustom himself to strictly watch for these in order to detect, resist, and mortify them as early as they begin to appear, ^{Rom 8.13} they will speedily acquire such force as to urge him on violently and irresistibly to thoughts, words, and acts of sin. If he would retain comfortable fellowship with an infinitely holy God, then he must watch diligently for the first motions and sallies of depravity in his heart. This is in order that, by the lively exercise of the *contrary graces*, he may resist them without delay. For if in such a case, he does not instantly try to exercise his graces, and especially his faith, Satan (who is always envious and watchful) will seize that opportunity to exercise the man’s corruptions. And if by being negligent to watch and resist the first motions of corruption in his heart, he

often allows them to obtain such force as to gain the consent of his will to *actual* transgression, then he can have none to blame but himself, for the loss of his holy consolation. ^{Jer 2.19}

The remaining depravity of the heart is not only *itself* a source of temptation to actual sin, but it is the inlet for all temptations from Satan and the world. ^{Jas 1.14; Jer 17.9} Thus, if he would retain spiritual consolation, the believer must likewise be ever on his guard against *temptations from without*. If he ceases for a short while to watch against those temptations of Satan, which that deceitful adversary manages in a way of subtlety and stratagem, he will soon be so ensnared by one or more of them, as to fall into sin. Alas! Spiritual wickednesses in high places, which are watching at every moment for opportunities to ensnare his soul, are so many, and so powerful, and so subtle, that it is in vain for the exercised Christian to hope that he will be able to retain his comfort if he ceases for but a moment to watch. ^{Eph 6.12} Though he cannot shut Satan wholly out of his imagination, he should be very cautious that he does not, even in the smallest measure, provide fuel for his flame.

He should, for this purpose, often pray in faith that the Lord would so set a watch upon his eyes and ears, as to constantly enable him to reject and repel every appearance of temptation to sin. And if he would not be tempted by the men of the world, who are also the inveterate enemies of his comfort, he must always keep himself at a due distance from them. Christian, the snares of Satan and of his emissaries are continually set for you. “Be sober therefore and vigilant.” ^{1Pet 5.8} “Watch in all things;” ^{2Tim 4.5} and “watch with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, with all perseverance.” ^{Eph 6.18} If you would retain your comfort, then shake off carnal security, and take good heed lest your spiritual enemies surprise and overcome you. Be continually solicitous to spot temptations while they are yet at a distance, in order to prevent them from surprising you. And that you maybe enabled to do so, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the powder of his might.” ^{Eph 6.10} Trust that the Lord Jesus will, and pray that He may, “strengthen you with all might, according to his glorious power, by his Spirit in the inner man.” ^{Col 1.11; Eph 3.16}

8. Believers likewise forfeit their spiritual comfort, by presuming, without necessity, *to omit repeatedly some known duty*. The Lord declares in the 89th Psalm, that he will visit the transgression of the spiritual seed of Messiah with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. There are *four* phrases by which he expresses the sins or modes of sinning which would procure for them his paternal chastisements. It is remarkable that he employs three of them to express the *omission of duties*, and only one to express the direct *commission* of sins: “If his children *forsake* My law, and *do not walk* in my judgments; if they *break or profane* my statutes, and *do not keep* My commandments, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” ^{Psa 89.30-32} Though sins of *commission* do indeed expose believers to fatherly chastisements, I believe it will be found that sins of *omission* do it much more frequently. This is because they are more often guilty of these, and yield to them with less struggle and remorse, than they do to sins of commission. The spiritual declension of a Christian, especially at its beginning, reveals itself for the most part, more by the customary omission of some duties, than by the positive commission of crimes. ^{Isa 43.22-24} For although the omission of a present duty is indeed a sin, it does not usually appear to a declining Christian, at first view, to be so horrible as the direct commission of a known transgression.

And therefore, commonly, nothing but some violent and strong temptation can at first impel him to the downright *perpetration* of a crime. Whereas, a very small temptation will often suffice to move him to *neglect* an ordinance, or *omit* a duty. If at any time he happens to be fatigued more than usual; or to be under a very slight bodily sickness; or to have less time or less accommodation than usual; or to be disturbed and ruffled in his temper; or to be receiving or paying visits — any one of these will probably suffice as a temptation to prevail with him to sluff off, at such a time, private prayer, or family worship, or even public worship or some other present duty; or at least to perform them in a cold and superficial manner. And having once begun to admit such frivolous excuses, he may perhaps be permitted, for a season, to offer to his conscience almost any sort of occurrence as an excuse for omitting the stated performance of one or another of these duties. On such occasions, he likewise commonly neglects the exercise of his *graces*, especially of his faith and repentance — and it may be that he takes occasion to do so, either from his sins or from his duties. Or perhaps he allows himself to neglect, for a season, some *relative* duty,¹ or at least not to perform it “heartily, as unto the Lord.” Col 3.23

Now, inasmuch as every omission of a known duty is a sin against God, Jas 4.17 the Christian — by allowing himself for a season, to often neglect some known duty, or not to perform it cheerfully — grieves the Holy Spirit of God, Mal 1.13-14 and provokes Him to suspend consolation from his soul. When he thus presumes to make the Spirit sad, he must not expect that the Spirit will continue to make him glad, as formerly. The moment his heart withdraws and breaks off from any present duty as if it were an unpleasant or irksome task, in the same proportion, it withdraws from the Lord. And so it loses the comfort of serving Him, as well as losing communion with Him. Joh 14.21 To *resolve* to omit a present duty is even more sinful than to actually omit it *without intending* so to do. Rev 2.4 Ah! how heinous a sin it is, to be disposed, and without necessity to be *resolved*, either to omit or to curtail a single religious or moral duty! It shows how little regard a man has for the glorious Majesty of heaven, when he can put *Him* off with slight and curtailed service. Mal 1.6-8 Such behaviour as this will soon, very soon, raise such a thick and dark cloud, as to intercept the cheering beams of the Sun of righteousness from the soul. Alas! the omission or slight performance of many duties, is far from being as considered and lamented by true Christians, as it ought to be.

I have already said that a believer loses his comfort by omitting repeatedly, and without necessity, some *known* duty. I must now go further, and add that if he lives for a long time in the omission of some duty which he does not yet know is a duty, but which he might have known if he had diligently availed himself of his opportunities to know it — this instance of neglect may lie concealed at the root of his comfort, like a gnawing worm. Neglecting the study of the moral law in its spirituality and great extent, as his *rule of duty* ² — so as to continue ignorant of his duty in any one point, when opportunity is graciously afforded him to attain this knowledge — is a greater sin than it will ever be possible for him, or even the highest angel to comprehend. It is not enough, in order to retain spiritual comfort, that a holy man

¹ Eph 6.2-3; 1Tim 5.8.

² The clearest and fullest exposition of the Ten Commandments that I have yet seen, is that of Thomas Boston, in his *Sermons on the Shorter Catechism*.

studies well *the promises of the gospel*. He must likewise study diligently the *precepts of the law*, in order to obey them. ^{Psa 119.92,165}

9. Believers procure for themselves the loss of comfort by *sitting down contented with their spiritual attainments*. When a good man so far forgets himself, as to rest satisfied for a time with his present degree of knowledge, faith, or holiness, and to become remiss in his efforts to attain more and more of these — when he begins and continues to be so well pleased with his degree of knowledge as to read and hear the gospel with less relish and less diligence than formerly; to be so delighted with his measure of faith and experience, as neither to complain so much about his unbelief, nor to be so diligent and frequent in his actings of faith as in times past; and to be so fond of his attainments in holiness, as to be less diligent than formerly in pressing toward perfection — then he may assure himself that he will thereby lose the comfort of communion with a holy and a jealous God.

If he accustoms himself for a season, not only to rest *in* his religious attainments, so as to be less eager in pursuing after higher degrees of holiness, but to so rest *on* them, or to place his confidence *in* them — he hereby adopts the surest method of losing at once, the sight and the comfort of them.¹ In proportion to his trusting in his own knowledge, faith, or holiness, or in pleasant frames in the prospect of any duty which he may be about to perform, instead of trusting only in Christ — or in proportion to his looking to them for comfort, instead of looking solely to Him — he *prefers* them before Christ. He *idolizes* them. He makes a saviour and a comforter of them, instead of Jesus Christ; or at least he allows them to share with Christ in that honour. He relies on grace received, and so he trusts in his own heart. This is one sure way in which he provokes the Lord to hide His gracious countenance from him, and to cover his evidences with a cloud in His anger. ^{Luk 9.33-34} If *spiritual* comforts are rested on, they will just as effectually as *earthly* ones do, keep a man from comfortable communion with Christ. When the Lord Jesus grants to him the comfort of spiritual attainments, it is not that he may live on it, but that he may be incited and encouraged by it, to persevere in holy faith and evangelical obedience.

But if, on the contrary, he allows himself to be elated with his attainments or comforts, and like Hezekiah, he invites others to see his treasures, then it will be time for the Lord to send the messengers of His anger, to carry away from his view these idols which steal his heart away from Him. When his heart is swelling with self-importance and self-confidence, all that is then poured on it, runs over into the gulf of self-conceit and self-sufficiency. If he relies on his own wisdom and strength, especially in the prospect of difficult duties, then he must not think it strange if he should soon become discouraged and disconsolate. When he presumes to rest on the acting of his faith, rather than upon the glorious Object of his faith, and to draw consolation from *that acting*, rather than from *this Object*, he so far prefers the *act* before the *Object*, and he then becomes guilty of idolatry. ^{Psa 16.4} But when at length he begins in his practical judgment, to habitually prefer receiving all his strength and comfort directly from Christ, and not to have them in and of himself (even if he would), his consolation by Christ will continue and even abound.²

¹ Eze 36.25; Psa 30.6-7.

² 2Cor 1.5; 1Pet 1.13

10. Christians deprive themselves of holy consolation *by their indolence in the exercise of graces, and in the performance of duties*. We read in the Song of Solomon, ^{Sng 5.2-6} that the Church lost the comfort of a gracious visit from Christ, by her sluggishness. This disposed her to neglect entertaining Him as kindly as she ought to, and as the kindness of His manifestation of himself required. When any of the saints by “joy and peace in believing, and by rejoicing in hope,” ^{Rom 15.13} have found that “there is great reward in keeping His commandments,” ^{Psa 19.11} and yet *afterwards* they become slothful in the service of Christ, counting his yoke uneasy and His burden heavy, “shall He not punish for these things?” ^{Jer 5.29} They need not wonder that they lose their sense of His favour, when they are conscious that they often pray for his grace as if they had not prayed — when by their criminal indifference and the coldness of their petitions, they show that they don’t care much whether these are granted or not. If they were duly concerned at the welfare of their souls, they would frequently refresh them by exercising holy meditation and faith, just as they refresh their bodies by receiving food three times or more per day. Diligence in holy exercises and moral duties is not only a debt to the Lord, but a privilege to believers themselves. And therefore, by being slothful they reveal at once injustice and unkindness; a contempt for the glorious Majesty of heaven, and a neglect of His redeeming mercy.

When the Saviour draws near and they don’t regard it, when He knocks and they don’t open, it is indeed high time that He chastises their negligence and rouses them to diligence by withholding the comfort of His gracious visits from them. ¹ It is equitable as well as reasonable that the consequence of spiritual sloth should be a loss of sensible consolation. Accordingly, in the administration of the covenant of grace, an intimate connection is established between diligence in holy duties, and the fruition of spiritual comforts. The indolent Christian *cannot* retain tranquility of mind ^{Heb 6.11} — what heavenly consolation he must lose, for instance, by his criminal inattention to the precious promises of God, and even to the daily dispensations of His holy providence to him! If his love which was once an ascending flame, becomes a feeble spark; if his penitential sorrow which once overflowed all its banks, like the Jordan, becomes “like a brook in summer;” if his zeal which formerly ate him up, is devoured by leanness or declension; if one who in times past could not “give sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids,” ^{Psa 132.4} till Jesus gave rest to his soul,” can now lie down securely with contracted guilt in his conscience; and if one who formerly was diligent in spiritual exercise and holy obedience, becomes remiss and regardless — *he thereby makes a wide breach for the entrance of spiritual trouble.* ²

It is indeed mercifully appointed, as well as wisely, that when he becomes indolent, his comfort should decline, in order that he may in time perceive that he is in a languishing condition; and that without delay he may entreat the Lord Jesus to restore his soul. Besides, if the Lord did not on such occasions, withdraw Himself, then the Christian would not prize His gracious presence highly, nor think it as comfortable as it is. Believer, “do not then be slothful in business; but be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” ^{Rom 12.11} See that your soul is vigorous and active in His holy service, by the grace that is received daily from the fulness of Christ. ^{Ecc 9.10} Always be diligent in attempting the exercise of grace, in using the means of

¹ Pro 10.4; Heb 11.6.

² Pro 19.15; Hos 5.15.

grace, and in doing every good work in the strength of promised grace. If persons linger on a journey, they are sometimes overtaken by darkness. If you become slothful in exercising your graces or in performing your duties, don't wonder if you begin to walk in darkness. Be on your guard continually, then, against every appearance of inward declension, and especially against slothfulness in the exercise of direct confidence in Christ, and of private prayer.

11. Believers suffer a diminution of their spiritual comfort by having and entertaining a *low estimation of the counsels and comforts of the Holy Spirit of Christ*. When they allow themselves to entertain for a season a light esteem of the counsels, ordinances, promises, influences, or comforts of the blessed Spirit — when they receive these, but not gratefully, or they keep them, but not diligently, they thereby dishonour and grieve the Holy Spirit himself, who is the glorious Author of them. An earthly Sovereign would consider himself dishonoured if his proclamations, pardons, or favours, were not entertained with high regard — especially by those who are not only the subjects of his dominion, but the objects of his favour. In like manner, if those who are the subjects of the Spirit's gracious influences, and the objects of His peculiar favour, do not consider His word their treasure, His promises their joy, His Sabbaths their delight, and His consolations their felicity, then to that extent they treat Him with indignity. And the more exalted and glorious the adorable Spirit is, the more sinful the indignity is which is thereby offered to Him. Besides, if in their practical judgment, they prefer mean and even sinful objects, before the great things of the Spirit — such as preferring the wisdom and the maxims of the world, before His counsels; the comforts and pleasures of the world, before His consolations; the riches and honours of the world, before the honour of holy conformity to Him, and intimate communion with Him — then thereby they offer an infinite affront to his glorious Majesty. For what greater dishonour can they reflect upon the holy and blessed Spirit, than to show greater practical regard for a creature, for a *vain* creature, indeed for an *enemy*, than for Him!

Ah! when a Christian's desire for the food of his soul is almost gone; when he appears as if he had been surfeited with the gospel; when Divine ordinances, instead of being highly esteemed, are basely slighted by him; and when his heart is more set upon his farm or merchandise, than upon seasons of communion with God in Christ — he must not be surprised if, for a season, he should be taught the worth of these inestimable blessings, by the *lack* of them. Or when he takes little account of the offers and promises of the blessed gospel, by constantly poring upon the sins of his heart and of his life, and setting the demerit of these, as it were, in battle-array against the merit of the great Redeemer's consummate righteousness — he must blame none but himself for his loss of comfort. O Christian, consider well these words of the apostle Paul: "To be spiritually minded is *life and peace*." Rom 8.6 Endeavour without delay, to attain a more spiritual and clearer discernment of the things of the Spirit. Pray frequently and fervently for more acquaintance with them, and for more complacency in them. Learn to form such a low estimate of the creature, as to expect *nothing* from it; and such a high esteem of the Lord Jesus, as to expect *all* from Him. Thus you will be exempted from those frequent and galling disappointments which can only render the life of a believer uncomfortable. ^{Psa 146.5} If you were to love your redeeming God so much as to habitually come before Him in his ordinances, with *delight in Him*, and go away with *desire for Him*, then you would always retain the comfort of communion with him. ^{Psa 37.4; 71.21}

12. True Christians deprive themselves of comfort *by presuming to pray for things which are not suitable to their condition*, and which it would not be consistent with the scheme of their salvation to grant them at present, nor indeed at any time. When they venture repeatedly to ask in prayer for something which the Lord sees to be improper for them, and not necessary to subserve the wise purposes of His glory in their sanctification, “They ask, and receive not, because they ask amiss.” ^{Jas 4.3} If they pray, for instance, that as much grace might be given them at once as would be sufficient for them their entire life-time; ^{Joh 4.15} if they peremptorily ask for sensible manifestations, great enlargements, and high ecstasies of joy; if they pray for any comfort whatever, without resolving to use diligently *all the other* appointed means of attaining it; if they entreat the removal of any affliction before they have been rightly exercised under it; ^{2Cor 12.8} and if they pray absolutely for a *certain measure* of the good things of this life — then the Lord will not, and indeed *cannot*, in mercy to them, grant such petitions.

Often, the consequence is that after having waited perhaps a long time for answers, without receiving any, they become discouraged and disconsolate. Moreover, when they venture in prayer to prescribe to the Lord *a way and a time* of appearing for their help. And when the Lord, as He will surely do, refuses to come for their salvation in that particular way, and at that very time, ^{2Kng 5.11} they take occasion from that refusal, to yield to disquietude and discouragement. Or when they venture to propose the Lord’s particular way of treating some other believers, as the way in which they desire that He would deal with them, and find that they are not likewise gratified in this, they sometimes begin to yield to discouraging and desponding thoughts. Thus they presume to limit the holy One of Israel, who has resolved to act as an infinite Sovereign in his manner of bringing all his saints to glory. If they would retain spiritual consolation, believers would do well to consider that it is only petitions for things that are unnecessary, and even hurtful to them, that the Lord refuses to grant; that He never denies any of them without a sufficient reason; that He sometimes condescends to show them the reason; ^{2Cor 12.8-9} that He never refuses except when they ask what is not good, or rather, what is not *best* for them at the time referred to; and that although they don’t receive what they come for, He yet allows them what is sufficient to bear their charges in coming and going, and He invites them to come again.

They should also consider that those are not the holiest, nor the greatest of believers, whose sense is the most indulged. Believing Mary is forbidden to touch Jesus; and disbelieving Thomas is commanded to thrust his hand into his side. Christian, if you would be comforted from time to time, with answers of peace to your prayers, then offer up to the Lord no unwarrantable desires; no desires except for things which are agreeable to His revealed will; and no desires except in the name of Christ, and by the help of the Spirit. Ask nothing for the purpose of consuming it on your pleasures. ^{Jas 4.3} Always regulate your petitions by the promises of the everlasting covenant. These comprise all that is good for you in time and through eternity, and infinitely more than you are able to ask or think. ^{Eph 3.20}

13. They procure for themselves the loss of holy comfort by *yielding* for a season to those temptations which urge them to *attempt things in religion* that are impracticable. When Satan perceives that he cannot persuade the Christian to live in the neglect of any known duty, especially the young and inexperienced Christian, he sometimes presses him vehemently to a rash and quick performance of some *difficult* duty. He suggests to him that the Lord is a hard

Master; that He delights in requiring difficult duties — duties which must be performed speedily and on pain of incurring His infinite displeasure; that like a tyrannical ruler who makes laws in order to ensnare his subjects, the Lord commands duties which are oppressive, and does it with unrelenting rigour; and He requires them to be done with the utmost degree of exactness, or else He will not accept them. Now, so far as a good man yields to this horrible temptation, he presumes to imagine that the commandments of God are grievous, and that the yoke of Christ is hard. Apprehending the Lord Jesus to be a rigorous Master, and being under the prevalence of slavish fear, ^{1Joh 4.18} he performs even the easiest of his duties without courage, without affection, and even with aversion. His comfort is accordingly destroyed, his heart is dejected, and his hands are weakened.

Moreover, Satan sometimes urges him to attempt doing several things at once, which he well knows is impossible. And the moment the saint yields to this temptation, his heart begins to be so divided, his thoughts so perplexed, and his attention so distracted between a multiplicity of objects which crowd into his view, that he becomes incapable of performing *any* duty well. Endeavouring to grasp too much, he lets it all slip. Whatever he tries to perform, he does it superficially and unseasonably. When he is called to perform one duty, he is perhaps addressing himself to another; and like Martha, he is “careful and troubled about many things.” ^{Luk 10.41} The great rule of every duty is this: “Whatever your hand finds to do, *do it with all your might.*” ^{Ecc 9.10} That is, let your heart be wholly intent upon and occupied with that one duty while you are performing it. Otherwise, indeed, it cannot be performed either acceptably or comfortably.

The tempter will also sometimes instigate those of the saints who are called to perform a greater variety of duties than others are, to continue longer than is requisite in doing some one duty, in order to put it out of their power to rightly discharge some other duty, equally incumbent on them. He will press them, for instance, either to employ so much time in the worship of the family, and especially in that of the prayer closet, as to have no opportunity for some other duty that is equally necessary; or to spend so much time in some duty respecting their secular affairs, as to have almost no opportunity for those holy and necessary exercises. In proportion to a good man yielding for a time to this temptation, it is easy to see that he thereby deprives himself of that comfort of communion with a holy God, which is enjoyed only in a conscientious and seasonable discharge of every known duty. Now, in order to prevent his falling into this destructive snare, he should daily trust, as well as pray, that the Lord Jesus, who is given “for a leader to the people,” ¹ “would according to his promise, ^{Isa 58.11} guide him continually to that which is his *present* duty, in preference to every other. And when he discerns his present duty, he should resolutely dispatch that duty in the faith of the promise, and then proceed to his next duty in the same manner. Let him diligently perform every act of obedience in its proper season. And that he may have opportunity for every one of them, let him so redeem his time as to spend no time in idleness, or in doing anything except that which his conscience pronounces to be his present duty. ^{Eph 5.15-16}

14. Believers forfeit the continuance of their spiritual comfort by the commission of *gross and atrocious transgressions* — of those sins which are contrary not only to the light of revelation,

¹ Isa 55.4.

but even to the light of nature. By doing so, they rebel against and “vex the Holy Spirit, so that he is turned,” as it were, “to be their enemy, and to fight against them.” Isa 63.10 By such iniquities, they wound and waste their own consciences at the same time. When a holy man presumes to resemble the men of this world so as to commit but one of the sins mentioned in 1Cor 6.9-10, or any other heinous iniquity, he thereby pierces the Lord Jesus, grieves the Holy Spirit, inflicts a deep wound in his own conscience, and so he procures for himself the loss of holy consolation. We see in some of the penitential Psalms of David, that his adultery and murder not only deprived him of sensible comfort, but exposed him for a long season, to Divine desertion in respect even to quickening and purifying influences. We know also that Peter’s denial of his blessed Lord rendered him very disconsolate for a time.

If a good man, then — instigated either by corruption within, or by temptation from without — allows himself not only to contemplate with desire, but to actually fall into any of those enormities which are termed by one apostle “the works of the flesh,” Gal 5.19-21 and by another, “the pollutions of the world,” 2Pet 3.20 then he exposes himself, in an uncommon degree, to the dreadful frowns of his heavenly Father. For such enormities, as they are directly opposite even to the light of nature, so they are most contrary to the influences of grace. The sin of a believer in falling into any one of them, is deeply aggravated from all his manifold privileges, and more especially from this: that he usually has more strength afforded him against gross enormities, than even against sins which are more spiritual, and less obvious to his view. The means of being kept from falling into gross iniquities, which the Christian ought diligently to use, are such as these: trust in Christ at all times for continual supplies of sanctifying grace; prayer without ceasing and without fainting; watchfulness in prayer, and against his spiritual enemies, with all perseverance; and keeping a constant guard, more especially against pride of heart, confidence in grace received, and the evil that is in the world.

15. Christians likewise destroy the peace and comfort of their minds, by *open sins* of any kind, which *offend others around them, and cause many of them to stumble*. When any of the saints commit sins that are exposed to the view of others, and thereby grieves, offends, or stumbles them, the Lord is greatly dishonoured and displeased. And his Holy Spirit is so grieved as to suspend for a time, His cheering influences from their souls. In this way, He frequently embitters those sins to his people, by which they have offended others, and given them occasion to reproach His blessed religion, and to blaspheme His holy name. After David had sinned openly in the matter of Uriah, Nathan said to him, “Because by this deed, you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord *to blaspheme*, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.” 2Sam 12.14 The Lord charged it as a deeply aggravated sin upon his ancient people, that by the unholy and offensive behaviour of many of them, they occasioned “His holy name to be profaned among the heathen.” ¹ If blasphemy is justly allowed to be a most atrocious crime, doubtless it must be a heinous iniquity to give *occasion* for it, especially in any of the children of God. When at any time they fall openly into dishonesty, pride, passion, revenge, or unbecoming discourse, and especially into covetousness — the enemies of the gospel never fail to take special notice of it, and to take occasion from it, to become more confirmed in their inveterate prejudices against faith and holiness. These sins therefore

¹ Eze 36.20, 23; Rom 2.24.

procure for believers the loss of spiritual comfort, as much as more enormous evils do that are committed in secret.

“For the iniquity of his covetousness,” says Jehovah, “I was angry and struck him: I hid myself, and was angry.” ^{Isa 57.17} When after spiritual enlargement and communion with God in holy exercises, Christians become negligent in glorifying Him by good works before men; when as soon as they have come down from the mount, like Moses, they break the tablets of the holy law — such ungrateful and inconsistent behaviour as this often provokes their heavenly Father to chasten them by the infliction of inward, as well as of outward trouble. By presuming to sin openly, they not only offend and grieve the Holy Spirit, but they trouble and discourage other saints around them. And therefore it is proper that they themselves should feel spiritual trouble, and should know by their own bitter experience, “That it is an evil thing and bitter, that they have forsaken the Lord their God.” ^{Jer 2.19}

16. Lastly, Believers procure for themselves the loss of holy comfort *by relapsing often into the same sin*. Whatever sin it is, and however strong the temptation to it is, the repeated, and especially the *frequent* commission of it, will provoke the Holy Spirit to withhold His consoling influences from the backsliding Christian. This will more especially be the case if, under the prevalence of corruption and the power of temptation, he allows himself to so resemble the secure hypocrite, as to use the smallest encouragement from the riches of redeeming grace in Christ, to repeat the same offence. By his daring to do so, he “makes Christ the minister of sin.” ^{Gal 2.17} He practically represents the holy Jesus and his great salvation as leaving him still under the *dominion* of sin— indeed, as affording him encouragement to practise iniquity. Besides this, by relapsing often into the same transgression, the Christian practically declares that he still loves and has pleasure in that sin. Now, by loving what is inexpressibly hateful, and which the Lord hates with infinite abhorrence; and by counting that thing pleasant to his taste, which is the bitterest of all things, and which tendered to the Saviour’s lips the vinegar and gall — the believer renders it indispensably *necessary* that the sweet and holy consolations of the Spirit be suspended from him in order that he may be made to *see* that his iniquity is most hateful, and to *experience* that it is most bitter.

Moreover, the repetition of a transgression *heightens* the crime. As in math, the addition of one figure makes the number ten times greater, so the Christian’s repetition of the same sin — of a sin which he has often confessed, lamented, and resolved against — renders it heinous in a tenfold degree, and calls aloud for paternal chastisement. In such a case, he must be taught not only by the anguish of the Redeemer’s soul in the garden and on the cross, but by the trouble of his *own* spirit, that sin is the greatest of all evils; and that his having fallen again and again into the same offence, after he had received the forgiveness of sins, renders his sin exceedingly sinful.¹ And after he has been chastened with *outward* affliction for his disobedience, he nevertheless turns again to the same offence, ^{Pro 24.16} this will, if infinite mercy doesn’t prevent it, inevitably expose him to *inward* distress, which is inexpressibly more dreadful and intolerable. Ah! when a man, who has believed through grace, presumes to cast a propitious eye upon some easily besetting sin, and to secretly say, “Isn’t it a little one? and my soul will live” — he is not aware how effectually he thereby robs his soul of holy

¹ Ezr 9.13-14; Mal 2.13.

comfort. If after having often complained to the Lord about his unbelief, pride, self-confidence, deadness, frowardness, censoriousness, and other evils, he is still ready on almost every occasion to gratify them, if not to excuse and vindicate them, doesn't he hereby resemble the hypocrite? And isn't it proper that he should for a season be deprived of the comfort of seeing that he is a sincere believer? And also that he should be left under the prevalence of perplexing fears that up to now he has been, and at present still is but a hypocrite?

I do not say that a man's relapsing for a time, again and again into the same transgression, proves him to be a hypocrite. For God has nowhere promised such a degree of strength to his people during their state of imperfection, that it will set them beyond the possibility of relapsing for a season into the same offences. But I affirm that a true Christian's doing so, makes him appear very *like* a hypocrite, obscures his evidences of sincerity, renders his condition inexpressibly dreadful, and exposes him to a very severe chastisement. Believer, if this is your present condition, O apply, and without delay, plead this gracious promise, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." ^{Hos 14.4} And in the faith of it, watch and strive with holy resolution, especially against "the sin, which so easily besets you." ^{Heb 12.1} Know that your redeeming God has made an unalterable, an *eternal* separation, between the love of sin and the joy of salvation. O endeavour diligently to become eminent, especially in that grace which is more immediately the opposite of your constitutional sin. Would you wish to keep down doubts and fears, and to keep up faith and comfort? Then shun, O shun every occasion, and every appearance, especially of *that* sin. ^{1The 5.22} Be persuaded that the pleasure of overcoming even the most easily besetting sin, is inconceivably greater than the pleasure of committing it.

Reflections

FROM the foregoing particulars, the disconsolate believer may plainly see that *he has none to blame but himself*, for his loss of holy consolation, When he is bewailing his lack of peaceful tranquility, or of holy joy, he must complain of none but himself. It is he himself that takes, and even *forces away* his own comfort. For by his aggravated sins, he has rendered it necessary for the Lord to hide His face from him. Indeed, he never sins against God without sinning against his own soul at the same time. We read in the Scriptures, that we must forgive our *enemies*, but never in express terms that we must forgive our *friends*. The iniquities of God's own people are the most provoking to Him. And though he has forgiven them all as to the guilt of *eternal wrath*, yet as in the case of Moses, He may refuse to forgive some of them in respect to the guilt of *paternal anger*. The iniquity of others "is marked before Him;" but "the sin of Judah, is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond." ^{Jer 17.1} The friends of Christ, then, must be ever on their guard against sin, especially against *willful* sin. Sinning willfully will assuredly weaken their hands, and bring trouble into their consciences.

Does a good man forfeit his holy comfort by making his graces, performances, or lively frames, his ground of a right to trust in Jesus for salvation? Then he should learn from this the need that he has to daily exercise himself *in mortifying the legal spirit* which remains in him. It is *this* that prompts him to make his graces and duties into a warrant to renew his actings of trust in the Saviour, and thereby to forfeit the comfort of his soul. Next to unbelief itself, his legal temper is perhaps the worst enemy of his pure consolation. It is a secret and subtle foe that seems to intend a kindness for him; and yet it always sets him upon seeking some good

qualifications in himself, on the ground of which he may trust that God loves him, and that Christ saves him. Let him therefore, if he would retain spiritual comfort, be diligent in mortifying his self-righteous spirit; and know that the way to conquer and destroy it is, by faith, to bring daily into his conscience a better hope from a better righteousness than that of the law. All the spiritual distress of the exercised Christian, may be traced to a legal spirit in him. He seldom lacks comfort, except by looking more or less to his own righteousness, instead of looking away to the consummate righteousness of Jesus Christ. ¹ Believer, it is not sufficient, in order to maintain spiritual comfort, that you simply not rely on your graces and performances for a *title to eternal life*. You must not presume to rely on them for even so much as a *right to trust in Christ*. You must not make them the smallest part of your warrant to renew your exercise of confidence in Him.

AGAIN: Do believers lose their holy consolation by living upon their comfort, rather than upon the holy Comforter himself, and by loving the former as much as or more than the latter? They may perceive from this, that it is sinful and very displeasing to the Lord *to rely upon the comfort already given to them*; or to love consolation *in the streams, more than, or even as much as, comfort in the Fountain*. He takes sensible comfort away from them, because they have loved it inordinately or too much; and because He would effectually teach them the necessity of loving the adorable Comforter Himself, more than all the sweet consolation which they have received from Him. They must not expect that “the God of all comfort,” will allow them to let their love run waste upon their pleasant feelings. He will elevate it all to Himself. Because he loves them, he will so chasten them as to teach them to love Himself supremely, and to live upon Himself in the absence of sensible delights. He will teach them to love Him more for that boundless ocean which is in Himself, than for the few drops which he has shed upon them — more for His own infinite benignity, than for the grace or comfort which he has communicated to them. He will thereby show them, at the same time, how weak their love of Him is, when they love him chiefly for the comfort which they have received from Him; and how weak their faith is, when they live upon the streams rather than upon the overflowing Fountain of consolation.

FURTHER: By their aggravated offences, do believers provoke the Lord at any time to so hide His face from them, as to leave them in the dark respecting the truth of grace in their hearts? It then follows that, although grace is always in the heart of a holy man, yet he is *not always* able to discern it there. His heart is always the seat of the principles and habits of grace; and

¹ The Author of an excellent Sermon, in pointing out some of the injuries which believers sustain by the prevalence of the legal temper, expresses himself thus: — ‘It spoils them of their comfort, and brings a damp of sorrow and dejection over their spirits. None have such ground of comfort as believers; and if they knew how to improve their privilege; if they lived daily in the faith of the gospel, and in the comforts of their new state; then they would be the most cheerful persons in the world. But the prevalence of this temper, like a moth; secretly worms out the very life of their comfort, and throws them into the depths of despondency. What comfort can they have in the duties of religion, when they seek it from themselves, and from their duties? What comfort can they have, either in duty, or out of duty, in the absence of their God?’

‘It robs them of their peace. As all true and solid peace is built upon justification by the blood of Christ, so it can only be maintained by the daily exercise of faith in this comfortable doctrine. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,” Rom 5.1. But so far as the legal temper prevails, their peace is set upon another foundation; it is built upon their enlargements in duty, their frames and attainments in religion; and therefore it must be unstable as water.’ The Evangelical Preacher, vol, iii, p. 199.

yet he does not continually enjoy the comfort of perceiving them. The figures of a sundial continue to be plainly marked upon it, and yet we cannot see what hour of the day it is unless the sun shines upon it. It is only when graces are *in exercise*, and when the glorious Sun of righteousness shines upon them, that they can be seen. Therefore, don't let any of the saints conclude that they never had, and that they do not now have, a well-grounded assurance of their being in a state of grace, just because doubts about the truth of grace in them sometimes arise in their minds. Their assurance of a personal interest in Christ is well-grounded and true, even if it is far from being perfect. Their graces themselves are imperfect; and therefore that assurance of sense which arises from the perception of them, must likewise be imperfect. Those believers who resolve never to rejoice till they attain perfect assurance, must resolve never to rejoice while they are in this world, They should consider that there are many degrees of *real* certainty below a *perfect* degree of it — and that they greatly injure themselves when they call their *state* of grace into question, whenever they do not clearly perceive their *habits* of grace.

ONCE MORE: Is it only by sinning against the high and holy One, that believers lose the comfort of communion with Him? Then they may discover from this, what reason they have to *abhor*, and with holy detestation, *turn* from all manner of sin. Their iniquity has not only pierced the incarnate Redeemer, and grieved the Holy Spirit, but it pierces themselves through with many sorrows. It is the worst enemy of their souls. It incessantly strives to rob them of their purest and sweetest joys. Let them therefore, without ceasing, strive against the motions, and mortify the members, of the body of sin that dwells in them. ¹ If they allow sin to dwell *at ease* in them, even for a moment, it will assuredly deprive them of their holy tranquility.

¹ Rom 7.5 (KJV), with 8.13.

CHAPTER 4.

The grievous consequences of a believer's losing his spiritual consolation.

By withholding spiritual consolation from the souls of any of His people, the Lord, in proportion to doing it, is represented in the Scriptures as *forsaking* or deserting them. His forsaking of them in respect to comforting influences, either in a lesser or greater degree, is the same as His withdrawing the sensible influences and tokens of his special favour from their souls; or as it is often expressed in the Scripture, *hiding His face* from them. When he so forsakes them — or hides the light of His gracious countenance from them so as to suspend in any measure, His influences of comfort from their souls — they lose, in the same measure, that consoling sense of his special favour and love to them, which previously they usually enjoyed. The meaning of God's hiding his face from believers may, in some degree, be understood from the opposite phrases, of "causing His face to shine upon them," Psa 53:3 and "lifting up the light of His countenance upon them." Psa 4:6

These phrases appear to carry in them, an allusion to the shining forth of the *Shechinah* in the ancient Tabernacle and Temple — that is, of the glorious lustre which dwelt in the cloud as the visible token of Jehovah's favour to the Israelites; and of that gracious presence with them, which He was pleased to peculiarly manifest on some solemn occasions. Num 9:15^f There may also be an allusion in them, to the pleasant appearance of the countenance of a friend in a superior station of life, when he converses familiarly with an inferior whom he regards with peculiar favour. Accordingly, Job, when mentioning the regard shown him by his attendants says, "If I laughed at them, *or* jested with them, they did not believe it; and they did not cast down the light of my countenance." Job 29:24 — as if he had said, 'On an occasion so agreeable to them, they were solicitous to do nothing that would so displease me as to make me frown at them.' And when the Israelite Church in captivity prayed to be restored to her former freedom, she said, "Cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved;" Psa 53:3 that is, 'Restore us to our former prosperity, and thereby manifest to us Your mercy and Your favour.' On the other hand, God is said in Scripture, to hide his face from his children, or not to cause his countenance to shine upon them, when as a mark of his paternal displeasure with their evil conduct, He suspends from their souls, for a season, the usual influences and tokens of his favor. Therefore, such forsaking or suspension of spiritual comfort, though sometimes intended as a *trial of their graces*, yet it is oftener designed by their heavenly Father, as a *grievous chastisement for their sins*.

Now, the consequences of their loss of spiritual consolation, are especially the following:

1. *Trouble and sorrow of spirit*, are consequences of it. "You hid your face," says David, "and I was troubled." Psa 30:7 When he was driven from the Sanctuary of Jehovah, in which the visible symbol of His favour was placed, and where the manifestations of His favour were enjoyed, the soul of that holy man was cast down and disquieted within him. Psa 42:5-6 Indeed, when a saint has lost the sense of his peace with God, especially by his own aggravated folly, he cannot but be troubled. And when he has forfeited the sense of his joy in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot help but be sorrowful. "In the favour of God is *life*." Psa 30:5 When a holy man thus loses his perception of that favour, "the sorrows of *death* will more or less compass him, and the pains of hell will get hold of him. He will find trouble and sorrow." Psa 116:3 And the more he is insensibly upheld by sustaining and quickening influences; the more troubled and

grieved he will commonly become for his loss of comforting influences. A prevailing persuasion of the favour of God in Christ, and of acceptance with Him, is the ordinary attainment of the saints in this world. “The Lord will speak peace to his people, and to his saints.” ^{Psa 85.8} But when a saint forfeits the light of God’s gracious countenance, and of holy comfort, he ordinarily loses all sight of his evidences of grace at such a time. And when he cannot discern in himself the smallest evidence of grace, or of his being an object of Divine favour, he cannot fail to be deeply dejected and troubled in spirit. The tangible departure of a good and gracious God from the holy soul, is like the departure of the soul from the body — it is painful and dreadful.

In other losses, something still remains that is comfortable. When a believer loses his earthly friends, he still has a heavenly Friend and Father, who is unchanging in His good will to him, and to whom he may always look for comfort. But when this gracious, this matchless Friend himself, is apprehended to be lost, then how perplexing, how grievous, how overwhelming is the loss! The heaviest of other losses is light, even tolerable in comparison to this one. ^{Pro 18.14} No wonder if, in such a condition, the Christian takes up Jeremiah’s mournful complaint, “When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me!” ^{Jer 8.18} To lose the perception of the Saviour’s love toward him is exceedingly distressing to a holy man. Just as all the candles in the world cannot make it day when the sun has set, so all the comforts in the universe cannot cheer the heart of such a man in the absence of the Sun of righteousness. A holy soul is like the flower that opens and shuts with the sun: if the Saviour shines upon it, it opens. But if He withdraws the cheering light of His countenance, it closes itself and droops. It is a comfort, however, and not to be forgotten, that when the Lord Jesus leaves a believing soul, He does not wholly forsake it, but always leaves something behind of Himself, which makes the soul long for His return. If He deserted it *wholly*, it would cease to long for Him.

2. *Piercing convictions and frightful views* of their innumerable sins, in their *heinousness and demerit*, usually accompany this trouble of mind. In the darkness of night, fire is more easily seen at a distance than it is in the light of day. When a holy man has lost the light of comfort, and is walking in darkness, he usually has a clearer and more disquieting sight of his great transgressions, than when he is walking in the light of consolation. The sin of his nature and the transgressions of his life, in their deep malignity and dreadful demerit, are then set in order before his eyes. The painful recollection of them, with their manifold aggravations, is revived in his mind; and they appear more horrible in his view than they ever did before. They are brought afresh to his painful remembrance, as if they had been committed but yesterday. Being set in array before him, each of them gives to his disconsolate spirit a *new*, and a *deep* wound. This increases the smart of his former wounds, and makes them bleed afresh. They present themselves to his troubled mind with all their aggravations, as committed against God and Christ, against redeeming love and grace; against the law and the gospel; against mercies and judgments; against the warnings of conscience and the motions of the Holy Spirit; and against the patience and forbearance of that gracious God who has so loved him, as to give his only begotten Son to die for him.

Holy Job said, when in such a condition, “You write bitter things against me, and make me possess the iniquities of my youth.” ^{Job 13.26} And David, “My sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight.” ^{Psa 51.3-4} “My iniquities have taken

hold of me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me.” ^{Psa 40.12} Thus the backsliding believer, is sent back again to mount Sinai, where he finds the devouring flames of the fiery law flashing in his face. His convictions are deeper and his scorings hotter than perhaps they ever were before. The Lord permits the tremendous curse of the violated law to re-enter his conscience; and thereby He shows him the awful demerit of his innumerable offences. ^{Rom 5.20} Perceiving that he has sinned in the midst of evangelical light — of frequent checks of conscience; of manifold mercies, enjoyments, enlargements, and experiences — he begins to dread that maybe he has committed even the unpardonable sin.

A sense of the horrible malignity and dreadful demerit of his transgressions strikes a deep impression on his soul, and makes his heart tremble. His conscience upbraids him with his criminal folly and his base ingratitude in sinning against his gracious God and Saviour. Hence, cutting reflections, self-condemning and galling thoughts, often disquiet his mind. ^{Psa 73.21-22} He can now think of almost nothing but the awful majesty, sovereignty, holiness, justice, and vengeance of the Lord. “He remembers God and is troubled.” ^{Psa 73.3} His spirit is troubled, indeed overwhelmed, when he reflects that he has provoked the just, the omnipotent, the great and terrible God, to appear as an enemy against him. Or if he thinks at all of the mercy of God, he will be disposed to argue thus: ‘Surely, if my transgressions had not been peculiarly heinous, or if I had so much as a single spark of grace in me, an infinitely merciful God would not have thus forsaken me.’ Ah! sin committed against the high and holy Majesty of heaven is a strange, a horrible thing! If the Lord should at once reveal *fully* to the exercised Christian, all the hideousness of this infernal monster, the discovery would be utterly intolerable to him.

3. A distressing *apprehension that some overwhelming judgment* will suddenly be inflicted on them because of their great offences, is often a consequence of their loss of holy comfort. Heman apprehended that such judgments would come upon him and cut him off. ^{Psa 88.5} The disconsolate Christian, under a deep sense of accumulated guilt, is frequently struck with fear that an offended God will inflict upon him some sudden and terrible punishment. A filial and holy fear of Divine judgments, arising from the consideration of the great evil of sin — and of Jehovah’s infinite righteousness and abhorrence of iniquity, as well as His tremendous wrath revealed against it — is indeed lawful; and it should at all times be exercised by the saints. “O Lord, I have heard your speech,” says Habakkuk, “and was afraid.” ^{Hab 3.2} And David, “You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love Your testimonies. My flesh trembles for fear of You; and I am afraid of Your judgments.” ^{Psa 119.119-120}

But when a holy man has deprived himself of comfort, he commonly yields to a *slavish* and *excessive* dread of the judgments of God. When he hears that a thousand have fallen at his right hand, and ten thousand at his left, he trembles like a leaf of the forest. In such a condition, he is disposed to indulge a disquieting, distracting, and tormenting fear — a fear which unsettles his mind, suspends his exercise of faith, disturbs his peace, destroys his hope, and instigates him to impatience and to the use of unlawful means in order to escape the danger that threatens him. A fear of this kind is very sinful, as well as unbecoming in a true Christian. It alienates his heart from the Lord, and disqualifies him for the spiritual performance of his duty. Since he is walking in darkness, a thousand *imaginary* fears disquiet and perplex his soul. He is now readier than formerly, to be imposed upon by imaginary

dangers, and to be “in great fear, where no fear exists.” Psa 53.5 The Lord has promised him that “no real evil shall befall him;” Psa 91.10 that no affliction will ever come upon him except what will result from the greatest love, and terminate in the greatest good to him. Yet he can think of almost nothing but imminent danger on every side; and his groundless and gloomy fears of it render him inexpressibly uneasy. Such fears are so many galling fetters to his imprisoned soul. And when he would at any time try to shake them off, his quick sense of total inability discourages him. From this, they take occasion to become still more oppressive to him. Hence, is that mournful expression of Job; “If I say, ‘I will forget my complaint, I will put off my heaviness, and comfort myself,’ I am afraid of all my sorrows. I know that You will not bold me innocent.” Job 9.27-28

4. Great *uncertainty* of mind about *their present* and *future state*, is usually a consequence of the suspension of spiritual consolation from their souls. Now that the Christian is walking in darkness, he cannot as a sinner see as he did formerly, either his warrant to trust in Christ for salvation for himself in particular, nor any good evidence of his having ever trusted in Him. Having lost the light of God’s gracious countenance and of holy comfort, he has consequently, and in the same proportion, lost sight of his vital union with the Saviour, and of his personal interest in His righteousness and salvation. Hence great and sad doubts about what will become of him for the future frequently disquiet his mind. “Whoever walks in this darkness, does not know where he is going,” Joh 12.35 Unbelief prevails so much against him that he often questions whether Jesus Christ can, or will, save such a great sinner as he is, and whether God will have mercy on him or not. He is in perplexing and painful uncertainty as to what the great, terrible God may be about to do with him when he is to depart from here; and he often suspects the worst. Indeed, his doubts may be allowed to prevail so much as to make him *conclude* that the Lord will be favourable to him no longer. Thus Asaph expresses himself in a similar case: “Will the Lord cast off forever? and will He be favourable no more? is his mercy clean gone forever? does his promise fail forevermore? has God forgotten to be gracious? has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” Psa 77.7-9

And the Israelite Church says in her captivity, “My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord.” Lam 3.18 When the holy soul is in darkness, it will often argue thus: ‘The Lord has departed from me, and it may be He will never return to me. Oh! what will become of me if I am never to enjoy communion with Him anymore! What if I will have my portion, through all eternity, with hypocrites and unbelievers in the place of torment! I have now no cheering light, no enlivening hope, and perhaps I am soon to be cast into outer darkness.’ The Christian, in this perplexing condition, has indeed some lucid intervals now and then. But as one expresses it, ‘They are like the small breathings and refreshments of a person who is newly taken off the Rack, and is about to be carried to the Rack again. It is accounted a bitter ingredient in the cup of outward affliction, to be kept in suspense concerning any object which is deemed necessary and important to our *temporal* welfare. How distressing it must be, then, to the spirit of a holy man, to be held in suspense between hope and fear, respecting objects which are absolutely requisite and infinitely important to his *eternal* felicity! As a natural man cannot be at ease without natural accommodations, or the possession of those things which are adapted to the comfort of natural life, so a spiritual man cannot be quieted without the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. The possession of ten thousand worlds could not afford him the smallest ease. Nothing but the faith of redeeming love to him, the view of his personal

interest in the Redeemer, and the hope of his eternal enjoyment of God, can put his soul to rest. Were he but to know that he is to be glorified together with Christ, and in due time to enter into His joy; he would soon come forth to the light of consolation.

5. Another consequence of their having provoked their heavenly Father to withhold comfort from them, is their *uttering of heartless and useless complaints*. “Even today,” says Job, “my complaint is bitter; my stroke is heavier than my groaning.” ^{Job 23.2} And Asaph, “I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.” ^{Psa 77.3} Some believers, after they have lost their usual consolation, are not at first deeply sensible of the greatness of their loss. And therefore, though they mention with sorrow their lack of former comfort, their sorrow is far from being very deep. Their hearts are indeed *affected* by their loss; but they are not so deeply *afflicted* by it, as to bitterly bewail the sins which procured it. They fill the ears of some of their Christian friends with lamentable accounts of their doleful condition. But at the same time, they utter almost nothing but complaints about what they themselves are suffering. They do not humble themselves deeply before the offended Majesty of heaven. Nor do they strive by faith, prayer, and holy circumspection, to recover what they have lost. They are like Issachar, couching down under their burdens. ^{Gen 49.14} Or they may be compared to a diseased man who frequently bemoans himself, but does not seek to free himself from his distemper. Sometimes, they are very peevish and obstinate, and seem to take pleasure in complaining about the trouble which they endure. But they are not aware that, by indulging a temper of this kind, they render it necessary that their wound should be deeper still, and that they should yet have more reason to complain before comfort is restored to them. When David was under a sense of guilt and paternal displeasure, he doubtless felt his loss of holy comfort. Yet he did not strive ingenuously to confess and bewail his iniquities, and to fervently supplicate for spiritual consolation, until “day and night, the hand of God was so heavy upon him, that his moisture was turned into the drought of summer.” ^{Psa 32.3-4}

They think too, that they can never complain enough — that *their* condition is inexpressibly miserable, like that of Job when he exclaimed, “Oh, that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea. Therefore my words are swallowed up.” ^{Job 6.2-3} But such thoughts and expressions as these are very unbecoming in the true believer, who in every condition has a compassionate Saviour to trust in, a consummate righteousness to rely on, and promises of grace and glory to apply and plead. The exercise of faith is certainly intermitted when he can allow himself to utter such clamours. He undoubtedly forgets the infinite freeness, suitableness, fulness, and sufficiency of the grace which is in Christ Jesus. Besides, he thereby shows plainly that his grief and fear are, after all, far from being great. When sorrow and fear are shallow or superficial, believers are usually clamorous. But when they are great and deep, believers are commonly silent; they are so great that they cannot be expressed. ^{Psa 77.4} And therefore, like the waters of a large and deep river, they move silently. So long as the dejected Christian is able to complain, I think, instead of complaining to others around him only of an absent God and Saviour, ^{Lam 3.39} he should rather complain about himself, and should complain about himself chiefly to the Lord, who alone can relieve him.

6. A deep and painful *sense of God’s paternal anger* is also a consequence, and a concomitant of that anger. In their justification, believers are so entirely delivered from condemnation to

vindictive and eternal wrath, as to no longer be exposed to wrath of *that* kind. ^{Isa 54.9} Yet by sinning against the Lord *after* their justification, they incur the guilt of *fatherly anger* — not as their avenging Judge, but as their gracious God and *Father*. By “fatherly anger of God” is meant His holy and righteous displeasure with his disobedient children. This is manifested by His infliction of chastisement upon them.

In this manner, the Lord was angry with Moses, ^{Deu 1.37} and with his ancient Church, the members of which expostulate with Him thus: “O God, why have you cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?” ^{Psa 74.1} When the Lord is so displeased with any of his children, as to withdraw from them the sense of His special favour, He commonly, at the same time, impresses on their souls in place of it, a sense of His paternal anger. Instead of cheering them with that delightful sense of His redeeming love to them which they formerly enjoyed, he fixes deep in their souls a painful feeling of his being angry with them. “For the iniquity of his covetousness,” says Jehovah, “I was angry, and *struck* him. I hid, and was angry.” ^{Isa 57.17} When the Lord is angry with any of His people for their iniquities, He will not only hide his face from them, and deprive them of the cheering sense of His favour; but He will strike them likewise. And he will do this, not only by some external stroke of His rod on their bodies or estates, but sometimes by an internal and deep impression on their souls, of His anger. And if depriving them of the cheering sense of God’s favour is connected with the feeling of His hot displeasure, an inexpressibly bitter and grievous conflict in their souls must ensue.

Therefore the Lord has said, “I will not contend forever, neither will I be angry always. For the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made.” ^{Isa 57.16} When God is angry with His children, He makes them *feel* his displeasure. He does this either by,

- frowning on them, so that for a season they will discern almost nothing in His countenance but a continued and dreadful frown;
- or by “covering them with a cloud in his anger ;” ^{Lam 2.1}
- or by seeming “to be angry even with their prayer,” ^{Psa 80.4} to shut it out, ^{Lam 2.8} and to “cover Himself with a cloud that it cannot pass through;” ^{Lam 3.44}
- or by leaving their souls to languish under the prevalence of unbelief, discouragement, and dread;
- or by laying sore and long affliction upon their bodies, and rendering all the means which they employ to remove it, unavailing;
- or in a word, by threatening to destroy at once all their external comforts.

Indeed, when the Lord impresses on their spirits a deep and fixed sense of His anger, no creature can afford the smallest consolation to them. In vain they will seek ease for their oppressed souls — in business, amusements, or cheerful company. Friends may indeed mourn with them. But as one expresses it, ‘they cannot wipe away *their* tears.’ Nor can they then find relief, even in the ordinances of God. Every threatening of His holy law appears as an arrow aimed at their heart. Every promise of His blessed gospel, however full of consolation to others, seems empty to them. Every offer of a Saviour and of his great salvation, however unlimited, appears to be directed to *other* sinners, and not to them, The Lord himself seems to them as if He were taking no notice of their distress — yes, as if He were an enemy to their souls. We are not to wonder then, if in such a case they feel overwhelming trouble and

anguish of spirit. ^{Job 19.6,8; Psa 88.3} Indeed, it is because the Lord still loves them and resolves to save them, that when He sees them running on to sin and misery, His paternal anger thus overtakes them. This is in order to stop them, and bring them back again to the comfort of holy conformity to the image of His Son Jesus Christ.

7. A *most distressing sense, even of the vindictive wrath of God*, is sometimes a consequence of their loss of comfort. True believers indeed can never be cast into hell; but the Lord may, as it were, cast hell into them. Some of them, accordingly, when God has hidden His face from them, have been permitted to rashly and falsely conclude that because they cannot see Him now, they never saw Him; that because they cannot perceive their evidences of grace now, they never had true grace; that as they never had true grace formerly, they have no saving grace now; and that the anger of God which they now feel is not his fatherly displeasure, but his *vindictive* wrath. ^{Psa 88.14} Thus they unjustly, as well as rashly conclude that what they now feel is an impression of revenging wrath. It is this wrath that Heman seems to complain of when he says, “Your wrath lies hard upon me; Your fierce wrath goes over me.” ^{Psa 88.7,16} In like manner, one of the prophets says, “I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of Your indignation and Your wrath.” ^{Psa 102.9-10} The sense of vindictive wrath is much more doleful and intolerable than even that of paternal anger. And therefore the Psalmist prays that if he must be chastened, that greatest of all chastisements may not be inflicted upon him: “O Lord, do not rebuke me in your *wrath*, nor chasten me in your hot displeasure.” ^{Psa 38.1} He prays not merely that the Lord may not punish him in vindictive wrath, but that He may not so chasten him as to lay him under an overwhelming *impression* of that intolerable wrath.

When the soul of a holy man is under that direful impression for a season, he can see nothing, and feel nothing, but consuming wrath. Conscious that he deserves the fierceness of eternal wrath, he is filled with dreadful apprehensions that the hand which presses him sorely, is not the hand of a merciful Father, but of an avenging Judge — casting him down as a condemned criminal, into a deep and horrible dungeon. Under a sense of that wrath, Heman complains to the Lord thus: “You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.” ^{Psa 88.6} When a saint is under terrible impressions of Jehovah’s infinite wrath, he cannot but be under great horror of conscience, and in perplexing depths of mental trouble. The sense which he has of avenging wrath, occasions a conflict in his spirit, that is inexpressibly agonizing and terrible. When his troubled conscience is inflamed by a sense of the fiery indignation of God almighty, the more he thinks of Him as his infinite enemy, and the more he is dismayed. ^{Psa 77.3} Every thought of Him brings doleful tidings, and pours oil on the raging flame.

A troubled conscience for sin is indeed very disquieting; but a sense of the vindictive wrath of God, kindled in the conscience, is still more dreadful. No words can express the direful anguish which the disconsolate soul then feels. ^{Psa 116.3} At that time, the Christian cannot think so much as one quieting, one cheering thought. What he first thinks of is tormenting to his wounded spirit. He exchanges that thought for another, and that is still more tormenting. He finds himself entangled, as in the midst of a thicket of thorns, so that whichever way he turns, he is pierced and grieved afresh. This dismal thought often arises in his troubled mind: that if death were to surprise and cut him off in his present condition, he would sink forever and ever under the intolerable wrath of the infinite Jehovah. The most exquisite torment of body

is almost nothing in comparison to the anguish of his spirit at such times. ^{Pro 18.14} Oh! how inconceivable is the anguish, the agony, especially of a holy soul, when it is conflicting with the tremendous wrath of the eternal God! The bodily torture even of crucifixion, could not extort from the holy Jesus, the smallest sigh or complaint. But the sense of his Father's wrath in his soul, wrung from him that doleful outcry, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" ^{Mat 27.46}

8. Another consequence of their having deprived themselves of spiritual comfort, is *overwhelming terror*. Terror is an excessive fear and trembling of heart.¹ The troubled soul begins to dread that its present feeling of vindictive wrath, is but the beginning of what it will have to feel through an endless eternity. "The terrors of God," says Job, "set themselves in array against me." ^{Job 6.4} "Destruction from God was a terror to me." ^{Job 31.23} And Heman, "While I suffer your terrors, I am distraught; Your fierce wrath goes over me, Your terrors have cut me off." ^{Psa 88.15-16} The Lord permits some of his children, when He hides his face from them, not only to draw false conclusions from that awful dispensation, with regard to their past and present state; but to form rash and despondent conclusions concerning their future condition. They then conclude that it will never be better with them as to their outward afflictions. Hezekiah, in a similar case, said, "I will not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living. I will behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world." ^{Isa 38.11} They likewise conclude that it will never be better with them in this world, with respect to their inward troubles. "I will go softly all my years," said Hezekiah, "in the bitterness of my soul." ^{Isa 38.15}

In fact, under the prevalence of unbelief and despondency, they peremptorily conclude that the Lord, whom they have greatly displeased, will cast them off and punish them with everlasting destruction in the world to come. They do not merely question, as Asaph did, if the Lord will be favourable to them anymore; but they rashly and positively conclude that He never will. They say, as the house of Israel did, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we ourselves are cut off;" ^{Eze 37.11} and as the Israelite Church did, "My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord." ^{Lam 3.18} They do this, not during a short fit of despondency, or in their haste, as David did; but for a long time. "When neither sun nor stars" of consolation, "appear for many days, all hope that they will be saved seems to be taken away." ^{Act 27.20} Those awful passages of Scripture, in which "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness," ^{Rom 1.18} continually present themselves to their view. And by a strange kind of belief, they even apprehend that every part of the word, as well as every dispensation of the providence of God, is the sword of an enemy; that it promises threatenings as well; that mercies as well as judgments are against them; and that by all this, the Lord hinders their access to the tree of life, as with a flaming sword turning every way. Terrors, like fire, assimilate everything to their own nature. And so they render dejected souls unable to put a just or favourable construction upon any of the words or dispensations of the Lord.

The terrors of God may indeed be *felt*, but they cannot be *expressed*. They are inconceivably dreadful and overwhelming. They are "the arrows of the Almighty within a man, the poison

¹ Gen 15.6; Act 9.6

of which drinks up his spirit.” Job 6.4 Wounding him in the most vital and tender part, they cause his spirit within him to pine away and almost die.

‘I will doubtless perish,’ says the frightened soul. ‘I am undone, *forever* undone. I am already in the place of torment, as it were, under inexpressible anguish, insupportable terror. The great and terrible God has cast me off, and I see nothing before me, but horrible darkness, blackness of darkness forever.’ The shadows of the evening are stretched out over me; and what will become of me if it proves to be an endless night? Oh! what will my eternal state be, should death surprise me in my present condition! If I cannot now bear even a slight impression of the anger of God, how will I be able to endure the full weight, the eternal fierceness, of His avenging wrath? If I am so troubled, so terrified, so amazed *now*, what will I do when my tremendous doom will be pronounced, and the endless execution of it has begun?’

Oh! what overwhelming horror, what direful agony, an awakened and disconsolate soul must feel in the awful prospect of suffering the vengeance of eternal fire! Oh! eternity, eternity, how in the night of terror, the prospect of eternity amazes and even absorbs the spirit!

9. Satan’s being permitted *to add to the trouble and terror* of believers, is usually a consequence of their having forfeited their spiritual comfort. In that condition, they are commonly “in heaviness through *manifold temptations*.” 1Pet 1.6 When the Lord is chastening any of His children for being more ready to believe the lies of Satan than the truths of His holy word, He often permits that crafty and cruel enemy to hold them down, and to terrify them. And so far as he is permitted, Satan’s constant work is to render them as uncomfortable as possible on their way to heaven. Thus he treated Job. The spiritual trouble and dismal terror of that holy man were, for the most part, from the immediate hand of Satan. When this enemy of souls perceives that believers constantly resist his temptations to *presumption*, he assaults them with furious and horrible temptations to *despair*. And when he observes any of them under a sense of Divine anger and a dread of eternal wrath, he commonly selects this as the fittest opportunity to enforce those temptations. He then especially labours to persuade them that when God is afflicting them with such great severity, it is a sure evidence that He is not their *God*, but their *adversary*; and that they are not *His people*, but *His enemies*. He misrepresents both God and themselves to them, and so he insults them in their misery.

When that cowardly enemy perceives that their spirit is already broken down, he makes his most furious assaults on them. For he knows that once they are cast down, he can more easily trample on and afflict them. No sooner does the Lord depart, than Satan comes. He comes to triumph over their anguish, and to say, ‘Where now is your God? Remember that your iniquities have been particularly great and aggravated, and that you have thereby provoked the Lord to finally abandon you. You already feel His fiery indignation, and you have reason, good reason, to dread that you will endure it forever.’ He takes occasion from their anguish of spirit, to represent the Lord to them as a cruel tyrant, one who has resolved to destroy them. And when they already fear and even feel that God has departed from them, what can they say in answer to him? Perceiving their distress and knowing their weakness, Satan urges against them with amazing dexterity and unwearied importunity, even passages of Scripture and dispensations of providence, to enforce his infernal suggestions.

When he sees that their faith is very weak, and their sense of Divine displeasure is very deep, he then shoots his fiery darts, which penetrate and inflame their souls with additional anguish and horror. ^{Eph 6.16} It is a pleasant sight to that wicked one, to behold God afflicting his children —to see even but one of them wounded with griefs, broken with terrors, and made “a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls.” ^{Job 30.29} Therefore, after they have long been disquieted and enfeebled by desponding fears, he assaults them furiously, so that when they are already pressed down, he may throw additional weight upon them.

It is his usual method to so impress terror on their minds, that it frequently comes upon them by sudden fits. These fits or paroxysms commonly return whenever the troubled soul would promise itself some degree of ease. Accordingly, the usual time of refreshing the body with food and sleep, are ordinarily the seasons which Satan watches for his renewed assaults.¹ At such times, he commonly injects blasphemous and atheistic thoughts which fill them with horror. And when he has thereby prepared their hearts, he seizes the opportunity to persuade them that such a heart must be wholly destitute of regenerating grace. And when he perceives that any of them are afflicted with melancholy, he considers it a distemper that affords him advantages which are peculiarly suited to his design. The imagination is then disordered, and so it is fitter than at any other time, to receive impressions from him. It also affords him great advantage if they have lately fallen into some great and grievous sins — especially, as one observes,² into sins against the third, sixth, or seventh commandment. Arguing from such crimes, he labours to persuade them that they are reprobated, and doomed to eternal destruction.

When he perceives that they have been guilty of some atrocious iniquity, he will suggest that it is even the unpardonable sin. He argues likewise from their perturbed spirit, that their heart is so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, as to be utterly incapable of exercising repentance unto life. The more he distracts and shocks their minds with terrors, the more unable they are to detect the fallacy of his arguments; and the more disposed they are to admit the force of them. Excessive fear removes their souls to such a distance from true comfort, that they will not be persuaded to trust in the Lord Jesus, either for His salvation or for the *joy* of that salvation. Under such perplexing fears, they seem so far disposed to take part with Satan, as to plead against themselves with much eagerness and surprising subtlety. Believer, when your transgressions are at any time so exceedingly aggravated in your view, as to exceed either the mercy of God, or the blood of his Son, or the power of his Spirit, or the grace of His covenant, you may be sure that it is one of the lies of the devil. Oh! From now on, be so wise for yourself, as to no longer expect truth from a liar, or sound argument from a deceiver, or true comfort from an enemy.

10. To be *discountenanced* ³ or *coldly treated by Christian friends*, is often a consequence of a believer's having forfeited his spiritual comfort. When the Lord is angry with His rebellious child, and is chastening him, He not only gives Satan leave to trouble him, but permits some of the saints who are acquainted with him, to discountenance him and add to his grief by their

¹ Job 3.24; 7.13-14.

² Mr. William Perkins.

³ *Discountenance*: to show no approval or favor; to turn away from someone. – WHG

cold treatment of him. When the Father of a family resolves to more effectually correct his obstinate child, he will say to the rest of his household, ‘Don’t be familiar with him; show him no countenance; put him to shame.’ In like manner, when the Lord is striking His disobedient child, especially with spiritual trouble, He says to others of his children, as it were, ‘For a season, have no familiarity with him. Treat him with coldness and neglect in order that he may be ashamed, and humbled for his iniquity.’ ^{2The 3.14-15} Under his grievous affliction, Job complained thus: “He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintances are utterly estranged from me,” etc. ^{Job 19.13-19} And likewise Heman, “You have put my acquaintances far away from me; you have made me an abomination to them. You have put lover and friend far from me, and my acquaintances into darkness.” ^{Psa 88.8,18} When God’s favour to the soul is clouded, the comfort of Christian society is also obscured. When He frowns on one, His other children commonly appear to frown likewise. And when He makes himself a stranger to one, so for the most part will they.

If a holy man, then, under trouble of spirit, begins to be treated with disregard and even with contempt by some of his Christian brethren, he should not be surprised; nor should he take the occasion to be angry, or to quarrel with them. Rather, he should look above them, and take the afflictive dispensation as being from the hand of the Lord, as a necessary part of the chastisement intended for him. He should say with respect to them, as David said concerning Shimei, “The Lord has bid them;” ^{2Sam 16.10} or as Heman did, “You have put my acquaintances far away from me.”

11. *Hard thoughts of God, and jealous thoughts of Christ*, often take occasion to arise from the lack of comfort, especially if believers have long remained in that condition. Hard thoughts of God proceed from their disconsolate hearts, such as,

- that He is so greatly incensed against them, as to be implacable;
- that He has so forsaken them, as to never return any more;
- that He has passed such a sentence of condemnation upon them, that it will never be reversed;
- that He has covered himself with such a cloud in His anger, that it will henceforth render it impossible for their prayer to pass through;
- that He has forgotten to be gracious to them;
- that His mercy is clean gone forever,

and such things as these. When dejection and terror long continue, they obscure the mind and cause it to form and entertain gloomy, indeed, monstrous apprehensions. Hence come these words of Job: “He performs the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him. Therefore I am troubled at His presence. When I consider, I am afraid of Him. For God makes my heart soft, and the Almighty troubles me, because I was not cut off from the darkness.” ^{Job 23.14-17}

Jealous thoughts of Christ, the glorious head and husband of believing souls, likewise arise from the disconsolate heart. If souls have hard thoughts of God, they will quickly entertain jealous thoughts of Christ Jesus. And if they only begin to suspect that Christ does not love them, or that He is not faithful in performing His promises to them, they will be afraid to take His word, and afraid to trust Him or commit themselves and their salvation to Him. Christian, be continually on your guard against unbelieving and suspicious thoughts of the love of Christ

to your soul. Trust firmly that He loves you, and cares for you, and that He will never leave you, nor forsake you. Your sensible comfort may leave you; but your faithful Redeemer, the husband of your soul, will never totally or finally forsake you. For a season, He may indeed “cause grief; but He will have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.” ^{Lam 3.32} Do not say, then, when He hides his face from you, ‘He has utterly forsaken me.’ Rather, in the exercise of unsuspecting confidence in Him and in His love to you, say, “He will turn again; He will have compassion on me; He will subdue my iniquities, and will cast all my sins into the depths of the sea.” ^{Mic 7.19} O, guard against jealous thoughts of your infinitely faithful Redeemer. Do not suspect Him without ground. The moment you are suspicious of His love to you, you sin against Him without cause.

The Lord Jesus at no time so conducts himself in his ways of grace and providence toward you, as to give you the smallest cause to suspect his faithfulness. ^{Lam 3.23} And if you would never suspect His kindness and faithfulness to your soul till you had a cause, it is all that He would desire. Remember, to be jealous of the holy Jesus, is not only to sin against Him, but against yourself. “Jealousy is the rage of a man;” ^{Pro 7.34} and “it is cruel, or hard as the grave.” ^{Song 8.6} It will disquiet and torture your soul; it will waste your spirits, and prey upon you like the grave. You, indeed, have been unfaithful, very unfaithful to the Lord Jesus. But though this is a ground of deep humiliation, it is no ground at all for suspecting *His* faithfulness to his own promise, upon which He has caused you to hope. ^{Psa 119.49}

12. Another consequence of their loss of spiritual consolation is their usually being so discomposed and dispirited by it, as to become at the time, *unfit for the spiritual performance of their duty*. This will more especially be the case with them if in their disconsolate condition, as is too common, they forbear to trust in the Saviour for present and eternal salvation. Though their obedience is not accepted on account of their faith, yet it is spiritually good and acceptable in proportion to the strength and frequency of their *actings* of faith. If then, they cease for a season to act faith ¹ in the same proportion, they cease for that time to perform spiritual and acceptable obedience to the Lord — for “without faith, it is impossible to please Him.” ^{Heb 11.6} It is not sufficient for acceptable obedience, that Christians have faith in *principle* and even in *habit*. They must likewise have it in *exercise* — and to have it even when they walk in darkness, and have no light of sensible comfort. ^{Isa 50.10}

But if in the darkness of spiritual trouble, they forbear for a season to trust in the Lord Jesus for complete salvation for themselves in particular, that trouble will so disquiet and dispirit them, as to disqualify them either for doing or for suffering according to the will of God. “I am,” says Heman, “like a man who has no strength.” ^{Psa 88.4} Indeed, it has made some of them even think that it is to no purpose for them to endeavour spiritually to perform *any* duty. Indeed their souls, when in that doleful condition, are commonly so occupied with the fear of eternal wrath, that sin *as* sin, and duty *as* duty, are but little considered by them. Moreover, that conscience by which they judge themselves to be still under the guilt of all their sins, is called in Scripture “an evil conscience” ^{Heb 10.22} — a conscience which the blood of Christ must purge from dead works, in order to be capacitated to serve the living God. ^{Heb 9.14}

¹ *Act faith*: a common phrase in reformed writings, meaning to act *in* faith, or to *exercise* faith. – WHG

Love, which is the fulfilling of the law, and the end of the commandment, must arise out of a *good* conscience, as well as out of a pure heart. ^{1Tim 1.5} That evil or guilty conscience by which disquieted Christians judge that the Lord is still their enemy because of their sins, greatly strengthens the remaining enmity of their hearts *against* Him. And so it indisposes them for affectionate and filial obedience *to* Him. For in proportion to their decline in their love to Him, they are hardly drawn *to* Him in any spiritual service, and easily drawn *away* from Him — they come slowly, and depart readily. They approach with reluctance; and while they stand before Him, it is with hesitation and dislike.

Besides, just as spiritual joy raises and invigorates the spirit, so carnal and legal sorrow depresses and enfeebles it. All sorrow, except godly sorrow, lies like lead on the heart, cold and heavy, and presses it still downward. It likewise makes the soul contract itself, or shrink from that spiritual intercourse with God in Christ, which it ought to eagerly and incessantly pursue. Under the pressure of sadness, especially when it is accompanied with terror, believers themselves find no heart to pray, and no life in praying. They bow their knees; they sigh and cry; but the Lord seems not to regard them, nor to return answers of peace to their prayers. For the most part, their thoughts are in a continual tumult. And so, in all their efforts to pray, wandering and perplexing thoughts sadly prevail against them. Their sadness greatly abates their vigour of spirit, and destroys their freedom of speech. It dampens also their faith, hope, and love — and so it mars their prayers, as well as all their other spiritual exercises. Finding that they are still as perplexed and disconsolate after prayer as before it, and fearing that their prayer is an abomination to the Lord, they are almost at the point of giving it up. They are troubled when they do not pray. And when they *would* pray, they find that they cannot. Sometimes, when the trouble of their mind becomes great and violent, it suppresses their words, and can find no vent. “I am so troubled,” says Asaph, “I cannot speak.” ^{Psa 77.4} The waters of their trouble and anguish so drown their cries, that they either cannot pray at all, or they can find no liberty, no pleasure, no relief in their prayers.

13. *Lastly*, The joint effect of those consequences mentioned above, is that frequently *the natural spirits begin to be disordered and dejected*. Trouble of mind, especially when it is great or of long continuance, commonly produces this effect. Such is the nature of the union between the soul and the body, that there is almost never any vigorous exercise of any of the affections or passions of the soul, without some corresponding effect thereby produced on the motion of the fluids,¹ and especially the natural spirits of the body. The motion of the animal spirits is thereby altered, from which often arises some bodily sensation, especially about the heart and other parts essential to life, which are the fountains of those fluids. So much is the body subjected to the soul, and so much do the spirits of the body depend on the affections of the soul, that the exercise of any one of the affections has a direct tendency to produce some sensible effect on the body. And if the exercise of any one of them is great or violent, it will produce an effect that is proportionally great and violent. Accordingly, the holy Psalmist, expressing his vehement desire for communion with God in public ordinances, says, “My soul thirsts for you, my *flesh* longs for you.” ^{Psa 63.1} And again, “My heart and my *flesh* cry out for

¹ *The fluids*: a reference to the belief at the time, that good health depended on maintaining a balance between four fluids, or *humors* — sanguine (blood, or optimism); phlegmatic (phlegm, or sluggishness); choleric (yellow bile, or anger); and melancholic (black bile, or depression). — WHG

the living God.” Psa 84.2 Now, the affections of grief and fear, in proportion to the degree of their exercise, contract the natural spirits and render their motions feeble and slow, The consequence is that the vigour of the body commonly declines: its motions become sluggish. The lamp of life burns dimly. The countenance grows dejected; the complexion waxes pale; and no liveliness or activity seems to remain.

Hence come these complaints in Scripture: “On my eyelids is the shadow of death.” Job 16.16 “I have become like dust and ashes.” Job 30.19 My moisture has turned into the drought of summer.” Psa 32.4 “There is no soundness in my flesh, because of Your anger.” Psa 38.3 “I have become like a bottle in the smoke.” Psa 119.83 “My soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave.” Psa 88.3 Just as the motion of the spirits of the body is retarded and altered by the influence of the grief and fear of the soul, so this alteration will at length produce that disorder which is called *melancholy*, especially if it continues for a considerable time. Though melancholy, which is indeed a distemper of the *body*, is totally distinct from trouble of the *mind*, strictly so called, the former often proceeds from and is increased by the latter. And the latter again is reciprocally augmented and often prolonged by the former. For as the soul cannot but feel with the body in its pain, so the body cannot be exempted from sharing with the soul in its trouble.

HAVING now considered the leading consequences of the loss of spiritual comfort, and in order to prevent mistakes, it will be proper to observe that in the case of some disconsolate Christians, all these consequences concur; but in others, only some of them take place. It is seldom that they are all felt by one and the same believer, except when spiritual distress becomes very deep, and continues long. Spiritual trouble usually consists either in the loss of comfort, together with all its consequences; or in the lack of comfort, with only some of them — and that is in a greater or lesser degree. Accordingly, it is either total or partial. Some believers have been afflicted with *total* distress of soul, so that they have despaired even of mercy to a certain degree. It may possibly appear harsh to some, to charge so horrible a sin as despair upon true believers, even in their deepest perturbation of spirit. But if it seems uncharitable to say that any of the saints ever fall into a degree of despair, it will surely be harsher and more uncharitable to affirm that none who ever fall into despair, are saints.

Indeed, it cannot be denied that some of the saints, under the deepest anguish of spirit, have for a time so despaired as to have been overwhelmed with terror in the dreadful prospect of eternal wrath. Then again, other believers, upon loss of their comfort, are afflicted only with *partial* trouble of mind, and are soon delivered from it. They have indeed the painful experience of some or even of most of those consequences mentioned above, but not *all* of them. They have, it may be, a painful sense of paternal anger. But being enabled to still trust that the hand which afflicts their souls is the hand of a Father, and not of an enemy, they are exempted from an overwhelming sense of avenging wrath. Or they may, perhaps, have some feeling even of vindictive wrath, yet are only under a very small degree of despondency. Psa 88.1 Those of the saints who have even *all* those doleful consequences of having forfeited their holy consolation, may have them in a greater or lesser degree. And those who have only *some* of them, may likewise have these in various degrees. Trouble of mind in some believers is transient and short; in others it is fixed, of long continuance, and sometimes attended with very alarming symptoms. But still, however short and however low in degree it is, the very

lowest degree of it is inconceivably more intolerable and dreadful than the highest degree of bodily affliction.

Reflections

Now, from the foregoing detail, the following remarks are obvious:

First, Trouble of mind, especially when it is excessive, is *not in itself good, but evil*. It is sinful in true Christians to allow themselves to be disquieted by, and to languish under despondent fears — as if they did not have a compassionate Saviour to trust in. Deep dejection of Spirit produces much aversion of heart from the spiritual performance of every duty. It is contrary to the great duty of believing. Faith is a *resting*; this trouble is a *disquietment* of the heart. Faith is the eye of the soul; such trouble is the blindness and darkness of the soul. Faith gives glory to God; this reflects dishonour upon Him, It is not only a sin, but a most heinous sin to so yield to dejection of spirit, as to refuse to be comforted. The troubled spirit of the Christian actually rises against redeeming grace. It is well for him in such a case, that the covenant of grace in which he is still instated, is well “ordered in all things;” ^{Wis 11.20} — that it stands like a well-marshalled army on the field, ready to resist Satan’s attacks on whatever part of it he may choose to fall. Be deeply convinced, O disquieted believer, that your refusing to trust in the Saviour, and to be comforted, is your *aggravated* sin; and that it is inexpressibly dangerous, as well as sinful, to allow despondency and trouble to grow upon your spirit.

Next, The most tender *compassion* from all, and especially from fellow-Christians, is due to those who are under trouble of spirit. Such distress cries aloud for the tenderest sympathy. If it is a great sin to treat with roughness or severity, fellow-creatures who are under exquisite pain of body, then it is a much more heinous iniquity to so treat fellow-Christians who are under anguish of soul. ^{Oba 12; Gal 6.2}

Again, It is the duty of the disconsolate believer *to hope* that he will in due time be delivered from his trouble. “It is good that he should both hope, and quietly wait for the Salvation of the Lord; for the Lord will not cast off forever.” ^{Lam 3.26,31}, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” On these words of the Lord Jesus, Austin ¹ puts this pertinent question to a believer: “You who cannot lose a single hair, how does it come to pass that you are afraid of losing your soul?” Christian, cheer your troubled spirit with the hope that your compassionate Saviour will deliver you, though you can not tell how, nor when. ^{Psa 34.19} Let the consideration of His infinite mercy, and of His near relation to you, encourage you in expectation of deliverance, to bear with patience your grievous trial.² Consider what you have deserved at the hand of the Lord, and that impatience will only provoke Him to set a yet keener edge on your trouble. You have need of patience. “Let patience therefore have her perfect work.” ^{Jas 1.4}

Moreover, It appears evident that it is also the duty of the disconsolate Christian, *never to give way to carnal reasoning against himself*. When his faith is lively, and his evidences are clear, he can refute carnal reasoning, and say with the apostle Paul, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is risen again,” etc. ^{Rom 8.33-34} But when his faith is languid, and his

¹ *Austin*: Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

² Mic 7.9; Jas 5.11.

evidences are eclipsed, it is not only useless, but dangerous in the extreme, to yield to carnal reasoning about the state of his soul. For then he is least qualified to take God's part against the cavils of Satan, and of an evil heart of unbelief. If a man were to encourage a suit to commence against himself in order to try and confirm the validity of his title to an estate, he surely would not choose for that purpose, the time in which he could *not* find his evidences of that title. Alas! the time which a good man chooses for giving ear to carnal reasoning, is commonly the very time in which he has lost his evidences of grace. And it is grievous to see with what a weak piece of sophistry the devil will baffle him at such a time. It is inexpressibly dangerous for a child of light, especially when he is in the dark, to be *reasoning* with the prince of darkness. He cannot be safe in such circumstances, other than by the resolute exercise of prayer, and of that faith which is above sight as well as contrary to sense and carnal reason. He should not spend a moment framing arguments against himself. Satan will be ready enough to suggest them. And in particular, he should never conclude that he is a hypocrite, from those things that are nowhere in Scripture declared to be marks of *reigning* hypocrisy.

Where, O disconsolate Christian, do you read in the Oracles of truth, that the lack of legal terrors in conversion; or that wandering thoughts, straitness, dullness, and deadness of spirit in prayer (while you bewail and strive against them); or that the lack of present evidences of sincerity, and of those degrees of peace and joy to which some have attained; or that some iniquity prevails against you for a time, notwithstanding your frequent efforts to resist it — *where*, I ask, do you read that any of these is an evidence of reigning hypocrisy? Or where can you find that the *presence* of hypocrisy in the heart, is the same as the *predominance* of it?

It is no less the duty of the disquieted believer, *to distinguish well* between the atheistical and blasphemous thoughts which are injected by Satan; and those which proceed from his own heart. His doing so, through grace, will be a means of lessening in no small degree the anguish of his soul. Atheistical and blasphemous thoughts do sometimes proceed from his own heart. For our blessed Lord says, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts... blasphemies." ^{Mat 15.19} And he may charge himself with such thoughts as having arisen from his own heart when, instead of resisting them instantly and with abhorrence, he yields to them for a little while. But if, as is more frequently the case, they come in suddenly and violently upon his mind; if his heart trembles at them, and with holy abhorrence instantly opposes them; ^{Psa 73.15} and if his being assaulted with them is very grievous to him ^{Psa 73.21-22} — then without hesitation, he ought to charge them upon Satan, and not upon himself. For his comfort, he should never impute them to himself, as *his own* transgressions, but to the tempter, as *his*.

It is likewise his duty *to read diligently and frequently*, those passages of Scripture which are most suited to comfort him. It is not less true than strange that the believer, under mental trouble, is usually much disposed to read, remember, and apply to himself, those passages of Scripture and of human writings, that are most adapted to *increase* the trouble and terror of his soul. Such places of Scripture and other books, that are arousing and alarming, are indeed very proper for a good man to often read and remember when he finds that carnal security is prevailing against him. But when his soul is already depressed with terror and dismay, so that he needs cordials to refresh his drooping spirit, he should chiefly and frequently read, meditate, and believe with application to himself, those passages of Scripture, which are most

encouraging and consoling to his fainting soul — especially these referred to at the bottom of this page.¹ Let him resolve firmly, in dependence on promised grace and in defiance of his disinclination, to read again and again those and similar passages; to *believe* them with regard to himself; and to convert them into matter for ejaculatory prayer.²

As the dejected believer is chastened less than he deserves to be, and as it is of the Lord's mercies that he is not consumed, let him *readily acknowledge this*, and see that he expresses his grateful sense of it by *glorifying the Lord* even in the fires.³ Let him endeavour to glorify the Lord, by being constantly on his guard against all manner of sin, and especially against omitting any known duty. He must never take occasion from the uneasiness of his mind, to neglect a single duty that it is possible for him to perform, It is inexpressibly dangerous for the Christian to be indolent at any time, but especially when he is under depression of spirit.

TO CONCLUDE: Does God afflict even some of his own dear saints with unutterable anguish and terror of soul, when He is only chastening them for iniquity? *What exquisite torment then, what direful anguish*, awaits impenitent sinners in the place of torment, where they must lie throughout eternity under His vindictive, His infinite, His tremendous wrath! Christ has given infinite satisfaction to the offended justice of God, for *all* the iniquities of His children. They love God supremely. They also love His commandments, and study to keep them. They are the objects of His redeeming, His immense, His everlasting love. And yet, in chastening them for their iniquity, God sometimes afflicts them with dreadful impressions of His displeasure.

Now, if only a sense of his *fatherly* anger is so terrible and intolerable to His children, how will you, O impenitent and careless sinner, be able to endure the fierceness of His *vindictive* wrath, the heat of his fiery indignation, “which shall burn unto the lowest hell?” *Deu 32.22* If the suffering of that — only for a short season, for a small moment — is so inexpressibly painful to them, then Oh! what direful agony, what overwhelming anguish *you* must endure when you suffer this, not merely for millions of ages, but through all the endless ages of eternity! Ah! secure sinner, if you don't flee speedily from the wrath to come, to the great Redeemer offered to you in the gospel, then “the smoke of your torment will ascend forever and ever; and you will have no rest, day or night.” *Rev 14.11* We are informed by Him who cannot lie, that “the wicked shall be turned into hell;” *Psa 9.17* that “they shall go away into everlasting punishment;” *Mat 25.46* and that “they shall be cast into a furnace of fire, of everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”⁴ Consider this — you, who lives in sin — *and be afraid*. Oh! Do not continue any longer in the love and practice of iniquity. Do not, for the momentary and polluted pleasures of sin, persist in exposing yourself to endless wrath. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you. While you have light, *believe* in the light, that you may be one of the children of light. *Joh 12.35-36*

¹ *Psa 43.5, 71.20-23; Isa 1.18, 55.1-4; Eze 33.11; Hos 14.4-6; Isa 57.15-19, 66.13, 40.27-31, 49.8-10, 54.7-14, 61.1-3; also Isa 41.10-14, 43.1-2; Lam 3.22-26; Mat 11.28-29; Rev 22.17; Joh 3.14-17, 14.15-27; 1Tim 1.5; Mat 9.13; Psa 138.3-8. See the Appendix for the texts of these verses — WHG*

² *Ejaculatory prayer*: a brief prayer offered spontaneously in response to some precious truth of God (“may Your name be praised!”, “thank you, Lord!”), or aspirational in our walk (“give me strength!”, “lead me in Your ways!”). — WHG

³ *KJV Isa 24:15* Therefore glorify the LORD in the fires, *even* the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea.

⁴ *Mat 13.42; 25.41.*

CHAPTER 5.

The nature and signs of melancholy

With directions for those believers who are afflicted with it.

MELANCHOLY,¹ though it so weakens and disorders the mind as to render a person unable to enjoy the comforts and to perform the duties of life, it is nevertheless seated in the *body*. But the state of body which accompanies this disease is acknowledged by the best Physicians, to be in general beyond the reach of their investigation. By this distemper, the mind is so disordered that, like an inflamed eye, it becomes disqualified for discerning its objects clearly and justly. The disease is commonly attended with gloomy thoughts, heaviness, sorrow, and fear, without any apparent cause of them, Wicked men are as liable to be afflicted with it as good men. In the case of some, though a bodily distemper, melancholy produces dejection of mind. In others, trouble of mind on spiritual accounts — especially if it is great, or of long continuance — produces the disease of melancholy in the body. Melancholy also increases trouble of mind; and trouble of mind again, increases melancholy. Where they both exist together, they mutually increase and confirm each other. However great a believer's grief for sin, and his dread of Divine anger may be, he should not be called *melancholy* so long as these appear to be rational, and his imagination appears to be sound.

On the other hand, however small his measure of sadness and fear may be, if his imagination and mind are so distempered or impaired that he cannot assign a proper *reason* for his sadness and fear, nor express them in a *rational* manner, he is to be counted melancholy. Now, when a good man is at any time afflicted with this grievous distemper, it will usually reveal itself by more or fewer of the following signs.

Sect. 1. Signs of melancholy, especially in a true Christian.

A holy man, when he is under this mournful disease, commonly gives himself up to excessive grief. He often weeps without knowing why, and thinks that he ought to do so; and if he but appears to smile at any time, or to talk cheerfully, his heart strikes him for it, as if he had done amiss. He is usually *exceedingly timorous, or full of groundless fears*. Almost everything that he sees or hears of, serves to increase his dread; especially if fear (as is often the case) has been the primary cause of his melancholy.

If the distemper is not deep, sadness and fear commonly seize him *at intervals*. He is seized with fits of them for a part of a day, or for a whole day, or even for several days together. And after some short abatement of them, they return to him, and he feels them again fastening on his spirit. without knowing why.

Through the distemper of his imagination, he is disposed to *aggravate* his sin, or misery, or danger. He is ready to speak with horror about every common infirmity or fault, as if it were an atrocious crime. Every ordinary affliction, he considers as utterly destructive; every small

¹ For further insights on spiritual depression, its causes and treatment, see Timothy Rogers' book, *Trouble of Mind, and the Disease of Melancholy*. He suffered from melancholy himself, as did Charles Spurgeon, who read Rogers' book with profit. A modernized digital version of it (pdf, epub) is available at www.onthewing.org/Classics.html. Colquhoun will refer to it in his *Reflections* at the end of this chapter – WHG

danger, as a great one; every possible danger, as probable; and every probable danger, as certain.

He often thinks that, his day of grace is *past*, and that now it is *too late for him* to believe, to repent, or to expect mercy. Were anyone to declare to him that redeeming grace is infinitely free, or that the riches of saving mercy in Christ are always overflowing, or that the offers and calls of the gospel are directed to him in particular, he would still affirm that now it is too late, because his day of grace is undoubtedly past. No arguments will convince him that concluding his day of grace is past, or that God will never show mercy nor give grace to him — while God is yet continually beseeching him to accept His offers of grace, and so be reconciled to Him — is an unbelieving suspicion that the God of truth is not sincere in His offers. And it is a most sinful attempt to make Him a liar. ^{1Joh 5.10} The Christian, dejected as he is, should seriously consider how atrocious, how reproachful, how dreadful, the sin of unbelief is.

He is perpetually apprehensive that he is *utterly forsaken* by God, and is always *prone to despair*. Like someone who is forlorn and desolate, his continual thought is that he is undone, utterly undone. But he certainly ought to consider that sinners who are *utterly* forsaken by God, are habitually *willing* to continue in their sinful state and frame; that they are lovers of sin, haters of holiness, and so far as they have power and opportunity, persecutors of all who would reform them, as if they were enemies to them — which is far indeed from being his case.

He frequently takes occasion from the doctrine of *predestination*, to despair of Divine mercy; and so he abuses that great and fundamental doctrine. Perceiving every object as through a coloured and distorted medium, he thinks that if the Lord has not elected him, it would be altogether in vain for him to ever attempt believing and repenting. And then he strongly imagines that he is *not* elected, and therefore it cannot be *his* duty to hope for the mercy of God. But he would do well to recollect that all whom God has predestined to the end, He has also predestined to the means; that in choosing sinners to salvation, He has chosen them to faith and repentance, not only as means, but as necessary *parts* of salvation; and that it is his present duty, on the warrant of the unlimited offer of the gospel, to *choose* Christ for his Saviour, and God in Him for his God; and to immediately *trust* in them for all the parts of salvation. This would be a comfortable evidence to him in the meantime, that God has *chosen him*. ^{2The 2.13} To trust in the Lord Jesus for all His salvation, and to repent of all his sins in the faith of the mercy offered and promised in the gospel, are the way to know that he has been elected to faith and repentance, as well as to every other part of salvation,

He always asserts that he cannot believe, and hence he concludes that he cannot be saved. If any Christian friend exhorts him to come as a sinner to the compassionate Saviour, and to trust in Him for salvation to himself in particular; he is ready to reply,

‘Alas! You seem to understand nothing of *my* doleful condition; otherwise you would not exhort such a vile and unworthy sinner as I am, to trust that the holy One of God would ever save him. Indeed, it would be daring presumption in someone like me, to ever attempt trusting in Him. I dare not, I will not, I cannot confide in Him, against whom I have so heinously sinned.’

His distemper, so far as it prevails, will not permit him to exercise faith. This is a dreadful chastisement for his having omitted the great duty of trusting at all times in the only Saviour, when his imagination was still sound!

He is, at the same time, *utterly unable to exercise joy*, or to take comfort in anything. He cannot comprehend, or so much as think of anything which is suited to comfort him. When he reads or hears the dreadful threatenings of the violated law, it is always with application to himself. But when he reads or hears the precious promises of the blessed gospel, he either takes no notice of them, or he says, “They don’t belong to me. The greater the mercy of God and the riches of His grace are, the more miserable I am, who has no part in them.’ He looks upon his wife, children, friends, house, wealth, and all, without the least comfort — as a man would do who is going to suffer the most tormenting death for his crimes. He is like a man in continual sickness or pain, who cannot take pleasure in anything around him, because the feeling of his incessant pain prevents him.

He never reads or hears of any dreadful example of Divine judgment, without quickly imagining that it will *soon be his own case*. If he hears of Cain, or Pharoah, given up to hardness of heart; or if he but reads that some are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; or that they have eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear, hearts and do not understand, he thinks that this is his very case, or that it is all spoken of him. If he hears of any tremendous judgment inflicted on someone, he concludes it will also be executed on him. If he is told that some person is become distraught, or has died suddenly, or died in despair, he quickly thinks that it will be so with himself. The reading of Spira’s dreadful condition has, I believe, increased melancholy in many. The ignorant author described a case of the plainest and deepest melancholy, contracted by means of mental trouble arising from a sin committed against conscience, as if it had been the rational despair of a sound understanding. He persuades himself that *none was ever* in such a dismal condition as his. Although he is ever so often told that many of the saints have been in this very case, he still persists in saying, ‘Never was anyone’s case like mine.’¹

His conscience is usually *quick* in charging himself with sin; in presenting to his view the infinite punishment which he deserves for his sin; and in urging him on to still greater dejection of mind, as *his duty*. But he seems dead to all the duties which directly tend to his consolation — such as praising the Lord; thanksgiving for manifold mercies; meditating on the glorious Redeemer, and on the love, grace, and promises of God. Press these duties and similar ones ever so frequently upon him, and he will make no conscience of them. He will regard them as duties for others, but not for him.

¹ In 1548, Italian lawyer Francis Spira converted to Lutheranism and began to spread the Lutheran message to others. Under pressure from the Catholic Church, however, he renounced his Protestant faith. He then became convinced that he was a reprobate, destined for hell. The story of Spira spread throughout Europe, surfacing in sermons and treatises dealing with despair. For anti-Puritans, Spira's case exemplified the dangers of Calvinist teachings on predestination. Puritans, however, saw Spira's condition as an extreme example of the experience of all godly Christians. William Perkins wrote: “Often it falls out that the conscience of God’s child will be so exceedingly tormented in temptation, he cries out that he is forsaken by God, and will be damned — when indeed he still remains the dear child of God... Nothing befell him ... but that which may befall the child of God, who yet through the mercy of God has received comfort.

Source: <https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/260spira.html> - WHG

He is always *displeased and discontented with himself*; just as a peevish or froward person is apt to be with others. Is such a man hard to please? Is he ready to find fault with everything which he sees or hears of? And is he offended with everyone who comes in his way? Just so is a melancholy man with respect to *himself*. He is always suspicious of himself, always finding fault, always displeased with himself.

His thoughts, for the most part, are turned inward *upon himself*. Like millstones which grind on themselves when they have no grain between them, his thoughts are usually employed on themselves. When he suspects that he has thought irregularly, he thinks again and again of what he has already been thinking. He doesn't usually meditate much on God (except on His terrible majesty, justice, and wrath), nor on Christ, heaven, the state of the church, nor indeed on anything outside himself. His thoughts are all abstracted, and turned inward upon himself, and are such that they tend not to alleviate, but rather to increase his perturbation. His musing on himself is chiefly that he may perceive the working of Satan in himself — that he may find in the depravity or infirmity of his nature, as much of the hateful image of that wicked one as he can. But the holy image of God in him, he frowardly overlooks and will not acknowledge.

Noble objects of thought raise the soul; amiable objects kindle love in it; cheering objects fill it with delight; and God in Christ, who possesses every excellence, elevates, perfects and makes the soul happy. Whereas, mean objects of thought debase it; loathsome objects fill it with disgust; and mournful objects impress it with sadness. Therefore, fixing his thoughts incessantly upon his depravity and misery, cannot fail to increase the sadness of his spirit.

He commonly gives himself up to *idleness*; either lying in bed, or sitting unprofitably by himself. He is much averse from labour, especially from the work of his *usual* calling.

At the same time, he is daily harassed with *fears of want, poverty, and misery*, to himself and his family — and sometimes even of imprisonment or banishment. He is often afraid that somebody will murder him; and if he but perceives anyone whispering to another, or winking an eye, he quickly suspects that they are plotting to take his life.

He is *weary of company*, for the most part, and much addicted to solitude.

His thoughts are commonly *all perplexed*, like those of a man who is in a labyrinth or pathless wilderness, or who has lost his way in the dark. He is continually poring and groping about, and can make out nothing, but he is bewildered and entangled all the more. And he is full of perplexing fears, out of which he cannot find the way.

He is ordinarily endless in his *scruples*; afraid lest he sin in every thought, every word, every look; in all the food that he eats, and in all the clothing that he wears. And if he resolves to amend his ways, he is still scrupulous with regard to his designed amendments. He dares neither speak, nor be silent; neither travel, nor stay at home. But he scruples everything, as if his conscience were wholly enslaved by self-perplexing scruples.

Hence it comes to pass that he commonly addicts himself to much *superstition*. He makes laws for himself, which God never made for him. He ensnares himself by unnecessary resolutions, vows, and austerities. He places much of his religion in outward self-imposed tasks, such as spending so many hours of every day in this or that act of devotion; to wear

such and such clothes, and forbear others that are fitter for him; to forbear all sorts of food that pleases the taste; and similar things.

He has lost the power of governing his thoughts by *reason*, If a Christian friend exhorts him ever so earnestly and frequently, to forbear his unprofitable, self-perplexing thoughts, and to turn his mind to cheering objects, he is unable to comply. He seems to be under a necessity to think anxious and distracting thoughts. He cannot turn his mind away from gloomy and frightful ideas. He cannot meditate on redeeming love, grace, or mercy. He can no more cease to muse on what is already the subject of his thoughts, than a man afflicted with a violent toothache can forbear at the time, to think of his pain.

Hence, he usually becomes incapable of engaging in *private prayer or meditation*. When he tries to pray or meditate, all his thoughts are quickly thrown into confusion. He cannot fix or keep them on any object outside himself. For a distempered and confused imagination, with a weak reason which cannot govern it, is the very disease with which he is afflicted. Sometimes terror drives him from prayer. He dares not hope, and therefore he dares not pray; and usually he lacks the courage to receive the Lord's Supper. If at any time he is prevailed on to receive it, he is quickly filled with dread, fearing that by partaking unworthily, he has eaten and drunk judgment to himself.

The consequence is that he begins to feel an uncommon degree of *averseness* from religious exercises. Hence he rashly concludes that he is a hater of God and of holiness, imputing the effects of his bodily distemper to his soul — while yet he would rather love God and be holy, than to have all the riches, honours, and pleasures in the universe. Strictly speaking, he is averse to the renewed perplexity and terror which he experiences in those exercises, rather than the duties themselves. For he still desires to have that calmness of spirit, that confidence and delight in the Lord Jesus, which he would be glad to express by prayer and praise.

Here we ought to distinguish between that degree of averseness which is so predominant as to habitually and entirely overcome holiness in the soul, and that degree which indeed strives vehemently against it, but does not overcome it. Every holy man has some degree of backwardness to spiritual exercises remaining in him. But if this had dominion over him, he would *willingly* abandon them, which he is far from being permitted to ever do. However, when he is under melancholy, he may still be so deterred from some *external* duties, as to give them up for a time. Many real believers have, for a season, been deterred from receiving the Sacrament of the Supper. Some of them, when under deep melancholy and strong temptation, have even given up outward prayer, and the hearing and reading of the word of God. And yet they haven't lost their desire for holiness, which is *inward* prayer, nor their desire to believe, love, and obey the gospel.

He is commonly occupied very much with *eager and conflicting thoughts*. He now and then feels as if something were speaking within him, and as if all his own violent thoughts were the impulses and pleadings of another. He therefore frequently attributes his irregular fancies either to some extraordinary motions of the Holy Spirit, or even to some uncommon agency of Satan. He often uses such expressions as these: 'It was *impressed* on my heart,' or 'It was *said* to me that I must do thus and thus; and soon afterwards I was *told* that I must not do this or that.' He conceives that his imagination is something talking within him, and saying to him all that he is thinking of.

Hence he becomes *intractable and very obstinate* in adhering to his own conceits. It is with the utmost difficulty that he can be persuaded to relinquish any one of them, however irrational. At the same time, he becomes peevish and froward. It is easy to offend him, and difficult to please him.

It is seldom that the most *convincing argument* or the *best advice* does him any good, even if pressed upon him in the most affectionate and attractive manner. If a Christian friend tries to persuade him that he has some evidences of a work of grace begun in his soul, and succeeds so far as to lessen the dejection of his mind in a small degree, yet as soon as he again views his heart and life through the medium of his perturbing humours, every such argument and advice is forgotten, and he is as far from serenity of mind as ever. Any encouraging thought about his state, to which someone can be the means of helping him, seldom continues more than a day or two.

When his melancholy becomes deep, he is almost constantly *troubled* with hideous and blasphemous *temptations* against God, or Christ, or the Scripture, or the immortality of the soul. These arise *partly* from his own fears, which make him think most about what he is most afraid to think about. The very uneasiness occasioned by his fears, attracts and confines his thoughts to what he dreads. Like someone who is overly desirous to sleep, and fears that he will not sleep, he is likely to continue awake. This is because his desire and fear keep him awake. So the fears and anxieties of someone who is melancholy, counteract themselves. But these temptations arise *chiefly* from Satan, who seizing the opportunity of the Christian's being under that disease, vexes him, and tempts him to blasphemous thoughts. For just as that crafty and malicious enemy of the saints knows that he can tempt a melancholy saint to unbelieving, despairing, and blasphemous thoughts, more easily and successfully than any other saint — so when permitted, he will be sure to vehemently instigate such thoughts.

Hence a good man, when he is under strong melancholy, often feels as if something within him were forcibly urging him to utter some blasphemous or sinful expression, and he can have no rest unless he yields to the temptation. But no sooner does he yield, than he is tempted to utterly despair, because he has committed so heinous a sin. And when Satan has gained this advantage over him, he still sets it before him to increase the man's dejection of spirit. It is surprising what extraordinary acuteness the Christian will reveal under this grievous distemper, in evading the force of the strongest arguments that can be urged for his comfort. But I believe that Satan, on such occasions, is *permitted* to suggest his answers to him, and to assist him in setting them in the strongest light possible.

Upon the tempter's gaining that advantage over him, he further prompts the man to conclude that he has been guilty of *the sin against the Holy Spirit*, which will never be forgiven. This increases his despair of mercy. The man who indeed commits that horrible sin must be a professed infidel, and that is in opposition to *confessed* miracles. And yet the melancholy believer despairs, because he dreads that he has committed that sin. Yet perhaps he neither understands what it is, nor has any reason but his own groundless fear, or some blasphemous temptation which he abhors, for imagining that he has been guilty of it. Alas! he doesn't consider that a *temptation* is one thing, and a *sin* is another — and that no man has less cause to fear that he will be condemned for his transgression, than someone who abhors sin most, and is least willing to commit it. For no man can be less willing to commit iniquity than the

Christian afflicted with melancholy is to be guilty of those blasphemous and hideous thoughts which he bitterly complains of.

When a good man, under deep melancholy, has been long harassed with suggestions to blasphemy and despair, he at length begins to dread that he is possessed by Satan. A man may be said to be *possessed by Satan*, when that enemy is at any time permitted to exercise, in a certain measure, his power on him. And that is by a stated and effectual operation either on his soul, or on his body. The devil thus possesses the souls of the ungodly. ^{Eph 2.2} But he is never permitted for a single moment to thus possess those of the saints. But though he cannot possess the *souls* of any of the saints, yet as in the case of Job, he may be allowed to possess for a season, the *bodies* of some of them. He may perhaps, in the hand of the Lord, be an instrument of inflicting on them (among other distempers) the disease of melancholy. And by harassing them with horrible and despairing suggestions, he may also be an instrument of increasing that grievous disease. But let it still be remembered by the dejected believer, that Satan's exercising for a season, such power on the body as may be termed *possession* of it, is no sign at all of an unregenerate state, nor of his having gained possession again of that *soul* from which he had been cast out in the day of regeneration.

Still, however, as this malicious and cruel enemy often raises a storm of persecution against the Christian from without; so in proportion to the Lord permitting him, he likewise produces trouble within. It should also be regarded by the disconsolate saint, as matter of unspeakable comfort; that of all men, none loves the sin under which he sighs, less than *he* does, for it is the heaviest burden of his soul. And no sin evinces Satan's possession of a soul, except that which the man loves more than he hates, and which he would rather keep than forsake. The melancholy Christian should likewise, for his encouragement, recollect that God will charge his temptations only upon Satan himself, and in no way upon himself, so long as he does not receive them by the consent of his will, but continues to abhor them. And recollect that God will no more condemn him for those evil effects which, being produced by the force of a bodily disease, are unavoidable, than He would condemn a man for raving thoughts or words in a strong fever or delirium. ^{Psa 103.13-14} But so far as reason in the dejected Christian still has power, and has his understanding, and the government of his passions, it is doubtless his own fault if he does not exert himself in *using* that power, even though the great difficulty of using it renders his fault less.

If his melancholy becomes very deep, the dejected believer often imagines that *he hears voices, and sees lights and apparitions*, or that something meets him, and says this or that to him — when all this is but the error of a diseased imagination and an impaired intellect.

In consequence of the continued and harassing perplexity of his mind under strong melancholy, the dejected Christian becomes *weary even of his life*. Some, under deep melancholy, are strongly tempted to make away with themselves. They are assaulted with the temptation so incessantly, and so forcibly, that they can go nowhere without feeling as if something within were vehemently instigating them, and saying, '*Do it.*' For the grievous disease under which they labour will permit them to feel nothing but anguish and despair, and to say nothing but that they are forsaken, and miserable, and undone. It not only makes them weary of their lives, even while they are sorely afraid to die, but it affords Satan a special opportunity to urge them to destroy themselves. So that, if they happen to be crossing a bridge

by themselves, he urges them to leap into the water; if when alone, they see a knife or any other destructive weapon, he instigates them to kill themselves with it. And they usually feel as if something within them, were importunately urging them, saying, ‘Do it, do it instantly.’ Hence some of them begin to secretly contrive how they may accomplish it, even yielding to the importunity of the tempter, so far as to actually destroy themselves. This undoubtedly would be self-murder, were it not that the doleful distemper under which they labour, so impairs their understanding as to render them incapable of resisting the horrible temptation at the time.

The use of means for the preservation and recovery of Christians afflicted with melancholy, belongs as much to others connected with them, as to themselves. Yet, so far as it is possible for themselves to exercise their reason, they must be warned,

1. To *abhor* all such temptations, and not to give way to them for a moment in their minds;
2. To *carefully avoid all occasions* of yielding to them; such as not going near a river, or near any instrument which Satan would instigate them to use for that purpose;
3. And to *make known their case* without delay, to some of their Christian friends, in order that suitable means may be employed for their preservation, and restoration to health.

FINALLY, The dejected Christian, after all, *will not believe* that he is under the disease of melancholy, and will be displeased if he hears any friend so much as hint it to him. He will affirm that it is but the *rational sense* of his extreme misery, or of being utterly forsaken by God, and of lying under his terrible wrath. It is therefore with no small difficulty that he can be persuaded to observe the prescriptions and directions of a Physician, or to employ any means whatever for the cure of his bodily disease, asserting that his *body* is in perfect health, and that it is only his *soul* that is troubled. ¹

These are, for the most part, the signs of melancholy, especially when the *true Christian* is in that dismal case — a case to be pitied, but never scorned. Let no man despise or vilify such believers. For men of all descriptions are liable to that grievous malady — high and low, learned and unlearned, religious and irreligious — yes, and persons who have previously lived in the greatest jollity and luxury. Such have actually fallen under it as often as it pleased the Lord to make them thus feel some of the dreadful effects of His hot displeasure, for their aggravated transgressions of His holy law.

Sect. 2. Directions to Christians who are afflicted with melancholy.

If the disease has proceeded far, or become strong, directions to those Christians themselves are commonly to little purpose, because their minds are so weakened that they cannot comply with them. But because in some — especially when the distemper has but recently begun to seize them — there is some power of understanding and of reason still remaining, I will offer them the following directions and advices:

1. Endeavour to *understand well the covenant of grace*. Study without delay, to attain just and clear views of the infinite riches, suitableness, and freeness of the grace of that everlasting

¹ For the greater part of these signs of melancholy, I have been indebted to SAMUEL CLIFFORD’S *Collection* (1701).

covenant. The better you understand, and the more you think of that wonderful contract in which complete salvation is purchased, promised, and sure to you — the more your souls will be sustained, and your tempers be sweetened, under the consoling influences of the Spirit of grace. Think as often of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, as of your own sinfulness; as often of His fulness of grace, as of your own emptiness of grace; and as frequently of the boundless love, grace, and mercy, of your Covenant-God, as of His majesty, holiness, and justice. The way to diminish and even overcome those terrors which arise from partial and false apprehensions of God, is to attain spiritual, clear, and enlarged views of Him as a God whose glory is to be merciful and gracious even to the chief of sinners — and who will certainly show mercy to those who unfeignedly desire to honour Him, and to be eternal debtors to His redeeming grace, for all their salvation. Let your thoughts also dwell on these cheering truths: that the Lord Jesus has, according to that well-ordered and sure covenant, given such an infinite satisfaction to Divine justice for your sins, that it secures you from eternal death; that He has performed such a perfect obedience to the Divine law, that it merits eternal life for you; and that life eternal is the infinitely free *gift* of God to you. ^{Rom 6.23}

2. Be *firmly persuaded* that the incarnate Redeemer, with His righteousness and fulness is *offered to you* in the gospel, as sinners of mankind. Constantly believe not only that He is able and willing to save you, but that he is freely, wholly, and particularly offered to you by His eternal Father and himself. ¹ Cordially believe the record, “that God *gives you* eternal life, and that life is in his Son.” ^{1Joh 5.11} Consider that it is not your sin, but your *duty* to always believe that it is for you in particular that He offers His Son, with righteousness and life eternal in Him; and that it is not your sin, but your *duty* to likewise believe that the Father’s authentic offer of Him to you, affords you a warrant to *immediately* confide in Him for salvation for yourselves, or to trust that He saves, and will continue to save you.

It would be presumption for any of the fallen angels to trust in Him for their salvation, because He is not offered to them. However, it is not presumption but a *duty* for you to confide in Him for all your salvation, because the offer, the call, and the commandment to believe in Him, are directed to you, in common with all other hearers of the gospel. And these afford you a *right*, at all times, to place the confidence of your hearts in Him for grace and glory. Believe, then, that seeing you have an ample warrant to trust confidently in the Saviour for the whole of your salvation, it cannot be your sin but your duty, your *principal* duty, to do so. O if you but saw in the light of His word and Spirit, and believed your Divine warrant to come as you are — to come at all times, and to confide in the Lord Jesus for complete salvation — how greatly it would alleviate the trouble of your minds! ²

3. Be persuaded *to trust accordingly* in Jesus Christ for all the inestimable blessings and comforts of a free salvation, for you in particular. Come as unworthy, as lost sinners. Do not come on the ground of any qualifications in yourselves, but upon the warrant afforded you by the gospel-offer; and entrust your whole salvation to the compassionate Saviour. Rely with unsuspecting confidence on the faithful, the dear Redeemer, for the enjoyment of all that is offered to you in the glorious gospel. There, all the love of His heart, in and with himself, is

¹ Joh 6.32; Isa 55.1; Reve 22.17.

² Joh 4.10; Psa 28.7

offered to you. Trust therefore that He *loves* you. ^{1Joh 4.16} His consummate righteousness is granted to you. Rely on it for all your title to eternal life. All His salvation is also presented to you for your acceptance. Trust therefore that His right hand will save you. ^{Psa 138.7}

Since it is all offered to you, as a free gift of grace, trust with the entire approval and consent of your hearts, that He will save you in a way of boundless *grace*. ^{Act 15.11} Seeing that all the good things of this life which are necessary for you, are likewise offered, trust that He will give you *these* also, in the kind and measure that He sees good for you. ^{Psa 84.11} In the indefinite offer, all the promises of His eternal covenant are left and directed to you. Trust therefore that He will *perform* them for you, and so save you with an everlasting salvation. The absolute promises of the Spirit, and of faith especially, are given to you in the offer. Trust that He will give his Spirit to you, and thereby *enable* you to more and more believe in Him. O that you knew what a comfort it is that the great Redeemer has made it your duty to trust at all times in Him, and in God through him. He *commands* you to trust in Him with all your heart. ^{Pro 3.5} And therefore you may be assured that He will not deceive your confidence, nor disappoint your expectation. Ah! if a faithful and able friend suggests that you may depend on him for relief in some external difficulty, you will most readily confide in him, and believe that he won't deceive you. Yet you cannot trust a faithful, *almighty* Redeemer, though He commands you to do it, and promises that, "He will not turn away from doing you good." ^{Jer 32.40}

4. Do not so love the good things of this world, as to place either your *happiness or your confidence* in them. No objects whatever can continue in your possession, except Christ and God in him. No mercies can either be satisfying or sure to you, except "the sure mercies of David." ^{Isa 55.3} Do not set, then, such a high value on any of the empty and transitory things of this world, so as to put it in their power to ever disquiet your souls. Reproaches, injuries, losses — these are all *outside* you. They cannot come into your souls to vex them, unless you yourselves open the door to let them enter. The Lord sends affliction on your bodies, and it may be that He permits men to injure you in your good names and worldly estates. But it is only yourselves who allow these or any other outward calamities, to enter and vex your souls. The things of this world are still so high in your estimation, and they lie so near to your heart, that you cannot permit the loss of any of them, without vexation of spirit. Ah! that the world should seem so great, and that God in Christ should appear so small in your view, as not to satisfy you except when you can have the *world* along with *Him*!

O, watch diligently against the inordinate love of earthly things, for it will dispose you to indulge a distracting care, and repining opposition of spirit to the holy disposals of adorable providence. It is often anxious care and peevish discontent that are the first occasions of melancholy. They usually so disturb a man's mind, as to render it defenceless against those temptations which Satan will afterwards use to assail him, respecting the state of his soul. The disquietude occasioned by outward crosses then moves to his conscience. It so inflames it, that he begins for a long season, to be oppressed with many fears about the salvation of his soul. Thus, as if the Lord had not afflicted him enough, he adds to his own affliction. Just consider how heinous a sin it is to so love the world, as to set up your own will in opposition to the holy will and providence of the Most High. By repining against Him, you secretly accuse Him; and by accusing Him, you blaspheme His worthy name. Consider that the resignation of your will to the will of God, in *everything*, is a principal branch of holiness; and that your

hearts are comforted in proportion to your complacency in His blessed will. O, be persuaded to trust firmly that God in Christ loves you, and bestows Himself upon you as your everlasting *portion*; and that the Lord Jesus will give you what is *good*, and *withhold no good thing* from you. For that is the way to mortify the inordinate love of the world, by the Spirit. Rom 8.13

5. *Do not be solitary*, except as little and as seldom as possible. A time for retirement from company is — for those Christians who are well — indeed a season of the greatest value for meditation, self-examination, and prayer. But for *you*, it is a season of great danger. If the devil assaulted Christ himself with his temptations, when he found Him in a wilderness, remote from company, then he will much more assail you if he finds you are solitary. It is your duty, therefore, to be as often in the company of humble, faithful, and cheerful Christians, as attention to your other duties will permit — especially those whose views of the gospel are clear, whose faith is strong, and who can speak from experience of deliverance from dejection of spirit. It may also be an advantage if you confer at times even with Christians whose cases are similar to your own, in order to be satisfied that your condition is far from being singular.

6. Recollect frequently that, although it is a sin to *yield* to a temptation, *it is not a sin* to be *tempted*. Jesus Christ himself “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Heb 4.15 He was tempted to the most atrocious and horrible sins — yes, even to fall down and worship the devil. And yet, having resisted every temptation with perfect abhorrence, He still was *without* sin. You can at no time be tempted to more horrible iniquities than those to which the holy One of God was tempted. You cannot, as He could, endure temptation without sin. Yet, as it is not every sinful inclination in the heart of a believer, that is considered compliance with a temptation, you should not charge yourselves with that which is the sin only of the tempter.

7. Consider *how much it gratifies Satan* to see you indulging gloomy and despondent thoughts. It exceedingly pleases that gloomy spirit, to perceive you sullen and melancholy, like himself — to behold you distrusting your Saviour, and suspecting your God is an enemy to you, and doing so under the pretence of being deeply humbled and grieved for your sins. That which gratifies the devil, and serves to promote the interests of his kingdom, surely cannot be either your duty or your ornament. That can be no honour to you, which robs your gracious God and Father of the honour of His redeeming grace; and which disposes you to hate Him, and to flee from His presence as if He were your implacable enemy.

8. Meditate frequently on the *promises and grace* of the gospel; but let each of your meditations be *short* and easy. A deep and continued meditation will only harass and perplex your minds, and render you less able to perform your other duties. Your imagination and mind are at present so weakened that you cannot employ them in a fixed and protracted meditation, without thereby increasing your malady. Do not mistake my meaning: I am not directing you to neglect meditation, especially on consoling subjects. But forbear *deep and long* meditation, because in your present condition, it will strengthen your painful distemper. A short meditation on some cheering subject may be a means of lessening and even removing your dejection. Whereas, a deep and continued meditation will distract you, and by increasing your disease, it will render you less able to perform the other duties incumbent on you. When you are meditating at any time, don't look down into the gloomy dungeon of your own heart, where at present nothing can be seen but darkness or confusion. Rather, look away from yourselves to the compassionate Redeemer, and to God as a God of infinite grace in Him.

Instead of poring over your own hearts to discern if love to Christ is there, you should rather be thinking of the infinite loveliness of Christ, and of His love *to you*. This would be the means of exciting the exercise of your love to him, and of bringing it out into your view. A sight of your own hearts will only render you more melancholy; whereas, a believing view of the glorious grace of the Redeemer will comfort you. Frequent thoughts of the Lamb of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you, and of the love and mercy of God in Him, would produce through the Holy Spirit, sweetness and love in your hearts; whereas, fixed thoughts of sin and of the wrath of God, would beget bitterness and aversion of spirit from Him.

9. Be frequently employed in *ejaculatory prayer*, and let your regular prayers be *shorter* than ordinary. In your present case, you are not able to continue in these holy exercises so long as formerly. Therefore, since you cannot do as you would, do as you can. Sickness or pain of body excuses a man for being short in devotional duties, because his nature is then so debilitated that it cannot hold out long. Sickness of the natural spirits, which enfeebles not only the body, but also the mind, may likewise well excuse him. When you feel yourselves unable to continue in prayer for long, as you cannot miss doing it, do not struggle too hard in opposition to your enfeebled nature. For by increasing your distemper, this will further disable you for *every* duty. Study at the same time to retain as much as possible, your relish for holy exercises, and to guard against everything that would render them troublesome or grievous to you. Do not be discouraged by your present inability to continue as long in prayer as formerly, for this would increase your malady also. Endeavour when you are praying, to employ as much of the time in thankful acknowledgement of His mercies, as in penitent confession of your sins. If you were to employ even *more* of the time in thanksgiving and praise than in confession and complaint, then under the influences of the blessed Comforter, it might be a means of lessening or even removing the bitterness of your spirits.

10. Do not be discouraged if, in your holy exercises, you have no *lively* feelings or *elevating* conceptions. However desirable and useful these are, they cannot be reasonably expected in your present condition. Although they are sometimes enjoyed by many holy persons, they are not the essentials of true holiness. Lively feelings depend more on one's natural constitution than many are willing to allow. Some Christians have naturally a quicker sensibility than others. A very small affair will make some of them feel deeply. Those who live nearest to God, are commonly *not* those who have the liveliest feelings and emotions of joy or grief; but they are those who are most conformed to the holy image of the Son of God. From principles of faith and love, they are most devoted to Him, and most inclined at all times to do His will. Many believers, especially when dejected in spirit, have bitterly bewailed their lack of *deep feelings*. If their feelings had been deeper or livelier in but the smallest degree than they already were, these believers might have been disordered and even distracted by them.

11. Be *diligent*, from principles of faith and love, *in doing the work* of your lawful calling. Be constantly occupied in doing your proper work seasonably, as far as your bodily strength will permit. And consider that it is very sinful, as well as dangerous, to squander any part of your precious time in idleness. The Lord has commanded you to labour six days. And therefore you cannot neglect prosecuting your secular business, without omitting your duty, and thereby incurring in a still higher degree, the displeasure of your heavenly Father. Besides, if you allow yourselves to be unemployed even for a short season, Satan will be sure to find employment

for you. By being idle, you *invite* him both to tempt and to trouble you; and he will not fail to instantly seize an opportunity that is so very favourable to his design. Then you will have leisure to hearken to him, and to revolve in your minds, every one of his infernal suggestions. Your precious time is continually hastening away, and the Lord has allowed you none to consume in idleness. If notwithstanding, you then allow yourselves to squander any part of it in sloth, you may thereby provoke the Lord to permit Satan to harass you to a very uncommon degree. No pretence of employing your time in exercises of devotion will excuse your idleness; for you are omitting that duty which the holy law of God requires.¹ Besides, you should consider that employing your time as formerly, in the work of your lawful vocation, especially if it is in the open air, will probably be a most effectual means of curing you of your bodily distemper.

12. Represent your case to some skilful, cheerful, and humble Minister or private Christian, and *follow his directions diligently*. Your imagination is so distempered, and your mind is so weakened, that you cannot judge rightly either about your condition or your duty. Your diseased imagination will represent every object to your mind, in dark and frightful colours. Therefore, relate your case to some skilful and faithful counsellor — especially to one who himself was once in your afflicted condition. And do not despise his judgment concerning either your dejection, or the means to be used for removing it. Be directed by him with respect to the subjects of your thoughts, the objects of your fears, the scruples of your consciences, and the manner of your devotional exercises. “Do not be wise in your own conceits.” Rom 12.16 Do not adhere obstinately to every fancy that strikes your minds. But distrusting your own understandings, follow resolutely the directions of an experienced and cheerful Christian. This is prescribed by the Spirit of God, and He will bless His own ordinance. Job 33.23-25

13. If you have reason to apprehend that your malady is *increasing*, you should consult a skilful Physician. And in the hope that you will recover in due time, *observe carefully* his prescriptions. Since the *body* is afflicted as well as the *mind*, then in order to remove your dejection, you should follow the directions of the Physician, as well as of the Divine. This is one of the duties required of you in the sixth commandment of the moral law.² Indeed, until the disease of the body is in some degree removed, it cannot be reasonably expected that the mind will be relieved.

14. Finally, trust that the Lord Jesus, whose infinite compassions fail not, will as far as it is for His glory and your good, command *deliverance* for you. “Though,” for a season, “he causes grief, yet He will have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.” Lam 3.32 Instead of trusting in the *means*, which it is still your duty to diligently use, trust in your infinitely compassionate *Saviour*. And in the exercise of humble confidence in Him, let each of you say, “He will turn again; He will have compassion on me.” Mic 7.19 “You will compass me about with songs of deliverance.” Psa 32.7

¹ Pro 27.23; Rom 12.11.

² Exo 20.13. ‘You shall not murder.’

Sect. 3. Advice to RELATIONS and FRIENDS of Christians afflicted with melancholy.

It will now be proper to subjoin some advice to those relatives and friends of Christians under melancholy, who are often in their company, and to whom it belongs to take care of them.

1. I would counsel you to regard them, at all times, with *the most tender compassion*. Of all the maladies to which persons are liable in this valley of tears, melancholy is the most dismal and overwhelming. Other distempers seize the body only; but this fastens on both the body and the mind at once. It disquiets a man's mind, disorders his thoughts, and fills his soul with anguish and horror.

Look then on those Christian friends who are under this dreadful distemper, with the greatest pity and tenderness. Considering that you yourselves are also in the body, and are liable to the same overwhelming malady, regard them with the most affectionate and tender sympathy. They are deeply afflicted in body, and sorely vexed in spirit. Their minds are troubled. Their spirits are dejected. Their consciences are inflamed. Their sighs are deep. The language of their doleful condition, especially to you, is the same as Job's to his friends — "Have pity on me, have pity on me, O my friends; for the hand of God has touched me." Job 9.21

2. *Pray frequently and fervently* to the Lord for them, and *request* other Christians to pray for them likewise. In presenting your supplications for them, you have strong arguments to plead. You may plead that the Lord Jesus endured unparalleled anguish of soul for them, as well as torment of body; that their trouble is so great and overwhelming, that none but He can help or deliver them; that the more insupportable their anguish and terror are, the more illustriously will His power and mercy be displayed in delivering them; that the more dismal and formidable their distress is, the more gloriously the kindness of His love will be manifested in creating peace for their troubled souls; and that the less others can do to relieve them, and the more unworthy of relief they are, the more brightly the glory of His redeeming *grace* will shine in saving them. And though they may, under deep despondency and terror, even forbid you to pray anymore for them, persist still in sending up your supplications to the Father of mercies in their behalf, and in requesting others to do the same. For if the Lord stirs up you and his saints around you to continue instant in prayer for them, He will in due season "stir up His strength, and come and save them." Psa 80.2 The Lord Jesus says to his disciples, "If two of you agree on earth, touching anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven." Mat 18.19 Accordingly, when many of the saints were gathered together and employed in praying for Peter, who was kept in prison, the Lord delivered him at the very time in which they were presenting their supplications for his deliverance. Act 41.12

3. Study frequently to suggest *grounds* of comfort to them, by telling them especially that the Lord can, and you trust that He *will, shortly deliver them*. Endeavour often to revive their drooping spirits, by reminding them that the Father of mercies can in a moment, command deliverance for them; and that you hope, "He will satisfy them *early* with His mercy, and make them glad, according to the days in which He has afflicted them, and the years in which they have seen evil." Psa 90.14-15 Remind them frequently that the more bitter their anguish, the more sweet their deliverance will be; and that the more deep and doleful their sadness is, the more delightful their joy will be. Encourage them likewise, by repeating daily to them, that many others have been in as deep an anguish as they are; and yet afterwards they have been made to rejoice in the light of God's countenance. By encouraging discourse like this, you may,

by the blessing of God, give them some faint hope of deliverance, which will alleviate their doleful trouble, and console their wounded spirit.

4. Often remind them of the infinitely rich and free *grace* of the Lord Jesus, of His being freely and wholly *offered* to them in the gospel, and of the ample warrant afforded them by the offer, to *trust* in Him for all salvation, to themselves in particular. Exhort them daily to come as they are, to come as sinners in themselves, and to entrust the whole of their salvation to Jesus Christ. Put them often in mind that this is their first, their principal duty; and that neglecting this is their greatest sin. ^{Joh 3.23,18} Urge them daily to trust that the Lord Jesus loves them with a free, immense, and everlasting love, and that He will surely bestow on them all the salvation that He offers to them. Remind them frequently that God in Christ is infinitely merciful and gracious; that as the heaven is higher than the earth, so His thoughts of mercy and grace are higher than their thoughts of guilt and unworthiness, of misery and despondency — and that the very chief of sinners have been, and still may be, pardoned and received into His favour. The greatest kindness that you can show them, next to praying for them, is to often set the consoling truths of the gospel before them. For *these*, in the hand of the adorable Comforter, are fitter than anything else, to comfort them.

5. Do not relate in their hearing, *any mournful or frightful tale*. For if they hear a doleful story, their diseased imagination is prepared to fasten upon it, and thereby to increase the sadness of their spirit. Hearing a melancholy tale will throw them into a still more violent perturbation of mind; and so it will strengthen their doleful malady. They are commonly very acute in exaggerating every dismal story, and in turning it to their own prejudice — so that, when they read or hear any sad and shocking narrative, they will not fail to say to themselves, 'If it is so grievous, so terrible, as to be treated with such severity, such barbarity, then how miserable, how dismal, how dreadful must our condition be when we have a sin-avenging God for our infinite enemy, and have no prospect except that of being tormented in fire and brimstone, forever and ever!' Their hearts already meditate on terror; and therefore every sad account which they happen to hear, increases their terror. It pours oil onto the flame. Be diligent, then, as much as possible, never to mention before them anything that would add to their mental trouble.

6. When you converse with them on religious subjects, *do not press* upon their minds and consciences, *the law as a covenant of works*. The law in its covenant-form, should be set before believers, as well as before others — but not before those believers who are afflicted with deep melancholy. To drive the fiery law more and more home to them, when they are already overwhelmed by a sense of contracted guilt, and by a dread of eternal wrath, is indeed the way to *inflame*, but not to *heal* the wounds of their consciences. The law *as a rule* should indeed be frequently urged upon them; but not the law *as a broken covenant*. They are already greatly cast down; and they should be *lifted up* by the comforts of the gospel, rather than cast down still lower by the terrors of the violated law.

7. Do not at any time speak to them *in a harsh or passionate strain*. Bitter words will do them no good, but will on the contrary, inflame their wounds, and so increase their anguish. If you desire to be instrumental in alleviating their sorrows, and in removing their sadness, then do not, on any pretence whatever, irritate their minds by rugged speeches. To rebuke or upbraid them now, when they are least able to bear it, will but embitter their wounded spirits, and so

add to their dejection. Do not say to them that they complain without cause. For they wouldn't complain if their hearts were not perplexed by the terrors of the Almighty. Besides, if you are harsh in your speeches to them, they will begin to suspect that you have no kindness for them, no sympathy with them — consequently, they will disregard almost everything you say to them. Job, in answer to the severe speeches of his three friends, said to them, "What miserable comforters you all are. If your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake my head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief." Job 16.2,4,5 The enemies of Messiah are thus characterized in ancient prophecy: "They talk to the grief of those whom you have wounded." Psa 69.26 So then, don't let the behaviour of your dejected friends at any time provoke you to anger against them; nor let any of their expressions ever make you speak passionately or harshly to them.

8. Believe that their griefs and fears *are as they say they are*. When you talk with them, believe that their words are a true expression of their thoughts and feelings, and do not contradict them. Don't be so cruel as to say, in answer to any of their doleful complaints, as some have said, 'It is but a mere whim, an odd freak, a strange fancy.' If it is but a fancy, a distempered imagination is at least as real and as grievous an affliction as any other calamity. And this requires that the persons afflicted with it, be treated with sympathy at least as tender as those who are under any other calamity, however great it may be. Do not think that they affect to be sadder than they really are. They are under such perturbation of spirit, that they need not, will not, and cannot counterfeit any more sadness or anguish than what they already feel. If you do not appear to them to credit what they say, it will not be in their power to believe that your concern for them, or sympathy with them, is real. And when they find that it is to no purpose to disclose the anguish of their souls to you, they will suppress it. And then it will overwhelm them, and so increase the disease of their natural spirits. If then, you have the smallest desire to be instrumental in relieving your afflicted friends, do not disbelieve or contradict them. Rather, show them invariably that you believe their doleful complaints to be true expressions of the anguish which they feel.

9. Study as far as you can, consistently with a good conscience, to *please* them in everything, and not to do or say anything that may *displease* them. To irritate them will only disquiet and perplex them more, so it will increase their distemper. Whereas pleasing them in everything and in every way possible, will be one of the most effectual means of curing them. If you know what it is that disgusts them in any degree, let it be removed without delay. And if you can conscientiously do, say, or afford anything which you know would gratify them, do not withhold it from them. This indeed will not be an easy task. For being gloomy, or apt to be frequently displeased, forms no small part of their distemper. But you should carefully study it. For if you could frequently please them, it might by Divine blessing be a means of arresting the progress of their doleful malady, if not of removing it altogether in process of time.

10. Do not *press* them to do anything which their grievous distemper renders them *unable* to do. They are under great depression and anguish of spirit, and continually full of perplexing thoughts. It would then be very unkind, and even cruel, to vehemently urge them to do anything which requires exertion of mind, or intenseness of thought. If you importune or press them to do something which they are no more capable of performing in their present condition than a man whose bones are broken is capable of running a race, or walking under

a burden, then you will thereby throw them into still deeper perturbation of spirit. And this will increase their malady. If the distemper has not yet advanced far, you may indeed, if necessary, often exhort them to do anything that can be done easily, and to engage in the exercises of social and public worship. But even this must not be done in a peremptory manner, but gently and affectionately.

11. At the same time, if possible, do not allow them to be *habitually idle, nor to be alone for long*. Endeavour with loving and mild importunity, to allure them to some agreeable and easy task that will exercise the body, yet not require exertion of mind. This will contribute not only to strengthen the body, but in some degree, to withdraw the attention of the mind from its disquieting thoughts. Do not permit them to remain *alone* for a long time, especially if their doleful malady appears to be increasing. Rather, study to procure suitable company for them. Also, do all that you can to prevent them from reading books that may discourage, alarm, or terrify them; and from reading any book for a long time.

12. To conclude, choose a Physician for them who is *eminently skilled* in curing the disease of melancholy, and at the same time, *prudent and cautious*. If one can be found who has himself been afflicted with that grievous malady in any degree, and who has by the blessing of God, cured some who had been under it, then he should be consulted in preference to any other. His prescriptions and directions ought to be so carefully observed, that in extreme cases, if it cannot be otherwise attained, the afflicted persons are even forced to comply.¹

Reflections

FROM what has been advanced in this Chapter, I hope it will be obvious to the intelligent and candid reader, that true religion is *neither the cause, nor the effect* of melancholy.

It cannot be the *cause* of melancholy, for many have been and are truly religious, who have never appeared in the smallest degree, to be under the disease of melancholy. If genuine religion were the cause of melancholy, it would undoubtedly have been so in the case of all who have exhibited satisfactory evidences of their godly sincerity. Every religious man would inevitably be afflicted with that dreadful malady — indeed, he would be oppressed with it, usually in the very degree in which he is religious. But this is so far from being the case, that on the contrary, not a few instances have been found of persons whom pure religion has most effectually *cured* of it, even of deep melancholy. Peace with God, and peace of conscience, together with the exercise of supreme love to God, have in many instances removed deeply-rooted melancholy. And that is after it had resisted all the power of medicines. Joy and peace in believing have, by the Divine blessing, often effected the cure, *without* the help of medicines — especially in those cases in which the melancholy constitution of the body had been produced by trouble of mind. True religion, then, when it has its due effect upon the heart, is so far from being the cause, that it is the *best cure* of melancholy.

Just as religion is not the cause, so neither is it the *effect* of melancholy. If true religion were the effect of melancholy, every melancholy man would become truly religious, and his degree of genuine religion would be in exact proportion to his degree of melancholy. So that the more

¹ For several of these Advices, I have been indebted to MR. TIMOTHY ROGERS' Preface to his *Discourse on Trouble of Mind, and Melancholy*.

afflicted he was with that direful malady, the more joy and peace in believing, and the more love to God and delight in Him, he would experience at the same time. But instead of this, it appears, in fact, that most of those who are under the disease of melancholy, are persons who are entire strangers to true religion; yes, and some of them are avowed enemies. Faith, holiness, and spiritual comfort, which constitute real religion, are so far from being the effects of melancholy, that the disease of melancholy is *in itself* a great hinderance to them. It is true that the Lord may render this dreadful malady subservient to faith, holiness, and comfort, as He sometimes does with legal terror. But *in themselves*, both are obstructions to them. Melancholy, indeed, effects slavish fears, legal terrors, and endless scruples. But these constitute no part of pure religion. For these are diminished in proportion to the increase of religion in the heart and life of the believer. To say then, either that genuine religion makes persons melancholy, or that melancholy renders people truly religious, is to utter an ignorant and impudent slander against our holy religion. No man who has the smallest experience of Godliness, can deliberately reproach it in that-manner. Some of the saints, it is granted, are sometimes melancholy. But this is not because they are religious. It is either because they find that they have too little of religion, or because they fear that they have none at all. Melancholy, therefore, instead of being styled *religious*, I humbly apprehend it should rather be termed *superstitious* melancholy. For while this distemper makes no man truly religious, it has a direct tendency to render all who are afflicted with it, superstitious, whether they are converted or unconverted.¹

Hence, the devout reader may also learn that, so much does the direful disease of melancholy weaken the mind of a holy man while he is under it, that he not only cannot, but *will not* be sensible of joy, or of any other grace in himself. So far as that doleful malady prevails, it renders him sullen, and averse from seeing, feeling, or attending to anything which might afford him comfort. It makes him willing to despond, and *unwilling* to hope or rejoice. The consequence commonly is that he makes it his main study to raise doubts in himself, to frame objections against himself, and so to help forward his own affliction, Whatever grounds of consolation he reads or hears of, he disregards. And he spends his time starting objections against himself, which he is as *unwilling* to answer, as he is unable. He has the principle and habit of faith, love, joy, and every other grace in his soul, but does not perceive them, because he *will not* perceive them. His views are dark and gloomy. His feelings and exercises are greatly tainted by the disease of his natural spirits. And at that time, his imagination and mind are more susceptible to impressions from the powers of dark, than at any other time.

No sooner does his imagination become distempered by an alteration in the motion of his nervous spirits, than this mysterious distemper affords Satan an avenue for assaulting him with the most terrifying of his temptations — in addition to the corruption that remains in the imagination. Immediately, that infernal enemy pours in like a torrent, blackness of darkness, frightful illusions, and distracting terrors, so that the dejected Christian becomes a terror to himself. Oh! what anguish, what horror fill his soul when Satan is permitted to thus tyrannize him by means of that malady! How dreadful is this distemper which leaves the imagination so exposed to that merciless enemy. It enfeebles the mind and impairs the judgment to such a degree, that while the Christian is feeling the deepest anguish of spirit, he is at the same

¹ See Henry on the *Pleasantness of a religious life*, p. 50.

time unwilling to receive that consolation which is freely offered to him, and which alone can relieve him! If he can take pleasure in anything, it is in solitariness and darkness, in sadness and wailing. The mysterious distemper under which he labours, turns fancies into realities and realities into fancies, fictions into truths and truths into fictions. It renders every sweet thing, bitter, and every bitter thing, bitter in a tenfold degree.

From what has been said, dejected believers may see what ground they have to hope that the Lord will not deal with them according to what they *are*, or what they *do*, under deep melancholy. God in Christ is infinitely gracious and merciful. He will not consider the inevitable consequents of a direful malady which none but Himself can remove, as sins against Him. He will indeed treat believers according to what they are and do when their understanding is sound — but not according to what they think, speak, or do when their imagination is distempered, and their mind is disabled and perplexed. A tender-hearted father will not be angry with his beloved son for those injurious expressions and actions which are the effects of frenzy. He will, on the contrary, feel and reveal a more tender sympathy with him. Now, “as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.” ^{Psa 103.13} Let no good man conclude, then, from his inconsistent and strange behaviour under the disease of melancholy, that he was never a child of God.

LASTLY, However doleful the distemper of melancholy is, it is *infinitely more desirable* to be a melancholy saint, than a mad sinner. Solomon, who could not be mistaken, informs us when speaking of unregenerate sinners, that “madness is in their heart while they live.” ^{Ecc 9.3} Now suppose that a holy man should be afflicted with melancholy all his days (which very seldom happens). It is still infinitely less dreadful to have that direful malady affecting the mind during the short period of human life — and then to have it followed by endless and ineffable delight — than it is to have that madness in the heart while one lives, which afterwards will increase into hideous and endless rage. Impenitent sinners like Saul of Tarsus, are “mad against the saints;” ^{Act 26.11} and “they are mad with their idols.” ^{Jer 50.38} The prodigal, under conviction of his sin and misery, is said to have “come to himself” ^{Luk 15.17} — which intimates that up till then, he had been *beside* himself. Unregenerate men are madmen with respect to the concerns of their souls; and all their joys are but like the pleasant dreams of a man who has been deprived of his understanding. Whereas, those regenerate men who are under the deepest melancholy, still have the principle and habit of pure, solid, and everlasting joy.

CHAPTER 6.

The designs of God in permitting some of His children to lose their spiritual comfort.

The throne of the incomprehensible and only wise God is “established in righteousness.” But at the same time, it is surrounded “with clouds and thick darkness. He makes darkness His pavilion round about him.”¹ “His judgments are a great deep.”² Psa 36.6 They are too deep for us to fathom. His counsels are unsearchable, and his ways of providence are past finding out. Therefore, when we would try to penetrate into the mysterious designs which the infinitely wise God has, in permitting any of His redeemed to lose their spiritual consolation so as to fall under spiritual trouble, and even sometimes under melancholy, it becomes us to do it with the most profound reverence, and only so far as the holy Scriptures are our guide.

Now, from these we discover that the Lord allows believers to deprive themselves of their sensible comfort, and to continue for a season under trouble of mind, *not* in order that they may thereby give the smallest degree of satisfaction to His justice, for their sins. Their Divine Surety has endured for them the *whole* punishment due for *all* their iniquities. And so He has fully satisfied the offended justice of Jehovah.³ We also find that He does not permit this from any pleasure that He takes in their perplexity of soul, considered merely in itself. For His nature is so infinitely merciful that He can take no pleasure in their sorrows, considered as disunited from the purposes intended to be served by them.³ We likewise discern that He does not allow any of the saints to fall under depression of spirit, with a view to discourage any unregenerate sinner from coming to Christ, or from entering upon a holy life. For an apostle says, “God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt any man.”⁴ Jas 1.13

But I humbly apprehend that He permits them to lose their spiritual comfort, so as to be disquieted and distressed in spirit, especially for the following purposes:

1. That he may thereby render them *more conformable to his beloved Son*, their head and representative in the new covenant. So delighted is Jehovah the Father, with the image of his infinitely dear Son — who as the second Adam is the Firstborn among many brethren — that He has resolved that the objects of His redeeming love shall, as much as possible, consistently with their eternal salvation, be conformed to that image, not only in point of holiness, but of *suffering*. “Whom he foreknew,” says the apostle Paul, “he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”⁵ Rev 8.29 Now, seeing that the Lord Jesus in his estate of humiliation in this world, suffered not only in his body, but in his *soul*, God the Father has determined that the spiritual seed of Christ will resemble Him in this world, by suffering more or less in their souls, as well as in their bodies.

As Christ endured in His soul an awful suspension of Divine consolation, together with a dreadful impression of vindictive wrath, so believers, in order to resemble Him, sometimes endure the hiding of their heavenly Father’s countenance, and the sense of paternal anger which they often mistake for vindictive wrath. Hereby they drink of His cup: they are

¹ Pro 25.5; Psa 18.11

² Isa 42.21; Gal 3.13

³ Lam 3,33; Jer 31.20; Isa 63.9.

partakers of His sufferings; and so they are able to say from experience, "As He was, so are we in this world." ^{1Joh 4.17} For though they never actually experience in their trouble of soul, that *vindictive* wrath which Christ Jesus felt in His, yet by this conformity to Him, they have fellowship with Him in his sufferings, and attain some small experience of the bitterness of what He endured for them. And so they learn to more highly esteem Him, more ardently love Him, and more gratefully remember His immense love to them.

2. He allows them to lose their comfort for a season, so that He may make them *feel more sensibly, and see more clearly, the deep depravity of their nature*. We read that Jehovah led the Israelites "through a great and terrible wilderness in which there were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, and where there was no water ... that He might humble them, and test them, to do them good in the end," ^{Deu 8.15-16} by revealing to them what was in their hearts. In like manner, He sometimes withholds his influences of comfort from believers, and leaves them for a season under a depression of spirit, in order to test them, and to give them clearer and more humbling discoveries of the depth and strength of the corruption which remain in them. ^{2Chr 32.31} The hearts of believers are like the waters of the sea, which in a calm appear to be clear. But no sooner does a storm arise and agitate them, than they begin "to cast up mire and dirt." ^{Isa 57.20}

When Christians are at ease, they sometimes think that their corruptions are not so strong, and that their graces are not so weak, as they really are. They flatter themselves that their sanctification is much further advanced than it actually is. But when their comfort is gone, and their hearts are troubled — what unbelief, what pride, what deadness, what enmity against a holy God, what impatience, what murmuring, what strange unbecoming thoughts of God arise and appear in their hearts, which they could never before either feel or believe to be there! Mental trouble serves in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to show them how deeply rooted, how inveterate, how malignant their depravity is; and what reason they have to be greatly ashamed and to blush before the omniscient and holy Lord God. It was upon Job's having been grievously afflicted in spirit, that he discerned more vileness in his heart than he could formerly have suspected to be in it; ^{Job 40.4} and that he learned to deeply abhor himself as a sinner. ^{Job 42.6} There are abominations which, like nests of vipers, lie so quietly within, that believers don't suspect they are there till the rod of spiritual trouble disturbs and arouses them. Some corruptions lie so very deep in their hearts, that they can hardly discern them. But as fire under a pot causes the scum to rise up and run over, so trouble of mind brings up from the bottom of the heart, such deep corruptions to our view, as the most enlightened of the saints could otherwise scarcely have conceived were there. And discoveries especially of *these*, are necessary to *deep* humiliation of spirit before the Lord,

3. Another design which God. has, in inflicting trouble of spirit upon some of His children, is that He may thereby *chasten* them for their sins, and so *embitter sin* to them. Disquietude of the soul is a fatherly chastisement to believers. The Lord resolves thereby to correct them. He determines that, by their bitterness of soul, they will "know and see, that it is an evil thing and *bitter*, that they have forsaken Him." ^{Jer 2.19} By this most afflictive dispensation, He thus speaks to each of them: "Your ways and your doings have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reaches to your heart." ^{Jer 4.18} As the Lord never

chastens any of His children, except for their profit, ^{Hab 12.10} so He never afflicts them with spiritual trouble, except when it is necessary for that purpose.

Accordingly, the apostle Peter says, "You are now for a season (if *need* be), in heaviness through manifold temptations." ^{1Pet 1.6} By suspending His influences of consolation from their souls, and so embittering their sins to them, the Lord weakens the remains of corruption in them. He thereby renders them wiser and more circumspect, and so He prevents much sin into which they otherwise would fall. ^{2Cor 12.7} By this painful discipline, their souls are "purified, and made white, and tried." ^{Dan 12.10} And so, by sad experience, they are made to feel, as well as to see, that their sin is exceedingly sinful.

By withholding consolation from them for a season, He shows them the evil of their not having employed their former comfort well; of their having made for themselves a saviour of their pleasant frames, by relying on *them* rather than on Jesus Christ. By permitting distrust and despondency to prevail against them, and so occasioning much trouble and perplexity of mind for them, He teaches them the exceeding sinfulness of their unbelief and distrust. His design in hiding His face from them, is to teach them that they did wrong in setting a small value upon His favour, and the light of His countenance. If He leaves them under a painful sense of His anger, it is to make them sensible of their folly, as well as ingratitude, in provoking His displeasure. By piercing their hearts with deep sorrow, He teaches them the sinfulness of their having pierced His beloved Son, and grieved his Holy Spirit. If He makes them experience the terror of His vindictive wrath, or the dread of suffering the pains of hell through eternity, it is to teach them the extreme folly of their not having been afraid of sinning against Him.

One part of his design in allowing His fiery law to re-enter and distress their consciences, is to make them deeply sensible of the great evil of their legal spirit. By permitting them for a time to lose sight of their evidences of grace, He teaches them that they should never be proud of their attainments in religion, nor trust in received grace. If He appears not to stand in the relation of a *Father to them*, it is to render them more sensible that they have not acted the part of obedient *children to Him*. By seeming to shut out their prayers, He reproves them for restraining prayer, ^{Job 15.4} and for their unbelieving, wandering, and vain thoughts in prayer. When He permits them to be afraid that they are yet under the dominion of spiritual death, it is to teach them the great evil of deadness and coldness of heart in their acts of worship. If He denies them His reviving and consoling presence in reading and hearing His blessed word, it is to make them deeply sensible of the sinfulness of their having despised His glorious gospel. And if He lets any of them fall into some gross and *open* sin, His design may be to chasten them for having allowed themselves to commit *secret* iniquity. By thus chastening them, the Lord *instructs* them in the exceeding sinfulness of their sin, ¹ in order that they may so bewail and abhor it, as to turn from it with fuller determination of heart, and turn to Him as their gracious God and Father. Hereby He also teaches them that if He leaves them for but a single moment, they will instantly fall into even the most atrocious crimes. Ah! how deep, how inveterate is their disease, when a potion so bitter is requisite to accomplish their cure!

4. The Lord withholds consolation from some of His people, and allows them for a season to walk in darkness, *in order to test and exercise their graces*. Hereby the graces of the Spirit in

¹ *Chastening* and *instructing* are, both in the *Hebrew* and in the *Greek*, expressed by one word.

them are tried or proved, and their truth, as well as their weakness or strength, is manifested to them. "Now for a season," says the apostle Peter, "you are in heaviness (grieved), through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tried with fire, might be found to praise, honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." ¹Pet 1.6-7 No affliction is so grievous and so trying, as spiritual distress. Therefore, the Lord sometimes inflicts spiritual trouble upon believers in order that He may try their faith and other graces, and so reveal these to them. It appears to have been one of the designs of Job's spiritual trouble, to try, and so to manifest to himself and others, the strong faith, and the invincible patience, which God had given him. There are some graces in the heart of a holy man, which are revealed more clearly to him by means of spiritual trouble, than by any external affliction. When he finds that he has been enabled to trust in the Lord Jesus at the very time in which He was frowning upon him, and seeming even to slay him; to love him for himself, when he had no reviving sense of God's love to him; and to follow Him with longings and prayers, in the midst of darkness and discouragement — *this* is afterwards a clear proof to him of the reality of these graces in his soul.

Trouble of mind, during its continuance, renders the exercise of graces, and the performance of duties, peculiarly difficult. If believers, then, when they are under spiritual distress, still continue to cling in some degree to God in Christ, and to so love Him as to prefer Him before every other object of affection — even when He seems to be casting off their souls, and to be shutting out their prayers — when they afterwards reflect upon it, *this* will be an evidence to them, that they are sincere, and that their love to Him is supreme. Moreover, when they are enabled under that most grievous trial, to exercise their graces in some degree, those graces are not only manifested to their consciences, but are *strengthened* and *increased* by their exercise of them. The same affliction that serves in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to test and reveal their graces, also serves to excite them to exercise. And the more they are exercised, the more the habit of them is strengthened.

When the Lord thus chastens any of his dear children, it is invariably for their profit, so that they may be partakers of His holiness. "For this chastening, though for the present it is not joyous, but grievous," exceedingly grievous, "nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness for those who are exercised by it." Heb 12.10-11 It supplies them, in the meantime, with special occasions for striving and wrestling against their spiritual enemies, for swimming against the stream, for pressing on as through an opposing crowd. And thus their graces have special opportunities afforded them, of becoming stronger by frequent exercise. It affords occasion for many actings of faith and love, of repentance and resignation; and for many ardent longings and heavenly breathings, which otherwise, perhaps, would not be experienced. Besides, the exercise of the graces of his Holy Spirit in believers, especially of that grace in which each of them excels, is so pleasing to the Lord, that He will on no account allow them to lack occasion, indeed, *frequent* occasion, for such exercise. ¹

5. His design in withholding consolation is also to teach them by experience, their *continual need* of living upon Christ by faith; and so *to render Him more precious to them*. "I will leave in the midst of you," says Jehovah, "*an afflicted and poor people*; and they shall trust in the

¹ Psa 147.11; Song 2,14, 4.9

name of the Lord.” ^{Zep 3.12} Paul and Timothy, “had the sentence of death in themselves, that they should not trust in themselves, but in God who raises the dead.” ^{2Cor 1.9} It is not enough that the saints merely *believe* their need, every moment, of fresh supplies of grace from the fulness of Christ. They must be made to *see* and *feel* that need. Nor is it sufficient for them merely to believe that it is their duty at all times to *trust* in Him for those supplies. They must be made to *see* clearly, and *feel* deeply, their extreme need to do so. They must, by experience, be made deeply sensible that without a fresh supply of grace at the time, they are as unable to perform spiritually a single duty, as they were in their unregenerate state. ¹ So very unwilling are they to believe this, and to regulate their spiritual exercise according to it, that ordinarily they must be trained for it by sad experience.

Now the Lord suspends influences of comfort, from many of them; and for a season, inflicts on them a greater or lesser degree of mental trouble; in order to make them see and feel how much need they have at all times, to trust in Christ for continued supplies from His fulness; and to render them deeply sensible that they cannot otherwise perform even the least degree of acceptable obedience, than by trusting solely and firmly in Him, for new communications of sanctifying grace, to *enable* them to perform it. To trust daily, and with unsuspecting confidence, in the great Trustee of the New Covenant — that He will by his Holy Spirit “work in them, both to *will* and to *do*” ^{Phi 2.13} — is of such necessity and importance to their growing in grace, that rather than leave them ignorant of it, God will teach his children, even by the most painful discipline, how needful it is to do so. He will permit them to feel what anguish of soul their neglecting the daily exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus will occasion to them, in order that He may reduce them to the happy necessity of placing, at *all* times, the confidence of their hearts in Him alone; and to do this for *comforting* as well as *sanctifying* influences.

He will embitter a life of *sense* to them, so that He may dispose them to relish a life of *faith*. He will make them know by experience, what trusting in their habits of grace has procured for them — that they may discern the exceeding sinfulness of a legal spirit, and see that without faith, or the daily exercise of direct confidence in the incarnate Redeemer, it will be impossible for them to please Him. ^{Heb 6.6} The death of their sensible comfort will show them the *necessity* of a life of faith. The Lord gives to many of His saints, frightful discoveries of sin and wrath, in order that, by being shaken, they may learn to rely more firmly on the sure foundation which He has laid in Zion. ^{Isa 28.16} He hides himself from them, and delays helping them till they are in extremity, so that they may learn the high and difficult art of living by faith, and not by sight. Living by signs of grace is most natural and pleasing to *them*; but living by faith is most acceptable to *Him*. The sight of their evidences of grace, indeed, cannot fail to be delightful to them; but the sight of Jesus, by faith, ought to be a thousand times more delightful. And when they pore so much and so long upon their evidences, as to thereby be prevented from direct and frequent actings of trust in the Saviour, they so far dishonour and displease Him. When they build their comfort and hope upon their *evidences*, instead of building all their comfort and all their hope upon *Him*; they at once greatly dishonour Him, and deeply injure themselves.

¹ Joh 15.5; 2Cor 3.5.

Thus they render it necessary that He hide his face, cloud their evidences, and wither their comforts. This is in order that they may learn to prefer Him before their clearest evidences and liveliest frames; to set a higher value on the Husband of their souls, than on the bracelets and jewels which they receive from Him; and that in the absence of evidences and frames, they may study the art of living *above* them — living upon Him who is their life and consolation, their hope and their ALL IN ALL, In this manner, He wisely and graciously trains them, as sinners, to trust in Himself, and to rely on Him — not as *felt* by them, but as *offered* to them; and to depend on Him *alone*; and stay upon Him as theirs in the gospel-offer, when feelings and comforts fail them. ¹ As nothing done by believers glorifies the great Redeemer so much as their acting particular trust in Him for salvation — so, if necessary, He would rather hide every other object of confidence from their view, than allow them to continue resting on *it*, instead of trusting in *Him*. ^{Psa 42.4-5} In a few words, His grand design is to render Himself and his redeeming grace more precious to them; to show them experientially that none but Himself can calm the tumults of a troubled soul; ^{Isa 57.19} and that without Him, they can do nothing that is spiritually good. ^{Joh 15.5}

6. Another end which the Lord proposes to himself in afflicting believers with trouble of mind, is that they may be *stirred up to search the Scriptures more earnestly and more frequently*. It is to make them capable of relishing and esteeming more His glorious gospel. One great design of the doctrines and promises of sacred Scripture, is to comfort the saints under their manifold afflictions. Accordingly, most of the precious promises are adapted and made to them, as considered in circumstances of trouble. For although they assent to the truth of them, they cannot so well and so feelingly experience the suitableness and sweetness of them, unless they are sometimes brought into the circumstances to which they refer. The Lord says, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.” ^{Psa 50.15} “I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.” ^{Psa 91.15} “I have seen his ways, and will heal him. I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him, and to his mourners.” ^{Isa 57.18} Now, till the day of trouble comes, believers do not know *by experience*, either the use or the value of such promises as these, because they are not in the condition to which they relate. Were they to continue long without affliction, and especially without some degree of spiritual trouble, they would be (at least many of them would be) only slightly affected by the doctrines and promises of the gospel. This is because they could not feel their need of that consolation which many of these are designed to afford. If they had no burdens to weigh them down, no fears to disquiet them, no distress of conscience to exercise them, then much of the good word of God would be of comparatively little use to them. Without such trouble in a greater or lesser degree, the saints could not have an opportunity to experience the truth, suitableness, and sweetness of many of the promises. They could not feel the need, nor understand the true meaning, of a great part of the Bible.

Indeed, if believers were always triumphing in the unmingled light of God's countenance, they would thereby, as one expresses it, ‘be cut off from half of the promises of the gospel.’ In order, then, that they may feel their need of *all* the declarations and promises of the blessed gospel — and so, be trained up to set such a high value on the Scriptures, as to search them carefully, and diligently — the Lord sometimes permits them to fall under distress of mind. At those

¹ Isa 1.10; Psa 42.11; Song 8.5.

times, a sense of need urges them to look eagerly and frequently into His blessed word, in order to see if there are any doctrines, or directions, or promises in it, suited to revive their drooping spirits, or to console their disquieted souls. And when they find any passages of it (as they sooner or later will) which through grace afford direction or consolation to their troubled souls, then each of them will be able to say from experience, with the holy Psalmist, "This is my comfort in my affliction; for Your word has quickened me." ^{Psa 119.50} "Your testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors." ^{Psa 119.24} "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes." ^{Psa 119.71}

7. God inflicts trouble of spirit upon many of His children, to the end that, by supporting them under it, and delivering them from it, He may more effectually recommend to them the infinite suitableness, riches, and freeness of His redeeming grace. It is impossible for a man who has never experienced in any degree, the distress of a wounded conscience, to highly esteem and admire the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only when his conscience has been distressed by a galling sense of guilt, and his soul been troubled with a fear of deserved wrath, as well as renewed by the Holy Spirit, that he can eagerly desire and cordially embrace the promises of redeeming mercy, or see the inestimable value of super-abounding grace. One of the designs of God, therefore, in laying any of His people in the depths of spiritual trouble, is that they may see in their deliverance, what reason they have to highly prize and gratefully adore the transcendent riches and freeness of His glorious grace; and that when they are delivered from "the sorrows of death, which compassed them, and from the pains of hell, which got hold of them," each of them may be able to say from experience, with the Psalmist, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple. I was brought low, and He helped me. Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." ^{Psa 116.5-8}

When, in their deliverance, believers are made to see that, from the thickest darkness, the Lord has brought them out into the light;

- that He has overruled the greatest evils in their hearts, for *good* to them;
- that when they were bleeding inwardly, and when no man or angel could afford them relief, He kept them from bleeding to death;
- that after they had been hearing the tremendous thunders of His fiery law, He has caused them to hear for themselves the reviving sound of His gospel;
- that after they had been at the very mouth of hell and had, as it were, been smelling the fire and brimstone, He has exalted them to the hope of heaven;
- that notwithstanding their distrustful and hard thoughts of Him, he has been gracious to them;
- that after they had been very undutiful to Him, He has been kind and compassionate to them;
- that after they had reflected much dishonour upon Him by their desponding fears, He has caused their souls to hope in His mercy; and
- that after they had been sinking in the waters of trouble, He has set their feet upon a rock, and filled them with joy and peace in believing.

I say, when they are made to *experience* so great a deliverance, they cannot fail to be deeply affected by the sovereignty, the riches, and the freeness of redeeming grace. One design of God, then, in the infliction of mental distress on any of His saints, and in afterwards delivering them from it, is to afford them special opportunities to esteem, admire, and adore His immense love and boundless grace to them. Hereby, His glorious method of salvation by Jesus Christ is exceedingly endeared to their souls.

8. Another end which the Lord has, in permitting some of the saints to lose their spiritual comfort so as to be disquieted in spirit, is that thereby He may rouse them to *greater diligence in watching and praying*.

Disquietment of soul serves in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to stir them up to *greater watchfulness*. A man who walks in the dark, finds it necessary to be more careful where and how he treads. To be lifted up and cast down; to be emptied, as it were, from vessel to vessel, is of great utility to excite believers to always be watchful.

By these means, the Lord also rouses them to *pray* more earnestly and more frequently. Accordingly, when Heman was in deep distress of soul, he was much employed in prayer. "O Lord God of my salvation," he says, "I have cried day and night before you." ^{Psa 88.1} So was David: "You hid your face, and I was troubled: I cried out to you, O Lord; and to the Lord I made supplication," ^{Psa 30.7-8} "I poured out my complaint before Him; I declared before Him my trouble, when my spirit was overwhelmed within me." ^{Psa 142.2-3} And Hezekiah likewise: "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." ^{Isa 38.14} And Jonah: "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in to You, into your Holy Temple." ^{Jon 2.7} It was not until Peter was beginning to sink in the sea, that he cried, "Lord save me!" ^{Mat 14.30} There are, I believe, more prayers in the writings of David and of Jeremiah, than in any other parts of the sacred Volume. Indeed, many of the saints would not be so frequently on their knees as they are, if trouble of spirit did not weigh them down. This, then, is one of the Lord's designs in going away: that believers may pursue after Him. And He will never so hide Himself from them, as to render it impossible for them to find Him; nor will He depart any faster or farther than He will enable them to follow, so as to overtake Him. ^{Psa 63.8}

A long continuance of ease has a tendency to render them cold and formal in prayer, especially in *private* prayer. But spiritual troubles and painful changes tend to rouse their spirits, and impel them to "seek the Lord and His face" ¹ with greater earnestness and importunity. For it is then, especially, that they deeply feel their want of that help, which He alone can afford to them.

9. Many of the saints are afflicted with trouble of mind, to the end that they may thereby be *more prepared for spiritual comfort*, and that in times to come, their consolation may be *greater*. Sometimes, the Lord inflicts spiritual distress on many of His children in order that He may afterwards give them greater comfort, and that their comfort may be purer, sweeter, and more solid. He inflicts it in order to prepare them for that strong consolation which He has designed for them — to make them relish and value it more; and be more solicitous to possess and retain it. When the church, after Christ had withdrawn Himself and departed, found Him again, "she held him, and would not let Him go." ^{Song 3.4} Like a tree, by being shaken

¹ 1Chr 16.11; Psa 27.8; 105.4.

with the stormy wind, is more deeply and strongly rooted in the ground, so believers are sometimes “tossed as with tempest, and not comforted,” ^{Isa 54.11} so that they may cling more closely to Christ by faith, and thereby derive more strength and consolation from His fulness. For the more they “continue in the faith, grounded and settled,” the greater their peace and comfort will be. ^{Isa 26.3}

Moreover, when the Lord, by the witnessing of his Spirit, assures them that they have been enabled to love Him, even when He seemed to be hating them; and to follow after Him with lamentation and desire when He appeared to be going away from them — such a clear evidence of the truth of grace in them as *that* — cannot fail to yield a pleasing satisfaction to their souls. It is the manner of the Lord Jesus, to empty the souls of his children, that He may fill them; to cast them down, that He may lift them up; to trouble them, that He may more effectually comfort them; and to take away from them a smaller degree of mental serenity, that He may prepare room in their souls for a greater measure of pure consolation. ¹ He commonly allows the bitter waters of trouble to swell, in order that the sweet waters of holy consolation may afterwards rise higher than ever in their souls.

Inward trouble, in His hand, is a means of enlarging the capacity of the holy soul. And the more capable that soul is of comfort, the more consolation is poured into it. Heaviness of spirit also humbles such a soul; and true humility is, as it were, the vessel into which the wine of consolation is poured. A humble spirit is a deep spirit; and the deeper the spirit is, it is fitted to contain more consolation. Besides, as food is doubly sweet after hunger, and light after darkness, so is consolation after anguish of spirit. By their lack of spiritual comfort for a season, the Lord teaches His people to know more of the value of it. And when they learn to prize it, and to trust constantly and solely in the great Redeemer for it, as part of their salvation, the more they will receive of it.

10. Another design of God in laying some of his children in the depths of spiritual trouble, is to *render them more compassionate* toward other saints around them, when they see them depressed in spirit. No outward affliction, however painful it may be, is so dreadful and overwhelming as anguish of spirit. So, if it is the duty of a Christian to show compassion to such fellow Christians who are under outward affliction, then much more should one show pity to those who are under anguish of spirit. Surely, the most tender compassion from fellow saints, is due to those who have “the arrows of the Almighty within them, the poison of which, is drinking up their spirits.” ^{Job 6.4} Such perplexing distress, calls aloud for the greatest sympathy, the tenderest pity, as Job did from his friends. “Have pity on me,” he said, “have pity upon me, O my friends; for the hand of God has touched me.” ^{Job 19.21} Those Christians are deeply wounded in their spirits; and such wounds need to be touched with a tender as well as skilful hand. But none of their fellow-Christians are so well qualified to treat them with gentleness and tenderness, or to speak to them with mildness and pity, as those who were themselves in the same doleful condition, and have been mercifully delivered from it.

¹ **Psa 71:20-23** You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, Shall revive me again, And bring me up again from the depths of the earth. ²¹ You shall increase my greatness, And comfort me on every side. ²² Also with the lute I will praise you-- And Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. ²³ My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, And my soul, which You have redeemed.

The Lord, then, permits some of His saints to lose their comfort, so as to become disquieted in spirit. This is to render them more compassionate toward other brethren who are in spiritual trouble, and also more capable (as well as desirous) of being instrumental in binding up their wounds with a tender heart, and a gentle hand. In that way, He teaches them most effectually to “put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, and meekness” Col 3.12 toward those who are in any trouble, especially in mental trouble. And so He qualifies them to be merciful and helpful to such sufferers.

Moreover, in inflicting on some of the saints a painful sense of His anger, the Lord may also have it in view to teach them to pity *unregenerate* sinners around them, so as to willingly seize every fit opportunity to instruct them in the way of salvation; Psa 51.12-13 and from their own experience of the terror of the Lord, to labour to persuade them to flee speedily from sin, and the tremendous wrath due for sin, to the compassionate Saviour, for salvation. Those saints who have been in trouble of mind, can feel from the anguish and terror which they themselves have experienced, a compassionate and deep concern for the dreadful condition of secure sinners. They can say more than others can say, to assure them that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Heb 10.31

11. The Lord also permits some believers to forfeit their comfort, so as to fall under depression of spirit, in order to qualify them for *speaking comfortably* to other believers in a similar condition. As a humble, patient, and compassionate spirit is perhaps not attainable by any other means than this, neither are readiness and skill in comforting those who are cast down. Those who have been led through the depths of dejection and temptation, are better acquainted than other Christians are with the various griefs, fears, perplexities, and conflicts of the heart in those depths. And therefore they know better “how to speak a word in season to those who are weary.” Isa 50.4 They have experience of great and sore trouble, of being supported under it, and of being comforted afterwards with deliverance from it. The Lord therefore casts some, indeed many of the saints down. And in a little while, He raises them up again, so that they may learn from experience, not only to pity, but with meekness of wisdom, to comfort others of them who are cast down.

The apostle Paul, accordingly, “was troubled on every side,” cast down and then comforted, in order that he might attain eminent skill in comforting other saints. “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he says, “who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. Whether we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; ... or whether we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” 2Cor 1.3-6 The Lord has work for some of His children to do, which none of them can perform so well as those who are *thus* qualified for it. He has sin-sick souls to be visited and healed, tempted souls to be relieved, drooping spirits to be revived, weak hands to be strengthened, and feeble knees to be confirmed. It was necessary that the apostle Peter should have sad experience of his own weakness, in order that he might be qualified for strengthening his brethren. Luk 22.31-32 Besides, a man under a dangerous malady will choose to entrust himself to the care of that Physician who, by having been afflicted with the same distemper, has much experience of it, rather than trust another who was never afflicted with it. So too, troubled souls will be more

attentive to, and more affected by the advice and encouragement suggested by that Christian who speaks to them from his own experience, than by those of any other Christian.

12. It is likewise the intention of God, by that most painful discipline, to *prepare* some of His children for *special and eminent service* to Him. Some believers continue all their days in a low way, and have neither much trouble, nor much comfort. They experience little distressing fear, and just as little joyful hope. These are believers of a *lower* class. Others, again, are raised aloft in flashes and even raptures of sensible joy; but they do not perceive distinctly the objects which are below. Various mistakes, failings, and improprieties in their own mind and conduct almost entirely escape their notice. These too are Christians of an *inferior* rank. But when the Lord is training up any of His redeemed for *special and eminent* service to Him, He commonly brings them low, and employs them in deep exercises, and sharp conflicts with motions of sin from within, and temptations of Satan from without. He brings them into depths of spiritual trouble, and gives them deep, humbling, and even frightful discoveries of the strength and sinfulness of the unbelief and other abominations which lie deep in their hearts. He hides His face from them, and permits their spiritual enemies to frequently assault them, and sometimes to so prevail against them, as to threaten their eternal destruction. At the same time, He secretly upholds them. And when the design of the dispensation is gained, He comforts them with deliverance. Thus he advances them to *higher* degrees of experiential knowledge, to more enlarged views of themselves and of Christ, of sin and of holiness, and of the suitableness, riches, and freeness of redeeming grace, than other believers attain. He thereby renders them more intelligent, wise, and humble; more deeply sensible of their infinite obligations to Him; more disposed to trust firmly, and at all times, in the Lord Jesus; and more zealous, lively, and active for His glory, than most other believers. And so He prepares them for special service and eminent usefulness in their generation. Some think, and indeed it is probable, that Heman was laid in the darkness and the depths expressed in the 88th Psalm, in order that he might be qualified for that eminent station to which he was raised in the Church. Doubtless, it is in proportion to believers attaining deep experience, that they have the capacity, and especially the *wisdom* requisite for superior usefulness in the Church of Christ.

13. Another purpose which the Lord has to serve by the spiritual trouble of many of His people, is *to encourage and confirm their hope*; and thus to render them livelier in their exercise of graces, and their performance of duties. "We glory in tribulations also," says Paul, "knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, *hope*." ¹ And Jeremiah: "This I recall to my mind; and therefore I have hope." ^{Lam 3.21} God allows some of His dear children to lose their tranquility of mind for a season, in order that He may take occasion from their perplexity, to favour them with such an experience of His grace and mercy, power and faithfulness — in supporting them under it, in freeing them from it, and in sanctifying it to them — that they will also experience the truth of their faith, and the uprightness of their heart under it, in such a way as to encourage and confirm their hope of eternal life. Although it is not the *experience* of a holy man, but the righteousness of Christ and the promises of God offered to him in the gospel, that are the *foundations* of his hope of salvation, yet his past and present experience *encourages* him to hope. Such an experience

¹ Rom 5:3-4

that is proof to him of his personal interest in Jesus and of His great salvation, *works hope* — in as much as it affords him great encouragement both to expect and to desire complete salvation. His experience also of deadness of frame and coldness of love, of dejection of mind and sadness of heart — and yet of powerful support under these, and comfortable deliverance from them — serves exceedingly to make him abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. And the more he abounds in the delightful exercise of that living hope which is founded upon the living Redeemer — and which has for its object, the eternal enjoyment of the living God — the livelier and more cheerful he will be in all spiritual exercise and holy obedience. When he reflects that his great Redeemer, in His love and in His pity, has delivered him from the greatest of all troubles, and restored to him the joy of His salvation, he is encouraged. Yes, and he is sweetly constrained to expect from such a Saviour, the greatest blessedness, the highest felicity of which his nature will be capable, through all eternity.

14. One end which the Lord may have to accomplish by inflicting spiritual trouble upon some, is *the instruction of others* of His children. He seems to have resolved, in His adorable sovereignty and infinite wisdom, that some of His redeemed should be afflicted with inward as well as outward troubles, for the instruction of the rest. By subjecting some to that most painful discipline, He appears to have determined that others of them will thereby learn the exceeding sinfulness of their *own* unbelief, and other sins — the necessity of trusting simply, cordially, and at all times in the Lord Jesus for sanctifying grace; the unspeakable importance of holy comfort, and of constant reliance upon Christ for its continuance and increase; and the duty of being more thankful to Him for the peace of conscience which they enjoy; as well as being more circumspect and more solicitous not to provoke His displeasure. Spiritual trouble seems peculiarly adapted as an instrument to convey spiritual and holy instruction to the minds of all who believe. Accordingly, the 32nd, 42nd, and 88th Psalms, in which mental trouble is described, are each entitled MASCHIL; it signifies *Giving instruction*.

15. Another design which God may have in afflicting many of the saints with trouble and terror of conscience for a season, is to assure wicked men around them, of *judgment and of the wrath to come*. His intention thereby seems to be to give assurance to unregenerate sinners, by their very senses, that there will be a future judgment in which “it shall be ill with the wicked, seeing the reward of his hands shall be given him;” ^{Isa 3.11} that “if the righteous will be recompensed on the earth; much more the wicked and the sinner;” ^{Pro 11.31} and that “if judgment begins at the house of God,” then inexpressibly dreadful “will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God.” ^{1Pet 4.17} The saints are the objects of Jehovah's immense and unchangeable love. They are unspeakably precious in His sight, and are kept by Him as the apple of His eye. They love Him supremely, and study sincerely to please and honour Him. Jesus Christ, their Divine surety, has fully satisfied His justice for all their offences. And yet God afflicts many of them in this world, with a grievous and perplexing *sense* of His anger against them for their sins, and even with an overwhelming *dread* of His eternal wrath. Now, may it not be partly the intention of God, by thus afflicting many of His own dear children, to show to unconverted sinners what a dreadful punishment must be inflicted on them if they continue impenitent? Hereby, He affords them evident warning of their danger, before it is too late. And He gives each of them repeated opportunities to make this reflection:

'If even God's own children experience such terror and anguish of soul when they are only under the mild rod of His fatherly anger, and that is for their *salvation*, then how inconceivably more horrible and intolerable will be the torment of his enemies — and of *me* in particular, if I continue but a little longer to be an enemy to Him — when we lie through eternal ages under the unrelenting strokes of His vindictive wrath, for our *destruction*!'

16. *Lastly*. The Lord inflicts trouble of spirit on many of the saints, to purposely *manifest His own glory*. To display the glory of God in Christ is indeed the chief and ultimate end of that dispensation to which every other end is subordinate. His chief design in inflicting spiritual trouble is the manifestation of the infinitely glorious perfections of His nature. Next to that unparalleled display of the glory of His attributes — which has been made in the sufferings of Christ, their Covenant-head — is perhaps the display of it that is afforded in the sufferings (especially in the mental sufferings) of the members of His mystical body. The glory of His manifold wisdom shines illustriously in devising those circumstances of their mental trouble, which of all others, are fittest to subserve the designs of His grace in their sanctification. Also,

— the glory of His *infinite power* both in supporting them under that greatest of all afflictions, and then in delivering them from it;

— the glory of His *holiness*, in hiding His face from them;

— in laying them under dreadful impressions of His *anger* on account of their sins, even though they still continue to be the objects of His redeeming love;

— the glory of His *justice* in raising them to the full enjoyment of the salvation purchased for them, even by the most painful discipline, rather than allowing them to come short of it;

— the glory of His *love, grace, and mercy* in dispensing temporary trouble whenever it is needful, in order to prevent that eternal torment which they deserve; in mitigating that trouble, and delivering them from it as soon as the ends of inflicting it are served;

— the glory of His *faithfulness* in performing the promise of that kind of paternal chastisement which is most grievous, rather than leave a single promise unperformed for them;

— and the glory of His *sovereignty* in thus afflicting for their good, whomever, whenever, and in whatever degree He pleases.

He displays the glory of his infinite sovereignty by dispensing to his people trouble and comfort, sorrow and gladness, just as it pleases Him. On that ground, Elihu vindicated the Lord's afflicting of Job, without questioning His integrity as Job's other three friends had done. "I will answer you," he says, "that God is greater than man. Why do you strive against Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His matters." ^{Job 33.12-13} By inflicting mental trouble on some of his saints, the Most High shows them and others around them what He could do with them if He would. By doing so, He makes it manifest that it is HE "who forms the light, and creates darkness; who makes peace, and creates evil." ^{Isa 45.7} He thereby makes them deeply sensible that all their comforts, whether outward or inward, depend as entirely on His sovereign pleasure, as their election and regeneration did.

Reflections

FROM what has been said here, disconsolate believers may see that the Lord never withholds sensible comfort from them, except when His doing so *is for their good, in subservience to His own glory*. Although the loss of spiritual consolation, and the trouble of mind which ensues, are *in themselves* discouragements from holy practice, and even obstructions to it, the Lord has appointed that many of the saints will sometimes be afflicted with these, in order that, in His hand, they may subserve the designs of His grace in their sanctification and salvation. If believers were always alike; if they were continually in a lively frame; if they could invariably exercise ardent love and sensible joy, then they would begin to think that the power to do so was *inherent* in them, and that it was in great measure *their own*. But when, by means of their lack of consolation, they are made deeply sensible that, of themselves, they can do nothing, and that they need to depend continually on Christ for supplies from His fulness, they are hereby prepared to glorify Him — both by trusting in Him, and by advancing in conformity to Him,

Disconsolate Christian, you are never laid in the furnace of spiritual trouble, except when it is necessary *for your good*. Therefore, love your gracious God and Father, who consults your welfare in all His dispensations; who never chastens you but for your profit, so that you may be a partaker of his holiness. ^{Heb 12.10} “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” ^{Psa 37.7} “For a small moment He has forsaken you, but with great mercies He will gather you.” ^{Isa 54.7} What, is the reason that the glorious gospel has often appeared to you, too plain to be practically understood, and too good to be believed with application? It is your pride, your self-righteous spirit. Endure then, with faith and patience, that greatest of all afflictions, distress of mind. For by it, your heavenly Father is destroying the pride of your heart in answer to your own earnest prayers.

From the foregoing particulars, exercised Christians may also see that, when outward and inward troubles meet them at any time, this is no proof either that they are unregenerate, or that God is their enemy. Believer, when you are under great and sore troubles, Satan will try to persuade you that they are proofs of your hypocrisy; and that if God loved you, He would never subject you to such long, complicated, and grievous calamities. The construction which Job's three friends put on his complicated and grievous afflictions, was that they evidenced he was a hypocrite, and that God was his enemy. When waters of a full cup are measured out to you, do not conclude that God does not love you, or that you are not one of His children. For great as your distresses are, they are not only consistent with His love to you, but they *proceed* from it, “Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” ^{Heb 12.6} Others whom God has loved, have endured as great troubles as you have, if not greater. Heman suffered terrors which threatened to overwhelm his amazed soul, and that was not for a short season, but from his youth up. And yet, instead of concluding that God was his enemy, or that He did not love him, he addressed God as the “Lord God of *his salvation*.” ^{Psa 88.1}

Believers may see from this, that *they have no reason to be offended* at the ways of godliness on account of any trouble which they sometimes endure in those ways, however grievous it may be. They have no sufficient reason to “be weary, or faint in their minds.” Their gracious God and Father proposes to Himself the best of all ends in afflicting them; namely, their

sanctification, in subordination to His own glory. And they may rest assured that they will at no time be afflicted with any degree either of inward or outward trouble, except what infinite wisdom sees necessary for attaining those ends. The kind, degree, and continuance of their troubles are all fixed by the immutable decree of their heavenly Father, who *loves* them; whose wisdom could not have devised less; and whose love could not have appointed more affliction for them than is requisite for the purposes of His glory in their salvation. Therefore they have no reason to be displeased with *any* afflictive dispensation; or to think worse of His ways of grace and providence, because of any of their sufferings.

Once more: Let every disconsolate Christian *endeavour*, in the diligent use of appointed means, *to have those ends accomplished in him*, for which the Lord is afflicting him. If he doesn't know the particular design which the Lord may more immediately have in view, in visiting him with his present distress of soul, let him study to have at least *all* those ends of it gained upon him, which have been explained above. His duty is to trust firmly in the Lord Jesus; and also to pray frequently that all the designs which God usually has in thus afflicting any of His children, may be obtained upon him. Perhaps the particular intention of his spiritual trouble is concealed from him for a season, in order that his heart may be set on having *all* the ends of the Lord gained upon him, in that most afflictive dispensation. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." Pro 25.2 "Clouds and darkness surround Him." Psa 97.2 And therefore, though it is the duty of a holy man to inquire into the Lord's *principal* design in hiding His face from him, so that he may align with that design in his exercise — yet it becomes him to search into it with the deepest reverence and humility; and not be so disappointed, if he doesn't succeed, as to sink lower in depression of mind, or to be deterred from any part of his spiritual exercise. On the contrary, by the frequent exercise of every grace, and the diligent performance of every duty, he should "grow up into Christ in *all things*." Eph 4.15 And he may warrantably hope that, in proportion to his being enabled to do so, the end or ends of his mental trouble will be gained upon him.

Chap. 6. God's designs in permitting loss of spiritual comfort.

CHAPTER 7.

The means which disconsolate believers should employ to recover spiritual comfort.

SPIRITUAL consolation is a commodity of *heaven*, not to be imported except from that distant and better country. It is only God, the God of all comfort to whom infinite mercy and power belong, who can impart holy consolation to the sorrowful heart, or pour the balm of peace into the wounded spirit. It is only the adorable Spirit the Comforter who, like Noah's dove, can fly with the olive-leaf of peace to assure the troubled soul "that the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone." *Sng 2.11* When a holy man is walking in darkness, the day of comfort will not dawn, nor the shadows flee away, till "the Sun of righteousness arises with healing in His wings." *Mal 4.2* And the holy man can no more command at his pleasure, the rising of the spiritual Sun within, than he can the natural sun without. All he can do, in the strength of the grace which is in Christ Jesus, is *to use means* of recovering comfort; or like the mariners in the ship with Paul, cast anchor and wish for the day. *Act 27.17*

The means which he ought to employ for that purpose, must be means of Divine appointment, especially the following:

1. In humble reliance on the grace of Christ, he ought to *search out and confess* to his heavenly Father, those *iniquities* which have provoked Him to hide His face from him. He must without delay resolve, as the Israelite Church did in captivity, to "search and try his ways, and to turn again to the Lord; until the Lord looks down and beholds from heaven." *Lam 3.40,50* He ought to imitate David who, when he was in distress of conscience, said to Jehovah,

"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I have not hidden my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. For this, everyone who is godly will pray to You in a time when You may be found." *Psa 32.5-6*

One special design of the Lord's hiding his face sometimes from many of His children, is to chasten them for some latent sins in their hearts or lives, so as to make them deeply sensible of them, and their horrible malignity. This is in order that they may attain deeper humiliation and self-abhorrence. The omniscient eye of God has seen all those secret evils which either have escaped their own notice altogether, or which they have carefully concealed from others' notice, while they could not help but know they were open to His view. His eye has also beheld how much His own glorious majesty and spotless holiness have been affronted and insulted by them. From this come His righteous displeasure, and that painful sense of it under which they languish and mourn. *Isa 59.1-2* It is their own evil tempers, and especially their unbelief and self-righteous spirit, that are the principal bars to their enjoyment of holy consolation.

Therefore, when they complain of desertion and darkness, they ought to search impartially and diligently into the hidden abominations which have procured for them that anguish of spirit which they feel. They should strictly examine their consciences to see if some sinful inclination, opinion, or practice hasn't been indulged by them. They must listen to the softest whispers of conscience. If conscience reports that this has been neglected, or that it has been done wrongly, they ought to trace that report to its grounds, and search even into the deepest recesses of the heart. And when their discovery of lurking depravity, or of secret iniquity, is

as deep as they can make it, they should next — with holy shame, sorrow, and self-abhorrence — make ingenuous and particular confession of that to the Lord. ^{Hos 5.15}

2. The disconsolate believer must likewise, if he would recover spiritual comfort, study without delay *to be deeply convinced of the exceeding sinfulness and hurtfulness* of his sins in general, and especially of *his unbelief*. “When the Comforter comes,” says Jesus Christ, “He will reprove, or convict the world of sin; ... of sin because they *do not believe in me*.” ^{Joh 16.8-9} He will convict the world of unbelief, as if there was no other sin in the world to be compared to that. Refusing to believe or trust in the great Redeemer, is the radical evil of the human heart, the *principal* sin, the most malignant of all sins. And therefore, to be truly convinced of the strength, sinfulness, and perniciousness, especially of *that* sin, is necessary to the Christian’s attaining holy comfort. Indeed, the Spirit of Christ will not ordinarily restore consolation to troubled saints, without previously convincing them, as sinners, of the exceeding sinfulness of their refusing to trust in Christ for all their salvation. When they are under distress of conscience, they commonly see and bewail their *other* sins; but they still continue, and cannot help but continue to be without comfort, because they don’t see that their *not* believing the record concerning the Son of God, with application to themselves, and that their *not* relying on Him for salvation for themselves with the confidence of their hearts, are the greatest of all their provocations. They cannot be favoured with true consolation, till they are made deeply sensible that, by their unbelief and distrust, they have done what they could to make the God of truth a liar. ^{1Joh 5.10}

Ah! little do they think of what reproach, what indignity they have reflected on the infinitely holy and faithful Jehovah, by giving the lie to his immutable veracity! They do not consider that by refusing or even hesitating to trust in Jesus the Son of God, for salvation to themselves in particular, they have charged the God of truth with disingenuity and treachery — as if He had said one thing in His word, and intended another in His heart; as if He had not been in earnest to them in his offers of a Saviour and of salvation; or as if He had not spoken the truth, and so didn’t deserve to be trusted. Jehovah swears by his life, that He has no pleasure in their death, but rather, that through the compassionate Saviour, they should turn to Him and live. And therefore, to doubt after all, to think He is not willing to save them, is to charge Him not only with insincerity, but with perjury. The high authority of the great and holy God is interposed in a special manner in His commandment to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. He styles it “His commandment” — as if it had been the only one He ever gave to the children of men. ^{Joh 3.23}

Now, by not believing in the name of His dear Son, disconsolate Christians fly in the face of all that sovereign authority. Their presuming to disobey that *high* command on any pretence whatever, is a crime of the deepest dye. It is more criminal even than the sin of Adam in eating of the forbidden fruit. For by doing so, Adam sinned against God only as a Creator and Preserver. But these sin against Him not merely as a Creator and Preserver, but as a Redeemer. It is more criminal than the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. ^{Mat 10.14-15} It is even worse than the sin of the Jews in crucifying the Lord Jesus; for they crucified Him when he was disguised in the form of a servant. But disconsolate Christians, by refusing to trust in him for salvation, crucify him afresh *after* he has been declared by his resurrection from the dead, to be the Son of God and the true Messiah. ^{Rom 1.4} Indeed, it is even more heinous than the sin of

devils; for they never had a Saviour offered to them, nor a commandment given to them to believe in Him. Ah! how inconceivably sinful it is, *not* to trust for salvation in the Lord Jesus, the faithful trustee of that everlasting covenant which is well-ordered in all things, and sure! Alas! why don't saints shrink with horror from the first risings of unbelief in themselves, as they would shrink from a temptation to commit murder, or any other enormous crime? Unbelief is the radical evil of the depraved heart, from which every other abomination issues.

It is also requisite to having comfort, that disquieted Christians be deeply convinced of the exceeding *hurtfulness* of their sins in general, and especially of their unbelief. They must, without delay, study to become deeply sensible that the unbelief which prevails against them, and which passes in their minds under the disguise of humility, and a dread of presumption, is a most deep, dangerous, and destructive evil. Their unbelief is the source to which every other departure of their hearts from the living God may be traced. It is the principal cause of all their spiritual trouble. What is it, if not their distrusting of Christ, and apprehending God as their enemy, that increases what they feel — the enmity against Him, the deadness of spirit, the hardness of heart, and the indisposition of soul to meditate on Him as a God of grace, and to pray to Him? What is it, if not their fearing that He doesn't love them, and apprehending that He is laying snares for them, or watching for evil against them — that fills their souls with trouble and anguish, terror and dismay, aversion from Him, and weariness in every act of service done to Him? Isn't it their disbelief of His care, and their distrust of His mercy, that disposes them to put a dark construction upon His dispensations to them, and to sink even under the slightest pressures? Let the disconsolate Christian, then, assure himself that he cannot attain holy comfort until he is convinced, as a sinner, that his refusing to trust in Jesus Christ for his salvation, is not only exceedingly *sinful* in the sight of God, but inexpressibly *hurtful* to himself.

3. In order to recover spiritual consolation, he should take heed that he doesn't make *rash and desperate conclusions against himself*, respecting what is either past, present, or future. When a holy man rashly concludes that he is still in a state of nature after he has good evidence of his having been in a state of grace, he bears false witness against himself, and he reflects dishonour on his faithful Redeemer.

He must therefore strive against forming rash and sad conclusions against himself with respect to what is *past*. He should not conclude that he never had the grace of God, and that all his past experience has been but delusion, merely because he is now walking in darkness, and is not able to discern the evidences of that grace. He should be much on his guard against thinking that he was never renewed in the spirit of his mind, or that he never passed from death to life, because all his former experiences now appear to him to have been counterfeit. When he is under a sense of Divine anger, and he rashly calls into question all that the Lord has done in and for his soul, this is a sin which is highly provoking to the Holy Comforter. Asaph seems to have been guilty of it when his remembrance of God, and of his song in the night, did not lessen his trouble. ^{Psa 77:3,6}

Neither should the disquieted believer rashly conclude against himself with regard to his *present state*. He must take heed that he not grieve the Holy Spirit by concluding that he has at present, no true work of grace in his heart, no vital union with Christ, no personal interest in him, or that God is his enemy and has utterly cast him off. As the hypocrite is always

disposed to hope on false grounds, that he is a true believer, so the true believer is frequently disposed to fear upon improper grounds, that he is a hypocrite; especially if troubled in soul. The ancient church in her captivity said, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my claim is passed over by my God." ^{Isa 40.27} Jonah likewise said, "I am cast out of your sight." ^{Jon 2.4} and David, "I am cut off from before Your eyes." ^{Psa 31.22} But these and other instances of the same kind are left on record, not for the believer's imitation, but for his admonition. It is a great sin in a holy man, to deny Christ within him; a sin of which he must be made deeply sensible in order for his attainment of pure consolation.

Moreover, he must take heed that he not form desperate conclusions against himself respecting *the future*. He should be on his guard against concluding, with respect to his spiritual condition, that it will never be better with him. He should tremble at the impious thought of making this peremptory and desperate conclusion: 'the Lord will be favourable to me no longer. I will undoubtedly perish forever.' He ought to beware even of doubting whether God will be merciful to him; but much more of rashly concluding that He will *never* have mercy on him. Is he "plagued all day long, and chastened every morning?" ^{Psa 73.14} He must not conclude from this, that the Lord will never lay aside the rod, nor be favourable any more. There is nothing in the Oracles of God, nothing in the dealings of God with him, and nothing in himself, which can render that conclusion warrantable.

The disconsolate Christian, under the influence of temptation, is indeed often prone to make such a dismal conclusion. But let him remember that it is a very heinous sin to do so. ¹ It tends greatly to harden his heart, and to strengthen his remaining enmity against the God of his salvation. The saints in Scripture who had been guilty of that sin, afterwards bitterly bewailed it. When David said he was cut off, he informs us that he said it in his haste. ^{Psa 31.22} After Asaph expressed the thoughts of his desponding soul, thus: "Will the Lord cast off forever?" etc., he said, "This is my infirmity." ^{Psa 77.7-10} The dejected Christian, then, must beware of provoking the displeasure of God to a still higher degree, by casting away his confidence in the Redeemer, and giving himself up as undone forever. If in the darkness of spiritual trouble, he cannot discern evidences of his being in a state of grace, then he should on no account rashly

¹ It is lamentable to reflect how ready some the saints have been, when in trouble of mind, to form desperate conclusions respecting their eternal state, and thereby to gratify the tempter, as well as reflect much dishonour on redeeming grace. And it is no less wonderful how often, infinite mercy has interposed for their support, and even their deliverance, at the very times in which they have been making such conclusions. I have read the following account of one *Mrs. Honeywood*, who lived more than a century ago in England. When she was 'under deep desertion, she refused all comfort, and seemed to despair utterly of the mercy of God. A worthy Minister being with her one day, and reasoning against her desperate conclusions, she took a Venice-glass off the table, and said, *Sir, I am as sure to be damned, as this glass is to be broken*; and therewith, she threw it forcibly to the ground. But to the astonishment of both, the glass remained whole and sound. The Minister, with admiration, took it up, rebuked her presumption, and showed her what a wonder Providence had wrought for her satisfaction. This greatly altered the temper of her mind. *FLAVEL'S Divine Conduct*, etc., p. 291.

'*Mrs. Joan Drake* of Emersham too, in her great temptations, had a custom of turning over the Bible to put her finger suddenly upon some verse, saying, *Now, whatever my finger is upon is just my case (whatever it is), and my doom*. But the Lord so ordered it, that looking upon the verse, it was always found to be encouraging and comfortable.' She was much entreated to desist from that practice, but she begged that she might be allowed to do it once more, promising faithfully to then leave it. Afterwards, being permitted, she opened the Bible, and put her finger upon that excellent text, without looking or reading a word; "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord?" etc. *Isa. 40.27*, which being read and considered, so crossed her expectation, that it made her blush.' *CLARK. Exam.* vol. 2. p. 357.

conclude that he is certainly *not* in that state, much less that he will *never* be in it. Rather, leaving that matter undecided in the meantime, he should entrust the whole affair of his eternal salvation to the compassionate Saviour, by direct actings of faith. For that is the way to recover the *joy* of that salvation in due time.

4. He must, for the same purpose, call his soul to *strict account* for its dejection and disquietude, and *charge it again and again, to trust* in Jesus Christ, and in God through Him. He should call his troubled soul *to account*, without delay. This was a means of recovering comfort which David employed, and which he did not employ in vain. When his soul was cast down and disquieted in him, he called on it to give an account of itself: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted in me?” ^{Psa 42.5} The grief of holy David was not without a cause. And yet it must not be obstinate, nor exceed due bounds. It must not continue to depress and disquiet his soul, and to so discompose it as to disqualify it for the spiritual performance of present duty. The disconsolate believer should, in like manner, commune with his own heart, and call upon his soul to assign a sufficient reason why it allows itself to be disquieted and cast down. He should call upon his troubled soul to answer such questions as these:

‘Is the cause of this dejected, this despondent frame, a just one? Why, O my soul, are you thus disquieted? What ground do you have for these perplexing fears? You will say, I have good reasons *indeed* to be troubled — yes, to be so troubled as to be disqualified for the acceptable performance of every duty. But do you have *sufficient* reasons; such reasons as will endure being tried before the awful tribunal of the omniscient and righteous Judge of the world? Haven’t other believers as much cause as you to be uneasy — who yet do not yield themselves, as you do, to gloomy dejection and obstinate grief? Why should you be cast down, as if you had no grounds of hope or encouragement in the blessed gospel; as if you had a God without mercy, a Saviour without merit, a Comforter without a right of access to him, and trouble without a promise either of support *under* it, or of deliverance *from* it? Will you still be miserable, and not know why? Why, O my soul, by your despondency and sadness, do you dishonour your God and Saviour, injure yourself, and deter others from the way of holiness? Can you give a good account of this tumult?’

If a holy man were but to make strict inquiry into the *grounds* of his uneasiness of soul, it would soon be lessened in some happy measure. He can at no time have any *real* ground to be afraid that the Lord has either totally or finally forsaken him. Moreover, he should frequently *charge* his disquieted soul *to hope* in the Saviour, and in God through Him. “Hope in God,” said David to his troubled soul; “for I shall yet praise him for the help of His countenance.” ^{Psa 42.5} After the Christian has urged his soul to search into the grounds of its disquieting fear, he must next charge it not to harden itself in sorrow; but on the contrary, to trust in God; to hope that it “will yet praise Him for the help of His countenance” — that is, for His favour and the comfort of it.

5. If a good man, troubled in mind, would recover spiritual comfort, he must labour *to understand and consider well, his warrant* as a sinner of mankind, to *trust* in Christ and in God through Him, for complete salvation. When he cannot discern evidences *within* himself of having *formerly* believed in Jesus, it would relieve his mind much, through grace, if he could see a full warrant in the Scripture *without* him, to believe in Him *now*. Therefore, in

order to attain consolation, he should consider well that in the gospel, Christ with His righteousness and fulness is wholly, freely, and particularly *offered to him* as a sinner of mankind; ¹ that the *calls* or *invitations* of the gospel to accept all that is offered, are addressed to him; ² that an authoritative *commandment* to comply with the invitations, and thus to accept the offers of the gospel, is given to him; ³ that *all the promises*, being in Christ, are in and with Christ, freely offered to him for his acceptance; ⁴ and that these promises, and such as these, are given to him in a special manner: “Whoever comes to me, I will in no way cast out.” Joh 6.37 “Whoever believes, and is baptized, shall be saved.” Mar 16.16 “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,” Act 16.31 He should know and consider that these *four* things — the offer, the invitation, the commandment to believe or trust in Christ, and the promise — all being addressed or directed to him as a sinner of Adam’s race — form his warrant, or they afford him a right to come as a sinner in himself, and without a moment’s delay, to trust firmly in the Lord Jesus for eternal salvation.

He should study to clearly understand that those four things being founded on the intrinsic sufficiency of the obedience and death of Christ, for the salvation even of all mankind, afford *him* as a sinner of mankind, a sufficient right or warrant to come as he is — to come with all his sins, all his wants, and all his griefs, and to rely with assured confidence on that Divine Redeemer for complete salvation for himself in particular. He should understand distinctly, that as they are all directed particularly to him (as if there was no other sinner in the world beside himself) — so they afford to him a particular, present, and sufficient warrant, to confide in Christ and in God through Him, for all salvation for himself — that Christ’s obedience and death afford him a full right, not to believe that Christ is indeed *already* his in possession (his assurance of this must be founded on evidences), but to *trust*, and trust cordially, that Christ *now gives* (offers) Himself to him in possession, with His righteousness and salvation. In order to recover true comfort, he must learn (he must spiritually and clearly understand) that Christ’s being his *in offer*, gives him a right to *trust in Him for possession*.

The disconsolate Christian should likewise have it firmly settled in his mind and conscience, that the great commandment to believe in the name of Jesus Christ forms a main part of his revealed *warrant* to trust in Him. Thus, it makes it *his duty* to trust in Him. And if it is his duty to trust in Him for salvation, then it cannot at the same time be his sin. He must labour to be fully persuaded that his endeavouring to trust cordially and confidently in the Lord Jesus for all his salvation, is not presumption or a sin; but it is his present duty. Indeed, it is his first, principal, and greatest duty, without the performance of which, it will be impossible for him to please God in any other duty. ^{Heb 11.6} Surely, it cannot be presumption in him to do what God commands. If the disquieted Christian could only be convinced that his distrust of the great Redeemer is his chief, his greatest sin — the source of all his other sins — and that trusting in Him for salvation for himself is his first duty, the *principal* of all his duties, it would be a sure step toward his attaining holy consolation. O that he but knew what an unspeakable comfort it is that the God of all consolation has made it his duty, his first duty,

¹ Exo 20.2; Isa 55.4; Joh 6.32; 3.16; 1Joh 5.11.

² Pro 1.22-23; 8.4; Isa 55.1-3; Mat 11.28; Rev 22.17.

³ Exo 20.3; Psal 62.8; Pro 3.5; 1Joh 3.23.

⁴ 2Cor 1.20; Pro 1.23; Act 2.39; Heb 4.1.

to trust at all times in the infinitely compassionate Saviour! O that he would instantly and frequently try to place the confidence of his heart in Him for salvation; and not stop a moment to look into himself for any good qualification to add to, or strengthen that warrant for doing so, which the Lord has graciously afforded him in His holy word!

6. In order to attain consolation, he should also consider *the encouragements* which he still has, to trust in the blessed Redeemer. Those four things mentioned above,¹ which afford the disconsolate Christian a warrant (in common with all other hearers of the gospel), encourage him at the same time to *rely* with confidence on the Lord Jesus. There are various other things which, strictly speaking, form no part of his revealed warrant. Yet, when he properly considers them, they serve greatly to *encourage* him to trust in the Saviour. These are,

- the infinitely gracious and merciful nature of God in Christ;
- the consummate righteousness of the Lord Jesus; ^{Jer 23.6}
- the infinite fulness of grace which is in Him, and that is for the chief of sinners; ^{Psa 68.18}
- the plenteous redemption which is with Him; ^{Psa 130.7}
- the forgiveness of iniquity, which is dispensed by him; ^{Psa 130.4}
- the absolute promises of His gracious covenant; ^{Eze 36.25-28}
- His infinite ability and willingness to save even the chief of sinners; ²
- His intercession for the transgressors; ^{Isa 53.12}
- His experiential sympathy with all the members of his mystical body, or being touched with the feeling of their infirmities; ^{Heb 4.15}
- His moderating all their afflictions, or keeping them within measure; ^{Jer 30.11}
- the secret support which He has previously afforded them; ^{Psa 73.23} and,
- the intervals of grief and fear, with which He has favoured them, even in their greatest extremity.

Moreover, when a holy man is in trouble of mind, he may be conscious of several things *in his own present experience*, which should also encourage him to renew his exercise of trusting in Christ, and thereby to receive comfort from Him; such as these:

He finds no righteousness or strength in himself, in which he can deliberately confide. He now perceives and feels more of the depravity of his heart than he ever did before, which is evidence that he has attained more spiritual light and life. He now feels the sin which dwells in him, rising, struggling, threatening to carry all before it, and indisposing him for the practice of holiness, more than he did formerly. His deadness of spirit, ³ his hardness of heart, his enmity against God, his legal temper, his worldly-mindedness, and his inability to hate and mourn for sin, are a burden and a trouble to him. His inability to believe in Christ, and to pray in faith, is a ground of much uneasiness and complaint. He counts sin the greatest of all

¹ That is, the offer, the invitation, the commandment to believe or trust in Christ, and the promise. – WHG

² Heb 7.25; Jer 9.24; Joh 5.40.

³ SHEPARD of New England says that ‘more are drawn to Christ under the sense of a *dead and blind heart*, than by all sorrows, humiliations, and terrors.’ And another eminent Minister who was a famous instrument of converting many to God, used to say that, “for his own part, he had no other evidence in himself of being in a state of grace, than that he was *sensible of his deadness*.’ BROOKS’ *Cabinet*, p. 48.

evils; and he is conscious of no sin in himself, except what he either loathes, or else is troubled by because he cannot loathe it as he should; he is conscious of no sin except what he utterly disapproves, and from which he would count it a mercy to be saved. He dares not allow himself to deliberately displease the Lord, and desires above all things to please Him.

He highly esteems the Lord Jesus, and concludes that the loss of Him is greater than the loss of ten thousand worlds. He is persuaded that the possession of the whole universe could not make him content to be without Christ. He is greatly troubled because he can discern no satisfying evidence of his being personally interested in Christ, and in God as a covenant-God. He is greatly alarmed and deeply perplexed, because all his past experience now appears to him to have been counterfeit. He finds that he is utterly unable of himself, either to perform spiritual duties, or to resist spiritual enemies. He is grieved because he cannot approve the covenant of grace as he should, because he cannot trust cordially in Christ for salvation, and because he is unable to exercise godly sorrow for the evils of his heart. He finds that he cannot rest upon Christ, and at the same time, that he cannot rest or be easy *without* Him. He desires the presence of God, and the light of His gracious countenance; and he often fears that he is not sincere in his desire for communion with Him. He also mourns the absence of God, and cannot be kept from Him. He loves the company of the saints more than that of others. Those of his relations and acquaintance who appear unconverted, he regards with pity; and he endeavours to recommend the Saviour and his great salvation to their esteem.

These things, in the present experience of the disconsolate Christian, which he may be conscious of for the most part — though they do not, strictly speaking, afford him a warrant to renew the acting of confidence in Christ for salvation, nor in the least degree strengthen his revealed warrant for doing so — yet, if he is conscious of but any one of them in himself, it should *encourage* him to trust afresh, and not be afraid. He should not indeed trust in *it*, nor make *it the ground of his right* to trust in the Saviour; but he should be animated and emboldened by it, to avail himself of his warrant to renew his acting of trust in Him.

Besides this, the disquieted Christian, for his further encouragement to trust in Jesus Christ and in God through him, should frequently consider that he is not only commanded, in common with all other hearers of the gospel, but that in a *special* manner, he is commanded to trust in Him. “Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his servant, and walks in darkness, and has no light? Let *him* trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God;” Isa 1.10 — as if Messiah, who is the speaker in the immediately preceding verse, had said to the professed members of the Israelite Church, ‘Whoever is among you, even if only one, who has a sincere regard for the commandments of the Lord, and a humble veneration for His high authority — who is also willing to listen attentively to the instructions, and to obey sincerely the laws of Me, His righteous servant; and who is in the darkness especially of spiritual trouble, without the light of deliverance or comfort — tell him that I have a special command to lay and to urge upon him: Let him trust, let him confide in the name of Jehovah; yes, let him continue resolutely to rely with firm confidence upon his God, for all grace and consolation.

When the believer is walking in the darkness of mental trouble, he cannot ordinarily perceive that God is his God in possession. Yet he is to firmly believe, at least, that He is his God *in offer*, and to frequently as well as cordially say that He is his *in choice* and *in preference* to

every other God; and thus to place an unsuspecting confidence in Him. The gracious and special command, then, which Messiah gives him here — to confide constantly in Him, and in God through him — should be regarded by the disconsolate Christian as the very highest encouragement to entrust to Him all the concerns of his disquieted soul.

7. The troubled Christian, accordingly, in order to recover consolation to his wounded spirit, should without delay *trust* in the Lord Jesus, and in God as reconciled in Him. He should, in dependence on the grace of Christ, instantly strive to trust that God the Father loves him, and has good-will toward him; ^{1Joh 4.16} that Jesus Christ saves him, and that He will save him to the uttermost; ^{Isa 33.22} and that the blessed Spirit will in due time restore comfort to him. Let him not delay trusting in the Saviour till he is in a better frame, or till he is so brought out into the light as to discern some good qualifications in his own heart. But even while he is in darkness, let him endeavour to trust, and to say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” ^{Job 13.15} If I perish, I will perish casting myself down at the feet of the Saviour, for mercy. He who is the Lamb of God is too gracious, too merciful, to allow any to perish there. If he doesn’t save me, I cannot be much worse than I am. In this way, I can but perish; and it may be that I will be saved. When a good man is in the darkness of spiritual trouble, let him not sit down desponding in that darkness; but let him *walk on* in it, and walk by faith. Let him quickly and resolutely, humbly and confidently, trust in the infinitely faithful and compassionate Redeemer.

Elihu’s exhortation to Job when he was in darkness, is also addressed to him: “Although you say you do not see Him, yet judgment is before Him; therefore trust in Him.” ^{Job 35.14} He should then adopt without delay the resolution of the holy Psalmist, and say to the Lord, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.” ^{Psa 56.3} It is his present duty to place the confidence of his heart in Jesus, that faithful Trustee of the everlasting covenant. And it is his duty to say with the afflicted Psalmist, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me. You will stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerns me.” ^{Psa 138.7-8} “You will light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.” ^{Psa 18.28} “You will guide me with your counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.” ^{Psa 73.24} Let him trust not only that the Lord Jesus will save him with an everlasting salvation, according to his promise, but that He will comfort him in due season. And let him say with holy David, “You who have shown me great and severe troubles, will quicken me again, and will bring me up again, or You will return, and bring me up from the depths of the earth. You will increase my greatness, and comfort me on *every* side.” ^{Psa 71.20-21} — as if he had said, ‘I will in due time see nothing dark or discouraging on *any* side.’

The disconsolate Christian should confide likewise in the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort, and say with the church of Israel, “My God will hear me. Do not rejoice against me, O my enemy. When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. He will bring me forth to the light, and I will behold his righteousness. He will turn again; He will have compassion on me; He will subdue my iniquities; and He will cast all my sins into the depths of the sea.” ^{Mic 7.7-9,19} He should trust even in a frowning and withdrawing God. He should trust Him even though he cannot trace Him. And like the woman of Canaan, he should be resolute and peremptory in trusting Him. ^{Mat 15.22-28}

Nor should he be afraid that endeavouring to trust in this way, is presumption. Presumption is *unwarrantable or groundless* confidence. It cannot then be presumption, so long as he is conscious that he trusts *only* in Christ and in God; and that he places confidence in Christ and in God — not on the ground of any good thing in his own heart or life, but only on the Divine warrant afforded him in the gospel. Nor should he fear that he is acting presumptuously, so long as he is conscious that he sincerely endeavours to trust in the Saviour, not merely for a part of his salvation, but for the *whole* of it; not for salvation *in any sin*, but for salvation *from every sin*; not for salvation *with* sin, or *to* sin, but for that salvation which comprises *universal holiness* of heart and life; not for salvation by his own righteousness, but for salvation by *grace*, reigning through the righteousness of Jesus Christ unto eternal life;¹ and for salvation, not for his own glory, but for the glory of Christ, and of God in Him.

Presumption also is *unreasonable* confidence. But nothing can be more reasonable than for a needy sinner to come at the *command* of God, and trust with firm confidence in Jesus Christ for all that salvation which is laid up in Christ, laid out in the promise, and brought near in the offer of the gospel. And on the contrary, nothing can be more *unreasonable* than to trust for what is impossible even for omnipotence itself to afford, and which the Saviour has never promised to give - salvation in sin---salvation consistent with retaining some darling lust — salvation merely from the punishment of sin — salvation in order to be at liberty to commit sin with impunity. In a few words, the disconsolate Christian should not fear that his trusting in the Lord Jesus for salvation for himself in particular, is presumptuous confidence — not if it is accompanied with *fear* that he doesn't cordially approve the whole scheme of redemption delineated in the gospel; and with *desire* to thus approve it; and with *diligence* in the use of all the other means of grace within his reach.

In his endeavouring to trust cordially in the blessed Saviour for salvation, he must not overlook the *promises* of salvation. All the promises of God being yes and Amen in Christ, they are in and with Christ, and offered to him in the gospel. Therefore, in applying Christ to himself, he should not embrace or apply the promises *separate* from Christ, but in and *with* Him. And believing that the absolute promises in the offer are especially directed to him for his acceptance, he must rely on the faithfulness of God in them, which is pledged for the performance of them; and so he must trust in Christ to perform them for *himself*. To trust for salvation is to rely with confidence, not only on Christ and his righteousness, but on the truth of the promises. It is to rely and live upon Christ, not as felt in the heart, but as offered and promised in the gospel. And it must be of the same extent as the promises. The absolute promises of the eternal covenant are *open*; they are *free*. The disquieted Christian should therefore cast himself freely upon them, when his feelings and evidences fail.

He has been trying to see if he already had a personal interest in the Redeemer; and he has found no satisfying evidences of it in himself. Let him forbear that inquiry for a little while, and in the meantime, put the matter out of doubt by trusting that Christ *now gives* him a saving interest in Him. Every scriptural evidence of a personal interest in the Redeemer is either *comprised* in faith, or it is a *consequence* of faith. Let his actings of faith in Christ and

¹ Act 15.11; Rom 5.21.

in the promise then be distinct and express, in order to be conscious that he is *acting* it. ¹ And at the same time, let him not rest on the *act*, but on the glorious *Object* of his faith; and not draw consolation from the *act*, but from Christ and the promises, *by* the act.

To trust simply in the Lord Jesus for salvation to himself, is the *principal* means which the disconsolate Christian should employ for attaining spiritual comfort. Without this, no other means will be of the smallest avail. To rely on the faithful Redeemer and the free promises, with cordial and unsuspecting affiance, is not only in itself an ease to the troubled soul, ^{Heb 4.3} but according to the covenant of grace, it is the appointed instrument of deriving consolation as well as holiness from the fulness of Christ. After Job had said, “I *know* that my Redeemer lives,” ^{Job 19.25} he was so relieved from the extremity of his trouble, that he no longer uttered such doleful complaints as before. “The Lord is my strength and my shield,” says David, “my heart *trusted* in Him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart greatly *rejoices*, and with my song I will praise him.” ^{Psa 28.7} Again, “I would have fainted, unless I had *believed that I would see* the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living..” ^{Psa 27.13} “And again, “I have *trusted* in your mercy; my heart shall *rejoice* in your salvation.” ^{Psa 13.5} The Lord Jesus said to his disconsolate disciples, “Let not your hearts be *troubled*; you believe in God, *believe* also in Me.” ^{Joh 14.1}

If the disquieted Christian, then, would recover spiritual consolation, then let him “hold the *beginning* of his confidence steadfast to the *end*.” ^{Heb 3.14} Let him come frequently to Jesus, the Consolation of Israel, and come every time as if it were the first time, or as if he were but beginning to come to Him. Let him come as a sinner in himself, and trust that Christ will save him from his sin and from his trouble. So the joy of God’s salvation will in due time be restored to him. By thus casting all his care upon his gracious Redeemer who cares for him, his depressed spirit will become easy and cheerful.

8. For the same purpose, he must also *hope* in the Lord Jesus, and in God as the God of all comfort. Spiritual hope comprises a cordial *desire and expectation* of all promised good things, both in time and in eternity. It is a certain and longing expectation of all the good of the everlasting covenant. And it is grounded on the declarations and promises of the gospel; the perfections of God in Christ; His relations to his people; and on the office, righteousness, fulness, and intercession of Christ. It has an inestimably precious object, and a heart-purifying and enlivening influence. ² It is a consequence of saving faith, and it is inseparably connected with it. *Faith* is trusting that the faithful Redeemer will perform all the *promises* of His eternal covenant to me. *Hope* is a desire and an expectation of all the future *blessings* which are promised in it. It is a living principle which revives and supports, strengthens and elevates the soul of the true believer, and carries him beyond this finite scene into that which is infinite. There he is transported with the joyful prospect of life eternal in the immediate presence of God and the Lamb; of seeing his glorious Redeemer as He is; of being like Him; and of the full enjoyment of Jehovah — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — forevermore.

Now for his comfort, the dejected believer should endeavour to frequently exercise this living hope — this “hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for him.” ^{1Pet 1.3-4} He must, in his dependence on the grace of Christ, hope

¹ Psa 91.2; Lam 3.24.

² 1Joh 3.2-3; 1Pet 1.3.

for all necessary grace, and especially “for the grace that is to be brought to him at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” ^{1Pete 1.13} He ought to hope that the Lord will comfort him in due season; and that “the God of hope will yet fill him with all joy and peace in believing.” ^{Rom 15.13}

If he would recover his holy consolation, he must charge his soul as the Psalmist did, to “hope in God;” ^{Psa 43.5} to hope that he will yet have comfort from God; that he “will yet praise Him for the salvation of his countenance,” for the manifestation of His favour to his soul; and for the consolation which will ensue. He ought to hope even against hope; “to hope continually;” and “to show diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end.” ^{Heb 6.11} His Redeemer is the great God, and He resolves to act like Himself. The believer should therefore expect great as well as good things from Him: great deliverances and supplies; great enlargements and consolations; great mercy and peace; and a great salvation. ^{Jer 33.3} The Lord Jesus is “the hope of Israel, and its Saviour in time of trouble.” ^{Jer 14.8} He will often disappoint the fears of the timorous believer; but He will never disappoint his hopes in so far as they are grounded on and regulated by the *promises*. Let him therefore build his hope no longer upon any good thing wrought in, or done by himself. But let him build it wholly upon the righteousness and grace of Christ, and upon the promises and faithfulness of God. The exercise of a well-grounded hope tends to settle the heart, and to calm the troubled spirit. “It is good, therefore, that a man should both *hope*, and quietly *wait* for the salvation of the Lord. For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though he causes grief, yet He will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.” ^{Lam 3.26,31,32} The hope that greatly pleases the Lord, is when it is accompanied with *filial fear* in its exercise; and when it is a special means of attaining the light of His gracious countenance. ¹

The disconsolate believer should at no time suspect that his endeavouring to hope, is presumption — so long as he is conscious that his expectation is founded solely upon the grace and power of God exhibited in the declarations and offers of the gospel; upon the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ; and upon the faithfulness of God in the promises. ^{Psa 130.5,7} True hope is grounded, not upon that which the Christian feels in himself, but upon that which Jesus felt in his stead; not upon what he does for Christ, but upon what Christ did and is still doing for *him*. Evidences of grace in the heart and life are indeed great encouragements to exercise hope; but they are not the grounds upon which *true hope* is built. Whoever exercises a living hope, is diligent in using all appointed means of grace. And yet he doesn’t rest upon the use of those means, but upon the Lord speaking to him in His word of grace.

9. Another means of recovering spiritual comfort, is *diligence* in the exercise of *evangelical repentance*.² If the disconsolate Christian would exercise repentance in an upright and acceptable manner, then in the faith of pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, he must first of all repent of his unbelieving, distrustful, and desponding thoughts; and next, repent of all his other sins. His unbelief and distrust of the Saviour are his radical crimes. And therefore, in his exercise of repentance, he should begin with them. And in order to exercise repentance sincerely and acceptably, he should trust that the Lord Jesus, the exalted Prince and Saviour, give him repentance and forgiveness of sins. ^{Act 5.31} It is faith in His pardoning mercy, which

¹ **Psa 147:11** The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.

² *Evangelical repentance*, like evangelical righteousness, is *personal*; it is driven by and grounded in the gospel. – WHG

breaks the heart and opens all the sluices of godly sorrow for sin. Trusting, then, in the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of God in Him, ^{Psa 13.5} he should endeavour to attain a true and humbling sense of his own iniquity. Without placing confidence in redeeming mercy, a man may have a sense of sin, but not a *true* sense of it. He may have a sense of sin as hurtful to himself, ^{Gen 4.13} but not as hateful to God; ^{Hab 1.13} a sense of its danger and demerit, but not of the deep malignity and pollution of sin.

The dejected Christian should therefore study to attain by faith, a spiritual sight and sense of the horrible malignity, as well as the infinite demerit of his unbelief and other transgressions. He must without delay, in the exercise of faith, look upon Jesus whom he has pierced, in order that his grief for the loss of his comfort, may be turned into godly sorrow for those iniquities which have pierced his dear Saviour, and which procured for him that grievous loss. ^{Zec 12.10} Viewing his iniquity as laid on Christ, and Christ as pierced for it in his stead, he must also, with holy self loathing and deep abhorrence of his sin, turn, not from one sin to another, but from all sin to God. ¹ Let him hate sin, and hate it *as* sin. ^{Psa 119.104} Let his hatred be universal against all sin, and irreconcilable to any sin. ^{Psa 101.3} He must, in the faith of redeeming mercy, turn from all iniquity, and especially from the sins for which the Lord is pleading a controversy with him; ^{Eze 14.6} and say with Ephraim of old, “Turn me, and I shall be turned, for you are the Lord my God.” ^{Jer 31.18} Trusting that the Lord his God turns him, he should turn to the Lord “with all his heart; with fasting, weeping, and mourning.” ^{Joe 2.12} He ought to turn to the love of God, ^{Psa 119.105} and to the spiritual performance of every duty to Him. This is what the Israelite Church in her captivity resolved to do: “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.” ^{Lam 3.40}

If the disconsolate believer would recover pure consolation, let the exercise of his faith and hope be penitential. And if after all his endeavours, he finds that he cannot shed a tear, or feel such bitter sorrow for sin as he longs to feel, let him not be discouraged; but recollect that turning with holy abhorrence from all iniquity, to the Lord, is the very *essence* of true repentance. Let him turn from his sins of omission, especially from his sin of allowing himself to be discouraged from the great duties of believing and rejoicing in Christ Jesus, ^{Phi 3.3} by a sense of the corruption of his nature — by which he has brought an evil report upon the good ways of the Lord. And he should not fear that his repentance is legal or hypocritical, so long as he is conscious that he endeavours to exercise godly sorrow for all sin, *as* sin, and to turn from it *because* it is sin. The repentance of the legalist or hypocrite is not so much sorrow for sin, as a sullen grief that he is not allowed to sin with impunity; it is not so much turning from sin to the Lord, as turning from one sin to another. ^{Hos 7.16}

As the exercise of evangelical repentance is an appointed means, so it is a *sure* means of recovering holy consolation. For thus says the Lord, “To this man I will *look*, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.” ^{Isa 66.2} “The Lord is *near* to those who are of a broken heart; and He *saves* those of a contrite spirit.” ^{Psa 34.18} “He *heals* the broken in heart, and *binds up* their wounds.” ^{Psa 147.3} As soon as Ephraim’s heart is troubled for his iniquities, God’s heart is troubled for Ephraim; He “will surely have mercy upon him.” ^{Jer 31.20} Godly sorrow for sin is not only a means of attaining future comfort, but it is accompanied

¹ Isa 6.5; Hos 6.1/

with present consolation. There is more joy in the penitential mourning of a humble believer, than in all the vain mirth of an unregenerate man.

10. For the same end, he should *meditate frequently* on the blessed Jesus, and on God as a God of grace in Him. He is disposed to muse often on the trouble of his own mind; but he should rather contemplate *the sufferings of Christ's soul*. If he were to frequently meditate on the unparalleled anguish of his dear Redeemer's soul — the doleful agony of it when He was enduring the vindictive wrath of God for him, and was not allowed to discern the least smile in the countenance of his righteous Father — it might be a happy means of calming the tumult of his own soul. The compassionate Saviour, in love for him and for his salvation, drank a cup of unmixed wrath; while the believer puts into his hand only a cup of suffering, mixed with many sweet and salutary ingredients. What are his sorrows, then, compared to those of the Lord Jesus? There is no comparison, There was more bitterness in one drop of Christ's sufferings, than in an ocean of his own. Devout meditation on the loving, the agonizing, the dying Redeemer, has often been a reviving and delightful exercise to holy souls. "My meditation of Him," says the Psalmist, "shall be sweet." ^{Psa 104.34} It has many times been sweet and soothing to holy men, even under spiritual trouble.

The disquieted believer should moreover think frequently on *God in Christ*, as a God of mercy and grace, and on His amiable perfections and precious promises. In Christ, God manifests himself to be a gracious, a promising, and a performing God — to be just such a God as an afflicted saint would choose to deal with. In Christ, God exhibits his infinitely glorious excellencies in the most amiable, attractive, and encouraging point of view. He manifests himself to be "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." ^{2Cor 1.3} Presenting Him often to the mind in *that* point of view will therefore, in the hand of the adorable Comforter, be a sovereign cordial to a drooping spirit. Hence the afflicted Psalmist said, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me. Therefore I will remember *You* from the land of Jordan, and from the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." ^{Psa 42.6} — as if he had said, 'In order to cheer my drooping spirit, I will remember you as a God of mercy. I will call to remembrance Your love and faithfulness, Your power and presence in the sanctuary. I will remember You from the most distant countries to which I may be driven.' In another Psalm, he says to the same purpose, "My soul will be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness; my mouth will praise You with joyful lips, when I remember You on my bed, and meditate on You in the night-watches." ^{Psa 63.5-6} When his soul was in trouble, Asaph likewise said, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your doings." ^{Psa 77.10-12}

The dejected Christian must meditate on God in order to attain peace and comfort, especially as a God *in covenant*; as a God offering and promising to be a God to him. And that is not from a regard for any worthiness in himself, but merely to the glory of God's own free and sovereign grace. He should frequently contemplate the covenant of grace, in the making, fulfilling, and administration of it. For the Lord has devised and established that gracious covenant as the rule according to which all His dispensations of grace and providence are adjusted. There, the timorous believer will see that everything is of infinitely free grace; that every blessing is to be received as a free gift; that the great Redeemer Himself is "given as a covenant to the people;" ^{Isa 49.8} that God is first in the obligation of the covenant; and that there

is no tie upon the believer, except what depends on and is similar to the tie which the believer has upon God,

11. In order to receive comfort, he should also *pray much* in the name of Christ, and thus pour out his heart before his gracious God and Father. This was the exercise of David when his soul was disquieted. “O my God,” he says, “my soul is cast down within me.” And again; “I will say to God my Rock, Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” ^{Psa 42.9} He had already charged his soul to hope in God, and to no longer yield to disquieting grief and fear. But he had found no relief; and therefore he turned to his Covenant-God, and complained to Him of his disquietude. Although he could not himself command calm in his troubled spirit, he knew that his redeeming God could. He therefore complained *to* the Lord, but did not complain *of* Him. He did not complain that afflictive dispensations had troubled his soul, but that his soul had troubled *itself*. “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me,” he says, “I poured out my complaint before Him; I showed before Him my trouble.” ^{Psa 142.2-3} He presented this supplication to him; “O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak. Heal me; for my bones are vexed, My soul is also sorely vexed. But you, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul, O save me for your mercies’ sake.” ^{Psa 6.1-4} The apostle James says, “Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.” ^{Jas 5.13} The Lord Jesus recommends this duty to disconsolate believers by his own example. For we read that when He was “in an agony, he prayed more earnestly.” ^{Luk 22.44}

The prayer of faith is a sure means of obtaining relief. For thus says Jehovah, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” ^{Psa 50.15} Does the distressed Christian say that he feels sadly indisposed for the duty of prayer; or that he has long been attempting its exercise, but the Lord “shuts out his prayer?” ^{Lam 3.8} Let him nevertheless persist in trying to pray, and in looking up for an answer. ^{Luk 18.1} Is he ready to say that he cannot pray acceptably? Let him attempt it as he can, and notwithstanding all the imperfection attending it, commit it to the Lord Jesus, his “Advocate with the Father.” Jesus will understand it with infinite ease, and will put it into such language as will be accepted in the court of heaven. He should therefore “come boldly to the throne of grace,” and present such requests as would show he has honourable sentiments of the riches and munificence of the King of glory. He ought to come firmly persuaded that, even though a little is too much for his desert, yet that much is too little for his great Redeemer’s bounty. ^{Mar 11.24} By doing so, he will greatly honour the marvellous lovingkindness of the Lord. When he prays for spiritual comfort or for any other spiritual blessing, let him pray in faith — and according to his faith, it will be done for him in due time. ¹

¹ In order to illustrate the sentiment expressed here, I cannot forbear mentioning a heathen story: ‘Alexander had a Philosopher in his court, who once was greatly straitened in his circumstances. On that occasion, he applied to his sovereign for money, the conqueror of the world. No sooner was his request made than granted. Alexander gave him a commission to receive from his treasurer whatever sum he wanted. He immediately went and demanded a hundred talents, which amount to about ten thousand pounds sterling. The treasurer, surprised at so large a demand, refused to comply, but waited upon the king, and represented to him how unreasonable he thought, the petition was, and how exorbitant the sum. Alexander heard him with patience; but as soon as he had ended his remonstrance, he replied, Let the money be immediately given to him. I like that man. I am delighted with his way of thinking. He has done me a singular honour; and by the largeness of his request, he has shown what a high idea he has, both of my great riches, and my royal munificence.’

He should do as the Canaanite woman did — to convert even the greatest discouragements into so many encouragements, trust and plead the promises. He must not conclude that his prayers are lost, or hypocritical, merely because he doesn't experience comfort in them, and doesn't receive the very thing which he asks for. Mercies seldom do good to the man who is over-peremptory in asking for them. It is only the prayer of faith, founded on the promises and regulated by them, that provides the *outlet* from trouble, and the *inlet* of consolation. Even the *desire* to thus pray, is a forerunner of success and an earnest of the blessing implored. "You drew near," says Jeremiah, "in the day that I called upon You. You said, Fear not." ^{Lam 3.57} The more speedily God seems to be departing from the disconsolate believer, he ought to pursue after Him with firmer trust, and greater importunity. And in praying for spiritual consolation, he should ask only that measure of it which the Lord may see proper to give him. And he should ask it, not so much for his own relief, as for the glory of redeeming grace. In continuing to do so, he will in the fittest season experience a heavenly sweetness diffusing itself over his troubled soul. And he will know from his experience, that it is better to "*seek* the Lord," than to *find* all other things.

When the afflicted believer is praying, he must endeavour to *praise and thank* the Lord. This too is a special means of recovering holy consolation. We read in a passage of scripture cited above, the Psalmist saying to his dejected soul, "Hope in God, for I will yet praise him." ^{Psa 42.5} — as if he had said, 'I hope yet to praise him. I *long* to praise him.' This grateful and adoring frame was not only an *evidence* of David's beginning to emerge out of the depth of his trouble, but was likewise a *means* of his emerging. The depressed Christian, then, if he would attain spiritual comfort, should study in his prayers to occupy at least as much time in thanking the Lord for the mercies granted to him, as in confessing the sins committed by him. This would tend greatly to remove his bitterness of spirit, and to bring refreshing consolation to his weary soul. Frequently mentioning things that are sweet and cheering, is a means of sweetening the temper of the mind, and promoting cheerfulness of spirit. If the disquieted believer were to take special notice of the manifold blessings which are still granted to him, and to frequently bless the Lord for them, he would not remain long after in an uncomfortable frame. ^{Lam 3.22-24} He should therefore esteem it his privilege as well as his duty, to give thanks to God in every condition. ^{1The 5.18} He should be thankful that his heavenly Father condescends to be angry with him, and to reprove him for sin; that He has not given him over to a reprobate mind; ¹ — and that the sin which dwells in him is in any measure a burden to him. If he is *unworthy* even of the least of all the mercies bestowed upon him, then surely he ought to be *thankful* for the least of them. ^{Gen 32.10}

12. He should, moreover, *wait patiently* for the Lord. If the disquieted believer would regain holy tranquility of mind, then he must "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." ^{Lam 3.26} He must say, as Messiah himself did, "I will wait upon the Lord, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, and I will *look* for him." ^{Isa 8.17} The way to recover his comfort is to say to his soul, "My soul, wait *only* upon God; for my expectation is from Him." His duty at all times, especially when his soul is disquieted, is to "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; to wait on the Lord and keep His way." ^{Psa 37.7,34} "Though the vision tarry," he should "wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry" a moment longer than the appointed

¹ Job 5.17; Psa 94.12.

time. ^{Hab 2.3} He should consider that the Lord, who has appointed that great affliction for him, is infinitely wise, righteous, and good; that He is his own God, the God of his salvation; ^{Psa 88.1} and that by those methods which please him least, God often does him the most good. Moreover, the time that he has to wait is but short. Yet a little while, and the compassionate Saviour will come and save him. The Lord Jesus waited long for *him*. And He still waits for a fit opportunity to comfort him, more than he himself can wait for the enjoyment of comfort. “Therefore the Lord will wait,” says Isaiah, “that He may be gracious to you. And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment.” ^{Isa 30.18} Although he has no prospect of deliverance soon, let him still wait until the time, even the *set* time, has come to favour him. And wait with a patient and silent resignation to the Divine will. ^{Isa 28.16} The Lord is waiting for the very same day of comfort for which the disconsolate saint is to wait. And if the Lord cannot be disappointed, so neither can he.

In the love of Christ to him, there is an earnest longing, as it were, that the day might come. And therefore, in submission to the will of his gracious God, he may lawfully pray as the holy Psalmist did, for a *speedy* deliverance. ^{Psa 31.2; 102.2} But if his mental trouble continues, he must resolve to wait patiently, and to justify the infinitely wise God in His delaying to return to him with comfort. Let him still “hope and wait quietly;” ^{Lam 3.26} for it is the time of his extremity that is commonly the Lord’s opportunity to appear for his relief. Holy consolation is worth his waiting for it. It is, as it were, the opening of heaven upon the soul. Let him therefore wait, and the Lord will so console his troubled spirit at the appointed time, as to cause him to say from experience, “Look, this is my God; I have waited for Him, and He will save me. This is the Lord; I have waited for Him; I will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” ^{Isa 25.9} The longer he stays in expectation of spiritual consolation, the sweeter and purer the enjoyment of it will prove at length. Let his patience then be the “patience of hope.” ^{1The 1.3} It is hope that gives life and vigour to patience. He must not allow his exercise of patience to be interrupted, either by fretting, or by resorting to any creature for comfort. He should not fret in any way; but should wait upon the Lord with humbleness and calmness of spirit. Let him firmly resolve to await God’s time, and bear His frown, ^{Mic 7.9} in humble expectation that He will at length return and visit him with the light of His countenance, and with the joy of His salvation.

13. It is also requisite, in order to recover true comfort, that a holy man be constantly on his guard *against yielding to any motion of sin* in his heart; and that he press on toward more holiness of heart and of life. In dependence on the promise of sanctification, he must always take heed that he does not yield to any secret motion of sin in his heart. If he would have his conscience pacified and peaceful, then he must strive to keep it pure. Sin, like Achan in the camp, or Jonah in the ship, is what causes trouble. If the disconsolate believer allows himself for a season, to yield to any motion of sin, or temptation of Satan, or of the world, he cannot be easy or comfortable in his mind. Although a traveller might be sure that he will safely reach the place to which he was going, if he travelled with a thorn in his foot, he could not help but be sensible of pain at every step. If the Christian allows himself to connive, especially at what he knows to be wrong, he cannot help but be disquieted. Uprightness and singleness of heart are necessary to recovering his lost comfort. God has made an eternal separation between continuance in the love and practice of any sin, and holy tranquility of mind. Therefore, in the faith that Christ will strengthen him, let the afflicted believer maintain a resolute and continual struggle against the first risings, the secret motions of depravity in his heart. It is as

natural for indulged sin to raise and increase doubts and fears in his mind, as it is for rotten wood to breed worms.

Every instance of his yielding to a motion of sin will be like a blot upon his evidences for heaven. Let him, then, in all his conflicts with the risings of sin, diligently study both to discover, and to mortify the corruption of his-nature; both to sigh under the burden, and to act against the power of the sin that dwells in him. It should always be his manner to attack and mortify sin in its *first* risings. For, what usually destroys his peace of conscience, is his indulging of corrupt desires. So his constant endeavors, through grace, must be to resist and quell them before they have time to acquire strength. This is a sure means of recovering spiritual comfort.

He should also endeavour daily, to attain *more and more holiness* of heart and life. True holiness consists of loving the Lord our God supremely, of delighting in Him as manifested in Jesus Christ, and of habitually studying to serve Him with gladness, ^{Psa 100.2} as well as with abhorrence of all iniquity. Accordingly, spiritual comfort is a part of holiness. The more a believer advances in universal holiness, the more he possesses of the *principle and habit* of pure consolation. And the more he attains of the principle and habit of this holy comfort, the more enjoyment he will have of it in every time of need. To recover sensible comfort, then, the disconsolate Christian should receive by faith, out of the fulness of Christ, greater measures of sanctifying grace, that he may not only die daily to sin, but live to righteousness. From principles of faith and love, and for the glory of his redeeming God, he should become more and more diligent in all the duties of holiness. Though this will not merit consolation for him, it will be *connected* with consolation in his experience; indeed, it will itself be a comfort to him. “Our rejoicing is this,” says an Apostle, “the testimony of our conscience, that we have conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity — not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God.” ^{2Cor 1.12} To be advancing tangibly in conformity to the Lord Jesus, and in holy activity for His glory, cannot fail to be very pleasing and encouraging to a holy man. Although the beginning of comfort in the soul is necessary to the practice of true holiness, the practice of holiness is requisite to the increase of comfort, and to recovering it after it has been lost in any measure. ¹ Let it, then, be the ardent desire of the believer’s soul, and the settled purpose of his heart, to advance daily in the love and practice of universal holiness. Let perfection of holiness be the ruling wish of his heart, and the great purpose of his life, to which he uniformly directs all his efforts. Let his will always be in union with the will of Christ, and with the glory of God; and then Christ “will give him the desires of his heart.” ^{Psa 37.4} Then he will know by experience, that a supreme regard to the will and to the glory of God, is the health and happiness of the soul.

14. As a means of attaining the spiritual comfort which he desires, if the Christian is capable, he must *diligently perform the duties of his lawful calling*. Though this forms a part of the holiness mentioned in the particular immediately preceding, the special importance of it as a means of comfort requires that it be considered by itself. Let the disconsolate believer take care that he regards idleness as a continued omission of the duty required in the eighth commandment of the moral law, which is not to steal; and that he abhor it as a continued

¹ Isa 32.17; Joh 14.21; Gal 6.16.

crime, and as a reproach to his holy profession. ^{1Tim 5.8} To be idle without real and evident necessity, even for a single day, is dangerous to any Christian, but especially to a Christian in trouble of conscience. It tempts Satan to come and find employment for him; and it leaves him at leisure to weigh, one after another, the temptations of that subtle and malicious enemy. A Heathen philosopher terms idleness, ‘The grave of a living man.’ And a holy minister of the gospel styles it, ‘The hell of a living Christian.’ Let the disquieted Christian, then, be constantly on his guard against idleness, and especially against a *disposition* to be idle. Let his heart, as well as his hands, be exercised in a voluntary and diligent performance of the various duties of some honest and useful vocation. Otherwise, his heart will work out of itself a still greater degree of trouble for him. Idleness feeds and increases the distemper of a troubled soul. Whereas, lawful employment occupies the mind, and takes it away from poring incessantly over the causes and aggravations of the trouble.

When Elijah the prophet was in depression of mind, the Lord would not allow him to sit still in any place. When he sat down under a Juniper tree “an angel touched him, and commanded him to arise and eat.” When he again lay down, the Angel of the Lord, a second time, roused him to action. When he went to a cave at Horeb in order to lodge there, “the word of the Lord came to him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah? Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” Soon afterwards, when he was standing in the entrance to the cave, the Lord again disturbed his repose and said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.” ^{1Kng 19.4-16} If it is a Christian’s duty to be diligent in business, even under the disease of melancholy, then it is no less his duty when he is troubled in soul, merely on a spiritual account. He must not therefore say either that he is disinclined to work, or that his trouble is so great that he is unable to work — not until he is first well-satisfied from the Oracles of truth, that such excuses will be sustained at the tribunal of Christ, the omniscient and righteous Judge of the world. The Holy Comforter, in wonderful condescension, has visited many thousands of His saints with the joy of His salvation, at the very times in which, from their regard for His authority, they have been employed in the business of their several callings.

15. If he has reason to apprehend that he is in any degree under melancholy — which, as observed above, is a *bodily* disease — then he should *frequently entrust his imagination* to the blessed Redeemer, that sovereign Physician of soul and body, in the hope that He will cure its distemper. So long as the imagination continues to be weak and disordered, it will present to the understanding, a distorted, discouraging, and unamiable form of even the most encouraging and amiable objects. And so long as that is the case, trouble of mind, or sadness of spirit, must continue in a greater or lesser degree. The melancholy Christian should therefore not only trust the compassionate Saviour to console his troubled soul, but in the use of other appointed means, he should trust Jesus to deliver him from the distemper of his natural spirits, so far as it can subserve the glory of God in his salvation. He should trust in the great Redeemer for the health of his *body*, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, ^{1Cor 6.19} as well as for the happiness of his *soul* — in order that both body and soul may be prepared to “serve the Lord with gladness.” He is fully warranted to rely on the Lord Jesus with firm confidence, for all that is necessary to enable him to glorify God in his body, and in his spirit, which are God’s. ^{1Cor 6.20}

16. *To disclose the condition of his soul* to some experienced and judicious Minister, or private Christian, is also a means of recovering tranquility of mind, which the disconsolate believer should not fail to employ. He should, if possible, select for this purpose some holy and humble Minister, or private Christian, who had himself been in trouble of mind, but has mercifully been delivered from it — and he now appears to be confirmed in faith, and to be filled with joy and peace in believing. He should, without delay, reveal the condition of his soul to such a person. He should reveal to him as fully and distinctly as he can, what it is that more immediately troubles and depresses his mind; what makes him conclude that he is still unregenerate, and that his former experience was only counterfeit; what the grounds of his present doubts and fears are; and especially, why he cannot trust in the infinitely compassionate Saviour for salvation for himself in particular. He should, if he can do so with prudence, hint to such a person the sin or sins which he apprehends have provoked the Lord to plead this controversy with him, in order that he may afford the person an opportunity to speak pertinently to his condition. ^{Jas 5.16} “When I kept silence,” says David, “my bones grew old, through my roaring all day long;” ^{Psa 32.3} — as if he had said, ‘The sin which I did not freely and ingenuously confess to the Lord, and also to persons who are skilful in assuaging trouble of mind, rankled inwardly, and occasioned unspeakable anguish in my soul.’ The affliction of the soul, as well as that of the body, should be made known to a fellow-Christian who appears qualified to suggest suitable advice and encouragement, to the end that these may be seasonably afforded as a means of relief. When the Holy Spirit comforts a dejected saint, He usually does it by the instrumentality of some other saint.

If the disconsolate believer is providentially favoured with an opportunity to open the case of his soul to another believer, the Holy Comforter will very seldom create peace in him directly. He usually “*creates peace by the fruit of the lips.*” ^{Isa 57.19} He will comfort him by means of the presence and speech of those whom He has previously comforted, and so qualified them to be instruments of consolation to him. ^{2Cor 1.6} Faithful Ministers of the gospel, especially, are helpers of the Christian’s joy. But how can they be helpful to it in the case of a disquieted Christian who stands most in need of their help, if he does not afford them an *opportunity*? How can they answer objections, resolve doubts, or loose (as one expresses it) the knots of conscience, if these are not proposed to them?

Moreover, the disconsolate believer should not forget to request the fervent prayers, not only of the one to whom he disclosed the condition of his soul, but of other Christians with whom he is acquainted. Some have observed that those believers in former times, who were the most accustomed to request the aid of each other’s prayers, were commonly the most flourishing Christians; and that those who neglected this part of their duty, were usually the most languishing and hesitating. If “the effectual fervent prayer,” even of one “righteous man, avails much;” ^{Jas 5.16} then how much more will the prayers of many such, avail! ^{Act 12.12}

17. Finally, if he would attain pure consolation, he must not expect it from the means which it is his duty to employ. Let him diligently use all the means of Divine appointment, and especially those explained above. But let him take heed that he does not trust *in them*, nor in his *use* of them, for the smallest degree of comfort. He should use them as diligently as if he were to merit, not merely spiritual consolation, but even eternal life by them — and at the same time, to trust as little in them and in his use of them, as if he had never known or used

even one of them. Employing them is a duty he is bound to regard in point of *performance*, and to renounce in point of *dependence*. In his constant use of them, he is to rely for consolation *only* on the Lord Jesus, and on God in Him, as the God of all comfort. ^{Psa 62.5}

If he would recover a peaceful serenity of mind, he must renounce all confidence in his use of means, and expect consolation only from his God and Saviour, saying, “Ashur shall not save me; neither will I say any more to the work of my hands, *you are my gods*.” “What have I to do anymore with idols?” ^{Hos 14.3,8} He may expect all necessary comfort *in* his diligent use of the means; but no comfort *from* it. He must not presume to think that his utmost diligence in employing them, will give him either a meritorious or a pactional title ¹ to holy consolation. Spiritual comfort is a free gift, a gift of grace; and all the appointed means of attaining it are means of grace. There is, indeed, a tendency in those means, to comfort the disquieted believer who diligently uses them. However, it is not any virtue in them, nor in his use of them; rather, it is the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying them, that imparts all the comfort. He should not, therefore, as Christians in spiritual trouble too often do, promise himself relief by such and such a duty, at this or that time or place. For if his expectation is not answered (and it would indeed be a wonder if it were), he will be ready to conclude that the promise of God fails, and that the disappointment (especially if repeated) is a sure indication that the Lord has cast him off forever. Instead of bringing peace or comfort to his troubled soul, this will contribute greatly to plunge it into still deeper perplexity, and to enchain it faster under perturbation and terror.

Thus, I have endeavoured to point out the means which the disconsolate believer should chiefly employ in order to regain his spiritual comfort. If he perseveres in their diligent use, and in complying with the advice given in this Chapter concerning them, he will soon recover holy consolation, through grace — as it will subserve the glory of his God and Saviour, and the sanctification of his own soul. He perhaps may never experience *rapturous* joy while he remains in this valley of tears. But by the grace of the Lord Jesus, he will recover solid tranquility, and sweet satisfaction of mind. “In hope of eternal life, which God who cannot lie, promised before the world began,” ^{Tit 1.2} his soul will enjoy a calm and pleasing resignation in all things, to the holy will of his redeeming God, by the consoling influences of the Holy Comforter.

Reflections

FROM the foregoing particulars, it clearly appears that disconsolate saints have *no permission* from the Lord Jesus to *refuse* to be comforted, nor to harden themselves in sorrow. The holier any of the saints are, when they are under desertion, they are usually more troubled. The more they love their God and Saviour, the more it troubles them to lack the light of His gracious countenance; the more they are afraid *lest* they sin, the more they are troubled because they *have* sinned; the more they are disquieted by a sense of His paternal displeasure, the more they are overwhelmed by the dread of His avenging wrath. Still, however, they must not yield

¹ *Pactional*: agreed upon by making a pact or agreement; *i.e.*, negotiated. – WHG

to despondency, nor harden themselves in sorrow. ¹ But on the contrary, they should exert themselves in using the means of attaining holy tranquility of mind. To obstinately persist in refusing to be comforted, will provoke the Lord to proceed in the controversy, and to sink their souls still deeper in the waters of trouble.

Should the believer, when he is troubled in mind, diligently search out the particular sin or sins which have provoked his heavenly Father to hide His face from him? Let him not conclude that *in such a condition*, he will succeed in searching for his *graces*, or evidences of his personal interest in Christ. While he is walking in the darkness of spiritual trouble, it is to little purpose to spend his time searching for evidences of his being in a state of grace. For during that time, they are wrapped up in darkness and cannot be discerned. He may sooner expect to see his face in troubled waters, than to see his evidences for heaven when his soul is troubled and covered with darkness. The only thing he can do to good purpose at that time, is to entrust the salvation of his soul to Jesus Christ, and to trust and plead His *absolute* promises. Times of desertion and of temptation are seasons for mourning, and trusting, and seeking the Lord, rather than for judging the state of the soul. To search at such times for remaining corruptions in the heart, is one of the means of recovering spiritual comfort. But to try to find evidences of *grace* in it, when they are veiled with *darkness*, is the way to sink deeper in the waters of trouble.

Is trusting in Christ the *principal* means of recovering spiritual consolation? [Yes!] Then let the disconsolate Christian be exhorted and entreated *to trust in Him*. O let him endeavour to come anew, to come without delay, to come as a sinner, to come with all his burdens, all his griefs, all his fears, and to cordially trust that the infinitely compassionate Saviour will save and comfort him. Resisting every unbelieving thought, and every suggestion that would disquiet his soul, let him trust in the mercy of the Lord Jesus, and not be afraid, Let him come as he is, and place the confidence of his heart in the dear Redeemer, for all the salvation and all the consolation which are presented to him in the offers and promises of the gospel. Let him trust with firm confidence in the Saviour, for salvation for himself in particular. Do this not only because it is necessary for his comfort, but because it is his *duty*, his first, his main duty. If he could but be persuaded to rely with assured confidence on the Lord Jesus, peace and joy would soon be restored to his troubled soul! He would find the exercise of trusting in Christ to be most profitable to himself, and most pleasing to God. O Christian, trust resolutely in the blessed Redeemer, and *persist* in trusting, till comfort comes. Apply the promises, and take comfort from them. Suckle, and be satisfied with those breasts of consolation. ^{Isa 66.11}

But some dejected Christian will say, 'I see *no right that I have* to trust in Christ for salvation for myself; and therefore it would be presumption in me to so much as attempt it.' To this I would answer: You conclude, it would appear, that you have no right to trust in Him, because you can at present see no good qualifications in yourself to give you a right. But you were informed above that your right to trust in Christ for salvation is *not* founded upon any good quality *in yourself*, but upon the offer, the call, the commandment to believe on His name, and the promise — all directed in the gospel *to you*, as a sinner of mankind. These afford you

¹ **Job 6:8-10** "Oh, that I might have my request, That God would grant *me* the thing that I long for! ⁹ That it would please God to crush me, That He would loose His hand and cut me off! ¹⁰ **Then** I would still have comfort; Though in anguish, I would exult, He will not spare; *For I have not concealed the words of the Holy One.*

an ample, perfect, and sufficient warrant to believe in Him. And nothing in yourself can render that warrant more complete than it already is. It is nothing within you, but it is those things in the gospel without you, that give you all the right that you need to trust anew in Jesus. To say, then, that you have no right to entrust your salvation to Him, or that it would be presumption in you to trust Him, is direct *unbelief*. Whether you believe it or not, you have in the gospel a full, unchangeable right to trust as a lost sinner, in the almighty Saviour for all your salvation. And nothing which is good in yourself can afford you the smallest right. For all that is good in you is either in faith, or consequent on faith; but nothing of it can be *previous* to faith.

Another, perhaps, is ready to say, “I cannot trust in Christ, for I don’t know if I am elected to salvation.’ You *cannot* know that you have been elected, till *after* you have trusted in Him. Your election to salvation forms no part of your revealed warrant to trust in Jesus for salvation. Your warrant is that which was mentioned above. Your ignorance of your election, then, cannot lessen that warrant; and your knowledge of your election cannot add to it. The offers and invitations of the gospel are not directed to men as *elect* sinners — but as sinners of mankind. Although you don’t know if you are an elected sinner, you do know that you are a sinner of Adam’s race. Therefore the offers and calls are addressed *to you*; and they afford you an authentic right to place the confidence of your heart in Christ, for all the blessings of salvation. Just as you cannot know that you are elected before you venture to trust in Christ, so neither can you know that you are *not* elected. Your present duty, therefore, is to approach the Lord Jesus, and upon the ample warrant afforded you in the gospel, to trust firmly in Him for all salvation for yourself in particular. So you will know your election by God, by believing and walking in Him. You can never know that God has ordained you to eternal life, other than by knowing experientially that He has ordained you to *believe*. ^{Joh 6.37} You are bound to believe *before* you know your particular election, and *in order* to know it — and also because it is the *will* of God, that you should believe.

A third is ready to object thus: ‘I am afraid that I have no personal interest in Christ and His salvation.’ If you cannot perceive that the Lord Jesus has already given you a saving interest in Himself, then as you were directed above, trust that He *now* saves you — or, in other words, that He *now gives you* a personal interest in His salvation. *Trust* that He gives you an interest, in order to *see and feel* that He *has* given it. The more ignorant you are of your interest in the Saviour, the more you need to trust that He grants you a saving interest in Himself. You must not excuse yourself from trusting in Him for it, just because you don’t see and feel that you have it. But you ought to trust for it, in order to see and feel that you do possess it. Instead of saying, then, ‘I dare not confide in Jesus for salvation because I fear that I have no interest in salvation,’ you should say, on the contrary, ‘Because I have a revealed warrant to do it, I will cordially trust that He gives me salvation, and that in due time He will favour me with a *sense* of my personal interest in it. You must not seek to feel, in order to believe; but you are to believe, in order to feel. ¹

Another, perhaps, will reason thus:

¹ **Eph 1:13** In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...

‘All who believe in Christ rely upon the promises. But no promise so comes to me, as to be *impressed with power* upon my mind. The promises are not given to *me*, and therefore it would be presumption in me, to apply them and rest upon them.’

You seem to think that a powerful impression of some promise, made on a man’s mind, is the *ground* of his right to take and to trust that promise; and that because you experience no such impression of any promise, you have no right to apply any promise. But this would be to build your faith on your *feeling* of the promises; or to make the sensible impression of them upon your mind, your ground of a right to apply and trust them. A powerful impression of a promise, made upon your mind and memory by the Holy Spirit in a time of need, is indeed an *encouragement* to you, to apply and trust that promise. But it forms no part of your *warrant* to do so. It is the *offer to you of all* the promises, in and with Christ, and the *call and command* to accept that offer, that afford you a right to trust in Him, and to apply and trust all the promises in Him. The inward impression cannot add to your warrant, and the lack of it cannot lessen it. Your duty, then, is to apply and trust the promises — not as powerfully suggested to, or impressed upon your mind, but as offered or directed to you in the gospel. One reason, perhaps, of your not being favoured with comfortable impressions of the promises, is your not having trusted in the Holy Comforter for such impressions; and your not having honoured the promises themselves, by trusting them upon the Divine warrant which lies in the Word, *outside* of you. Know then, that in order for holy consolation, you must study to *trust Divine promises* — not on the ground of being impressed with them, but upon their being *offered* to you.

Some other disconsolate soul may be saying,

‘Alas, I have a dead, hard, and deceitful heart which greatly discourages me from trusting that the holy One of God will ever visit me with His salvation. How can I hope that He will save and comfort such an uncommon sinner as I am?’

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom,” says our Apostle, “I am chief.” ^{1Tim 1.15} Now you should accept, or *believe* that faithful saying, as applied to yourself, and say,

‘It is indeed true that I am an uncommon sinner, yes, the very chief of sinners. But it is equally true that Christ Jesus came into the world to save such sinners, and why *not* to save *me*? My heart, alas, is very dead, hard, and deceitful. But the deeper its depravity, the more the power and grace of Christ will be glorified in saving me from that depravity. I will therefore venture to trust that He will glorify the exceeding riches of His grace, in saving me from all the sin that dwells in me, and from all the iniquity that has been committed by me.’

It is your duty to greatly humble and loathe yourself for the evils of your heart and of your life. But it is your *sin* to let them discourage you in the least from attempting any one of your duties. You should, indeed, be humbled for them in the greatest degree. But you must not be deterred by them from your duty, even in the smallest degree — especially from the first and great duty of *believing in Jesus Christ*. If you are in your own sight, the chief of sinners, even *this* must not discourage you from the chief, the first of all duties. The deeper your sense is of the plague of your heart, instead of discouraging you, this should excite you all the more to diligently perform the duty of trusting in Christ, especially for *sanctification*.

Maybe someone will say,

‘Why should I be exhorted to trust in Christ? I have times without number been guilty of backsliding, both in my heart and in my life. I have frequently resolved to be more circumspect, and more diligent in the spiritual performance of every duty. But upon the very slightest temptation, I have acted contrary to my resolutions by *relapsing once and again into the same sin.*’

You have, indeed, *much* reason to exercise godly sorrow and self-abhorrence. But you have *no* reason to be so dismayed as to cease trusting in the Saviour, or to be so dejected as to refuse to be comforted. You have much need to exercise repentance. But you have as much need to exercise that reliance on Christ, from which true repentance flows. And it is as great a sin to allow your backsliding to deter you from reliance, as from repentance. No past sin, however aggravated, must be pled as an excuse for omitting a present duty. The Lord has graciously promised to keep you from *total and final* backsliding. But nowhere, as far as I know, has He promised to secure you against *partial* backsliding, or against *relapsing* in the hour of temptation, into the same sins of infirmity of which you formerly repented. Abraham was suffered again and again to dissemble; Lot to be twice overcome with wine; John to be twice guilty of worshipping the angel; and Jehoshaphat to ally with Ahab, and afterwards with “Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly.”¹ Indeed, it is not usual for God to let His dear children often relapse into enormous transgressions — but He lets them relapse into sins of infirmity for their *humiliation*. Though your backsliding, then, should humble you to the dust, it should not for a moment discourage you from the great duty of trusting in Jesus Christ.

Hearken to these gracious, these cheering invitations: “Return, you backsliding Israel, says the Lord, and I will not cause My anger to fall upon you:” “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.” Jer 3.12,22 Apply, trust, and plead these consoling promises: — “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.” Hos 14.4 “I will seek that which was lost, and bring back that which was driven away, and bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick.” Eze 34.16

Another may be ready to say,

‘How can my heart, which frequently revolts from God, be *upright* before Him? How can that heart be sound, which is often sore? I have bewailed my sin, and resolved against it. But no sooner am I tempted to it, than, alas, I often *fall* before the temptation. Indeed, I have much reason to dread that I will one day *perish* by the hands of sin and Satan.’

Your bewailing and striving against your sin are good evidences that, though sin sometimes prevails against you, it does not *reign* in you; that although it rebels, it does not *rule*. It is a *willing* obedience to the commands of the body of sin, which evidences the soul to be under the dominion of sin. You will never perish by the hands of sin and Satan, until God first forsakes you, totally and finally. But He has graciously promised that He “will never leave you, nor forsake you.” Heb 13.5 The sheep of Christ hear His voice and follow him, just as *you* desire and endeavour to do. Now hear what He promises concerning them:

¹ 2Chr 20.35.

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” *Joh 10.27-29* “The God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” *Rom 16.20* “Surely he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler.” *Psa 91.3* The more, your spiritual enemies threaten to destroy you, the more you should apply and trust those promises of salvation, The more frequently it is suggested to you that iniquity will be your ruin, the more frequently and resolutely you should take occasion to trust that your almighty Redeemer will come and save you — that “He will deliver you from every evil work, and will preserve you for His heavenly kingdom.” *2Tim 4.18*

Some discouraged soul will say, ‘How: can I venture to trust that the holy Jesus will perform the part of a Saviour to me, when I know my iniquities against Him *are innumerable and aggravated in an uncommon degree?*’ For that very reason, you should be more disposed and determined to trust in Him for salvation from them. You must permit me to inform you that, so far as your desire for salvation from the love and practice of iniquity is sincere, you should resolve to rely upon Him for that salvation. Without this resolution, it will be impossible for you to evidence to your conscience, the sincerity either of your complaints about sin, or your desires for salvation from it. In proportion to your *not* fully resolving and endeavouring to trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation from your sins, you *love* them; and so your complaining about the number and greatness of them is hypocritical. Besides, taking occasion from your innumerable and great transgressions to say, ‘I dare not trust in the holy Jesus for salvation,’ shows that you wish for some good thing, either in your heart or your life, to *entitle* you to trust in Him. This evidences the dreadful prevalence of a self-righteous spirit, as well as unbelief in you. You should consider that the salvation of Jesus Christ is infinitely free; and that the more numerous and heinous your sins are, the more you need Him and His salvation — and therefore the greater your need to believe in Him.

If you could suppose that the omnipotent Saviour never performed such a great work as saving a sinner from sins so innumerable and great as yours — even *this* could be no *just* obstacle to your trusting in Him. This is because the depth of His immense love has never yet been sounded,¹ and the greatness of His ability to save has never been searched out. He has never yet done the utmost that He can do. Suppose the mountain of your innumerable sins were so high as to reach not only the clouds, but the throne of the Eternal himself; suppose that mountain, and another ten thousand of them, were piled up, and the whole cast into the abyss of redeeming love, and redeeming blood — the waters of that bottomless, that *boundless* ocean, would still be as high above them, as the heavens are high above the earth. *Psa 103.11*

Another perhaps is saying, ‘I don’t doubt the ability, but the *willingness* of Christ to save me from my great transgressions.’ If you believe His ability, then in the same degree, you believe His willingness. For what is His willingness to save sinners, if not His *moral* ability? To doubt His willingness, then, is to question His ability. Why does He offer himself to you? Why does He invite, beseech, and even command you to accept and trust in Him for your salvation? And why does He say in his promises to you, “I *will*,” if not because He is *willing* to save you.

¹ *Sounded*: to measure the depth of a body of water with a sounding line. **Eph 3.18-19** that you may be able ... to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Would he ever have made it your duty to believe in Him for salvation; or would He ever have said to you, “Whoever does not believe will be damned,” ^{Mar 16.16} if He had not been *willing* to give you salvation? Would He ever have said, “Whoever comes to me, I will in no way cast out;” ^{Joh 6.37} or would He have complained that sinners “would not come to Him, that they might have life,” ^{Joh 5.40} if He had been unwilling to receive and save them? Indeed, to disbelieve His willingness, is to make Him a liar. To say that He is not willing to save you, is to blaspheme the kindness of His redeeming love and the riches of His glorious grace. If you think that He is willing to save *other* sinners, but not save *you*, know that this is one of Satan’s whispers, entertained by your evil heart of unbelief. It is not more injurious to the infinitely gracious Redeemer, to doubt His existence, than it is to doubt His willingness to save a lost sinner who desires to trust in Him. O believe, with application to yourself, His infinite willingness. Trust not only that He is *willing* to save you, but that he *will* save you. And say with the holy Psalmist, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You *will* revive me; ... and Your right hand *will* save me.” ^{Psa 138.7}

The Unforgivable Sin – Some other desponding Christian may say, ‘Alas! it is in vain to urge me to believe in Jesus, for I dread that I have committed *the sin against the Holy Spirit*, which will never be forgiven.’ From comparing various passages of Scripture, that horrible sin appears to include,

- *first*, a willful, malicious, and avowed rejecting of the Saviour and of salvation by Him;
- *second*, after a manifest conviction of the truth of the gospel text, an avowed and obstinate opposing of the doctrines of the gospel; and
- *lastly*, an obstinate and spiteful scoffing at the religion of Jesus Christ and those who profess it — sometimes attended with a rancorous persecution of those believers.

All of these are consequences of a total and final apostacy from the profession of Christianity. The man who is guilty of that dreadful sin, is not merely an apostate, but a *blaspheming* apostate. And so horrible is his enmity against Christ and the way of salvation by Him, that the person chooses to risk eternal damnation, rather than be indebted to Him for mercy.

Now, you may be assured that you have *not* been guilty of this most atrocious sin,

- if no one but *yourself* complains of it;
- if you desire complete salvation by Jesus Christ;
- if you are content to be an eternal debtor to His redeeming grace;
- if you are afraid that you have been guilty of this sin;
- if you are in the smallest degree grieved and troubled for the *unbelief* of your heart;
- if you are grieved and ashamed that *so much sin* is in your heart and in your life; and
- if you wish that the glory of sovereign and redeeming grace may be illustriously displayed in your salvation.

Someone perhaps is disposed to say, ‘I am *not humbled*, or at least *not humbled enough* for my sins; and therefore, I dare not place my confidence in Christ for his salvation.’ You ought to know that true humiliation is either a concomitant, or a consequent of saving faith, but it is not a *ground* of it. It gives a man no right to trust in Christ; no title to the Divine acceptance either of His person or His performances. It is, indeed, in the hand of the Spirit, a means of rendering a man willing to trust in the Lord Jesus. And the more of it he attains, the more

willing he is. But it affords him no degree of warrant to trust in Him, nor is it requisite that it should. For by the offers and calls of the gospel, he is already fully warranted — so well warranted, that nothing in himself can either diminish or increase his warrant. When you then say that you dare not trust in the Redeemer because you are not sufficiently humbled, you thereby show that you are under the prevalence both of *unbelief*, and a *legal spirit*:

- of *unbelief*, for you don't seem to believe that you are sufficiently warranted to rely on Christ by the offers, calls, and commands of God, but that something *more* is requisite to afford you a sufficient warrant;
- of a *legal spirit*, for you regard humiliation as that which must confer on you a *right* to trust in Him, since lacking a sufficient degree of it, you dare not entrust your salvation to Him.

But be assured that you cannot recover holy consolation till you come as you are, and place direct confidence in Jesus Christ for all your salvation; and that you cannot have more evangelical humiliation till you first trust in Christ for it, and so receive it by faith, out of His fulness. The more of this humiliation you attain, the more willing you will be to come as a sinner to the Saviour. But you cannot attain an increase of it before you trust in Him for it, as part of your salvation.

Another may reason thus: 'I am not *sufficiently troubled* for the heinous transgressions of which I have been guilty; and therefore I dare not trust in the Holy One of God for salvation from them,' But are you not already so troubled in mind, as to long for comfort? Are you not disquieted because you apprehend that you are not troubled enough for your sins? Are your transgressions not a real source of trouble to you? But what do you think of that trouble for sin, which keeps you from trusting in the only Saviour; which weakens your heart and injures your health; which renders all your outward comforts unsavoury to you; and disqualifies you for the acceptable performance of your religious and moral duties? Is trouble such as *that*, desirable to you? Isn't it sinful? And by wishing for more of it, don't you increase the number of your sins, and provoke the Lord to proceed in His controversy with you? Indeed, that distress of mind — even for sin itself — which keeps you from coming to Christ, is more sinful than it is possible for you to conceive. And it must be repented of, before you can experience pure consolation. That uneasiness of soul for sin, which indisposes a man to place his confidence in Christ for salvation *from* sin, is undoubtedly hypocritical and sinful. When a man is troubled for his other offences, but not for his *greatest* sin — the sin of refusing to trust in the blessed Saviour for salvation — he may assure himself that such trouble is not of the right kind. Genuine trouble of mind for sin presses a man forward to Jesus Christ, and it is accompanied with frequent attempts to trust in Him for pardon and sanctification.¹

Someone will say, 'But I am so very unworthy of Christ and His great salvation, that I fear He will not receive me, nor admit me to share in that salvation.' Indeed, you are very unworthy, *infinitely* more unworthy than any man or angel will ever be able to conceive. You are not only far, but *infinitely* far from being able to deserve Christ and His great salvation. But it seems you wish that you *could* deserve salvation, or at least that you could merit the Saviour

¹ Hos 6.1-3; 14.1-3; Jer 31.18-20; Psa 65.3.

himself; or if not salvation, nor the Saviour, that you could merit the good will of the Saviour, and could recommend yourself to His favour, so as to freely claim and trust in Him.

But hereby, don't you in effect declare that you are under the prevalence of strong *unbelief* — that you don't believe salvation is altogether *free*; nor that "eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord"? ^{Rom 6.23} You seem at present not to believe that salvation is an infinitely free gift; nor so free as not to admit the sinner's offer of the smallest price for it; and that it is so great as to be infinitely above the highest price he can ever afford to offer.

And don't you likewise show that you are under the prevalence of a *legal spirit* — when you are averse to trusting in Christ because you are not worthy of Him, or because you cannot recommend yourself to His favour? Aren't you thereby leaning toward the covenant of works? Do you think it possible that Christ, the inestimable gift of God, can be purchased with the money of your merits? Or that you can procure a title to that salvation which is wholly of sovereign grace? Suppose you offered but a single good thought for it; would not even *that* mar the freeness of it, and obscure the glory of immensely rich grace in the gift of it? Ah! Why do you try to find a cause *in yourself*, why the Lord Jesus should save you? Why do you seek to make *merit* the object of redeeming grace and mercy? You are invited to "take the water of life *freely*." ^{Rev 22.17} Why then are you discouraged, because you have nothing to pay for it? Why do you think it is hard, that you are not allowed to put something of your own into the scale, beside the consummate righteousness of Jesus Christ, in order to make it full weight?

Another disconsolate soul is saying, 'I cannot trust in Jesus for my salvation. I have no ability to believe in him.' That is a common objection. But it amounts to a complaint that however much Christ has done for you, He has not yet advanced you to a state of independence from Himself, nor set you free from your incapacity to do anything without Him. But why should this be a ground of complaint? He knows that you *cannot*, by any power of your own, believe, or so much as think one good thought. And yet He commands you to believe in Him. But he nowhere commands you to do it in your *own* strength. Rather, He enjoins you to "take hold of *His* strength," ^{Isa ;27.5} and to "be strong in the grace that is in Him!" ^{2Tim 2.1} So then, instead of excusing yourself from trusting in the great Redeemer because you cannot do it by any strength of your own, you should say to the contrary, "I can do that, and all other things, *through Christ* who strengthens me." ^{Phi 4.13} Although you are not able to trust cordially in Him by your own power, it is still your *duty* to trust in Him; and it is your *sin* not to do it. You should therefore attempt it frequently, looking to Him for grace to enable you.

Indeed to say, 'I *cannot* trust in Him,' is almost the same as saying, "I *will not*. I will trust in man who *can* lie; but not in God the Saviour who *cannot* lie.' Ah! what a heinous sin this is! You thereby presume to lay the blame of your unbelief upon the holy Lord God. But your impotence, as it is *voluntary*, is wholly your own sin. Your inability consists not so much in a mere lack of executive power, as in the lack of a willing mind. O do not imagine that such inability will in the least excuse you. Inability to discharge a just debt, does not excuse a debtor. Though you do not *feel* that Christ strengthens you for believing, or for other spiritual exercises, yet your duty is to *trust* that He strengthens you for them. Not *feeling* the habit of faith in you, will never excuse you from attempting to *exercise* your faith. Although you cannot cordially believe in Christ until the Holy Spirit works faith in you, you should try to believe in Him, *before you feel* the Spirit working it in you.

TO CONCLUDE: A Christian, under extreme dejection of spirit will be even ready to say, 'In my present doleful condition, I find myself neither able nor *willing* to trust in Jesus for salvation.' What! — Are you not willing to trust in Him? — not willing to be saved and comforted by Him? — not willing to afford Him an opportunity to show the exceeding riches of His grace in your salvation? Along with all His salvation, and with all the *joy* of that salvation, He himself is freely and particularly offered to you. ¹ And you are peremptorily commanded to accept Him, and to place your trust in Him. ^{1Joh 3.23} And are you still *unwilling* to trust in Him? The truth is, you are in some degree either willing to trust Him and his promises of salvation; or else you are willing to quit, henceforth, all *right* to Him, all *interest* in Him, and to forego all *expectation* from Him. Are you then willing to bid an eternal adieu to the only Saviour, and in testimony of your doing so, to transcribe and sign this Declaration:

'I _____ do hereby, in the presence of God the Judge of all, declare that henceforth I renounce, and do so forever, all my part in the Saviour and in His salvation; and declare that for the future, I will never allow myself to hope in Him either for salvation or consolation.'

Now, are you indeed willing to subscribe this Renunciation? If you are *not*, then you bear false witness against yourself, when you say that you are *not* willing to trust in Christ Jesus for salvation. For you are either willing in some degree to trust Him, or else you are willing to renounce Him. ² Is your heart indeed willing to be forever separate from the Lord Jesus? Or is it matter of indifference to you whether He saves you with an everlasting salvation, or else punishes you with everlasting destruction? No — it cannot be.

¹ Joh 3.16; 6.32; Rev 22.17.

² I am aware, that even an unregenerate man will refuse, in a deliberate and formal manner, to renounce forever his claim to the Saviour; and yet continue far from being willing to truly believe in Him for all his salvation. But there is a great difference between the refusal of the careless *sinner* to so renounce Christ, and that of the disconsolate *saint*. The reason why the secure sinner will refuse to abandon forever his claim to the only Saviour, is merely his fear of eternal torment. Whereas, the reason why the disquieted saint will tremble at the thought of renouncing his part in Him, is not so much his dread of eternal torment, as of being forever separated from the blessed God, and forever deprived of holy conformity to Him. The unwillingness of the disconsolate Christian to renounce forever his part in the great Redeemer, arises from a principle of grace in his heart. And it implies a proportional degree of willingness to trust in Him for all the parts of his salvation. Though the Christian under trouble of mind, is not able to discern this willingness in himself. As to the unregenerate sinner, he may indeed be willing to trust in the Lord Jesus for preservation from hell, but he *cannot*, so long as he continues unregenerate, be cordially willing to rely on Him for salvation from all sin. And therefore, let him not flatter himself that he is, in the smallest degree, willing to exercise true faith.

CHAPTER 8.

The means which believers should employ to attain increasing comfort.

It frequently happens, not only in the experience of young converts, but also in that of advanced believers when newly delivered from mental trouble (especially if their preceding distress and sorrow were very deep), that the joy which succeeds these is lively and almost rapturous. We are not to imagine, however, that they are all equally joyful, or that the joy which any of them feels will always continue. It will rather subside and settle into a peaceful serenity, or a pleasing tranquility of mind. Indeed, they usually “go out with *joy*; but afterwards they will be led forth with *peace*.” Isa 55.12 And though their joy is no longer ecstatic as before, it becomes purer and more spiritual — or rather, it subsides into a peaceful and refreshing tranquility of soul. This peace or serenity of mind, as observed above, is indeed the lowest degree of spiritual consolation; yet it is still a real and solid comfort. It is the office of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to maintain and increase it in the souls of believers; and in every time of need, to elevate it to joy or even to triumph. Yet it is ordinarily in their diligent use of appointed means, that He affords them the influences of consolation requisite for these purposes. Therefore, if the man who believes, and who experiences holy consolation, would retain this comfort, and rise to higher degrees of it, then in his dependence on the grace of Christ, he must diligently employ the following means especially:

1. He must study *to increase the habit and exercise of faith*, and *to be more resolute and express* in his actings of faith.

It will be necessary that he gives all diligence *to grow in the habit and exercise* of true faith. “We who have believed,” says an Apostle, “enter into rest.” Heb 4.3 The one whose heart trusts in Christ, and relies on the promise of eternal life as offered to him in the gospel, thereby enters into spiritual rest then, or holy tranquility of soul. And the more he trusts with firm confidence in the Lord Jesus for eternal life for himself, the more spiritual rest he experiences. Hereby, he enters further and further into rest. And notwithstanding all temptations and troubles from sin, Satan, and the world, he attains increasing ease and comfort of soul. He comes labouring and heavy-laden to Jesus Christ, and He gives him rest. Mat 11.28 Jesus gives rest to his *conscience*, in His own blood and righteousness; and rest to his *heart*, in God as his God and portion. Accordingly, Isaiah says, “You will keep him in perfect peace (*Heb.* in peace, peace), whose mind is stayed on You; because he trusts in You.” Isa 26.3 When the Holy Spirit enables him to trust with unsuspecting confidence in the faithful Redeemer for all salvation to himself in particular, and to rely on the promises as offered to him — the very acting of this faith sets his mind at rest. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he is “filled with joy and peace *IN* believing.” Rom 15.13

Committing himself to Christ Jesus, with all his spiritual and temporal concerns, and trusting that Jesus will save him, uphold him, and manage for him, his soul is set at ease in proportion to the strength of his faith. “He rests in the Lord, and waits patiently for Him.” Psa 37.7 This is not only because it is his duty, but because it is the instituted means of his attaining an increase of consolation, Knowing that the *joy* of the Lord is his strength for the spiritual performance of every duty, he studies to increase in the lively exercise of faith. This is in order that “believing, he may rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” 1Pet 1.8 Indeed, faith is the principal means not only of recovering, but of increasing holy consolation. The way to

console, is to settle the heart. The increase of comfort, therefore, is according to the increase of faith. If the believer would advance in pure consolation, then let him endeavour to diligently and constantly exercise faith. Let him “*labour* to enter into that rest.” ^{Heb 4.11} To bring his heart to the habitual exercise of trusting simply in the Saviour, will indeed cost him many hard struggles and hot conflicts with his remaining unbelief. But still, he must labour not only to *exercise*, but to *increase* his faith; and to do that by acting faith more frequently,¹ and by trusting in Christ at all times for an increase of his faith. He must endeavour to advance in the daily exercise of cordial and direct confidence in Jesus for salvation, so as to receive from Him, thereby, a daily increase of holiness. For the more he receives of holiness, the more he will experience of holy comfort. Let him also frequently renew his application of the blood of Jesus to his conscience, to purge away the guilt which he is daily contracting. The Apostle Paul informs us that, “The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” ^{Rom 14.17}

From the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ, applied to us by faith, comes peace — peace of conscience, as well as peace with God — and from peace, issues joy. Hence it is evident that the way to advance in spiritual peace and joy, is to increase in that faith which is relying on Christ and His righteousness for justification and complete salvation. Moreover, the principal way, if not the *only* way in which the Holy Comforter administers consolation to believers, is by testifying of Christ to them. It is by showing them His loveliness and love, His ability and willingness to save, His suitableness and faithfulness. And it is by enabling them to so confide in Him for salvation for themselves, as to rejoice in the *hope* of that salvation. It is likewise by enabling them to appropriate God in Christ, and to place increasing confidence in Him. This was David’s exercise in order to attain more comfort: “I trusted in you, O Lord; I said, You are *my* God.” And he expresses the happy consequence of it thus: “Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city.” ^{Psa 31.14,21}

If the believer would attain increasing consolation, then he must likewise be more *resolute and express* in his actings of faith. It will be necessary for him to be resolute in looking away from every other object of dependence, and looking to Jesus alone. He must habitually and peremptorily resolve to trust simply in Him — and in full assurance of faith, to entrust all his salvation, and all his concerns, to His care. By thus casting his burden on the Lord Jesus, and trusting that He will make all things work together for good to him, his heart will become light and cheerful. He will be freed from a thousand anxieties which otherwise would disquiet and distract his soul. The more distinct and explicit the actings of his faith are, the more peace they will bring into his conscience, and the more joy into his heart. When his actings of faith are so lively and express that he becomes habitually *conscious* of them, he thereby sits down to a rich feast of inward tranquility, and even of spiritual delight. When his faith under the influence of the Holy Spirit is so direct and so particular in its exercise, as to meet Christ in the promise, heart to heart and eye to eye, *Christ thereby dwells in him*. It is like a rod of Myrtle in the hand of the traveller, which some say revives his spirits and enables him to proceed without feeling weary.

¹ *Acting faith*: to act in faith, or exercise (apply) your faith in Christ in a given situation. — WHG

Christ is the Consolation of Israel, the Fountain from which all the streams of ineffable delight flow. Let every believer, then, diligently study to be more distinct, particular, and express in his exercise of faith. Let him endeavour daily to be more and more express, especially trusting in Christ for salvation from the love, power, and practice of every sin. This appropriating and express exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus, is graciously and absolutely promised. “Surely, *one will say*, In the Lord I have righteousness and strength.” Isa 45.24 “I will say, this is My people; and *they will say*, The Lord is *my* God.” Zec 13.9

2. It will be necessary that he trust frequently in Christ, not only for salvation in general, but for an *increase of comfort* in particular. Let him continue to humbly and firmly trust that the Lord Jesus will not only save him, but “comfort him on every side;” Psa 71.21 and that He will not merely preserve and increase the *habit* of spiritual joy in his soul, but that He will favour him in every time of need, with an increase even of *sensible* comfort. He must endeavour in every condition, and in the diligent use of all other instituted means, to trust that God in Christ, the God of consolation, will “fill him with all joy and peace in believing;” Rom 15.13 that Jesus, the Consolation of Israel, will “speak comfortably to him,” Hos 2.14 and “will never leave him comfortless;” Joh 14.18 and that the Holy Spirit the Comforter, by His inhabitation and influence, will fill his soul with an increase of holy consolation; and in every season of need, it will be unto him according to his faith.

Instead of refusing to be comforted by raising captious and frivolous objections against the consolation which is offered and promised to him in the gospel, he should, on the warrant of the gospel offer, habitually desire and constantly rely upon Christ for a higher degree of it, according to the promise. He should never forget that the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit is one of the *fruits* of trusting in the Lord. Pro 16.20 It is a part of the office of faith to accept and to hand spiritual comfort to the holy soul. Therefore, if faith is strong and frequently exercised, such a soul will have strong consolation. If faith increases in its habit, and in the frequency of its exercise, holy comfort will increase in proportion. Let the believer therefore trust at all times in the Lord Jesus for increasing consolation. Let him see that he takes comfort from Christ *as revealed*, rather than from his own discoveries of Him; and that he lives comfortably upon Christ himself, rather than upon his own *experience* of Christ. He should encourage himself continually in his God and Saviour. Amidst all his inward and outward troubles, by his frequent actings of particular trust, he must derive strong consolation from the life, death, resurrection, intercession, covenant, words, offices, victories, and relations of Jesus Christ. He must also trust that the blessed Spirit *loves* him. And that, as his gracious Comforter. “He will abide with him forever, and will bring all things to his remembrance,” that are necessary to comfort him. Joh 14.26

Believer, if you would advance in true consolation, you must always trust that whenever the Lord Jesus takes from you any of your present comforts, it will only be to make room for better and sweeter comforts. Entrust all your temporal comforts to your faithful Redeemer, without the least anxiety, and He will render them doubly sweet to you. Or if he takes any of them from you, He will restore them again with much advantage, either in kind or in value. Beware of relying partly on Christ, and partly on the creature for your comfort. Derive *all* your comforts of every kind, by the direct actings of faith, from Christ in the promise; and derive them *only* from Him. It is the character of the true circumcision, that “they rejoice in Christ

Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” ^{Phi 3.3} “If the sufferings of Christ,” or sufferings in conformity to Him, will abound in you at any time, then your “consolation will also abound by Christ.” ^{2Cor 1.5} Therefore, look to Jesus, the glorious Sun of righteousness, for the light of consolation, and do not look to yourself. Charge it often upon your soul, to rejoice in Him. When you diligently use the appointed means of advancing in spiritual comfort, do not forget to trust that He will abundantly bless them for that purpose. Thus they will prove to your soul, to be means of increasing in holy consolation.

3. If the believer would retain his comfort and rise to higher degrees of it, he must *constantly exercise the hope of eternal life*. Just as hope is a means of recovering spiritual comfort, so it is a means of increasing it. Therefore, the more that a good man “abounds in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit;” the more he will “*rejoice* in the hope of the glory of God.” ^{Rom 5.2} Having “fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before him,” let him “show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope,” that many of the first Christians especially showed; and then, like them, he will “have strong consolation.” ^{Heb 6.11,18} If he hopes continually for the full and endless fruition of God and of the Lamb in the *heavenly* world, he will thereby be weaned from undue attachment to the *present* world. And so he will be preserved from being greatly affected either by the smiles or frowns of worldly men. If he exercises daily “the lively hope of that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which does not fade away, reserved in heaven for him;” and builds his hope on the sure, immovable foundation laid in Zion — remote from all the changes experienced in himself, he will thereby “hold fast the confidence, and the *rejoicing* of the hope, firm to the end.” ^{Heb 3.6}

Were the believer to constantly exercise a lively and firm expectation of sufficient grace in time, and of consummate blessedness throughout eternity, it would be a special means of exciting and promoting ineffable delight in his soul. It would fill his heart with overflowings of holy gratitude, and his lips with expressions of joy and triumph. In proportion to his hope being grounded and frequently exercised on the love of God, on the promise of eternal life, and on the righteousness, grace, and faithfulness of the glorious Redeemer, it brings into his soul more and more of eternal life, and of that heavenly delight which forms a part of it. *That living hope is from above*. And in proportion to its being strengthened and frequently exercised, it elevates the holy soul *to the things which are above*. When the believer is exercising it, he lives in a joyful expectation and sweet anticipation of the ineffable and endless pleasures which are at God’s right hand.

HOPE settles and cheers the heart. It disposes the Christian to patiently and quietly wait upon the Lord for every promised blessing. ^{Rom 8.25} It leaves the season and the manner of bestowing any promised blessing, to that Divine Redeemer who is infinitely wise, gracious, and faithful. TRUE HOPE is the assured expectation that, although Christ may seem to delay long, He will certainly come with every promised, every *necessary* blessing; and He will not defer a single moment longer than the time appointed in the everlasting covenant. Moreover, the exercise of hope promotes holy consolation, inasmuch as it is a means of purifying the soul from sin, that greatest enemy of spiritual comfort. ^{1Joh 3.3} When a holy man is enabled to hope that he will abide in Christ, and endure to the end; that he will continue to receive from the fullness of Christ, rich supplies of sanctifying grace to enable him to faithfully keep His commandments; that he will consequently grow in grace and in the saving knowledge of

Jesus-Christ; that he will be graciously upheld under, and delivered from all the afflictions which may still await him; that he will at the appointed time be prepared to die in peace, and to pass over with joy into the embraces of his dear Redeemer; and that he will be with Him to behold His glory forevermore; ¹ — this hope fills his heart with inexpressible joy. It diffuses a delightful perfume of comfort over his soul.

4. It will be requisite for the same purpose, that he *daily advance in love* to the Lord Jesus, and to God in Him. The Christian's love to Christ, is the immediate principle of his delighting or *joying* in Him. Therefore, to advance in supreme love to Christ, is the way to increase in holy joy. The apostle Paul, in describing the fruit of the Spirit, mentions joy and peace in immediate connection with love. ^{Gal 5.22} And the Lord Jesus himself, when comforting his disciples, said, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him; and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." ^{Joh 14.23} Love is a pleasant, cheering affection. Therefore, those believers who excel others in love to Christ Jesus, commonly surpass them in spiritual comfort also. The exercise of supreme love to Him, and to God in Him, diffuses a sacred sweetness over the soul. Whether it is a love of desire for Him when he is absent, or of delight in Him when he is present, it still sweetly refreshes and invigorates the soul in proportion to the strength and exercise of it. "There is no fear in love," says the apostle John; "but perfect love casts out fear." ^{1Joh 4.18} Although it is always attended with a holy and filial fear of displeasing God, yet in proportion to the degree and exercise of it in the soul, it banishes all slavish, diffident, and disquieting fear of Him. Indeed, when the ardour of love decays, and the exercise of it fails, distressing fear usually arises. But when love is revived, and it is vigorous in its exercise on its transcendently glorious and amiable Object, such fear usually vanishes and gives way to holy consolation in the soul.

The vigorous exercise of ardent love to his dear Redeemer, excited by believing views of His infinite loveliness in Himself, and of His immense love to him, tends through grace to fill the mind of the believer with a pleasing tranquility. If loving *any* object has in its nature a tendency to make the Person who loves, take pleasure in the company of the object beloved, then notwithstanding all the infirmities which may cling to that object, a saint must experience inexpressible pleasure in loving Him who "is *altogether* lovely!" All the delights of worldly men are but like the toys of children, in comparison to the pleasure of supreme love to the Lord Jesus, and to a God of love in Him. The apostle Paul informs us that "love thinks no evil." ^{1Cor 13.5} Love of God thinks no evil of Him, and it fears no evil *from* Him, in proportion to the degree of that love. It does not indulge evil surmises, or groundless jealousies of Him. "He who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." ^{1Joh 4.16} He counts it his highest pleasure to please Him; and his greatest joy is to have intimate communion with Him. He delights in Him as his Friend, his Father, and his God — as his only portion, and his exceeding joy. And the more he delights in the Lord, the more holy consolation he experiences.

Believer, see that you advance daily in supreme and ardent affection to God in Christ, to *all* of God, and *all* of Christ. Love especially the holiness, the will, and the glory of Christ. Let

¹ An eminent minister, after having been silent in company a considerable time, and being asked the reason, signified that the powers of his mind had been solemnly absorbed with the thought of everlasting happiness, "O my friends," he said with an energy which surprised all present, "consider what it is, to be forever with the Lord — forever, forever, forever!" Buck's *Anecdotes*, vol. i. p. 95.

your soul cling continually to Him, and it will comfort you greatly to think of Him and of His immense and amazing love to you. To advance in supreme love to your dear Redeemer, will render you capable of increasing in heavenly consolation, notwithstanding all the afflictions which may henceforth befall you in your lot. For *His* sake, difficult things will seem easy, and bitter things will seem sweet.

5. If the believer would advance in holy consolation, then in the faith of redeeming love to Him, ¹ let him learn to *delight more and more in the law* of the Lord. The more he is enabled to delight in the will of God expressed in that holy law, the more comfortable and happy he is in doing that will; ^{Psa 112.1} and the more pleasure he takes in performing every part of his duty. And seeing that he is commanded to employ himself *always* in his present duty, the more his present duty is his delight; and the more he will always be delighted. “Great peace,” says the Psalmist, “have those who love your law, and nothing will offend them.” ^{Psa 119.165} For the more they delight in the holiness, spirituality, and perfection of the law as the rule of their duty, and delight in holy obedience to that law, the clearer evidence they have that they are so justified by faith as to have peace with God. And the more they enjoy peace of conscience, which is a *sense* of their peace with God, the more they are at peace with the creatures of God. No external troubles or offences can deprive them of this “great peace,” nor divert them from the path of duty in which they delight. Indeed, the more a holy man delights in the commandments of the law as expressions of the will of God the Father who loves him, of the mind of Christ who redeems him, and of the desire of the Holy Spirit who dwells in him — the more he will regard sincere obedience to them as his privilege, pleasure, and comfort.

Those precepts which are all “holy, just, and good,” prescribe good and pleasant work to him — such work as is not only good for him, but agreeable to the bent of his renewed nature. Therefore, the more he advances in sanctification, the more pleasure he takes in doing, and even in suffering the will of his heavenly Father. So much was this the attainment of the holy apostle Paul, that “he gloried in tribulations.” “He took pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ’s sake,” because it was the *will* of God that he should endure them; and they afforded the *power* of Christ an opportunity to so rest on him as to be gloriously displayed, and evidenced to be perfect in his weakness. ^{2Cor 12.9-10} Doubtless, his taking pleasure even in manifold sufferings for the sake of Christ, could only be attended with such a measure of holy consolation, that it would make him “exceeding joyful, in all his tribulation.” ^{2Cor 7.4} Thus it is evident that the more a believer delights in the *providential*, and especially in the *preceptive* will of God, and the more spiritual and exact his obedience, the more he experiences spiritual comfort.

Besides this, his delighting in or savouring those things of the Spirit, is a comfortable evidence to him not only that he has the Spirit of Christ, and that the prevailing inclination of his heart is toward spiritual and holy objects — but that the delight which he has in the Lord, and in the word and law of the Lord, is his *chief* delight. ^{Psa 43.4; 119.127} O how cheering it must be to a holy man, to be conscious not only that the grace of the promises, but the holiness of the precepts, instead of displeasing him, renders them inexpressibly pleasant to his soul! ^{Psa 119.143} He cannot perish in his affliction, because the law of God is his delight. ^{Psa 119.92} Delight in the

¹ That is, having faith, *trusting*, that he has indeed *received* the endless redeeming love of His savior. — WHG

will of the Lord is heaven on earth, the very essence of real satisfaction and of true felicity. The Lord himself is inconceivably happy in His own will; and He has revealed it to his people, so that they might be happy in it likewise.

6. Another means of retaining and increasing spiritual comfort, is to frequently exercise *godly sorrow, or contrition of heart*, for sin. Being contrite in heart comes from a principle of faith in Christ, of love to God, and of a desire to please and honour Him; it is to be sorrowful for having sinned against Him. The apostle Paul styles sorrow for sin, “godly sorrow” ^{2Cor 7.10} — that is,

- sorrow which has God in Christ for its *author* and its *object*;
- or sorrow *for* God, for having offended by our sin, a God of infinite holiness, justice, faithfulness, and goodness;
- or sorrow *according* to God, according to believing views of His redeeming mercy, and according to His holy will;
- or sorrow which is *acceptable* to God through Jesus Christ.

The same apostle informs us that “it works repentance unto salvation” — it works that evangelical repentance which is turning from all sin to God, as in Christ a God of infinite mercy and grace. Now, in order to advance in holy consolation — in the faith of pardoning mercy and of sanctifying grace — the Christian must frequently *exercise* that godly sorrow for sin, especially for the sin that dwells in him. The exercise of godly sorrow is not only consistent with holy joy, but it always tends to it, frequently issues in it, and yes, even includes it. Such refreshing of soul, such joy of heart, is often experienced while still in the depths of godly sorrow. The true penitent would not exchange that joy, even the lowest degree of it, for all the carnal mirth in the world, The most sorrowful Christian would not, for a thousand worlds, exchange states or pleasures with the most prosperous of ungodly men. In comparison to that pure and solid joy which often attends the penitential sorrow of a true believer, *carnal mirth* is folly and even madness. ^{Ecc 2.2} His mourning for sin because it has offended his gracious God, and wounded His compassionate Saviour — because it has pierced that heart which loves him, and shed that blood which saves him — is a joyful mourning, a real comfort to his soul. To mourn for sin on such accounts as these, is *to weep for joy*, as one expresses it.

Just as godly sorrow cannot be exercised by the Christian, without some comfortable apprehension of the mercy of God to him, or of Christ’s having been pierced for his iniquities, so it is seldom exercised without experiencing some degree of comfort, either during or after exercising it. “Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and *all* her paths are peace.” ^{Pro 3.17} The believing penitent takes delight in mourning for his crucified Redeemer, in sitting down at His pierced feet, and bathing them with his tears. His godly sorrow is a means of both preparing him for consolation, and also introducing it into his soul. Accordingly, Jehovah promises that He will “dwell with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” ^{Isa 57.15} The Lord Jesus also says, “Blessed are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted;” ^{Mat 5.4} and again, “The Lord has anointed me ...to bind up the broken-hearted; ...to comfort all that mourn.” ^{Isa 61.1-2} Hence holy *fasting* is represented in Scripture as spiritual *feasting*. ^{Zec 8.19} The penitential grief of a holy man is also *matter* for joy to him. He rejoices more to feel his heart melting for sin, than he would in enjoying all the carnal delights of the sons of men. He finds a secret sweetness in

the tears of evangelical repentance — a balm which refreshes and cheers his soul. Besides this, godly sorrow renders him capable of receiving influences of holy consolation to a higher degree. The more he grieves in a godly manner for sin, the more *capable* he is of rejoicing in God his Saviour. Yes, the more he grieves that he cannot grieve for his iniquity as he should, and mourns that he cannot mourn as he should, the more capacity he has for receiving and enjoying spiritual comfort. The joy of God's salvation is not to be found, except in the deep recesses of a contrite heart. True repentance consists more in turning from all sin to God, than merely sorrowing for sin. Yet, in order to retain and increase his comfort for the service and glory of God, the believer should diligently exercise that sorrow.

7. It will be necessary, for the same purpose, that he be *more and more diligent in mortifying the sin* that dwells in him. ^{Rom 8.13} When the Christian finds himself yielding to motions of sin in his heart, it can only occasion trouble of soul for him. But when he feels himself enabled to resist or act against them by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, it is a special comfort. And the more he is enabled to maintain a holy opposition to them, the purer and more solid is his consolation. To mortify the deeds of the body of sin, and your members of it which are on the earth, ^{Col 3.5} is to constantly apply the blood and Spirit of Christ to subdue, weaken, and destroy the body of sin, with all its corrupt affections, principles, and practices. It is to so resist and subdue the vital qualities and active powers of the body of sin in the heart, as to gradually destroy them by the gracious influences of the Spirit of Christ. Now, one of the means which the believer must employ in order to retain and increase his comfort, is to constantly maintain a holy opposition to all the affections, principles, and motions of the body of sin in him, until they are destroyed — in conformity to Christ in his crucifixion, and by the grace derived from His fulness. The more resolute the believer, and the more pleasure he takes in thus mortifying them, the more he will attain of spiritual and pure consolation. And the more of sanctifying influences he derives by faith for the mortification of sin, the more of these consoling influences he will commonly receive.

Accordingly, David prayed thus: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; renew in me a right spirit;" and then, "Restore to me the *joy* of Your salvation." ^{Psa 51.10,12} As the Christian advances in mortifying his unbelief and pride, with his self-righteous and worldly spirit, he will increase his enjoyment of the cheering light of his heavenly Father's countenance. The more diligent and successful he is in mortifying his propensity to cavil or dispute against the freeness of the offers, promises, and grace of the gospel, the more disposed he will be to admit and relish the comforts of the gospel. As remaining sin dies in the believer, he proportionally lives a life of holiness and comfort. The weaker the body of sin is in him, the less power his other spiritual enemies will have over him. The temptations of Satan and of the world will proportionally lose their influence with him. The only care of the hypocrite is to reform his *life*; whereas, the main (though not the only) concern of the sincere believer, is to cleanse his *heart*. ¹ And the sweetness which he experiences in obtaining victory over sin in his heart, is a thousand times greater than the seeming pleasure which is felt in gratifying sin. Indeed, were the least real pleasure to be enjoyed in sinning, the torments of the damned in hell would thereby be greatly

¹ Jer. 4.14. Luther used to say, 'I fear more what is within me, than what comes from without. The storms and winds without, ever move the earth. It is only vapours within, that cause earthquakes.'

lessened. For *there* they will forever sin in the utmost degree possible. But instead of being less tormented *by* as well as *for* their sinning, they will be more tormented.

Believer, take heed that you are diligent in mortifying the depravity of your heart. The further you advance in mortifying the sin that remains in you, and especially the sin that more easily besets you, the more pleasure you will take in mortifying it, and the more comfort you will experience in your conflicts with it. Learn to hate all sin in an increasing degree; for the more you abhor it, the greater delight you will take in opposing and subduing it. Holy joy can consist with *remaining* sin, but not with *retained and indulged sin*. Mortify the corruption of your nature by the Spirit, then, and Christ will not be constrained to mortify it *for* you, by the extremity of outward or inward trouble. Study to attain more eminence in that grace which is the direct opposite of the sin which easily besets you.

8. The Christian must, for the same end, endeavour daily to become *more and more circumspect and conscientious* in the practice of universal holiness. It is only in proportion to “walking in the fear of the Lord,” that he can walk “in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.” ^{Act 9.31} To walk circumspectly is to be habitually cautious and watchful on every side, against all manner of sin; and to always be attentive to every duty, and to every circumstance of duty — or it is to walk in all the duties of holiness, with wisdom, diligence, and exactness. So far as a good man walks circumspectly, he is upright, exact, and conscientious in all things. He is “in the fear of the Lord all day long.” ^{Pro 23.17} From a principle of faith in Christ, and of love to God, he dreads sin as the worst evil in the world; and consequently, he abstains even from all *appearance* of that evil. ^{1The 5.22} He abstains from the very appearance of it, not merely because he sees that it is reasonable and prudent to do so, but because it is the will of his God and Father. And though this does not afford him the smallest title to Divine consolation, yet he knows that it is a necessary means of consolation, and that it is inseparably connected with as much of it as the Lord sees good to afford him. The more spiritually and closely he walks with God; the more he walks in the light of His countenance. The more he makes the practice of universal holiness his main business — a business in which he principally engages, and which he pursues with the greatest earnestness and diligence — the clearer evidence he has that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter dwells in him.

Accordingly, the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, “If you love me, keep my commandments: and I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever.” ^{Joh 15.15-16} Let the believer then beware of sinning, especially of sinning willfully; for that would provoke the Lord to cover his evidences with a cloud in His anger, and suspend influences of consolation from his soul. Let it be his constant purpose and unwearied endeavour, through grace, to please God in everything, and to displease Him in nothing. To walk *circumspectly* is indeed the sure way to walk *comfortably*, and to advance in comfort. Whoever is enabled to so walk, from the principles of faith and love, and for the glory of God, “will sing in the righteous ways of the Lord,” ^{Psa 138.5} For he will find they “are ways of pleasantness and paths of peace.” ^{Pro 3.17} Just as spiritual comfort is necessary to the practice of holiness, so increasing holiness of heart and of life, is requisite to the maintenance and increase of comfort. As heat accompanies fire, so a greater or lesser measure of comfort usually attends the spiritual performance of holy actions. ^{Psa 19.11} It cannot be otherwise. For to

walk circumspectly in a course of holy obedience, is to *walk with God*, the God of all comfort; to *walk in Christ*, the Consolation of Israel; and to *walk after the Spirit*, the Holy Comforter.

If the believer would walk so circumspectly as to glorify Christ, and to promote his own comfort, he must first take heed that he doesn't walk in the *dark* on any occasion; that he doesn't go forward where he cannot discern his way by the *light* of holy Scripture; and next, he should be as much afraid of taking comfort merely from his duties, as from his sins.

9. To grow in *spiritual mindedness* is also the way to maintain and increase spiritual comfort. "To be spiritually minded" is to have the mind and heart frequently, intently, and delightfully employed about spiritual objects. This comes from the spiritual principles of grace, and it is under the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. It is to have all the powers of the soul habitually concurring in spiritual thoughts and desires, and in taking a holy delight in the things of the Spirit, especially in the things concerning Christ and the wonderful scheme of redemption by Him. Now, one special means of advancing in spiritual consolation, is to increase in spiritual mindedness. The apostle Paul informs us that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Rom 8.6 It is spiritual life in its very nature, and it is the earnest and beginning of eternal life, consisting in the full and immediate fruition of God and the Lamb, in the mansions of glory. And in proportion to a believer's increase in it, his soul is endued not only with spiritual activity, but with pleasing serenity and pure consolation. The more spiritually minded he becomes, the more of spiritual *peace* and comfort he attains. The more he spiritually understands, meditates, relishes, and delights in the doctrine of redeeming grace, and in the glory of God displayed in the wonderful person and work of the great Redeemer, the more he will experience of pleasing tranquility and refreshing delight. By however much he grows in spiritual understanding, or in the knowledge of the transcendent loveliness and love of God in Christ, and of the excellence, suitableness, and freeness of salvation by Christ — by *that* much he experiences holy serenity, and solid consolation in committing all his spiritual and temporal concerns to such a God, and such a Saviour.

In proportion to his heart becoming more deeply sensible of the unparalleled holiness and beauty of spiritual objects, and of his own personal interest in them, his heart is delighted, enlarged, and elevated. Whether he contemplates the cheering truths and precious promises of the gospel, or practises the spiritual duties of the law toward his God or his neighbour — the more spiritual he is in these things, the more pure, solid, and heavenly is the pleasure he enjoys. These are the banquet of his mind. They are sweeter than honey to his taste. In proportion to the increase of his spiritual understanding, and his disposition to count all earthly things empty and mean in comparison to union with Christ, and conformity to Him — he will set his affection on things above, place his happiness in them, and rejoice in hope of them. When he advances in habitual desires, and in his holy endeavours to aim at the glory of his God and Redeemer in all his exercise of graces and performance of duties — he will glory and delight in the Lord in the same proportion. To become more and more spiritually minded, then, is a sure way to attain higher degrees of spiritual comfort. The higher a bird flies, the more out of danger it is from the snares of the fowler. So too, the higher a believer soars above the world in spirituality of mind, the higher and safer his consolation.

Moreover, in order to attain increasing comfort, the Christian must always be on his guard against *formality and remissness* in his exercise of graces, and his performance of duties. To

be remiss or formal in performing any of his duties, is the very opposite of being spiritually minded. Now, he may assure himself that he is declining into formality, if he is more studious of approving himself to men than to God; if instead of performing his duties with holy delight, he performs them as a task; if instead of habitually exercising faith, love, godly sorrow, and spiritual desire in performing them, he satisfies himself with the external performance; and if the remaining carnality of his mind isn't so grievous or burdensome to him as it was formerly. Nothing will more effectually hinder his advancing in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, than remissness or negligence of spirit in the duties of religion. ¹ For when the Christian doesn't serve God with his spirit, he grieves the Holy Spirit of God, and provokes Him to suspend from his soul the influences of consolation. And when he doesn't ardently pursue increasing communion with Christ in holy exercises, he cannot expect to enjoy the comfort of communion with Him.

10. Another means of a believer's advancing in spiritual comfort, is to become *more and more content with God in Christ*, as his inheritance. He cannot be comfortable except in proportion to his being content. God in Christ, as the saints' Covenant-God, is the sure, boundless, unchanging, and everlasting portion of all the saints. Nothing can be added to Him; nothing can be taken from Him, nor diminished in Him. A holy man may lose all his earthly possessions, but he cannot lose his God, nor anything in God. And therefore he continues to be as rich as he was before. His outward comforts are only *lent* to him in order to be used for a season, and then to be willingly and thankfully relinquished. But his God is given to him to be eternally enjoyed by him as his immense, unchangeable, and sure portion. And therefore he has as much reason to be satisfied with, and to rejoice in his all-sufficient inheritance, *after* his outward losses as *before*. The ancient Church, after she had been deprived of her best external comforts, accordingly placed her happiness and her hope in Jehovah as her sure portion: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul; "therefore will I hope in him." ^{Lam 3.24} And Asaph, when he was emerging from his depths of spiritual trouble, said to Jehovah, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." ^{Psa 73.25-26}

The sincere believer trusts that a gracious God bestows on him, as his infinite inheritance, Himself and all that He is. He should thus be much more content than he is with his portion. The more satisfied he is with God in Christ as his inheritance, the more pleasure he will take in Christ. And the more pleasure he takes in Him, the more consolation he will receive from Him, and the more he will rejoice in Him. "Though the fig-tree may not blossom," says Habakkuk, "nor fruit be on the vines, ... yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation." ^{Hab 3.17-18} In proportion to the believer's contentment with God, or being satisfied that his Covenant-God is enough for him — without anything else except what infinite wisdom and love see fit to afford him for a time — he attains true, lasting, and increasing enjoyment. If he has outward comforts, *he enjoys God in them*; or if he has been deprived of them, he still *enjoys them in God*. So that, his spiritual enjoyment or comfort is not, strictly speaking, dependent on them. Being satisfied with God himself as his portion, he learns to be content with all the providential dispensations of God. "I have learned," says Paul, "in whatever state I am, to be content," etc. ^{Phi 4.11-12} The Lord Jesus has given to his Church

¹ Song 5.2,6; Pro 10.4.

“exceeding great and precious promises,” in order that every saint may, by faith, “suckle and be satisfied with these breasts of her consolation.” ^{Isa 66.11} And God, having reconciled them to Himself in Him, has graciously promised that *He will be their God*. What cause the believer has, then, to always be content! “He is an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ;” and therefore – *all things are his*. ^{1Cor 3.21}

There is more ground of comfort in this, than the heart of man can conceive. God in Christ is your inheritance, believer. And therefore, whatever He is, or has, or does, or *can* do — all will promote your consolation in time, and your felicity throughout eternity. Be contented then, as well you may, with your glorious, boundless, incorruptible, unfading, inheritance. ¹ Live continually and comfortably upon your God. Make up all your happiness in Him. Blame yourself if you lack strong consolation when the God of all comfort is your God and your portion. For you are never without comfort, except when you are not satisfied with something in your God and Redeemer. See that you rejoice more in HIM, than in all the delights of the sons of men. Do you know anything desirable or delightful in the creature? You may find it in your Redeemer, and enjoy it in your God. What if you have lost not merely one, but *all* your earthly comforts? In possessing God, the fountain of living waters, you still possess *all* things. You have one comfort still, which is worth infinitely more than *all* others. — “This God is *your* God forever and ever. He will be your guide even unto death.” ^{Psa 48.14}

See the hand of your God in that which *is*, and do not be disquieted by it. See in His hand, that which is *to come*, and do not be discouraged by the prospect of it. What can you wish for in an inheritance, that is not in your Covenant-God? If you would have a *large* estate, He is infinite. If you would have *sure* possession, He is unchangeable. If you desire *durable* riches, He is eternal. If God were to give you all that is in the universe, without Himself, you would be completely miserable, and you could never be satisfied. None can afford satisfaction for your soul, except that dear Saviour who gave, and that gracious God who received, satisfaction for the sin of the soul.

11. If the believer would advance in spiritual consolation, he must also increase daily in *holy resignation to the will of the Lord*. He must endeavour by grace, not only to be content with God in Christ as his infinite portion, but to increase in holy resignation of heart to the will of God with respect to all his *earthly* comforts. The way to advance in peaceful tranquility of soul, is to become so resigned to the providential will of the Lord, as to always submit to that holy will, without murmuring. God’s will of *providence*, as well as his will of *precept*, is not only wise and sovereign, but holy, just, and good. It is infinitely *wise*; and therefore it cannot be liable to the smallest mistake in its determination of anything respecting the external condition of the believer. His will is absolutely *sovereign*; and therefore any attempt by the believer to resist it, is in vain. It is also infinitely *holy and righteous*. And for these reasons, it is infinitely incapable of doing a Christian the smallest injury, or of dispensing anything to him, whether pleasant or painful, except what is right and even *necessary* for him. It is likewise infinitely *good*, and therefore it can appoint nothing to happen in the outward

¹ Menedemus being told one day, that it was a great felicity to have whatever we desire, ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘but it is much greater to desire nothing but what we have.’ Buck’s *Anecdotes*, vol. i. p. 111.

condition of a believer except what is good, indeed, what is *best* to subserve the sanctification and consolation of his soul at the time.

So good is the will of the Lord, that it has determined never to give or take away a single outward comfort from a saint, except when this is good for him, or even necessary, to promote the great designs of redeeming grace in his salvation. So wise and good is that adorable will, that under the direction and control of it, all things “work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” ^{Rom 8.28} Therefore, if a holy man would advance in pure consolation, then in dependence on the grace of Christ, he must study to cordially resign himself and all his concerns to the holy will of his heavenly Father. The more he studies to *delight* in the holy will of God, the more he will be disposed to acquiesce in it. And the more he acquiesces in it, the more comfort he will experience amidst all the vicissitudes of life. Let him endeavour to love it in an increasing degree. For in proportion to his loving it, he will be pleased with it, and will rejoice to think that everything in his lot has, from eternity, been unalterably fixed according to it. He will delight in the cheering thought that under the direction and control of it, all objects, all events, either directly or indirectly promote his eternal welfare; and that all hands in the universe are *continually at work* for good to him. If affliction comes, the storm which then arises in his natural passions, is hushed into a calm; and not only does submission ensue, but sweet resignation.

So far as the believer attains holy resignation, he is secure from disappointment. For his leading desire — that the will of the Lord may be done concerning him — cannot fail to be accomplished. He believes that the Lord chooses better for him than he can do for himself. He is persuaded not only that he has no *right* to complain of any providential dispensation, but he has no *reason*, because “all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to him.” ^{Psa 25.10} “I was dumb,” says holy David, “I did not open my mouth, because You did it.” ^{Psa 39.9} In proportion to his being resigned to the holy will of God, he is always pleased, always comfortable; because whatever pleases God, pleases him. As far as his will is in union with the will of the Lord, he will always have what he chooses. He will constantly be in a state of enjoyment, having the very thing he desires. If he is under affliction, he comforts himself with thinking that it is the appointment of his heavenly Father’s will. Believer, the more you welcome the *whole will* of your gracious God and Father, the more happiness and comfort you will enjoy. Consider how unbecoming, how sinful it is to murmur against the will of the only-wise God, your Saviour. Know that the moment you repine at the providence of the Lord, you secretly accuse him. You presume to charge Him with having done you an injury — to blame Him for something wrong in His management of your affairs. But isn’t this the same as secretly blaspheming him? O, if you would maintain spiritual consolation, take heed that you do not murmur against the holy will of your gracious God. You are not qualified to be the chooser of your own outward condition. And therefore it does not belong to *your* wisdom and will, but to *His*, to dispose of all your affairs.

12. Another means of advancing in holy consolation, is to become *more and more thankful for blessings* either received or promised. It is the duty and privilege of a holy man, “To give thanks always, for all things, to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” ^{Eph 5.20}

It is his *duty* in every condition of life, to maintain a thankful frame of heart, and to express daily to the Lord, a lively and grateful sense of the unmerited and unnumbered benefits which

He has bestowed on him. The apostle Paul accordingly gave this charge to the Thessalonians: "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, concerning you," ^{1The 5.18} And in his Epistle to the Hebrews he says, "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." ^{Heb 13.15}

It is also a *privilege* to the believer, when enabled in every circumstance of life, to be thankful for the mercies which God bestows either upon himself or others. A disposition to be thankful to the Lord in every condition, for the benefits received from Him, is always attended with some degree of comfort in a holy soul. A saint's frequent recollection and acknowledgment of the sweet mercies which he has *in hand*, and of the sure mercies which he has *in hope*, tend to sweeten and to cheer his spirit.

Praise and thanksgiving, according to the following passages of Scripture, are the genuine expressions of a comfortable frame of soul: "My heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise him." ^{Psa 28.7} "Because your loving kindness is better than life, my lips will praise you." "My mouth will praise you with joyful lips." ^{Psa 58.3,5} "My lips will greatly rejoice when I sing to you, and my soul which you have redeemed." ^{Psa 71.23} While these passages evince that praise and thanksgiving are the native expressions of holy joy, they intimate at the same time, that a saint's being disposed to gratefully praise and thank the Lord for blessings either received or promised, is commonly attended with an increase of comfort or joy. Habitual cheerfulness of spirit is thereby maintained and increased.

A truly thankful heart is in the same proportion, *cheerful*. The most humble and thankful of the saints are commonly the most eminent in holiness and comfort. Indeed, thankfulness and comfort imply each other. A holy man must be in some degree comfortable, in order to be thankful; and he must be thankful in order to be in an increasing degree, comfortable. If he would then retain and increase his holy consolation, let him frequently give thanks to God, not only for the unspeakable gift of his dear Son, but for all His benefits conferred upon him. Let him as often and as much as possible, gratefully remember them, and thank the Lord for each of them, whether it is a great or a small blessing, a spiritual or a temporal one. He must be thankful particularly for the degree of comfort with which the Lord has already favoured him; and then if his trials or sufferings at any time abound, "his consolation by Christ will also abound." ^{2Cor 1.5} Let him extract arguments even from the darkest dispensations of providence, for exciting him to be *always* thankful to his God and Redeemer. For when he is continually thankful, he will be comfortable in the same proportion. He should moreover express his gratitude daily for the inestimable and innumerable blessings granted to him, by giving all the glory for them to God in Christ, and by employing them all for the purposes of His glory. So he will enjoy them, and experience increasing comfort in using them.

13. Further, Let the believer *pray* with increasing importunity, *for the continuance and increase* of his holy comfort. The fervent and incessant prayer of faith is a means, not only of recovering, but of retaining and increasing spiritual consolation. Let him therefore pray importunately not only for sanctifying influences, but for *consoling* influences. The Spirit is the Comforter of the saints; and God "gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." ^{Luk 11.13} The Christian, then, should pray with increasing earnestness to his heavenly Father, in the name of Christ, and in the faith of the promise for the refreshing and comforting grace of the blessed Spirit. The more earnestly and frequently he offers up the prayer of faith for grace and

consolation, the more his heart will be strengthened with the consolation of the Holy Comforter. “In the day when I cried,” says David, “You answered me, and strengthened me with strength, in my soul.” ^{Psa 130:3} When the God of consolation seems at any time to forget or pass by the exercised believer, the prayer of faith will call Him in. When the Lord Jesus, came to Emmaus, he made as though he would have gone further. And when the two disciples constrained him, saying, “Abide with us; for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent, He went in to tarry with them.” ^{Luk 24:28-29} The less that true Christians desire from Christ, the less they glorify the immense riches of His grace.

But on the contrary, the more they expect and ask from Him, the more He will give, and the more He will manifest His *delight* in giving to them. The believer should therefore pray as the apostle Paul did for the saints at Rome: “May the God of Hope would fill me with all joy and peace in believing.” ^{Rom 15:13} And as the same apostle prayed for the Thessalonians, “May the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and our God and Father, comfort my heart, and establish me in every good word and work.” ^{2The 2:16-17} And he should pray as the disciples did, that the Lord would “increase his faith;” ^{Luk 17:5} — for as faith is increased, so is the *joy* of faith. Let him pray that he may be enabled to always thirst for spiritual consolation, “as the hart thirsts for the water-brooks.” ^{Psa 42:1} And at the same time, let his desire for sensible comfort be regulated by a due submission to the sovereign will of God. Paul had not been praying for long, before it was revealed to him that he was a chosen vessel. It was when Jesus Christ was praying, that He was transfigured, and “a voice from the excellent glory, said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” ^{Mat 17:5} Those of the saints who pray the most, have the most comfort. Prayer crowns God with the glory of His redeeming grace; and God crowns prayer with the comfort of that grace.

If a holy man would pray to advance in spiritual comfort, then he must not only pray in faith and with importunity, but he must pray with his spirit, and with understanding, and with a sincere desire for what he asks — with watchfulness, attention, and ardour. He should make supplication to God as his God and Father, in the name of Christ, by the help of the Spirit, and *only* for things which are promised. “He should always pray and not faint;” ^{Luk 18:1} or, “continue steadfastly in prayer.” ^{Rom 12:12} It will also be necessary that he *plead* in prayer; that he plead the promises, and that he fill his mouth with such arguments as will tend to excite and increase his faith, and hope, and love. Moreover, he must be habitually disposed to pray — to intermingle ejaculatory prayer with all his other duties, and to pray much in private. It was when Jacob retired for private prayer, that the Angel of the covenant came to him, and enabled him to wrestle with Him by supplication, so as to receive the blessing. She who was alone with Jesus at the sepulchre, was the first who participated in the joy of His resurrection, The holy Psalmist seems to have considered the comfort which he enjoyed with God in *secret*, as his sweetest comfort. ^{Psa 63:5-6}

14. It is necessary for the same purpose, that the believer increase daily *in his knowledge of the grounds* of spiritual consolation. In order to advance in true comfort, he must study (through grace) to attain clearer and juster views of God the Father as a God of love, grace, and mercy to him; of the person of Christ, in his righteousness, fulness, offices, and relations; of the Holy Spirit as his Quickener, Sanctifier, Comforter, and Guide; of the covenant of grace, in the admirable suitableness, fulness, and stability of it; and of the doctrines, offers, and

promises of the glorious gospel. The more spiritual and enlarged, clearer and distinct his knowledge is, especially of these grounds of pure consolation, the more he will see reason to be of good comfort; and the more the principle and habit of spiritual joy will increase in his soul; and the more he will rejoice in Christ Jesus, and glory in His cross. A spiritual and clear understanding of those glorious and reviving objects will make his way clear in *taking* comfort. Remaining ignorance in the mind of a good man is, for the most part, the parent of all his doubts and perplexities of spirit. This is because he doesn't know how far he may, or may not, take encouragement and comfort.

If he were but to study the *covenant of grace* more, and to understand better where it differs from the *covenant of works*, his doubts and fears would proportionally vanish, like clouds before the sun shining in its strength. And he would attain more of the holiness and consolation which are promised him there. The better he understands that well-ordered and sure covenant, and the more he meditates on it, and admires it, the more cordials he will find in it to cheer him under all his pressures and faintings of soul. If he better understood that eternal and wonderful contract, he would look for less from the creature, and for more from the Redeemer — for less here, for more hereafter. He would discern more clearly that a humbling *sense* of the sinfulness and strength of sin in his heart, is good evidence of spiritual life in it. And he would discern that notwithstanding the sin that remains in him, he has much in the promises, to daily afford him pure consolation. It is “through the *knowledge* of God,” as his Covenant-God, “and of Jesus our Lord,” as his Covenant-head, that “grace and peace are multiplied” to the believer. ^{2Pet 1.2} Let him then “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” ^{2Pet 3.18} that sure foundation of holy comfort. And then “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus.” ^{Phi 4.7} If the pleasure even of *natural* knowledge is great, then how inexpressibly great must be the pleasure of advancing in *spiritual* knowledge!

15. If the believer would attain an increase of spiritual, and solid consolation, let him *not give ear to the reports of sense*. By *sense* here, is meant the present frame, feeling, or perception of an exercised Christian, which is either pleasant or unpleasant, and is continually subject to change. To hearken and trust to the reports of sense — or in other words, to make his feelings or frames the ground of his faith, or the rule according to which he regulates his exercise — renders the faith of the Christian unsteady, and hinders the growth of it. And if the growth of faith is obstructed, then the increase of spiritual comfort will likewise be obstructed. *Sense* judges and reports that he is in a state of grace, and that Christ saves him, merely because his feelings are pleasant and comfortable. It concludes that his state is either good or bad, only from what he *feels*, or from his present frame of spirit. If this is lively and pleasant, then sense reports that he is in a state of grace, and that Christ is acting the part of a Saviour to him, But if, on the contrary, his frame is dull and unpleasant, sense reports that he is *not* in a state of grace, and that it would be rash and presumptuous of him to trust that Jesus will save him.

Thus, the report which sense makes to the believer's conscience, of the state of his soul before God, and of his salvation by Jesus Christ, is not founded on unchangeable grounds, which would set his mind and conscience at rest. But it is founded on things which are *changeable*, and which frequently expose him to perplexing doubts and fears. If he makes his lively feelings the foundation of his faith, instead of making the record of God its foundation, then

his acting of faith will either be lively or languid, more or less, according to these feelings. If he trusts in Christ on the ground of his own pleasant feelings, which are perpetually changing, instead of trusting in Christ on the warrant of the offers and calls of the gospel — which is an unchanging as well as authentic warrant — then his exercise of faith must cease as often as his frame ceases to be lively and comfortable. Now, how can his faith increase if it isn't exercised *daily*? And how can he exercise it daily, if he thinks that he shouldn't exercise it except on the ground of a pleasant frame, which he may have today and lack tomorrow; indeed, which he may not enjoy for a long season?

Thus, if he would derive solid and increasing consolation from the fulness of Christ, by daily actings of faith, then he must no longer ground his actings of faith on his feelings, but on the immutable offers and promises of God, who cannot lie. By building his confidence in Christ on the reports of *sense*, he builds it on a wrong as well as changeable foundation. And thereby he *forfeits* his comfort, instead of deriving an *increase* of it. Faith cannot derive any increase either of holiness or comfort from Christ, unless its exercise proceeds upon its proper ground. It is not the report of sense, but the record of God, that is the true and warrantable ground of saving faith. If the believer would attain solid and increasing consolation, then he must allow his faith to stand always upon the record of God concerning his Son. For that is the *only right ground* of confidence in the Son of God for salvation — and it is therefore styled “the word of faith.” Rom 10.8 Then he will see that when his pleasant frames are gone, he still has ground to hold fast his confidence in his faithful Redeemer. Then he will learn to retain the confidence of his heart in his Divine Saviour, even when the reports of his sense contradict the report of the gospel, and like Abraham, “against hope, believe in hope.” Rom 4.18 As his confidence in the Lord Jesus for salvation, ceases to be grounded on his comfortable *feelings*, he will proportionally receive that pure and everlasting consolation from Christ, which is the pleasant *fruit* and not the *ground* of his faith.¹

¹ In order to illustrate, as well as to confirm what has been advanced in this particular, I cannot forbear transcribing most of a paragraph from ROMAINE'S *Life of Faith*, p. 61. — ‘Sense judges from what it sees, and draws its inferences from what it feels. So that its report to the conscience, either of a believer's state, or of his growth in it, is not from unchangeable things which would settle the conscience in peace, but from changeable things, which leave room for continual doubting. Sense also looks at the *fruits* of faith, more than at the *object* of it. And if the believer has been misled, and taught to confound these two together, he will be at great uncertainty in judging his state. For instead of making the word of God, he will make his *comforts* the ground of his faith; and as these are more or less, so will his faith be. When he has comfortable feelings, then he will think himself a believer; and when he has none, then he will think himself an unbeliever, changing his judgment of himself as his feelings do, like the wind; and varying as his comforts do, like the weather. This is a common case. I have seen the sad effects of it in the lives of many of my acquaintances who, from being thus taught to judge themselves, were tossed about for several years, up and down — now comforted, then doubting — and could not get any solid establishment; till the word and Spirit of God convinced them that *sense* was not to be the ground of their believing, nor the *object* to which they were to look. Sense judges by feeling, and reports what it sees. Sense says, Now I am in the favour of God; for I *feel* it. Now he is my God, for I find Him so: I am comforted. Now He demonstrates it to me; for I feel nearness to Him in prayer, and sweet answers. Now I am sure my duties and services are acceptable, for I am quite lively in them, and come from them with warm affections. Now I cannot doubt, for I feel the assurance of His love to me. And when sense has lost those comfortable feelings, then it draws contrary inferences — Now I am *not* in the favour of God; for I *do not feel* it. Now he is not my God; for I do not *find* Him so. I am not comforted, etc. What can be the issue of this, but continual wavering and changing? For our feelings are sometimes more, sometimes less, as every believer experiences. What a state then he must be in, who has no way to judge of himself except by those changeable things! What room he leaves for continual doubting, and what trouble and misery he thereby brings upon himself, as well as dishonour to the unchangeableness of God in his nature and promises!’

16. It will also be necessary, for the same purpose, that the believer always be on his guard against *affected sadness*. Does he already have some happy measure of true consolation? Then let him show that he has it, by habitual cheerfulness of temper and manner. Let him not assume an air of gloominess or peevishness, thus showing to any around him that he finds no comfort in a life of communion with the blessed Redeemer. When a believer is not afflicted with trouble of soul, and yet he appears habitually dejected and gloomy in the view of others, he thereby gives the lie to the truth of his holy profession, as well as to the truth of God in His promises of consolation.

He thereby practically declares it to be false that God “is the God of all comfort;” that the Lord Jesus “is the Consolation of Israel;” that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and that “wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness.” By assuming an air of gloominess or peevishness, he brings reproach on the way of holiness, instead of recommending it. Like the unbelieving spies who discouraged the Israelites by bringing up an evil report of the promised land, he represents the life of faith and holiness as an uncomfortable and unamiable life. And so, more effectually than one can express, he discourages sinners around him from trying to enter upon that life. If he were, on the contrary, to exhibit the comforts of religion by habitual cheerfulness of temper and manner (so far as he possesses them), he would resemble the *faithful* spies who brought with them clusters of the grapes of Canaan, so that they might thereby invite their brethren to enter that good land. Because he is infinitely obliged to the Lord Jesus, it is his duty to always promote among men, the honour of His glorious name, and the interests of His spiritual kingdom.

His whole behaviour should therefore be such as would be the means of winning souls to the blessed Redeemer. The apostle Peter exhorts wives to be in subjection to their own husbands, “that if any do not obey the word, they may also, without words, be won by the conduct of the wives.” ^{1Pet 3.1} A holy man should not only *be*, but *appear to be* habitually cheerful, so that all who know him might have an opportunity to perceive that his blessed Saviour has made him *happy* as well as holy — and that his holy religion, instead of having rendered him gloomy, has disposed him to be *cheerful*. Conscious that he is under the greatest obligations to invite others around him to “taste and see that the Lord is good,” ^{Psa 34.8} let him from now on adopt this resolution of the holy Psalmist: “My soul will make her boast in the Lord; the humble will hear of it, and be glad.” ^{Psa 34.2} He indeed has cause to always be humble and penitent, but he has no cause to appear gloomy. A smiling aspect is attractive; and doubtless none has so good a reason to display a cheerful countenance, as the upright in heart. If the believer, then, would have lasting and increasing comfort, let him continually be on his guard against *affected* or pretended sadness. Otherwise he will provoke the Lord to deprive him of his present degree of comfort, and to afflict him with *real* sadness. Although he doesn’t always enjoy sensible consolation, he has the root and the habit of it, and he always has good *cause* to rejoice. Let him therefore be cheerful always, and on every occasion show that he can distinguish between gravity and sullenness, seriousness and gloominess. And let him never appear so ignorant as to once insinuate it is right or becoming in any true Christian, to appear habitually sad and sullen.

17. If the believer would attain increasing tranquility of mind, he must *frequently examine his heart and conduct*, in order that he may more clearly discern his evidences of personal

interest in spiritual consolation. The more clearly he perceives his personal interest in Christ and in the covenant of grace, the higher the degree of his holy comfort will usually be. The more diligently he scrutinizes his heart and life, comparing them with the word of God — and the more frequently and clearly he perceives his evidences of union and communion with Christ, in consequence of the witnessing of the Holy Spirit— the more his heart will be comforted and encouraged, and the more he will know that he is *of the truth*. ^{Joh 18.37} And with that greater confidence, he will assure his heart before God. ¹

Now, whenever he has it in view to examine himself, let him begin by renewing his *act of trusting* in Christ for all his salvation, as well as for the *joy* of that salvation. For if he begins this inquiry by fearing that the Lord Jesus will not save him, or by yielding to distrust and despondency, then he will be afraid to search deeply into his heart, or to know the worst of himself. But if he begins by an act of humble and direct confidence in Christ Jesus, for salvation for himself in particular, then he will be disposed, as well as *encouraged* to deal impartially with himself. He will be willing to find out the worst as well as the best of himself. He won't be afraid to find that his heart, so far as it is unrenewed, is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. ^{Jer 17.9} Besides, by means of that *acting of faith*, his other graces will be invigorated and excited to lively exercise. And the more he exercises them, the more *easily* and *clearly* he will perceive them. Further, let him also begin it by praying that the Holy Spirit may shine upon the graces which, he trusts, are implanted in his heart, and so “bear witness with his own spirit, that he is a child of God.” ^{Rom 8.16} He may then proceed to test his *graces*. And he should test them by their *nature* rather than by the degree of their strength or liveliness. Let him more especially examine himself as to “whether he is in the *faith*, and so prove himself.” ^{2Cor 13.5} If he doesn't discern true faith in his heart, and yet he is conscious of an earnest *desire* to believe cordially in Jesus Christ, accompanied by frequent endeavours to do so, then he ought to conclude that he has some measure of that precious faith.

An earnest and habitual *desire* for grace, *is grace* in the account of God. ^{Mat 5.6} And a man's desire for faith, love, hope, and all the other graces of the Spirit, is sincere and earnest when he desires them for their own intrinsic excellence and amiableness, and chiefly for the glory of God in Christ — and when (though he doesn't perceive them) he feels his *need* of them, and is conscious that he desires them, and desires even the perfection of them. Let the believer trust that the Lord Jesus gives him grace, and that the holy Comforter will, in every time of need, shine upon that grace in his soul and render it apparent to him. And so let him enter frequently upon the trial of his state and conduct. And if he finds but one scriptural evidence of his being in a state of grace, then he should conclude, for his own comfort, that he has *all the other* evidences of being in a state of grace — even if he cannot clearly perceive them at present. He should nevertheless frequently pursue this important inquiry, till he has the comfort of discerning clearly *all* his evidences. For the more knowledge he has of his personal interest in the blessings of salvation, the more consolation he will enjoy.

Moreover, let the believer search daily into his heart and life, in order to find out more of his *sins*, and of his *wants* (shortcomings) — so that by a deep and affecting sense of them, he may

¹ **1Joh 3:19** And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

be urged to apply and frequently plead the promises of pardon and of sanctification. This is a necessary means of “walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.” Act 9:31

18. Finally, In order to advance in spiritual consolation, the believer must endeavour diligently *to mortify his fear of death*. Although death is, by the almighty Redeemer, so disarmed of its sting and strength, that it can do no hurt to any of His redeemed, it is still a dreadful enemy to our nature. When the exercised Christian thinks of temporal death as armed with the tremendous curse of the violated law, and as a punishment for sin, it assumes even to him, the grim and ghastly visage of “the king of terrors.” Job 18:14 But when he contemplates it as moved from the *curse* of the covenant of works, to the *promise* of the covenant of grace — as no longer being a curse, but a blessing; and no longer an enemy, but a friend to all the spiritual seed of Christ — its terror should not make him afraid, The apostle Paul said to the believers at Corinth, “Death is yours.” 1Cor 3:22 And concerning himself, he says, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Phi 1:21 John the beloved disciple “heard a voice from heaven, saying to him, Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.’” Rev 14:13

If temporal death, then, is an article in the inventory of the believer’s treasure; and if, as such, it is *his in promise* — if it is *gain* to him, and a *blessing* in disguise — then why should he fear it any longer with a slavish dread? Why should he allow himself to fear it, so as to lose for a single moment the smallest degree of his holy consolation? If a good man would therefore subdue and rise superior to his fear of death, then under the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, let him study,

1st. To fear sin more and more. As one wedge drives out another, so the godly fear of sinning expels the slavish fear of dying.

2d. Let him also, in the prospect of dying, frequently commit his soul with all its concerns, to his infinitely merciful and faithful Redeemer; and let him commit it to Him with unsuspecting confidence, trusting firmly that, just as his Redeemer is able, so He is *willing* “to keep that which he has committed to Him, against that great day.” 2Tim 1:12 Let him constantly entrust to the Lord Jesus, the safety, comfort, and complete salvation of his precious soul. And as often as disquieting fear arises, let him say with the holy Psalmist, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.” Psa 56:3 “None who trust in Him will be desolate.” Psa 34:22 Seeing that the great Redeemer “who lives forevermore, and who has the keys of hell and death,” invites and even commands the saints to trust Him with their souls, their bodies, and all their concerns, they may rest assured that He will not deceive their expectation. No, he will not deceive it, for He has promised that He “will never leave them, nor forsake them.” Heb 13:5

3d. The Believer should, for the same purpose, familiarize to his mind the thoughts of dying, and of his Redeemer’s glorious victory over death and the grave. He should frequently meditate on Christ (as his federal representative) having *disarmed* death as to the dying Christian. The almighty Redeemer has disarmed it of its sting and strength, and so too of all its terror. “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” 1Cor 15:56 Now the Lord Jesus “has put away *sin*, by the sacrifice of himself;” Heb 9:26 and He has perfectly fulfilled the *law* by His obedience unto death. Thus, for the true believer, He has disarmed death of its venomous sting, and at the same time, of its strength or dreadful dominion. And what hurt can the most poisonous and frightful monster do to him, when it has entirely lost both its sting and its strength?

The Redeemer promises that by taking away the sting and strength of it, He will be the *plague* of death, for his *dying* saints. Indeed, he promises that by raising them up in glory at the last day, He will be the *destruction* of death for his *dead* saints. “I will ransom them,” he says “from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plagues! O grave, I will be your destruction! Pity will be hidden from my eyes.” ^{Hos 13.14} Accordingly, we read that He “has abolished death.” ^{2Tim 1.10} That is, He has annulled or reduced it to nothing, or so destroyed it for all who believe in him, as to have turned it from a curse to a blessing. How consoling then, how cheering is the thought that death disarmed, can do no more harm to the dying believer than if it had been completely annulled! It can indeed separate his soul from his body; but it cannot separate either one from Him who is the living Redeemer, the resurrection and the life. The dying of a saint is but sleeping. It is sleeping IN JESUS. ^{1The 4.14} Death to him is but “the *shadow* of death;” it is not the *substance* of it. It is not the Omega, but the Alpha of his consummate felicity. The believer then begins to live, when he begins to die. It is not the end either of his soul or of his body; but only a separation between them for an appointed time.

4th. By increasing his diligence in the exercise of every grace, and in the practice of every duty, let him also study to always be prepared for death and judgment, *actually* as well as *habitually*. For when in this manner, he gives “all diligence to make his calling and election sure,” ^{2Pet 1.10} he will gradually, through grace, overcome the disquieting fear of death and judgment, and will rejoice in hope of eternal life. ¹

Thus I have endeavoured to point out to the exercised Christian, those principal means of *retaining* and *increasing* spiritual consolation which he ought to employ diligently. I have been studious, as far as I could be, to diversify the illustration of them, such as the disquieted believer, which was directed to use for the *recovery* of his forfeited comfort. I will only add that if the sincere believer uses these means diligently, and if instead of resting in them, or depending on his use of them, he relies only upon his great Redeemer for all grace and consolation — then he will increase in the principle and habit of spiritual joy, and he will in every time of need, be favoured with sensible comfort.

Reflections

FROM what has now been discoursed, the pious reader may easily see that no other pleasures under the sun are to be compared to those of *faith and holiness*. The pleasure of true religion, or of communion with God, far surpasses all the other delights of the sons of men. In comparison to other pleasures, communion is pleasantness itself, pleasantness in the abstract. The *pains* of sense have frequently conquered and destroyed the *delights* of sense. But those pains, instead of being able to conquer the delights of faith and holiness, have in ten thousand instances, been counterbalanced and conquered by them. And while the pleasures of sense diminish with use, the delights of religion increase with it. The longer a holy man continues in the exercise of faith and the practice of holiness, and the higher he advances in these, the greater and sweeter is his delight. Besides, in order to enjoy and

¹ Write down the reasons which, at any time, make you afraid to die; and then endeavour, by faith, prayer, and conversation with experienced Christians, to remove the causes.’ HERVEY’S Rules, etc.

advance in the pleasures of religion, he is not called to relinquish any of the pleasures of sense, except those which are sinful, despicable, and productive of misery. Believer, as none has so much reason to rejoice as you, see that you exercise and “increase your joy in the Lord.” Isa 29.19 Study to attain an increasing cheerfulness of disposition, and pleasantness of manner. So far as they are spiritual, these will greatly promote holiness in yourself, and will so adorn it as to recommend it much to others.

Are spiritual knowledge and faith principal means of advancing in holy consolation? Then we may infer from this, that those hours in the life of a believer are usually *the sweetest ones*, in which he has the deepest sense of his need of Christ; the clearest discoveries of the fulness and suitableness of the willingness and glory of Christ; and the firmest confidence in Christ for the supply of all his wants. He commonly experiences the most solid comfort, when he is most enabled and excited to entrust all his spiritual and temporal concerns to his Divine Redeemer, whose power and grace, whose thoughts and ways, infinitely surpass the highest conceptions of men and angels.

Those of the saints who have attained much sensible joy, may see from the foregoing particulars, how necessary it is for them to take heed that the height of their joy *does not elate them with pride or self-sufficiency*. The sensible joy of God’s salvation should never lift them up with self-conceit; and the lack of such joy should never cast them down under disquieting and discouraging fear. The lack of sensible joy should not for a moment deprive believers of their peaceful tranquility of mind. Their serenity of mind should be as great when they are sorrowing with Jesus on mount Calvary, as when they are rejoicing with Him on the mount of transfiguration. The proper tendency of sensible joy is to *humble*. But through the depravity remaining in the heart, it does not always have that effect. Therefore, let those believers who are favoured with sensible and lively emotions of joy, take heed that they never delight in *them* so much as in *Jesus*, the Consolation of Israel; and that they never yield to any temptation to rest or trust in them; and never think themselves more holy or acceptable to God, because of them. The more sensible joy they experience, the humbler as well as more self-diffident they should be, and the more “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Rom 12.11

Let those believers who have by grace attained increasing consolation, learn from what has been said, to always take heed that they do not allow their fear of sinning, and of losing their comfort, to degenerate into a *perplexing scrupulousness of conscience*.¹ The apostle Peter exhorts believers to “pass the time of their sojourning here, in fear” 1Pet 1.17 — that is, in filial fear, which is a fear of sinning against God, their heavenly Father. The Christian should indeed attain more and more of this filial fear daily. But for his *comfort*, he should also keep it within its due bounds, and not allow it to run out into a vain and endless scrupulosity of conscience. He should, by studying the law of God concerning sin and duty in every particular case, have his conscience well-informed. If his persuasion that whatever it is that presents itself to be done, is lawful and right — grounded on his knowledge of the spirituality and great extent of that holy law — then his persuasion in that case, may be full and firm. And being firmly persuaded that it is according “to the law and the testimony,” Isa 8.20 he should resolve to do it without hesitation. But if his persuasion of the lawfulness of what he is requested or

¹ *Scrupulousness*: in this case, means striving for perfect sanctification in this life.— WHG

disposed to do, is grounded on *opinion* only — or if it is merely an opinion that it is agreeable to the law, and so he is not fully persuaded — there will always remain a secret doubt in his mind that the *contrary* is his duty, and not this. In such a case, if the arguments *for* the lawfulness of it appear to his judgment more probable than those *against* the lawfulness of it, he should resolve to do it, without allowing his resolution to be shaken by the latter.

But if the arguments *against* the lawfulness of it appear to his mind more probable than those *for it*, or even equally probable, then in that case, doubting the lawfulness of it, he shouldn't do it. For the apostle Paul says, "He that doubts is damned if he eats," or condemned in his own conscience by the word of God, "because he does not eat out of faith. For whatever is not of faith, is sin." Rom 14.23 Whoever does what he does not determine to be lawful and right, but still doubts whether it is lawful or not, *sins*. For though he does that which may be materially *right*, in itself and in the sight of God, yet he doesn't do it *rightly*, because he doubts at the time whether it is lawful or not. In order to prevent his sinning in such cases, he should "be fully persuaded in his own mind" Rom 14.5 of the lawfulness of an action, before he resolves to perform it. Then he won't condemn himself in what he allows himself to do. And when he is fully persuaded that he may lawfully do this or that, and yet has some objections to the contrary occur to his mind, he should not delay doing it till these difficulties are solved — for if he does, other difficulties may arise. Scruples will multiply the more they are attended to; and they will dampen the resolution, and thus mar the comfort of the exercised Christian.

Has any believer, after having been in the depths of spiritual trouble, not only recovered spiritual consolation, but attained an increase of it? Then his duty is *to constantly admire and praise* those wonders of the wisdom, power, faithfulness, and grace of Christ, which he has seen in those depths. The floods of trouble and waves of terror beat vehemently upon his soul, but the Lord Jesus, who "sits upon the flood," Psa 29.10 has mercifully upheld him, and "has drawn him out of many waters." 2Sam 22.17 He has seen the wonders of the Redeemer's wisdom in dispensing to him both trouble and comfort, terror and hope, sorrow and joy — and in teaching him by these means, the malignity and bitterness of sin, and the preciousness and freeness of grace; the wonders of His power and love, in sustaining his fainting soul under the pressure of his overwhelming distress; and the wonders of His mercy and faithfulness, in delivering him from the darkness of desertion, and bringing him into the light of communion with Himself.

Let him then, with adoring gratitude, admire and praise these wonders. Let him say with the holy Psalmist, "You are the God who does wonders." Psa 77.14 He should likewise say to his redeeming God, with holy reverence and ardent love, "O Lord, I will praise You. Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me." Isa 12.1 "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever." Psa 30.11-12 Be assured, O Christian, that "it is good to sing praises to our God, for it is *pleasant*, as well as beautiful." Psa 147.1 It will infuse a double sweetness into all your enjoyments. Though the Lord doesn't need your praises, He is glorified by them; and a growing disposition to praise Him is necessary to your own advancement in holy consolation.

To conclude: The Christian, who is favoured with the cheering light of God's gracious countenance may, from what has been discoursed, see that he is under the highest obligations to be more and more assiduous in using all the means of obtaining a daily increase of spiritual consolation. The sweetness, and especially the usefulness of holy comfort for the purposes of his Redeemer's glory, should excite him to unwearied diligence in employing every appointed means of attaining a daily increase of it. Let him live by faith, grow in grace, and take heed that he not rest in the comfort received, as an evidence of grace. Let him also guard against taking his comfort from the *act* instead of the *Object* of his faith, offered to him in the gospel.

CHAPTER 9.

Directions for attaining establishment in holy consolation.

To be *established* is to be settled firmly, or fixed unalterably, in the enjoyment of some privilege either of a spiritual or a temporal kind. By a believer's being established in spiritual comfort, I don't mean his being so established in a state of grace as to persevere in it to the end (for this is the common privilege of *all* who cordially believe).¹ But I mean his being settled firmly in the *habit* of peaceful tranquility and holy joy, which is the privilege only of those who are holy in an eminent degree. An eminently holy man is established in solid consolation when he is blessed with a settled tranquility of mind, and a constant inclination of heart to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to delight in God as his God in Him — even if he isn't often favoured with joyful frames or lively emotions of delight. After he has attained settled comfort, his frames may often change, notwithstanding, and his afflictions may be frequent and painful. But inasmuch as he trusts in Christ, and delights in the will of God, his inward consolation in times even of great affliction, is commonly *increased*, instead of being *lessened*. The sharper and more painful his trials are, his consolation is usually stronger, more sensible, and sweeter. And so his times of outward affliction are ordinarily the seasons of his greatest inward comfort. The consoling influences which are then graciously afforded him, serve to render the habit of holy joy in his soul more stable, and the exercise of it more lively and sensible. Now this consolation is established, and even "*everlasting* consolation."²The 2.16 It is heaven on earth. It is the earnest, the foretaste, and the beginning of that celestial, ecstatic, and endless delight which the happy believer is soon to enjoy in the immediate presence of God and of the Lamb.

If the exercised Christian would arrive at establishment in spiritual comfort, then in his dependence on the grace of Christ, let him diligently observe the following directions which I humbly offer him, as those which appear to me to be, of all others, the most adapted to his purpose.

1. Let him endeavour with all diligence, to attain establishment in *the assurance of faith*. By assurance of faith, is meant a firm assent of the heart to the truth of the gospel, and a firm or assured confidence of the heart in Jesus Christ, for the salvation that is offered and promised in the gospel. Or, it is a cordial belief of the Divine testimony, and a cordial trust in the Divine Saviour for the whole of his salvation. Or, in other words, it is a man's cordial belief of the record of God, with application to himself, and his trusting firmly in Christ, and in God through him, for all that salvation which Jesus has purchased for him, and which God offers to him in the gospel. His assurance of faith is not an assurance that Christ has *already* saved him; but it is trusting that Christ *now* saves him, and *will* save him, with an everlasting salvation. Act 15.11 It is the simple, direct confidence of his heart in the adorable Saviour, for salvation for himself in particular. It is always the *duty* (though seldom the attainment) of the believer, to receive the word not only in assurance, but "in *much* assurance;"¹The 1.5 — and in every act of worship, to draw near to his gracious God and Father, not only in assurance, but "in *full* assurance of faith."² Heb 10.22

¹ Joh 10.28.

Now, the way to attain establishment in solid consolation, is to become established in this assurance of faith, through grace. For that end, the Christian must not merely trust in the Lord Jesus for complete salvation for himself, but he must endeavour to place a *firm* trust, a *steady* affiance, a *settled* and *assured* confidence in that infinitely faithful Redeemer. It must be his habitual endeavour to honour the exalted Saviour not only with the confidence of his heart, but with strong, unsuspecting, and unshaken confidence. It will be necessary that, under the almighty operation of the Holy Spirit, he study diligently to become “established in the faith;” Col 2.7 to “continue in the faith, grounded and settled;” Col 1.23 and to “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, firm to the end.” Heb 3.6

By being established in the assurance or confidence of faith, the exercised Christian attains establishment in spiritual comfort. His establishment in *faith* does not merit establishment in *consolation*; but the latter is in proportion to the former, and is inseparably connected with it. Hence we have these declarations of Scripture: “If you will not believe, surely you will not be established.” Isa 7.9 “Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established.” 2Chr 20.20 “You will keep him in perfect peace (*Heb.* ‘in peace, peace’), him whose mind is *stayed* on you, because he trusts in you.” Isa 26.3 To *stay* the mind on the Lord Jesus, is to repose a *firm or settled* confidence in Him. Now, the compassionate Saviour, will not permit such a resolute believer to continue to be oppressed and tossed with disquietude of soul. He will, on the contrary, “keep him in peace, peace;” that is, in all manner of peace, or in great, settled, and durable peace. This is the happy attainment of the man “who fears the Lord, who delights *greatly* in His commandments.” “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is *fixed*, trusting in the Lord. His heart is *established*, he shall not be afraid.” Psa 112.1,7,8 Such joy is found in believing — or at least, such peace, such undisturbed quietness — as can be found in no other thing in the world. It is by means of his inward and assured confidence in the love, care, and faithfulness of his great Redeemer, that the advanced believer is carried wonderfully and sweetly through all the outward vicissitudes of life. By trusting firmly in his exalted Lord, his heart is fixed, amidst all the tumults and changes of this world. The hearts of other men are unstayed; and therefore they are agitated by every rumour — as the leaves of a tree are shaken by the wind, or “as the chaff which the wind drives away.” Psa 1.4

But just as no tidings of calamity can shake the confidence of that man whose faith is established on the Rock of his salvation, so none can disturb the tranquility of his heart. He will be enabled to say, ‘If afflictions come, “my heart is fixed;” “God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Psa 73.26 “I know in whom I have believed. I trust that He will keep that which I have committed to him;” 2Tim 1.12 and that He will perform these great promises to me. “As your days, so shall your strength be.” Deu 33.25 “I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.” Psa 91.15 Thus the advanced believer attains established comfort; for the confidence of his heart is firmly fixed on Christ, and on the promises. He believes that the Lord Jesus *can and will* sweeten every bitterness, make up every loss, and make all things work together for good to him. And so he trusts simply to the promise and power of the Redeemer, beyond and even *against* appearances. Having but *one* Object to rely and live on for *all* things in time and in eternity, his heart is fixed; his comfort is established. Come what will, he is “upon the mountain of the Lord’s house,” Isa 2.2 where he looks down with calmness of spirit, upon all the commotions beneath. And if the storm threatens him, he entrusts all to Him who in one moment can say, “Peace, be still.” Mar 4.39 Indeed, if his trust in the Rock of his

salvation were as firm as his spiritual state is secure, his holy joy would almost be equal to that of one of the ransomed above.

2. In order to arrive at established comfort, believers must also study to be *rooted and grounded in love*. The apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the saints at Ephesus, informed them that he offered up this prayer for them: “That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.” Eph 3.17-19 To be rooted and grounded in love is to be deeply fixed, and firmly established in love. Saints are rooted and grounded in love when they are deeply and firmly fixed in an experiential knowledge and assured faith of Christ’s infinite love to them — and in the exercise of grateful and ardent love to Him. Or when, in the faith and sense of His redeeming love to them, they are confirmed, or firmly settled and strengthened, in the habit and exercise of their supreme love to Him, and to God in Him, They may be said to be rooted and grounded in love, when the faith of Christ’s love to them, and the habit of their love to Him, are firmly rooted and strengthened in their souls.

Now, in order to be established in holy consolation, the believer must be established by the Holy Spirit in his *love* to Christ, and to God as his God in Him. Supreme love to God is the principal grace, the spring of all the other graces in a holy soul. It is in particular the principle of spiritual joy. In proportion to a holy man loving the Lord, and enjoying communion with Him, he delights and rejoices in Him. He delights and rejoices in all His perfections, and in all the manifested glory of them. He rejoices in the works and in the word of the Lord. He delights in his preceptive and providential will; and in his holy image, whether he discerns it in himself or in others. The infinite loveliness and love of God in Christ are objects of his supreme delight. Therefore, if he is always loving and enjoying God, he is always delighted in the same proportion; and in proportion to his delight, he must of course be comfortable. If he is established in the faith of God’s love to him, and in the exercise as well as the habit of his love to God; he will be established in Divine consolation in the same degree. It will be an inexpressible comfort to him, to reflect that the One upon whom he has set the supreme love of his heart, is infinitely worthy of it. Besides, when he is established in his unfeigned love of God, he is proportionally confirmed in his hatred of all sin; and in proportion to his being firm in his holy abhorrence of all iniquity, he is established in holy comfort.

Therefore, to be established in supreme love to God and Christ, is the way to become established in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Hence come these words from the apostle Paul, to the believers at Colossae: “I would that you knew what great conflict I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love.” Col 2.1-2 — as if he had said, ‘I wrestle with God in prayer for all the saints, that as they are already firmly cemented together in cordial affection to Christ, and to one another, so may their hearts be filled abundantly with holy consolation. He prayed for the *latter* as a consequence of the *former*. Love is the most delightful affection of the soul. Therefore, when it is set upon the Lord Jesus, who is altogether lovely, and for that reason the most deserving of it; and the more fixed and strengthened it is in the heart — the greater must be the delight, and the stronger the consolation it will produce. Accordingly, when our Apostle said, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” Rom 8.35 it

was with holy joy, and even with triumph, that he expressed those words. O how inexpressibly delightful and cheering it is, to constantly love and to always be loved by Him who is “the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely;” yes — who is LOVE itself! ^{Song 5.10}

3. It will be necessary for the same purpose, that the exercised Christian be established in *humility and meekness*. He must be established in true humility, or evangelical humiliation of mind. True humility is the deep and abasing sense which a good man has of his odiousness as a sinner in the sight of God; of his vileness as a sinful creature; and of his utter insufficiency for his own salvation. And *that* is accompanied by poverty of spirit. Humility is a true sight and sense of the hatefulness of all sin, and of his own odiousness *because* of sin, attended with a disposition to abase himself and to exalt his God and Saviour alone. ^{Isa 2.11} In evangelical humiliation, he is made not only to despair of ever being able to help himself, but to renounce himself in every point of view, and to freely prostrate himself at the feet of Jesus Christ. He has self-abasing views of himself as an unworthy sinner, and admiring views of the Lord Jesus as an all-sufficient Saviour.

He has also a quick perception of his own defects and defilements, and especially of the *pride* of his heart. He is therefore like a little child, afraid of taking a single step, *alone*. And he is so conscious of weakness and depravity within, and of snares and dangers without, as to cry continually to the Lord to “hold him up that he may be safe.” He is disposed to think that his attainments in holiness are comparatively small, and to count himself little among the saints, indeed, even one of the very least of saints. And the more he increases in humility, ¹ the more he sees and feels the strength of his corruptions, and the weakness of his graces; the greatness of his natural deformity, and the smallness of his spiritual attainments compared to what they ought to be; the deep and dreadful malignity of the least of his sins, and the inexpressible meanness and deficiency of the greatest of his performances. Hence he becomes proportionally poor in spirit, and disposed in lowliness of mind to esteem other saints better than himself. ^{Phi 2.3} Now, to advance to eminence and establishment in true humility,² is a special means of attaining establishment in pure consolation.

“Though the Lord is high, yet He regards the lowly.” ^{Psa 138.6} “Thus says the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble.’” ^{Isa 57.15} “Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” ^{Luk 14.11} “Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” ^{Mat 18.4} Deep humility is, as it were, the guard of spiritual consolation, as well as the soil in which it grows.

It is no less necessary for the same end, that the believer grow and be established in meekness. To be meek is to be of a mild, soft, and gentle spirit. The Christian, by “putting on the new, man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness,” ^{Eph 4.24} puts on “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.” ^{1Pewt 3.4} He is meek in proportion to being holy. Meekness is so much the character of every saint, that in Scripture, the meek and the wicked are opposed to one

¹ The saints increase in humility the nearer they get to heaven. Paul, some years after his conversion, said of himself, That he was “unworthy to be called an Apostle.” As he advanced in holiness, he cried out, “Less than the least of all saints.” A little before his death, his cry is “The chief of sinners.”

² ‘Should anyone,’ says Augustine, ‘ask me concerning the Christian religion, and the people of it, I would answer that the first, the second, and the third thing in it, and all, is — *humility*.’

another. “The Lord lifts up the *meek*. He casts the *wicked* down to the ground.” Psa 147.6 In proportion to a good man being meek, he is of a loving, merciful, and forgiving disposition. At the feet of Jesus, he has learned to be meek and lowly in heart. And therefore he is not critical, nor easily provoked, nor hard to be reconciled. If he meets with unkind and unjust usage, he recollects that although he hasn’t deserved such treatment from men, they are often the instruments employed by his heavenly Father to chasten and humble him. ^{2Sam 16.5-8}

Now, it is in proportion to the Christian advancing in holy meekness, that he increases in pure consolation; and so far as he is established in meekness, he is established in consolation. “The meek shall inherit the earth, and will delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Psa 37.11 They shall inherit the earth. The earth, empty and ‘transitory as it is, will be worthy to be termed an *inheritance* for them; for they will enjoy much of heaven upon earth. The more of a meek and quiet spirit they attain, they more they will enjoy themselves and their earthly comforts — and the more quietly and comfortably they will pass through the world, whatever their lot in it may be. “Learn from me, “says the Lord Jesus, “for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find *rest* for your souls.” Mat 11.29 He also promises that “the meek will eat and be *satisfied*,” Psa 22.26 and “the meek will *increase their joy* in the Lord.” Isa 29.19

4. If the believer would reach establishment in holy comfort, he must study *daily to grow in grace*. It must be his earnest and continual endeavour, in the faith of God’s free favour to him, to grow stronger and stronger in the *habit*, and to abound more and more in the *exercise* of every grace implanted by the Holy Spirit in his soul. By doing so, under sanctifying and consoling influences, spiritual declension and the loss of comfort will be happily prevented. The apostle Peter, in order to prevent the believers to whom he wrote from being led away with the error of the wicked, so as to fall from their own stedfastness, directed them to “grow in grace.” ^{2Pet 3.18} Believers, “holding the head, and having nourishment ministered,” should in point of duty as well as privilege, “increase with the increase of God.” Col 2.19 It is their duty to “grow up into Christ who is the Head,” not only in all things, but at all times. Eph 4.15 Their path should always be “as the morning light that shines more and more till the perfect day.” Pro 4.18 They should at all times grow inwardly by faith and love, clinging more firmly to Christ, the head of gracious influences; to grow outwardly by being more and more fruitful in good works; Tit 3.8 to grow upward in heavenly mindedness, and joy in God; Phi 3.20 and to grow downward in humility and self-denial. Hos 14.5 To thus grow in grace, and to continually grow in it, is the sure way to attain establishment in spiritual comfort. For the more a holy man advances in grace, the firmer his habits of grace become. And the firmer they are, the more “his heart is established with grace.” Heb 13.9 The more it is established with grace, the more he is established in the truth, so as to “continue in the faith grounded and settled.” Col 1.23 And the more this is his case, the more his “heart is established unblameable in holiness.” 1The 3.13 But as his heart is established in holiness — which comprises joy, and is the only true felicity of an immortal soul — it is proportionally established in holy consolation.

5. It will be necessary for the same purpose, that he be continually on his guard against *sinning in his use and enjoyment of lawful things*. The believer may assure himself that he pursues and does *lawful* things, but in an *unlawful manner*:

— if he desires or enjoys them immoderately;

- if he loves any of them so passionately as to have his heart inflamed with it, ^{Isa 57.5} and hindered by it from the vigorous exercise of grace, or the spiritual performance of duty;
- if his desire and endeavour to obtain the enjoyment of some outward comforts becomes ardent, and renders him impatient, ^{Gen 30.1} so that he begins to say, ‘I *must* have such and such a thing, whatever it may cost me;’
- if his heart becomes so fond and so tender of any of his earthly comforts, as not to be able to endure the thought that either the word, or the rod of God, would come so near as to touch it; ^{2Sam 18.5}
- if he entertains hopes of high satisfaction from any outward enjoyment, or promises himself more profit or pleasure from it, than it is fitted to afford; ^{Jer 2.13}
- if the Lord, by His providence, is calling for some one of his earthly comforts, he is so very unable and unwilling to resign it, as to become impatient and fretful, and to render it necessary to force it from him;
- if he becomes so anxious about the good things of this life, as to often be ready to say, “What will I eat? or, What will I drink? or With what will I be clothed?” ^{Mat 6.31} and if, when the Lord has been visiting him with some special dispensation in order to wean him from these earthly enjoyments, his heart still clings to them.

I say, if he pursues or uses earthly comforts in any of those ways, he uses them so as to *abuse* them. He uses *lawful* things in an *unlawful manner*, and so he transgresses the law of God. He sets them up as idols in his heart, and by his inordinate and undue affection for them, he impairs his inward consolation. He provokes his heavenly Father even to leave him for a season without the comfort of communion with Him.

Now, the love of earthly things, and the deceitfulness of sin, which remain in the heart of the believer, are such that they will continually expose him to the danger of sinning in one or another of those ways, in his pursuit or use of lawful things. If, then, he would advance to establishment in spiritual comfort, he must continually take heed that he does not pursue and enjoy lawful comforts in a sinful manner. It will be necessary that at all times he be “sober and vigilant,” lest he so love the world at any time, as to use lawful things in a sinful manner. And it must be his constant endeavour, through grace, to use his outward comforts so as to enjoy the inward comfort of communion with Christ in his use of them. He must always live *above* them, and never place his happiness *in* them. He should keep them constantly in their own place, and value them not so much for themselves, as for the opportunities and facilities which they afford him, to glorify his God and Saviour.

6. In order to be established in pure consolation, it will be no less necessary that the Christian be firmly fixed in his resolution and endeavour to *avoid those places, and that company*, which appear to have even *a remote tendency* to draw him into sin. He must for that purpose, always be firm in his resolution never to be present in the company of worldly and wicked men, without evident necessity or a clear providential call. And when at any time he has such a call, never to stay longer in their company than till his business with them is transacted. He should on all occasions show them that he loves their persons, but not their company; and that he is ready to do them all the good he can, but not to countenance them in any evil. It must also be his firm resolution never to venture into their company, however clear his call,

till after he has entrusted his temper, manner, and object, to that Saviour who “preserves the souls of his saints;” Psa 97.10 and who has said to each of them, “I will teach you the way in which you should go: I will guide you with My eye.” Psa 32.8 It is his duty to constantly maintain a holy jealousy over himself; and having tasted the sweetness of heavenly consolation, to live as distant as possible from the ensnaring society of worldly men. Just as he cannot approach too near to God, so he cannot stand at too great a distance from sin. Therefore, it will not be enough for him to keep himself merely from acts of sin. He must also constantly endeavour to “abstain even from all *appearances* of evil,” 1The 5.22 and from that company and those amusements which have even a remote tendency to lead him into sin, Such conduct will, indeed, expose him to the contempt and ridicule of ungodly men. Some will consider him a designing hypocrite; others, a precise formalist; and others, a weak and gloomy enthusiast.

Let it be so, “his witness is in heaven, and his record is on high.” Job 16.19 He can say that till he believed in Jesus Christ, he never knew what it was to enjoy real pleasure, or true satisfaction. He can attest from experience, that communion with Christ in His redeeming love and grace, is so delightful, so cheering, that anyone who has tasted the sweetness of it, cannot but desire more and more of it in preference to all the mean gratifications, the polluted delights, of carnal men. The men of the world, therefore, should cease to wonder if the experienced Christian so conducts himself as to evince on all occasions, his firm resolution to prefer the marrow and fatness of pure consolation, before the husks of vanity and sin. Indeed, such a resolution, when manifested by suitable conduct, is indispensably necessary to established comfort. For though the former doesn’t *merit* the latter, it is inseparably connected with it. The more firmly fixed a saint is in his holy resolution, always endeavouring to avoid whatever has a known tendency to draw him into sin, the more established he will be in his enjoyment of everlasting consolation. “I have not sat with vain persons,” says the Psalmist, “nor will I go in with hypocrites. I have hated the assembly of evildoers; and I will not sit with the wicked.” Psa 26.4-5 And again, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful... He will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season. His leaf also will not wither; and whatever he does will prosper. The ungodly are not so.” Psa 1.1,3-4

7. If the advanced Christian, would arrive at establishment in spiritual comfort, then he must attain some degree of *establishment in the assurance of sense*. The assurance of sense is an assurance of vital union with Christ, or of a personal interest in Him, founded on scriptural evidences of it. It is the believer’s certain knowledge of his being united to Christ, built on the sense or experience he has of his possessing those evidences of union and communion with Christ, which are stated in the Scriptures. In this place, I will take notice of only *three* of those evidences.

1st. *Saving faith* is a sure evidence of union with Jesus Christ. While, according to the covenant of grace, faith is the *instrument* of vital union with the second Adam, it is at the same time, an *evidence* of that union. “Whoever eats my flesh,” says the Lord Jesus, “and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him.” Joh 6.56 “Truly, truly I say to you, whoever believes in me has everlasting life.” Joh 6.47 “Whoever believes, and is baptized, will be saved.” Mar 16.16 If an exercised Christian has just and distinct views of the *nature* of true faith as declared in the Scriptures; if he clearly understands what it is to *believe* Christ, and what it is to *believe in*

Him; and if, at the same time, his actings of faith are direct and lively; then he will be less or more *conscious* of them under the witnessing of the Holy Spirit. He will be enabled to reason this way:

‘Whoever believes in Jesus Christ, dwells in him, and has everlasting life.’ Joh 6.46-47 I am conscious that I believe in Him. Therefore I dwell in him, and have the beginnings of eternal life. Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus, is united to him, and “shall be saved.” Act 16.31 I believe in him; therefore I am united to him, and I shall be saved.’

And in order to be satisfied that his actings of faith are unfeigned, or not hypocritical, ^{1Tim 1.5} and are made in dependence on the enlightening influences of the Spirit of truth, let him attend carefully to the distinction marked in the sacred Volume between a true and a counterfeit faith. There he will find that,

- if a man, convinced of his sin and misery, believes the record of God with application to himself, and with cordial approval of the whole plan of redemption by Jesus Christ;
- if he trusts in Jesus for salvation, not on the ground of previous qualifications in himself, but solely upon the warrant afforded by the gospel-offer, call, and commandment to believe in the name of Jesus Christ; ^{Joh 3.27; 4.10}
- if he does not rely, like the hypocrite, partly on his own performances and partly on the righteousness of Christ, but on the righteousness of Christ *alone* for all his title to eternal life; ^{Rom 9.31-32; Phi 3.9}
- if he trusts in the Saviour, not for salvation *in* sin, or *to* sin, as the hypocrite does, but for salvation *from* all iniquity, and especially from the sin that easily besets him — or in other words, for the *whole* of his salvation; ^{2Sam 23.5; Lam 3.26; 2Tim 4.18}
- , if he trusts *only* for that salvation which is wholly of sovereign grace, and in which the glory of redeeming grace is most illustriously displayed; ^{Act 15.11} and,
- if his faith works by love, and purifies the heart;

There he will find, I say, that if a man exercises *this* faith, and is *conscious* that he exercises it, then he may consider it good evidence that he is united to Christ, and interested in His righteousness and salvation. This is “the faith of God’s elect.” ^{Tit 1.1} It is “believing with the heart unto righteousness,” ^{Rom 10.10} “trusting in the Lord with all the heart.” ^{Pro 3.5} And therefore, when the Holy Comforter shines upon it, as His own work in the soul, it cannot fail to be a comfortable evidence to the Christian, that he is in a state of grace.

2d. Unfeigned *love to God and to the saints*, is also a sure evidence of union and communion with Christ. “He that loves *me*,” says the Lord Jesus, “shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and manifest Myself to him.” ^{Joh 14.21} “If any man loves God, he is known by Him.” ^{1Cor 8.3} “He that abides in love, abides in God, and God in him.” ^{1Joh 4.16} “Everyone who loves, is born of God, and knows God.” ^{1Joh 4.7} So then,

- if a man loves Christ and God in Him, for His infinite loveliness in Himself, as well as for His redeeming love to him;
- if he loves *all* of God — all His perfections, and especially His holiness, all His purposes and providential dispensations, all His precepts, promises, and ordinances, and does so chiefly *because* they are holy;

- if he loves God supremely, setting Him upon the throne in his affections; and if he laments sincerely that he does not love Him more;

then such love is a good evidence to him that he is “an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ.” ^{Rom 8.17} A pious mother dearly loves her suckling child; but she never complains that she loves it too little. Whereas she often laments that she loves the Lord Jesus too little, and often fears that she loves her infant more, or at least as much as she loves Him. But these complaints and fears are proofs that her affection for her Saviour is *greater* than it is for her child. They show that she sees much more reason to love and admire Him, than to love the most amiable of creatures; and that she wishes to esteem Him and delight in Him, more than in any creature. The more a saint feels and bitterly bewails the coldness of his affection, or the sinful deficiency of his love to his God and Saviour; the more evidence he has of the sincerity of his love to Him. The hypocrite *pretends* to love the Lord, but he never loathes himself in his own sight, for loving him too little — for he thinks that he loves Him a great deal, and is even proud of the greatness of his love to Him. Whereas the sincere believer — knowing that it is a sinful, abominable defect *not* to love Him, even in a *perfect* degree — loathes himself often in secret, for the criminal imperfection of his love to Him.

Unfeigned *love to the brethren*, flowing from supreme love to God, is likewise a sure evidence of union and communion with Christ. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ^{Joh 13.35} “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.” ^{1Joh 3.14} “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before Him.” ^{1Joh 3.18-19} “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” ^{1Joh 4.12}

If, then, a man is conscious that, while he loves all others as creatures of God with a benevolent love, he loves all the saints with a delightful love;

- that he regards with cordial esteem and affection, all who appear to be saints of the Most High, whatever denomination they belong to;
- that he is pleased with them and delighted in their company, not so much because they are generous, kind, or serviceable to him, as because they are holy and devout;
- that he loves them, not so much for their upright, peaceable, and courteous demeanour, nor for their charity, fidelity, and usefulness in society, as for the *truth*’s sake which dwells in them, and for the holy image of the Son of God which shines forth in their conversation;
- and that he regards them in proportion to the *degrees* of holiness which appear in them, with such affectionate kindness and tenderness as to always be careful not to hurt, neglect, or offend them;

I say, if he is *conscious* that he thus loves the saints, he may consider such love of them as a comfortable evidence that he himself is one of their number. He may conclude for his comfort, that his love of the image of Christ in others, is a valid proof of the grace and image of Christ in himself. For just as no saint can love a sinner *as a sinner*, ^{Psa 139.21-22} so no hypocrite or sinner can love a saint *as a saint*, however much he may regard him with affection on other accounts.

3d. The practice of universal holiness, or *obedience of heart and life, to all the commandments of the moral law as a rule of life*, is likewise a sure evidence of a man's union and communion with Christ.

"Whoever has my commandments, and *keeps* them," says the Lord Jesus, "is the one who loves me." ^{Joh 14.21} "Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine, and *does* them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock." ^{Mat 7.24} And the apostle John: "By this we know that we know Him, if we *keep* His commandments. ... Whoever *keeps* His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him." ^{1Joh 2.3,5} "Whoever *keeps* His commandments, abides in Him, and He in him." ^{1Joh 3.24} The behaviour or practice of every man who is vitally united to the holy Jesus, is universally conformed to the law as a rule of *duty*. Such a holy practice is the grand business of his life, the business in which he is chiefly engaged, and which he pursues with more earnestness and diligence than he does any other. His understanding is divinely enlightened to see the transcendent beauty of holiness; his will is renewed to choose holiness; and his affections are sanctified to love, desire, and delight in it. He is also constrained by the love commanded by the law. And he is enabled by the Spirit of Christ to be "holy in all manner of conduct." ^{1Pet 1.15}

He therefore makes the constant practice of universal holiness, his choice, his delight, and in an eminent degree, his employment. Relying on the righteousness of Jesus Christ for all his title to eternal life, trusting in Christ for continual supplies of grace, and aiming at the glory of God in all his performances, he perseveres to the end of life in the love and practice of universal holiness, through all changes and under all trials. He may indeed be left guilty of spiritual declension in some degree, and may be suffered to yield to some temptations, even so far as to occasionally fall into great sins. But he will never be permitted to fall so far that it ceases to be his *manner*, even in the most difficult situations, to *sincerely* perform all duties required of him, even the hardest.

Now, when a man is conscious that — relying on the surety-righteousness of Jesus Christ for all his *title* to life eternal; and trusting in Christ for all promised supplies of sanctifying grace; and believing the love which God has to him — he is enabled to cordially perform obedience to all the commandments of Christ;

- when he finds that he is enabled to yield universal obedience, not that it may secure him from hell, or entitle him to heaven, and not merely because he is bound to perform it, but because he is constrained by the love of Christ, and because he wishes, delights, and resolves to do it;
- when he is conscious that he pursues and practises universal holiness according to the law as a rule, from principles of supreme love to God, and of unfeigned gratitude to Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all righteousness for him, according to the same law, as a covenant;
- and when he knows by experience, that he has been enabled, under manifold trials, to resolutely cling to Christ and to His word, and to habitually make the glory of Christ, and of God in Him, the chief end of all his performances;

then he should consider this holy obedience as a sure, and a distinguishing evidence, that he is united to the Lord Jesus. Indeed, universal holiness of heart and of life is the surest, the most unexceptionable evidence of a personal interest in Christ. It is the sign of signs, the *chief*

of all the signs of grace. No faith is an evidence of union with Christ, except that which is made perfect by works. ^{Jas 2.22} No love is a sign of it, except that which is perfected in keeping his word. ^{1Joh 2.3} Holy practice is the highest evidence of connection with the holy Jesus; the great mark of distinction between the children of God, and the children of the devil. ^{1Joh 3.10} It is very remarkable that this evidence is much more insisted on in the Scriptures, than any other. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” ^{Psa 119.1} “Then I will not be ashamed, when I have respect for all your commandments.” ^{Psa 119.4} “If you love me,” says our Lord, “keep my commandments.” ... “If a man loves me, he will keep my words. Whoever does not love me, does not keep my sayings.” ^{Joh 14.15,23-24} “In this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples.” ... “You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you,” ^{Joh 15.8,14} “Little children,” says the apostle John, “let no one deceive you: whoever practices righteousness, is righteous, even as He is righteous. Whoever does not practice righteousness, is not of God.” ^{1Joh 3.7,10} “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” ^{1Joh 5.3}

Therefore, the man who is truly conscious that, from principles of faith and love, and for the glory of God, he forsakes with abhorrence every known sin, and studies to know and to cordially perform every commanded duty — this man may warrantably assure himself that he is united to Christ, and is in a state of grace. Let the believer, then, endeavour diligently to attain more and more of this high evidence of grace. So he will arrive, not only at sensible assurance of his union with Christ, but at establishment in that assurance. Indeed, when a man trusts in Christ Jesus for salvation, with cordial and strong confidence, he trusts that Christ *will afford him evidences of salvation*. And the consequence will be that his mind will never be entirely at ease till he sees that he has at least the evidences mentioned above. Whatever degree of the assurance of *faith* he attains, he will in the same degree be diligent to attain, as soon as possible, the assurance of *sense*, and establishment in this assurance.

And here I must remind the exercised Christian that however diligent he may be in the practice of holiness, he cannot attain this holy assurance, much less establish it, except by the testimony of the blessed Spirit, the Comforter. It is the same Holy Spirit who has implanted in the Christian’s heart, all saving graces that can, by shining upon them, *make him “know the things which are freely given to him by God.”* ^{1Cor 2.12} Just as the sun cannot be seen except by its own light, so the graces and fruits of the Spirit cannot be certainly known except by the light of the Spirit. The believer cannot be assured that the Spirit dwells in him as a *Sanctifier*, other than by the same blessed Spirit, as a *Comforter*. “The Spirit itself, *or, the same Spirit,*” says the apostle Paul, “bears witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God.” ^{Rom 8.16} The same Spirit that works habits of grace, or holy dispositions in the hearts of believers, shines upon these by exciting believers’ attention to them, and by enabling them to compare them with the signs of adoption mentioned in Scripture. He concurs with their consciences in witnessing that they are the children of God. In order to attain such establishment in *sensible assurance*, so that it will introduce establishment in *spiritual comfort*, the Christian must frequently trust, as well as pray, for the witnessing of the Holy Spirit. And he should continually take heed *not to grieve the Spirit*. ^{Eph 4.30}

8. Moreover, In order to be established in pure consolation, the believer must endeavour with all diligence, *to make a right and profitable use of the holy Sacraments*. These are the seals

of the covenant of grace; for they were instituted in order to *confirm* that holy covenant with true believers. ^{Dan 9.27} Accordingly, in the hand of the Holy Comforter, they are special means of confirming that everlasting covenant with them. And they confirm it with them, not by making it firmer in itself than it already is; but by confirming their *faith* of it, and by clearing up or confirming to them their personal *interest* in it, and in all the blessings promised in it.

Baptism. The believer, then, in order to be established in spiritual comfort, must employ *his baptism*, both for confirming his assurance of faith, and for confirming his assurance of a personal interest in the everlasting covenant. He should employ it at all times for these purposes, but especially when called either to present a child for baptism, or to witness the dispensation of baptism to the child of another. Seeing that baptism, in the place of circumcision, is a seal especially “of the righteousness of faith,” ^{Rom 4.11} he should, in witnessing the dispensation of it, renew his cordial application of the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ. In the gospel, this “is revealed from faith to faith.” ^{Rom 1.17} Since the water in baptism represents the cleansing virtue of the blood and the Spirit of Christ, ¹ when he sees the baptismal water applied to the body, he should seize the precious opportunity afforded him, to apply the justifying blood of Christ to his conscience, to cleanse it from guilt and pollution; and apply the sanctifying Spirit of Christ to his heart, to cleanse it from the power of sin. And relying on the righteousness and blood of Jesus for a complete title to deliverance from the guilt, power, and pollution of sin, and trusting in the Lord Jesus himself for all his salvation, he should then say to himself, ‘As certainly as I have now seen the baptismal water sprinkled on the body of that infant, the blood and the Spirit of Christ are *mine*, not only in offer but in possession. And while they are mine to justify, sanctify, and comfort me, *Christ himself* is mine, as my Covenant-head; and *God* is mine, as my Covenant-God — from henceforth and forever.’ And seeing that, in its baptism, the child is solemnly dedicated to the Lord, he should further say, ‘O Lord, I devote myself and all that I am, to You — to be yours wholly, only, and forever; to be saved by Your grace, and to be employed for Your glory.’

Lord’s Supper. That the exercised Christian may attain establishment in true consolation, he must likewise employ *the holy Sacrament of the Supper*. He must with increasing diligence, employ it for the confirmation both of his assurance of faith, and of his assurance of union and communion with his great Redeemer. After due preparation, when he has sat down at the Communion table with suitable affections, he should not only remember and meditate on the amazing love of Christ in serving and suffering for him, but upon seeing the sacramental bread given to him, he should say, “As certainly as the sacred bread is now given to me, with a command to take and eat of it, Jesus my gracious, crucified Redeemer, is now given to me in *offer*. And the offer, together with the commandment to believe in His name, affords me a warrant to accept and trust in Him. And when he is taking and eating of the bread, he should say from his heart, “O Lord Jesus, on the warrant of your offer and command, I now accept you as my only Saviour, and trust with firm confidence in You, for all my salvation,’

Upon seeing the cup of blessing presented to him, he should not forget to say, ‘As certainly as this cup is now given to me, with my Redeemer’s express command to drink of it, His

¹ Rom 1.5; Tit 3.5.

righteousness, and all the promises and blessings of the new testament in His blood, are given to me in *offer*. And the offer, together with the commandment to believe in His name, affords me a full right to receive and rely on them.’ And, when he is taking and drinking of the cup, he should say, ‘O my adorable Redeemer, upon the warrant of Your free offer, and Your authoritative command, I now accept Your consummate righteousness, and rely upon it only, for all my title to the inestimable blessings promised and bequeathed in the new testament, ratified by your death. Believing that Your righteousness, and all the benefits merited by it, are given to me in *offer*, upon the warrant of Your authentic offer and command, I *trust* cordially, that You give them to me also in *possession*.’ Appropriating, and thus feeding upon the body and blood of the incarnate Redeemer, the believer’s faith is confirmed, and all his other graces are proportionally strengthened, for *it is unto him, according to his faith*. ^{Mat 9.29}

Moreover, *conscious* that his heart accepts and trusts in the Lord Jesus for all the blessings bequeathed in His testament, upon hearing these cheering words, “This is my body broken *for you*,” and “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed *for you*,” ^{Luk 22.20} the believer ought to assure himself that Christ, with His righteousness and salvation, is *his* — not only in *offer*, but in *possession*. And he should regard the bread and the cup now given to him, as *visible tokens and pledges* of his union and communion with his dear Redeemer, and of his personal interest in all the promises and blessings of the new covenant. Or, in other words, in the exercise of trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation for himself in particular, having received the bread and the cup, he ought to consider them as visible signs and pledges that the body of Christ was broken *for him*, and that the blood of Christ was shed *for him*. And if through infirmity, when sitting at the Table of the Lord, he forgets this or any other part of the exercise of communicating, let him not be discouraged; but let him attend to it after he rises from the Table, and sees others communicating. Thus by the blessing of Christ, he will find this holy ordinance to be not only an instrument of conveying more grace to him, but a *seal* and a *pledge* to confirm both his assurance of faith, and his assurance of and interest in Christ and the covenant of grace. And in proportion to these being confirmed, his holy tranquility of mind is established, and his cordial resolution of heart, to devote himself wholly to the service and glory of Christ, is strengthened.

9. *Lastly*, If the believer would attain established consolation, he should endeavour diligently, according to the opportunities afforded him, *to promote the extension and establishment of the Redeemer’s spiritual kingdom*. This is a sure means of his arriving at solid and durable comfort. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper who love You.” ^{Psa 122.6} “Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favour my righteous cause; yes, let them say continually, ‘Let the Lord be magnified, who has pleasure in the prosperity of his servant.’” ^{Psa 35.27} “I will make you an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.” ^{Isa 60.15} “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her; that you may suckle, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that you may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.” ^{Isa 66.10-11} When the apostle Paul had reviewed the success of his ministrations among the Corinthians, he addressed them this way: “Great is my glorying of you; I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.” ^{2Cor 7.4}

The constant and earnest endeavours of the saints to promote and extend the interests of His Church militant, according to the law of Christ's kingdom, do not indeed *entitle* them to stable comfort; but they are usually connected with it. The glorious King of Zion has decreed that those who, by His grace, are habitually disposed to contribute by their prayers, labours, and substance, to promote so great and so glorious a design, will even in this valley of tears, participate with Him in that ineffable joy with which He always rejoices over His church. If a Christian, instead of having a liberal and public spirit, is contracted in his views, and concerned mainly for his own welfare and that of a particular party, he is not qualified for strong and durable consolation. Established comfort, like fame, will elude the grasp of the one who pursues it merely or chiefly for himself, and for its own sake. One reason, perhaps, why some believers today have little spiritual and lasting comfort, is that in comparison to it, they care little for anything else. If they were more employed in seeking the glory of Christ, the success of His blessed gospel, and the extension of His spiritual kingdom, both at home and abroad, than in seeking ease and comfort for themselves, they would find that holy and lasting consolation would come, as it were, of its own accord, and flow freely into their souls. Were they to "seek *first*, the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," ^{Mat 6.33} they would experience more frequently, and in a higher degree, that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, of which His kingdom consists. ^{Rom 14.17}

Reflections

FROM what has been advanced here, the following reflections are obvious.

The Gospel Offer. If any of my readers are destitute of true religion and spiritual consolation, they may see from this, that they are still an entire stranger to true happiness. It is impossible for a man to be happy if his soul is miserable; but the soul of a sinner must be miserable, so long as he continues destitute of evangelical holiness and pure consolation, The greatest variety and highest degree of sinful pleasures, leave the soul as miserable as they found it; but the lowest degree of holy comfort renders it happy. Be persuaded, then, O unregenerate man, that so long as you continue under the guilt and dominion of sin, "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." ^{Rev 3.17} You are a sinner against the infinitely holy and righteous Jehovah; a sinner in Adam; a sinner by nature and by practice. Your transgressions are innumerable, for you have been a transgressor from the womb. And as the smallest sin that you ever committed deserves the infinite wrath of the great and terrible God, you are at this moment under the tremendous curse of His violated law. You are *already* condemned, and "the wrath of God abides on you." ^{Joh 3.36} Death is already on its way to you, and perhaps is so near that you don't have a day or even an hour to live. If death should surprise you in your present state, the condemning sentence of the broken law must be executed upon you, without intermission and without end. The faithfulness, as well as the holiness and justice of that God whose eternal indignation you have deserved, renders it necessary that if you die under the guilt of but a single sin, the dreadful curse will be eternally executed upon you.

Ah! If you die impenitent and without union with the great Redeemer, you must "go away into everlasting punishment." You must be punished with endless torment, "with everlasting destruction," ^{2The 1.9} with "the vengeance of eternal fire;" ^{Jud 1.7} punished in "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone," ^{Rev 19.20} till that Divine justice which you have insulted, is fully

satisfied, and till that terrible wrath which you have incensed, is endured to the uttermost. Oh, how inexpressibly miserable you must be at length, if you were condemned to sink through all eternity in the bottomless abyss of infinite wrath! How can your heart endure, or your hands be strong, in the days that God almighty will thus deal with you? How will you be able “to dwell with the devouring fire, to dwell with everlasting burnings?” Isa 33.14 The day is coming when, if you die in your sins, the omniscient Judge of the quick and the dead, will say to you, “Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Mat 26.41 You now take pleasure in committing some secret, darling sin; and this is a sure evidence that you are an entire stranger to Christ, and to holy consolation from Him. Now you love and enjoy the pleasures of sin; but hereafter, if sovereign mercy doesn’t prevent it, you will feel its pains. It “will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.” Pro 23.32 “The gnawing worm will never die; the consuming fire will never be quenched.” Mar 9.48 You are now surrounded by a multiplicity of objects with which you gratify your depraved desires. But in the place of torment, while these desires will continue and even increase, you will have no opportunities to gratify them. Now you are so desirous of the delights of sense and of sin, that you continue to reject the compassionate Saviour, and that ever lasting consolation which is enjoyed in Him, for fear that you will lose those base and sordid delights.

But yet a very little while, and these pleasures will not only be irretrievably lost, but will be followed by the dismal sorrows of eternal death, and be expiated with everlasting pain. For thus it is written, “The wicked shall be turned into hell.” Psa 9.17 “Upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire and brimstone; and a horrible tempest shall be the portion of their cup.” Psa 11.6 “God will render to every man according to his deeds. — To those who are contentious, and don’t obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil.” Rom 2.6-9 Ah! secure sinner, eternal destruction is ready at your side. “God is angry with you every day,” Psa 7.11 and vengeance belongs to Him. His sword is drawn; His bow is bent; and His arrows are set to destroy you. — But why, why will you die? Why will you continue a moment longer, to prefer sin which is infinitely detestable, before holiness which is infinitely amiable; and the base pleasures of sin, before the exalted, ennobling, and everlasting joys of God’s salvation? The God of all grace and consolation now offers Jesus Christ, with His righteousness and salvation, *to you*, a lost sinner of mankind. He offers Him wholly and freely, directly and particularly. Jesus the faithful and true witness says, “God so loved the world, that He *gave* his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Joh 3.16 “My Father *gives* you the true bread from heaven.” Joh 6.32 “Whoever comes to me, I will by no means cast out.” Joh 6.37 And the apostle John, “This is the record, that God has given us eternal life; and this life is in his Son.” 1Joh 5.11

The compassionate Saviour, with infinite earnestness and tenderness, invites and entreats all, even the chief of sinners, to accept the gracious offer. He now says to you, “Come; eat of my bread, and drink of the wine,” the wine of spiritual consolation, “which I have mixed; forsake the foolish and live.” Pro 9.6 “Come, yes, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.” Isa 55.1 “Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Rev 22.17 Sinner, “*now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation.” O comply now with this gracious, endearing invitation; and looking to Jesus for the Spirit of faith, *comply* — because it is your first, your

principal duty, without which no other duty can be so performed as to please God. I beseech you to accept the authentic offer of a gracious Saviour, and of a free salvation.

I earnestly entreat you, by all the transcendent glory and incomparable excellence of the only begotten of the Father; by all His saving offices and endearing relations; by all His service and suffering for your redemption, by all His love and tears and blood, by all the exquisite torments of His body, and all the doleful anguish of His soul; by His glorious triumphs and unbounded fulness; by His mercies and judgments; by all the ordinances of His grace and all the necessities of your soul; by all the consolations of the blessed gospel, and all the terrors of the fiery law; by all the ineffable joys of heaven and all the direful torments of hell — to believe with application to yourself, the record of God concerning his Son. Whether you have up to now been a profligate sinner, or a formal hypocrite, come *now* to Christ. Come, because you are warranted by the unlimited offers and calls of the gospel, and because you are peremptorily commanded in the law — and trust in Him for all His salvation, The moment that you begin to trust cordially in Him for salvation — not only from the guilt, but from the love, the dominion, and the practice of all sin — you will pass from death to life, from sin to holiness, and from a slavish fear of endless punishment, to a reviving hope of eternal life. Forsake without delay, those sordid pleasures of sin which the sinner will soon lose, and by faith receive that holy consolation which every true believer will enjoy eternally.

Should sincere believers endeavour with all diligence to attain establishment in the assurance of faith as *a primary means of attaining established comfort*? Then it follows that every believer should constantly strive to attain *a strong faith*. Without a strong and lively faith, the Christian may have comfort, but he cannot have *settled* comfort; he cannot be habitually cheerful; he cannot “rejoice evermore;” he cannot cling resolutely to the promise when providence without, or sense within, seems to contradict the promise. It is only by a strong faith that the believer can live as a child in the family — without anxious care or fear. ^{Dan 3.16-17}

Weak vs. Strong. As often as Christ removes the burden of contracted guilt from the conscience, the *weak* believer lays it on again, and then sinks under it. But the *strong* believer takes the Saviour at His word, and relies with firm confidence on Him for pardon and eternal life. Thus, being strong in faith, he glorifies God, and God comforts him according to his faith. If his heavenly Father at any time frowns upon him and strikes him, he believes *His love* rather than his own feeling. Weak faith says, ‘The Lord Jesus can save me if he will.’ But strong faith says, ‘He both can and *will* save me.’ The strong believer lives not so much upon the comforts of God, as upon “the God of all comfort.” He draws his consolation from the higher springs, even while the waters of the lower springs are running. And were all his earthly comforts to fail him, he knows that he has still one comfort, which is of infinitely more value than them all: “*This God is my God* forever and ever.” ^{Psa 48.14} He trusts firmly for all necessary consolation, in his God and Saviour who does not change. And therefore, no outward changes which befall him can effect any considerable change in his spirit. He knows that he cannot be poor, so long as his Covenant-God is rich; for all the riches of God are *his*.

O believer, strive diligently to attain a strong, vigorous, and operative faith. Watch, and resist the very first appearances of declension in the life of faith. Hold fast the truth, in opposition to errors of every kind. Hold it fast in your understanding and judgment, in your will and affections, and in your confession and entire conduct. “Hold fast the faithful word, as you

have been taught.” ^{Tit 1.9} Keep the truth, and the truth will keep you comfortable and happy. Seek an established judgment, and a firm faith, in all the truths of the glorious gospel.

Should the Christian, in order to arrive at stable comfort, endeavour to be “rooted and grounded in love?” ^{Eph 3.17} Then he must study, in the faith of God’s redeeming love to him, to love God in Christ, so as to be *pleased* with Him at all times. In proportion to his loving his God and Father, he will be pleased with Him, with all His perfections, and with *all His will*. And if he is always pleased or delighted with God, he will in the same proportion, always be comfortable, always be delighted in his own soul. To be constantly pleased with God in Christ, and with all the will of God, is indeed a difficult and high attainment. But the believer cannot otherwise become so rooted and grounded in love to Him, as to attain settled consolation. To love God supremely, and to be so pleased with Him as to be constantly disposed to please Him in all things, are in effect the same thing. If, then, a good man would attain established consolation, he must by grace become firmly fixed in a holy and habitual endeavour to always be pleased with God, and to always please Him. One happy consequence would be that trusting and praying only for things that are agreeable to the holy will of God, he *could not be disappointed*. And another would be that loving the providential will of the Lord, he would frequently observe providence, and would perceive such traces of love to him in providential dispensations, as would greatly establish him in spiritual consolation.

While unfeigned love to the brethren is an evidence of union and communion with Christ, as remarked above, it appears at the same time, to be *an instituted means* of establishment in spiritual comfort. By the exercise of sincere love to the brethren, a holy man *enjoys communion* with them — which heightens his enjoyment of communion with Christ. The more he loves them, the more he is disposed to “cover a multitude of sins in them,” ^{1Pet 4.8} and to a “think no evil of them.” ^{1Cor 13.5} It is lack of love to the saints, that usually disposes a man to quarrel and contend with them, so as to mar his own comfort in fellowship with them. Hence, the apostle Paul exhorted the believers at Corinth, to “be of one mind,” and to “live in peace,” in order that they might be of good comfort. ^{2Cor 13.11} He urged brotherly love and unanimity upon those at Philippi, by an argument drawn from the comfort of love. ^{Phi 2.1-3} The more a believer loves the brethren, the more pleasure he takes in them. And the more pleasure he takes in them and in their company, the more pleasant he will be to them; and the more disposed he will be, to “be of one accord, of one mind with them,” and “in lowliness of mind, to esteem them better than himself.” His love of them, and his delight in their company, will render him very unwilling to deprive himself of the comfort of their society by differing in opinion from them, without necessity. The diversity of opinions in religion among Christians at this day, and the divisions which ensue, I believe are as much owing to the lack of perfect love to the brethren, as lack of perfect knowledge.

Should the believer always be firm in his resolution to avoid such company as appears to have a tendency to draw him into sin? Then he must learn *never to feel uncomfortable*, far less to murmur, when men of the world appear not to esteem him. The exercised Christian is always a fool in the account of worldly men; and he will mar not a little his own comfort, if he looks for respect from them. He should never expect that they will esteem him as a *holy man*, so long as they do not regard *holiness itself*. Indeed, it would reveal both ignorance and pride in him, to murmur when they slight him. He is unknown to worldly and wicked men. And

therefore he should not for a moment be uneasy if he finds himself disregarded by them. Indeed, if he would attain establishment in heavenly consolation, he must not allow himself to be in the least disquieted if he should find that even some of the saints themselves appear to disregard him. He should remember that even the holiest of men can be attentive to him in no higher degree than the Lord is pleased to make them at the time.

Is establishment in humility of mind, requisite to a saint's establishment in pure and holy comfort? Then the believer may learn from this, that the *deeper and more abiding* his sense of weakness is, the *stronger* he is. The strongest believer has, in one sense, no more strength inherent in himself than the weakest believer. He is as incapable of resisting motions of sin, and performing spiritual obedience by his own strength, as he was when he first began to know the Lord. In another sense, however, he is stronger and more firmly settled in holy tranquility of soul, because he has a deeper and greater *sense* of his own weakness and unworthiness, and a more constant dependence on Christ for *continued* supplies of grace. Thus he is not strong *in himself*, but "in the Lord, and in the power of *His* might." Eph 6.10 And the stronger he is "in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," 2Tim 2.1 the stronger his consolation.

It is also evident from what has been said, that just as the peace which believers have in Christ does not exempt them from outward affliction in the world, so they should take heed that outward affliction at no time *deprives them of, nor even lessens* their inward peace and consolation in Him. Outward and even inward trouble are dispensed to saints, not in order to destroy, but to increase and establish their holy tranquility and joy in the Lord Jesus. Joh 16.33 Afflictions are sent as a means of preparing them to derive increasing degrees of spiritual and strong consolation from His fulness. When the sufferings of Christ, or any calamities whatever, abound in them, it is not in order that their consolation may *diminish*, but that it may *abound* by Christ. 2Cor 1.5 If afflictions are dispensed, it is to take smaller comforts out of the way, or to make them cease to be comforts any longer, in order to make room for *greater* comforts. Therefore, when believers are under affliction of any kind, they should never allow their grief or fear to hinder them for a moment, from trusting and rejoicing in Christ Jesus, who is a *brother born for adversity*. Pro 17.17 On the contrary, while they are under trouble, as well as after they are delivered from it, they should fall in so entirely with the gracious design of God in dispensing it, as to endeavour to resolutely confide and rejoice in the great Redeemer.

Thus, "their hearts will be fixed, trusting in the Lord;" Psa 112.7 and they will enjoy a peaceful and stable tranquility in the midst of a changing and troublesome world. Thus, desiring above all things, and trusting that the infinitely sovereign, wise, and holy *will* of God may be accomplished in them, they will rejoice in the cheering thought that, in subservience to the glory of Christ in their salvation, "all things work together for their good." Rom 8.28 Afflicted believer, your grief arises from what you feel either of the plague of your heart, or of the pressure of your calamity. It should never be permitted to rob you of the comfort and joy which the blessed gospel designs for you — in what is recorded there about the person, righteousness, and fulness of the glorious Redeemer. O trust Him, *delight* in Him, *wait* for Him, and all will be well. Consider that He takes the curse out of every affliction, and turns it into a real blessing for you. Therefore, release all your concerns into the hands of your faithful Redeemer; and trust that, by His infinite love and His manifold wisdom, He will conduct them

all for your good. Do not judge the love of God by *providences*, but by *promises*. Just as no temporal comfort is good enough to be an evidence of His love to you; so no temporal calamity is afflictive enough to be a sign of His hatred of you.

Has a believer attained established consolation, and would he continue to enjoy it? Then let him take heed that he *not look intensely and excessively at his evidences of grace*. No sooner does a good man arrive at some degree of settled comfort, than Satan (if permitted) will tempt him to look with great intenseness at his evidences for heaven. That enemy of his holy comfort will often suggest to him that he cannot be sure enough that he isn't deceiving himself. Thus by occupying him continually with laying the foundation and testing it, Satan may keep him from diligence in the exercise of grace, and the performance of his duty.

If the believer were to be as diligent in "exercising himself to always have a conscience void of offence toward God and men," ^{Act 24.16} as in weighing his evidences, he would advance more speedily than he does in the *assurance of sense*. It is indeed the duty of Christians to often examine their state and their frame, and to see that they are not deceiving themselves. But they are not to do it *only and incessantly*. They are not to occupy themselves with that, when they are called to faith and love, and to patience and holy activity for God. If those saints who are favoured with comfortable discoveries of their evidences of inherent holiness, were to take frequent occasion from those evidences, to think of *Christ* — and to set their hearts more on *His* consummate righteousness as the only ground of their title to holiness and comfort — then they would thereby attain more assurance of their personal interest in Him; and they would attain more establishment in pure consolation.

When the apostle Paul was assured that Christ already lived in him, he took occasion from that, to live more *by faith* on the righteousness and fulness of Christ. "I live," he says, "yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." ^{Gal 2.20} At the very time in which this same Apostle had his eye fixed on having the excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus, he had his heart taken up with the *righteousness* of Christ. ^{Phi 3.8-9} If the believer would maintain solid and stable comfort, then let him think more of the Lord Jesus; let him delight more in Him and in His righteousness and fulness, than in his own evidences of grace. To pore upon his *inherent holiness*, more than upon his *imputed righteousness*, would soon interrupt and lessen his tranquility of mind. Evidences are indeed delightful to an exercised Christian — but Christ ought to be far more delightful to him.

Those of the saints who are favoured with strong and stable consolation, may learn from this to express their gratitude for this inestimable blessing, by *the frequent exercise of holy joy*. They should abound much in the lively exercise of joy and praise. When their souls are satisfied as with marrow and fatness, ^{Psa 63.5} their mouths should daily praise the Lord with joyful lips. Their "lips should greatly rejoice when they sing to Him, and their souls which He has redeemed." ^{Psa 71.23} Every stream of Divine consolation which flows in, ought to lead them up to the uncreated Fountain of joy, and to excite them to the exercise of rejoicing always in the Lord. They should place their happiness and their delight more in that which is in Christ, and in the promise, than in anything which they find in themselves. Rejoice, O believer, in the Lord Jesus. Make Him the consolation of your soul. Test how much of Christ may be enjoyed by you on earth, to prepare you for the full and endless enjoyment of Him in heaven. Let it be

your continual study, to enjoy as much of heaven on earth, as possible. To be *in* Christ, and to rejoice in Him, are heaven below. And to be *with* Him, to behold his glory, is heaven above.

Trusting in your gracious Redeemer who “rejoices over you to do you good,” ^{Deu 28.63} ask yourself every morning, ‘What do I have to expect from my dear Redeemer this day, to afford me joy?’ Under the consoling influences of the holy Comforter, this question will tend to make you cheerful and thankful at the commencement of the day. How exhilarating it will be to your soul, when you can answer,

‘Today, according to His promise, my gracious Redeemer will be with me to strengthen, to help, and to uphold me; to work in me by his holy Spirit, both to will and to do for His good pleasure; to fulfil in me all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power; to guide me continually with His counsel; and to grant me all the inward and outward comforts which He sees that I need. He will this day, afford me communion with Himself — in His grace, in His word, and in His providence. Perhaps He will cheer my soul even with the sweetness of sensible communion and of ineffable joy. He will at least, this day, bring me nearer than formerly, to the perfection of holiness, to the end of my faith, even the complete salvation of my soul.’

Rejoice then, O believer, every day, and all the day. Rejoice in hope. “Hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope, firm to the end.” ^{Heb 3.6} And let your whole life be a continued expression of grateful praise to the Lord Jesus, for all that He has done, is doing, and will do for your soul.

Finally, Are some of the heirs of salvation favoured in a good degree with settled comfort? Then let them take occasion from it, to meditate frequently on that fulness of inexpressible and endless joy into which they are soon to enter. O! the ineffable, the rapturous joy into which they will enter when, in the light of glory, they will see Jehovah and the Lamb, and become perfect in holiness! Believer, the greatest consolation which you have enjoyed, or which you can enjoy *here*, is but a small drop in comparison to that boundless ocean of eternal joy which will overflow your soul in the pure regions of eternal day. O what inexpressible, what transporting bliss is prepared for you! What a weight, what an eternal weight, what an exceedingly exceeding and eternal weight of glory, is secured for you by redeeming grace! Doesn’t your heart long ardently for this? Doesn’t it rejoice, and even exult in the cheering prospect of endless felicity, of inconceivable joy? Doesn’t it look beyond all transitory shadows “for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ?” ^{Tit 2.3} Set your affection on things that are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, ^{Col 3.1-2} amidst all the splendors of His exalted state, and all those flaming ministers who surround his throne. By frequent meditation on that glorious rest “which remains for the people of God,” ^{Heb 4.9} you *now* enter into rest — you enjoy more and more of holy tranquility, of heavenly consolation.

To rejoice in hope of the glory of God, is to experience the sweetest and purest joy — joy which will enable you to rise superior to the inordinate love of life, and to the disquieting fear of death. Consider your death as that by which you will not depart *out of life*, but rather *into life*, and expect from the hands of your faithful Redeemer, such living comforts in your dying moments, as will raise you above the terror of death, and cause you to triumph over the darkness of the grave. Though a believer may have fears and conflicts of soul when he is in

the near prospect of death, commonly these are all over before the solemn moment of death comes. His spiritual enemies are usually made to be still as a stone while he is passing through the river of death. ^{Pro 14.32} Jesus our great High Priest, has dipped his feet in those waters. The stream therefore is divided for you who are united to Him by faith. The channel is dry. You may discern the footsteps of your almighty Redeemer on the bottom, and endless felicity on the other side. Having already tasted the sweetness of pure consolation, you should long, with ardent and increasing desire, for “the marriage-supper of the Lamb.” He has by ten thousand-thousand instances of kindness, so endeared Himself to your heart, that you should not be fully satisfied until you have the full enjoyment of His immense and everlasting love; until you *see Him as he is*, enjoy the unclouded light of His countenance, and are crowned with the unfading brightness of eternal glory. Let your present consolation, then, excite you often to meditate on, and to ardently long for, that consummate felicity which awaits you in the pure regions of everlasting light, and love, and joy. Yet a little, a very little while, and for you, “the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon your head. You shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” ^{Isa 35.10}

THE END.

APPENDIX.

Verses which are most encouraging and consoling to a fainting soul.

(From chapter 4.)

Psa 43:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Psa 71:20 *You*, who have shown me great and severe troubles, Shall revive me again, And bring me up again from the depths of the earth. ²¹ You shall increase my greatness, And comfort me on every side. ²² Also with the lute I will praise you-- *And* Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. ²³ My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, And my soul, which You have redeemed.

Isa 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

Isa 55:1 “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. ² Why do you spend money for *what* is not bread, And your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what* is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. ³ Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David. ⁴ Indeed I have given him *as* a witness to the people, A leader and commander for the people.

Eze 33:11 “Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’

Hos 14:4 “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him.

Isa 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy *place*, With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones. ¹⁶ For I will not contend forever, Nor will I always be angry; For the spirit would fail before Me, And the souls *which* I have made. ¹⁷ For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, And he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. ¹⁸ I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, And restore comforts to him And to his mourners. ¹⁹ “I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to *him who* is far off and to *him who* is near,” Says the LORD, “And I will heal him.”

Isa 66:13 As one whom his mother comforts, So I will comfort you; And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”

Isa 40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel: “My way is hidden from the LORD, And my just claim is passed over by my God “? ²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹ He gives power to the weak, And to *those who have* no might He increases strength. ³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, ³¹ But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Isa 49:8 Thus says the LORD: “In an acceptable time I have heard You, And in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You As a covenant to the people, To restore the earth, To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; ⁹ That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’ To those who *are* in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ “They shall feed along the roads, And their pastures *shall be* on all desolate heights. ¹⁰ They shall neither hunger nor thirst, Neither heat nor sun shall strike them; For He who has mercy on them will lead them, Even by the springs of water He will guide them.

Isa 57:7 “On a lofty and high mountain You have set your bed; Even there you went up To offer sacrifice. ⁸ Also behind the doors and their posts You have set up your remembrance; For you have uncovered yourself *to those other* than Me, And have gone up to them; You have enlarged your bed And made *a covenant* with them; You have loved their bed, Where you saw *their* nudity. ⁹ You went to the king with ointment, And increased your perfumes; You sent your messengers far off, And *even* descended to Sheol. ¹⁰ You are wearied in the length of your way; *Yet* you did not say, ‘There is no hope.’ You have found the life of your hand; Therefore you were not grieved. ¹¹ “And of whom have you been afraid, or feared, That you have lied And not remembered Me, Nor taken *it* to your heart? Is it not because I have held My peace from of old That you do not fear Me? ¹² I will declare your righteousness And your works, For they will not profit you. ¹³ When you cry out, Let your collection *of idols* deliver you. But the wind will carry them all away, A breath will take *them*. But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land, And shall inherit My holy mountain.” ¹⁴ And one shall say, “Heap it up! Heap it up! Prepare the way, Take the stumbling block out of the way of My people.”

Isa 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; ² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, ³ To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

Isa 41:10 Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’ ¹¹ “Behold, all those who were incensed against you Shall be ashamed and disgraced; They shall be as nothing, And those who strive with you shall perish. ¹² You shall seek them and not find them-- Those who contended with you. Those who war against you Shall be as nothing, As a nonexistent thing. ¹³ For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, Saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you.’ ¹⁴ “Fear not, you worm Jacob, You men of Israel! I will help you,” says the LORD And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Isa 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You *are* Mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

Lam 3:22 *Through* the LORD’S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ *They are* new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!” ²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul *who* seeks Him. ²⁶ *It is* good that *one* should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD.

Mat 11:28 “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Joh 3:14 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Joh 14:15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments. ¹⁶ “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- ¹⁷ “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. ²⁰ “At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. ²¹ “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ²⁴ “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me. ²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ²⁷ “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

1Tim 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith.

Mat 9:13 “But go and learn what *this* means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Psa 138:3 In the day when I cried out, You answered me, *And* made me bold *with* strength in my soul. ⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth. ⁵ Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD. ⁶ Though the LORD *is* on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar. ⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me. ⁸ The LORD will perfect *that which* concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, *endures* forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.