

GOSPEL GROUNDS AND EVIDENCES
OF THE
FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

John Owen

1675

SHOWING

- 1.** The nature of true saving faith in securing the spiritual comfort of believers in this life, is of the highest importance.
- 2.** The way in which true faith evidences itself in the souls and consciences of believers, for their support and comfort, under all their conflicts with sin, and in all their trials and temptations.
- 3.** Faith will evidence itself by a diligent, constant endeavor to keep itself and all grace in due exercise, in all ordinances of divine worship, both private and public.
- 4.** A particular way by which true faith evidences itself, by bringing the soul into a state of repentance.

"Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, how Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are reprobates?"

— 2Cor 13:5

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WILLIAM H. GOOLD

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Editor's Note

Eternal security, or assurance of eternal salvation, is a fundamental concern for every believer in Jesus Christ. How do you know if you're saved? What are the evidences of it? This little book by John Owen lays out four simple evidences to test whether we believe the Gospel. He examines the saving CONTENT of that belief, and how we ought to visibly RESPOND to it. He uses similar language to that used in *Pneumatologia*, and *Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*. Yet his language here is simpler and more straightforward. But times have changed, and language has changed. And so this book has been modernized and annotated for you. It's a restatement and simplification of his original work, but not a paraphrase. You may reproduce the text so long as you do not change it, or sell it to anyone, or claim it as your own.

You should know that there is an unusual use of language involving the word "act." We say that we "act in faith," or "act under grace," and the Spirit imparts the grace that we act under. But Owen says that the Holy Spirit "acts grace" in us, and we "act faith" (rather than "act out our faith").

He also describes a God-given "principle" – not a value, but an ability or a compelling power in us — that we act, or actuate, according to its purposes. It "quickens," regenerates, or restores our faculties – our mind, will, and affections – from their fallen and corrupted state. And then, under this principle we *act* the graces He communicates to us. So, the Spirit imparts this principle to us, employing it to effect its purposes, using its real power in and through us, to produce its intended effects. And we freely participate by *acting* it — i.e., by putting that principle into gracious and holy action using our regenerated faculties.

Unlike Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted* (1671), which may cause the greatest saints among us to doubt their salvation, this will encourage and strengthen your assurance, that your faith is a *saving* faith. But if you find it is not, this will inform you what must be done to be saved. And so I commend it without reservation, to every believer in Jesus Christ.

William H. Gross

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CONTENTS

Editor's Note	3
PREFATORY NOTE.....	v
TO THE READER.....	vii
EVIDENCES OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – OVERVIEW.....	8
I. THE FIRST EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – GOSPEL APPROVAL.....	14
II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – OBEDIENCE.....	24
III. THE THIRD EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – WORSHIP.....	36
IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – REPENTANCE	42

PREFATORY NOTE

This treatise, entitled "Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God's Elect," was given to the world in 1695. The remainder of the title is scarcely applicable as a correct designation of the leading divisions of the work, and may perhaps have been added by those who had charge of publishing it. In the preface by Isaac Chauncey, the reader is assured that the treatise is the production of Dr. Owen. It bears internal evidence of the fact, and that he wrote it with a view to publication. When he waives the formal discussion of some topics connected with his subject, on the ground that he had attempted the discussion of them "in other writings," it seems a just inference that it had been his intention to publish the treatise — though no explanation has transpired why it was withheld from the press for a period of twelve years after his death. The circumstance is of some moment, as showing that the work, though posthumous, may be held to contain the deliberate and matured judgment of the author on the question which it treats.

His object is not to illustrate the common evidences of genuine religion, or the grounds on which we may conclude that a man is sincere in his religious profession. It is an inquiry rather into the evidences on which the elect of God, in any process of self-scrutiny, may ascertain the reality of their own faith. Ascribing to faith all the importance which is due it as the instrumental cause of justification, the author suspends the entire question of the genuineness of conversion upon the existence of a fourfold development or operation of that gracious principle in the hearts of all who may be anxious to discover whether they have been really quickened and born of God.

After stating the nature of saving faith, and after a brief exhibition of the gospel as the divine method for the salvation of sinners through the merits of Christ, he proceeds to "the trial of faith," as the main object of the treatise.

In the FIRST place, he shows that faith, if genuine, includes or denotes implicit approval of "God's way of saving sinners," in opposition to all schemes of merely human invention for our spiritual deliverance.

508

This approval of the divine plan for our redemption, in which he holds that the very essence and life of faith consist, is founded on the conviction, first — that the salvation revealed in the gospel is in harmony with the perfections and majesty of the divine character; secondly — that it is suited to the views, desires, and aspirations of a soul enlightened by grace; and, thirdly — that it as effectually honors the moral law as if it had been completely fulfilled in the personal obedience of the saints.

SECONDLY, Faith is shown to imply an approval of the will of God in requiring holiness and obedience of us, to the full measure of the perfection and spirituality demanded of us in the moral law. To illustrate the obedience required, he appeals to the light of nature, and to the knowledge of good and evil which men enjoy through the law; but he proves that without the light of saving faith, there can be no adequate conception of the holiness required by the divine will. He does this urging an acute distinction which might rank as a separate contribution to the doctrine of conscience; and according to this, its authority in determining the moral character of an action by no means implies the love of what is good, and the hatred of what is evil. The function of conscience, he views, is exclusively judicial; and he shows that the motive which prompts to action must spring from other considerations. Two grounds are assigned on which faith approves of the holiness required of us: — the consistency of such a demand with the perfection of the divine

nature; and its fitness, when full compliance is yielded with it, to advance us to the utmost perfection which our own nature is capable of.

THIRDLY, Evidence of genuine faith is also afforded when the mind endeavors to keep itself in the due exercise of the grace of faith, in the public and private ordinances of divine worship. If faith is not cultivated in the worship of God, all devotion is corrupted into the empty forms of superstition, as in the ritual of Popery; or it becomes the mere wildfire of fanaticism, or degenerates into the rationalism which ignores all worship instituted by the authority of revelation. Judicious directions follow as to the best method of preserving faith in vivid exercise while we are engaged in the various acts of devotion.

FOURTHLY, The last evidence specified of true faith is the evangelical repentance which it produces. Weanedness¹ from the world, the lively remembrance of sin, a becoming intensity of godly sorrow on account of it, and other spiritual duties, are described as essential elements in the penitential feelings and exercises of those who really believe unto salvation.

509

The treatise indicates an acquaintance with the true philosophy of human nature, thorough knowledge of the world, and of man individually, as he takes the hue of his character from surrounding objects and social influences, and that depth of Christian experience in which our author has perhaps been rarely excelled. He shines in the anatomy of human motives. And while he goes deeply into the subjective workings of faith, he is always keenly alive to the objective realities of evangelical truth. The Christian reader will find this treatise an admirable manual for self-examination. — Ed.

¹ Freed of dependence on something.

TO THE READER

As faith is the first vital act that every true Christian puts forth, and the life which he lives is by the faith in the Son of God,¹ so it is his next and great concern to know that he believes, and that believing, he has eternal life² — that his faith is the faith of God's elect,³ and of the operation of God. Without some distinct believing knowledge of this, he cannot so comfortably assure his heart before God concerning his calling and election, nor will it be so far as to carry him forward in all the ways of holiness, in doing and suffering the will of God with the necessary resolution and cheerfulness. Doing this in a right manner, according to the tenor of the gospel, is no small part of spiritual skill. Two things are highly requisite to this:

First, that he be well acquainted with the doctrine of Christ, and know how to distinguish the gospel from the law; and,

Secondly, that he be very conversant with his own heart, so that by comparing his faith, and the fruits of it, with that same doctrine of Christ, he may come to see that, as he has received Christ, so he walks in him.⁴

All his reasonings concerning himself are to be taken from the word of God, so that whatever judgment he passes on himself may be a judgment of faith, an answer of a good conscience towards God.⁵ For all the *trials* of faith must at last be resolved into a *judgment* of faith; and before that judgment is made, the soul still labors under staggerings⁶ and uncertainties.

The design of this ensuing treatise is to resolve this great question: Whether the faith we profess is true or not? — The resolution of it, upon an impartial inquiry, must be very grateful and advantageous to everyone who has but tasted that the Lord is gracious.⁷ There need be no doubt that the late reverend, learned, and pious Dr. Owen was the author. This is not only because good assurance is given by those who were entrusted with his writings, but also because the style and spirit running through the others of his practical writings is very manifest here. And accordingly, it is recommended with those others, to the serious perusal of every diligent inquirer into the truth about his spiritual estate and condition.

*Isaac Chauncey*⁸

¹ Gal 2.20.

² Joh 20.31.

³ Tit 1.1.

⁴ Col 2.6.

⁵ 1Pet 3.21.

⁶ *Staggering*: literally, to walk as if unable to control one's movements.

⁷ 1Pet 2.3.

⁸ **Isaac Chauncy** (1632–1712) – an English dissenting minister and physician.

EVIDENCES OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – OVERVIEW

Securing the spiritual comforts of believers in this life is a matter of the highest importance to the glory of God, and to their own advantage by the gospel. For God is abundantly willing that all the heirs of promise should receive strong consolation; and he has provided ways and means for communicating it to them. Their partaking of it is their principal interest in this world, and it is so esteemed by them. But their effectual refreshing enjoyment of these comforts is variously opposed by the power of the remainders of sin, in conjunction with other temptations. Hence, notwithstanding their right and title to these comforts by the gospel, they are often, in actuality, destitute of a gracious *sense* of them, and consequently, destitute of that relief which they are suited to afford in all their duties, trials, and afflictions. Now, the root from which all real comforts grow, from which they spring and arise, is true and saving faith, — *the faith of God's elect*. Therefore, these comforts ordinarily correspond to and are proportionate to the evidences which any may have of that faith in themselves; at least, they cannot be maintained without such evidences. That we may be a little useful to establish or recover that consolation which God is so abundantly willing that all the heirs of promise should enjoy, I will inquire about the following:

What are the principal acts and operations of faith by which it evidences its truth and sincerity in the midst of all temptations and storms that may befall believers in this world?

And I will insist on those evidences alone which will bear the severest scrutiny by Scripture and experience. The principal genuine acting of saving faith in us, inseparable from it and, indeed, *essential* to such acting, consists in choosing, embracing, and approving of God's way of saving sinners by the mediation of Jesus Christ — *relying* on it — with a renunciation of all other ways and means pretending to that same end of salvation.

This is what we are to explain and prove.

Saving faith is our "believing the record that God has given us of his Son," 1Joh 5:10, "And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son," verse 11.

This is the testimony which God gives, that great and sacred truth which he himself bears witness to — namely, that he has freely prepared eternal life for those who believe, or provided a way of salvation for them. And what God so prepares, he is said to give, because of the certainty of its communication. So grace was promised and given to the elect in Christ Jesus before the world began, 2Tim 1:9; Tit 1:2. And that grace is so to be communicated to them, in and by the mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, that it is the only way by which God will give eternal life to anyone. It is therefore wholly in Christ, and to be obtained by him, and to be received from him. Upon our acquiescence in this testimony, on our approval of this way of saving sinners, or our refusal of it, our eternal safety or ruin absolutely depends. And it is reasonable that it should be so. For in our receiving of this testimony of God, we "set to our seal that God is true," Joh 3:33; we ascribe to him the glory of his truth, and in this, the glory of all the other holy properties of his nature. It is the most eminent duty we are capable of in this world; and by refusing it, to the extent that lies in us, we make him a liar, as it says in 1Joh 5:10. This is virtually to renounce His being. And the solemnity with which this testimony is entered is very remarkable, verse 7: "There are three that bear record in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one."

OVERVIEW

The trinity of divine persons, acting distinctly in the unity of the same divine nature, give this testimony — and they do so by those distinct operations whereby they act in this way, and in this work, of saving sinners by Jesus Christ. This is declared at large in the gospel. And added to it is a testimony that is immediately applicable to the souls of believers: this sovereign testimony of the holy Trinity. And this is the witness of grace and all sacred ordinances — "There are three that bear witness on earth: the spirit, the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one," verse 8. They are not essentially of one and the same in nature, as are the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost; yet they all absolutely agree in the same testimony. And they do it by that especial efficacy which they have on the souls of believers, to assure them of this truth. In this record — so solemnly, so gloriously given and proposed — life and death are set before us. Receiving and embracing this testimony, with an approval of the way of salvation testified to, is that work of faith which secures us eternal life. On these terms, there is reconciliation and agreement made and established between God and men; and without this, men must perish forever.

513

So our blessed Savior affirms, "This is life eternal, that they may know you" (the Father) "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent," Joh 17:3. To know the Father as the only true God, to know him as he has sent Jesus Christ to be the only way and means of the salvation of sinners, and to know Jesus Christ as sent by him for that end, is that grace and duty which instates us in a right to eternal life, and initiates us in the possession of it. And this includes that choice and approval of God's way of saving sinners, of which we speak.

But these things must be more distinctly explained: —

1. The great fundamental difference in religion concerns the way and means by which sinners may be saved. From men's different apprehensions of it arise all other differences about religion. And the first thing that engages men really into any concern in religion, is an inquiry in their minds about how sinners may be saved, or what they themselves will do to be saved: "What shall we do? what shall we do to be saved?" "What is the way of acceptance with God?" This inquiry is what gives men their first initiation into religion. See Act 2:37; Act 16:30; Mic 6:6-8. Once this question is raised in the conscience, an answer must be given to it. "I will consider," says the prophet, "what I shall answer when I am reproved," Hab 2:1. And there is all the reason in the world for men to well consider a good answer to it — without it, they must perish forever. For if they cannot answer themselves here, then how do they hope to answer God hereafter? Therefore, without a sufficient answer always in readiness to this inquiry, no man can have any hopes of a blessed eternity.

Now, the real answer which men give themselves is according to the influence which their minds are under from one or another of the two divine covenants, — the covenant of works, or that of grace. And these two covenants, taken absolutely, are inconsistent; they give answers in this case that are directly contradictory to one another. So the apostle declares in Rom 10:5-9. The one says, "The man that does the works of the law shall live by them; this is the only way by which you may be saved:" the other wholly waives this reply, and puts it all on faith in Christ Jesus. Hence there is great difference and great variety in the answers which men give themselves upon this inquiry.

514

For their consciences will neither hear nor speak anything but what complies with the covenant to which they belong. These things are reconciled only in the blood of Christ; this the apostle declared

OVERVIEW

in Rom 8:3.¹ Most convinced sinners² seem to adhere to the testimony of the covenant of works; and so they perish forever. Nothing will stand us in stead in this matter, nothing will save us, "but the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ," 1Pet 3:21.

2. The way which God has prepared for saving sinners is a fruit and product of infinite wisdom, and powerfully efficacious for its end. As such, it is either received, or it is rejected. It is not enough that we admit the notions of it as declared in the gospel, unless we are sensible of the divine wisdom and power that are in it — such that it may be safely trusted to. On its proposal, arises the eternally distinguishing difference among men. Some look at it and embrace it as the power and wisdom of God; others really reject it as a foolish and weak thing, not fit to be trusted to. The apostle gives an account of this at large in 1Cor 1:18-24.³ And this is mysterious in religion: the same divine truth is proposed to various persons, by the same way and means, at the same time, all in the same condition, under the same circumstances, all equally concerned in what is proposed in it — and yet some of them upon hearing it, receive it, embrace it, approve of it, and trust to it for life and salvation; others despise it, reject it, do not value it, and do not trust to it. To the one it is the wisdom of God, and the power of God; to the other, it is weakness and foolishness. And it must of necessity be one or the other — it is not capable of a middle state or consideration. It is not a *good* way unless it is the *only* way; if there is any other, then it is not a safe way, it is not the best way; for it is eternally inconsistent with any other. It is the wisdom of God, or it is downright folly. And here, after all our disputes, we must resort to *eternal sovereign grace*, making a distinction among those to whom the gospel is proposed; and to the almighty power of actual grace in curing that unbelief which blinds the minds of men, so that they can see nothing but folly and weakness in God's way of saving sinners. And this unbelief still works in most of those to whom this way of God is proposed in the gospel. They do not receive it as an effect of infinite wisdom, and as powerfully efficacious to its proper end.

515

Some are profligate in the service of their lusts, and they do not regard it. To these may be applied that saying of the prophet, "Hear, you despisers, and wonder, and perish."⁴ Some are under the power of darkness and ignorance, so they do not apprehend, they do not understand the mystery of it; for "the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not." [Joh 1.5](#) Some are blinded by Satan who is the god of this world, by filling their minds with prejudice, and their hearts with the love of present things, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, cannot shine into them. Some would mix with it their own works, ways, and duties, because they belong to the first covenant. These things are eternally irreconcilable with this way of God,

¹ [Rom 8:3](#) For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

² *Convinced sinners*: those whose consciences convict them of their sin.

³ [1Cor 1:18](#) For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." ²⁰ Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

⁴ [Act 13.41](#); Paul is quoting from [Hab 1.5](#).

OVERVIEW

as the apostle teaches in Rom 10:3-4.¹ Hereby unbelief eternally ruins the souls of men. They do not, they cannot, approve of this way of God for saving sinners that is proposed in the gospel, as an effect of infinite wisdom and power — a way which they may safely trust to, in opposition to all other ways and means that pretend to be useful to the same end. And this will give us light into the nature and acting of *saving faith*, which we inquire about.

3. The whole Scripture, and all divine institutions from the beginning, testify in general that this way of God for saving sinners is by commutation, substitution, atonement, satisfaction, and imputation. This is the language of the first promise;² and all the sacrifices of the law are founded on it. This is the language of the Scripture: "There is a way by which sinners may be saved, — a way that God has established and appointed." Now, sinners being concerned in the law, the rule of all things between God and sinners would seem to be what they can do, or suffer, with respect to that law. "No," says the Scripture, "it cannot be so; 'for by the deeds of the law no man living shall be justified in the sight of God.'" Psa 143:2; Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16. Nor is it by personally answering to the penalty of the law which they have broken; for they cannot do so, but must perish eternally: for, "If you, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" Psa 130:3. There must therefore be, and indeed, there is another way, of a different nature and kind from these, for saving sinners, or there is no due revelation made of the mind of God in the Scripture. But the main design of Scripture is to declare that there is such a way, and what it is; and this is by the substitution of a mediator instead of the sinners who will be saved, a mediator who will both bear the penalty of the law which they had incurred, and fulfill that righteousness which they could not attain to.

516

This in general is God's way of saving sinners, whether men like it or not: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," Rom 8:3-4. See also Heb 10:5-10.³ "He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2Cor 5:21.

Here unbelief has prevailed with many in this latter age, to reject the glory of God in it; but we have vindicated the truth against them sufficiently elsewhere.

4. There are various things that are previously required to give us a clear view of the glory of God in this way of saving sinners. These are a due consideration of the nature of the fall of our first parents, and of our apostasy from God thereby. I may not stay here to show the nature or aggravations of them; nor can we conceive them rightly, much less express them. I only say that, unless we have due apprehensions of the dread and terror of them, of the invasion made on the glory of God, and the confusion brought on the creation by them, we can never discern the reason and glory of rejecting the way of personal righteousness, and establishing this way of a mediator

¹ **Rom 10:3-4** For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

² **Gen 3:15** So the LORD God said to the serpent... ¹⁵ I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed [Christ]; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

³ **Heb 10:5** When He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. ⁶ In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come-- In the volume of the book it is written of Me-- To do Your will, O God.'" ⁸ Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), ⁹ then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. ¹⁰ By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

OVERVIEW

for saving sinners. A due sense of our present infinite distance from God, and the impossibility of making any approaches to him in ourselves, is from the same consideration. So likewise is that sense of our utter disability to do anything that may satisfy the law, or the holiness and righteousness of God — of our universal un-conformity (in our natures, hearts, and their acting) to the nature, holiness, and will of God. Unless, I say, we have a sense of these things in our minds and upon our consciences, we cannot rightly believe, we cannot comprehend the glory of this new way of salvation. And because mankind has had a general notion of these things (or of some of them), though no distinct apprehension of them, many among them have apprehended that there is a need for some kind of satisfaction or atonement to be made, so that sinners may be freed from the displeasure of God. But when God's way was proposed to them, it was, and it is, generally rejected, because "the carnal mind is enmity against God." [Rom 8.7](#)

517

But when these things are fixed on the soul by sharp and durable convictions, they will enlighten it with due apprehensions of the glory and beauty of God's way of saving sinners.

5. This is the gospel, this is the work of it — namely, a divine declaration of the way of God for saving sinners, through the person, mediation, blood, righteousness, and intercession of Christ. This is what it reveals, declares, proposes, and tenders to sinners — that there is a way for their salvation. As this is contained in the first promise, so the truth of every word in the Scripture depends on the supposition of it. Without this, there could be no more intercourse between God and us than there is between him and devils. Again, it declares that this way is not by the law or its works; not by the first covenant, or its conditions; not by our own doing or suffering. But it is a new way, established in and proceeding from infinite wisdom, love, grace, and goodness — namely, by the incarnation of the eternal Son of God; by his susception of the office of mediator; by doing and suffering in the discharge of that office, whatever was needed for the justification and salvation of sinners; to his own eternal glory.¹

Moreover, the gospel adds that the only way to obtain an interest² in this blessed contrivance of saving sinners by the substitution of Christ, as the surety of the covenant, and thus to have the imputation of our sins to him, and of his righteousness to us, *is by faith in him*. Here comes that *trial of faith* which we inquire about. This way of saving sinners being proposed, offered, and tendered to us in the gospel, true and saving faith receives it, approves of it, rests in it, renounces all other hopes and expectations, and reposes its whole confidence in it.

For it is not proposed to us merely as a notion of truth, to be assented to or denied, as if only in this sense are all those who believe the gospel called Christians — they do not consider it a fable.

¹ [Rom 3:24](#) being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed; [Rom 8:3](#) For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. [2Cor 5:19](#) that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him, etc.

² *Interest* here means a part or portion, as in having an interest in a business by buying stocks in it. – WHG

OVERVIEW

Rather, it is proposed to us as that which we ought to engage practically, trusting to it alone for life and salvation.

518

And I will speak briefly to two things:

- I.** How does saving faith approve of this way? On what accounts, and to what ends?
- II.** How saving faith evidences and manifests itself by this, to the comfort of believers.

I.

THE FIRST EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – GOSPEL APPROVAL

HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY OF SALVATION? ON WHAT ACCOUNTS, AND TO WHAT ENDS?

FIRST, saving faith approves of this way of salvation, as that which in every way becomes God ¹ to establish, grant, and propose. So says the apostle,²

"It became him, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings," Heb 2:10

What becomes God, is that which is worthy of him, and is to be owned concerning him, and corresponds to his infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, holiness, and righteousness; and nothing else. This is what faith discerns, judges, and determines, concerning this way — namely, that it is in every way worthy of God, and corresponds to all the holy properties of his nature. This is called,

"The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2Cor 4:6.

This revelation of the glory of God in this way, is made to faith alone, and it is embraced by faith alone. Not discerning it, and thus the lack of acquiescence in it, is that unbelief which ruins the souls of men. The reason why men do not embrace the way of salvation tendered in the gospel, is because they do not see or understand how full it is of divine glory, how it becomes God, how it is worthy of him, and corresponds to all the perfections of his nature. Their minds are blinded, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, does not shine into them, 2Cor 4:4. And so they deal with this way of God as if it were weakness and folly.

The essence and life of faith consists in this: it sees, discerns, and determines that the way of salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, proposed in the gospel, is such that it becomes God and all his divine excellencies to establish, appoint, and propose it to us. In this, faith properly gives glory to God, which is its particular work and excellency, Rom 4:20;³ and in this, faith rests and refreshes itself.

520

In this, in particular, faith rejoices in the manifestation of the infinite wisdom of God. A view of the wisdom of God acting itself by his power in the works of creation (for in wisdom he made them all), is the sole reason for ascribing glory to him in all natural worship, by which we glorify him as God. And a due apprehension of the infinite wisdom of God in the new creation, in the way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all spiritual, evangelical ascription of glory to God.

It was the design of God, in a particular way, to manifest and glorify his wisdom in this work. Christ crucified is the "power of God, and the wisdom of God," 1Cor 1:24; and "all the treasures

¹ *Becomes*: that which is proper to, displays, or sets off to best advantage, the attributes of God.

² Owen, as did many of the Puritans, considered Paul to be the writer of Hebrews.

³ **Rom 4:20** He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God;

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him," Col 2:3. All the treasures of divine wisdom are laid up in Christ, and laid out about him, so as to be manifested to faith in and by the gospel. God designed in this, to make known his "manifold wisdom," Eph 3:9-10.

Therefore, our faith is according to our apprehension and admiration of the wisdom of God in the constitution of this way of salvation, and not otherwise; where that does not appear to us, where our minds are not affected by it, there is no faith at all.

I cannot stop here to recount the especial instances of divine wisdom in this. I have attempted something towards it in other writings. I will only say at present that the foundation of this whole work and way, in the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, is so glorious an effect of infinite wisdom, that the whole blessed creation will admire to eternity. Of itself, this speaks of this way and work being divine. In this, the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ. This is of God alone; this is what becomes him, which nothing but infinite wisdom could extend to. While faith lives in a due apprehension of the wisdom of God in this, and the whole superstruction of this way, it is safe on this foundation.

Goodness, love, grace, and mercy, are other properties of the divine nature, in which it is gloriously amiable. "God is love;" and there is none who is God but he. Grace and mercy are among the principal titles which everywhere he assumes for himself. And it was his design to manifest them all to the utmost in this work and way of saving sinners by Christ, as declared everywhere in the Scripture.

521

And all these lie open to the eye of faith in this. Faith sees infinite goodness, love, and grace in this way, such as becomes God, such as can reside in none but him; therefore, it rests and rejoices in it, 1Pet 1:8.¹ Faith acts itself continually in adherence to, and approval of, this way of salvation, as expressing these perfections of the divine nature.

Where unbelief prevails, the mind has no view of the glory that is in this way of salvation, in it being so becoming of God and all his holy properties, as the apostle declares, 2Cor 4:4. And where this is so, whatever is pretended, men cannot cordially receive it and embrace it; for they do not know the reason for which it ought to be embraced. They see no form or attractiveness in Christ, who is the life and center of this way, "no beauty for which he should be desired," Isa 53:2. Hence, in the first preaching of the gospel, it was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." ^{1Cor 1.23} For by reason of their unbelief, they could not see it for what it is, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God;" ^{1Cor 1.24} and so it must be esteemed or accounted folly.

Indeed, it is from the same unbelief that, at this day, the very notion of the truth in this is rejected by many, all those who are called Socinians,² and all those who adhere to them in the disbelief of supernatural mysteries. They cannot see how this way of salvation is suitable to the glory of God, which no unbeliever can. And therefore, those of them who do not directly oppose the doctrine of it, still make no use of it for its proper end. Very few of them, comparatively, who profess the truth of the gospel, have experienced the power of it to their own salvation.

¹ **1Pet 1:8** whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory;

² Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) rejected the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and original sin.

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

But here true faith stands invincibly. Hereby it will evidence its truth and sincerity in the midst of all temptations, and in the most dismal conflicts it has with them — yes, against the perplexing power and charge of sin arising from them. Faith will not be driven from this stronghold, not while the soul can exercise faith in it — namely, in steadily choosing, embracing, and approving of God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, as that way in which he will be eternally glorified. This is because it is suited to, and corresponds to, all the perfections of his nature, and in every way becomes him — and so faith will have the necessary means to be relieved in all its trials. For *this* is faith, this is *saving* faith, which will not fail us. That faith which works in the soul a gracious persuasion of the excellency of this way — by a sight of the glory of the wisdom, power, grace, love, and goodness of God in it, so as to be satisfied with it as the best, the *only* way of coming to God, with a renunciation of all other ways and means to that end — will at all times evidence its nature and sincerity.

522

And this is what gives the soul rest and satisfaction as to its entrance into glory, upon its departure out of this world. It is a great thing to apprehend in a due manner that a poor soul that has been guilty of many sins, leaving the body — maybe under great pain, distress, and anguish, maybe by outward violence — should be immediately admitted and received into the glorious presence of God, with all the holy attendants of his throne, there to enjoy rest and blessedness for evermore. But here also, faith discerns and approves of this great, of this ineffable, divine operation, as that which becomes the infinite greatness of that wisdom and grace which first designed it, the glorious efficacy of the mediation of Christ, and the excellency of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit — without any expectation from anything in itself as a meritorious cause for admission into this glory. Nor did any man ever know what glory is, or desire it in a due manner, who looked for any deserving of it in himself, or conceived that there was any proportion between it, and what he is or has done in this world. Hence some of those who do not have this faith, have invented another state, after men have gone out of this world, to make them fit for heaven, which they call *purgatory*; for they do not understand on what grounds a man should expect an entrance into glory, on his departure out of this world.

Let those who are exercised with temptations and dejections bring their faith to this trial; and in various degrees, this is the case for us all: —

First, then, examine strictly by the word, whether this is a true description of the nature and acting of saving faith. Various things are supposed or asserted in this; such as, —

- 1.** That the way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ is the principal effect of divine wisdom, power, goodness, love, and grace.
- 2.** That the design of the gospel is to manifest, declare, and testify that it is so, and thus to make known the glory of God in it.
- 3.** That saving faith is that act, duty, and work of the soul, by which we receive the record of God concerning these things, and ascribe the glory of them all to him, having discovered it in the way of life proposed to us.

523

- 4.** That upon this, faith proceeds to renounce all other ways, means, hopes, and reliefs that are in opposition to this way, or in conjunction with it, as to acceptance with God in life and salvation.

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

I say, in the first place, examine these things strictly by the word; and if they appear to be (as they are) sacred, evangelical, fundamental truths, do not be moved from them, do not be shaken in them, by any temptation whatever.

And, in the *next* place, test your faith on these principles: What do you judge concerning God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, as proposed in the gospel? Are you satisfied in it, that it is such that it becomes God, and corresponds to all the glorious attributes of his nature? Would you have any other way proposed in its place? Can you, *will* you, commit the eternal welfare of your soul to the grace and faithfulness of God in this way, such that you have no desire to be saved any other way? Does the glory of God in any measure shine out to you in the face of Jesus Christ? Do you find a secret joy in your hearts upon the satisfaction you take in the proposal of this way to you by the gospel? Do you, in all your fears and temptations, in all approaches of death, renounce all other reserves and reliefs, and place your whole confidence in this way alone, and the representation of God made in it? In this lies that faith, and its exercise, which will be an anchor to your soul in all their trials.

And this is the first and principal ground or reason on which divine and saving faith accepts, embraces, and approves of the way of God's saving sinners by Jesus Christ — namely, because it becomes him, and in every way corresponds to all the holy properties of his nature, which are manifested and glorified in it. And where faith approves of it on this ground and reason, it evidences itself to be truly evangelical, for the support and comfort of those in whom it exists.

SECONDLY, faith so approves of this way, that it finds it suited to the whole design and all the desires of an enlightened soul. So when our Lord Jesus Christ compares the kingdom of God (which is this way of salvation) to a treasure, or a precious pearl, he affirms that those who found it had great joy and the highest satisfaction, having attained what suited their desires and gave rest to their minds.

524

A soul that is enlightened with the knowledge of the truth, and made sensible of its own condition by spiritual conviction, has two predominant desires and aims by which it is wholly regulated. The one is that God may be gloried; and the other is that it may itself be eternally saved. Nor can it forego either of these desires; they are not separable in any enlightened soul. It can never cease in either of these desires, and that is to the highest degree. The whole world cannot dispossess an enlightened mind of either of them. Profligate sinners have no concern in God's glory; nor do those who are under legal convictions, if they have received no spiritual light with it. They want to be saved; but as for the glory of God in it, He may look to that himself — for they are not concerned with it. What they mean by salvation is nothing but freedom from external misery. They want to have this, whether God is glorified by it or not — what is truly salvation, they have no desire for.

But the first beam of spiritual light and grace instates an indefatigable desire for the glory of God in the minds and souls of those in whom it exists. Without this, the soul does not know how to desire its own salvation; and with it, I may say, the soul does not want to be saved in a way in which God would not be glorified by it. For without that glory, whatever its state would be, it would not be that state which we call *salvation*. The exaltation of the glory of God belongs to it *essentially*; salvation consists in beholding and enjoying that glory. This desire, therefore, is immovably fixed in the mind and soul of every enlightened person; he can admit no proposal of eternal things that is inconsistent with it.

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

But moreover, there is a ruling desire for his own salvation in every such enlightened person. It is natural to him, as a creature made for eternity;¹ it is inseparable from him, as he is a convinced sinner. And the clearer the light of anyone is in the nature of this salvation, the more this desire is heightened and confirmed in him.

Here, then, lies the inquiry, namely, "How may these two prevalent desires, for salvation and for God's glory, be reconciled and satisfied in the same mind?" For, as sinners, there seems to be an inconsistency between them. The glory of God, in his justice and holiness, requires that sinners should die and perish eternally.

525

So says the law; this is the language of conscience, and the voice of all our fears. Therefore, for a sinner to desire, in the first place, that God may be glorified, is to desire that he himself may be damned.

Which of these desires will the sinner cling to? To which of them will he give preeminence? Will he cast off all hopes and desires for his own salvation, and be content to perish forever? This he cannot do; and God does not require it of him. God has given him the contrary charge while he is in this world. Will he then desire that God may part with and lose His glory, so that, one way or another, he may be saved? Will God bring himself to be unconcerned with what becomes of His glory? This can no more be in an enlightened mind, than the soul can cease to desire its own salvation. But a sinner does not find how to reconcile these things in himself.

Here, therefore, the glory of this way of salvation represents itself to the faith of every believer. It not only brings these desires into a perfect consistency and harmony, but it makes them increase and promote one another. The desire for God's glory increases the desire for our own salvation; and the desire for our own salvation enlarges and inflames the desire for glorifying God in and by this way. These things are brought into a perfect consistency and mutual subservience in the blood of Christ, Rom 3:24-26.² For this is the way that God has established, in infinite wisdom, to glorify himself in the salvation of sinners. There is nothing in which the glory of God does or may consist, that is not in this way reconciled to, and consistent with, the salvation of the greatest of sinners. There is no property of His nature that is not gloriously exalted in and by it. An answer is given in it to all the objections of the law against the consistency of the glory of God and the salvation of sinners. It pleads His truth in his threatening, in the sanction of the law, with the curse annexed to it; — it pleads his righteousness, holiness, and severity, all engaged to destroy sinners; — it pleads the instance of God's dealing with the angels that sinned, and calls in the witness of conscience to testify to the truth of all its allegations. A full and satisfactory answer is given to this whole plea of the law in this way of salvation. God declares in it, and by it, how he has provided for the

¹ **Ecc 3:11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

² **Rom 3:21** But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

satisfaction of all these things, and for the exaltation of his glory in them, as we will see immediately.

526

Here true faith will fix itself in all its distresses. "Whatever," says the soul, "is my state and condition, whatever are my fears and perplexities, whatever oppositions I meet with, yet I see in Jesus Christ, in the mirror of the gospel, that there is no inconsistency between the glory of God and my salvation. What would otherwise be an insuperable difficulty laid by the law in the way of my life and comfort, is utterly removed." While faith keeps this hold in the soul, with a constant approval of this way of salvation by Christ, giving consistency to both its governing desires, it will be an anchor to stay the soul in all its storms and distresses. It will not need forego either of them — being content to be damned so that God may be glorified (as some have put it); or else desiring salvation without a due regard for the glory of God. We may briefly mention some benefits which will certainly ensue from this.

1. The soul will hereby be preserved from ruining despair, in all the distresses that may befall it. Despair is nothing but a prevalent apprehension of mind that the glory of God and a man's salvation are inconsistent — i.e., that God cannot be just, true, holy, or righteous, if the one in whom this apprehension exists, is to be saved. Such a person concludes that his salvation is impossible because, one way or the other, it is inconsistent with the glory of God; and nothing can render that glory impossible. Hence an utter dislike of God arises in the mind, with revengeful thoughts against him for being what He is. This cuts off all endeavors for reconciliation. Indeed, it begets an abhorrence of all the means of that reconciliation, as weak, foolish, and insufficient. Such are Christ and his cross to men under such apprehensions. They judge them unable to reconcile the glory of God and their salvation. Then a soul is in an open entry-way into hell. The soul is safely preserved from this cursed frame and ruin, by faith's maintaining in the mind and heart, a due persuasion of the consistency and harmony that exists between the glory of God, and its own salvation. While this persuasion is prevalent, even though the soul cannot attain any comfortable assurance of its especial interest in it, it cannot help but love, honor, value, and cling to this way, adoring the wisdom and grace of God in it. *This is an act and evidence of saving faith.* See Psalm 130:3-4.¹ Indeed, —

527

2. It will preserve the soul from heartless despondencies. Many in their temptations, darkneses, fears, and surprisals by sin, even though they do not fall into ruining desperation, they fall under such desponding fears and various discouragements, as to keep them away from a vigorous endeavor after a recovery. And under this, for lack of the due exercise of grace, they grow weaker and darker every day, and are in danger of pining away in their sins. But where faith keeps the soul constant in the approval of God's way of saving sinners — as that way in which the glory of God and its own salvation are not only fully reconciled, but made inseparable — it will stir up all graces to a due exercise, and diligent performance, of all duties, by which it may obtain a refreshing sense of having a personal interest in it.

3. It will keep the heart full of kindness towards God, from which love and gracious hope will spring. It is impossible for a soul not to be overwhelmed with a sense of sin, and thus be filled with

¹ [Psa 130:3](#) If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But *there is* forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

self-condemnation. But if it has a view of the consistency of the glory of God with its deliverance and salvation, through a free contrivance of infinite wisdom and grace, then the soul must have such kindness towards God, such gracious thoughts of him, that it will beget and kindle in itself both love and hope, as in Mic 7:18-20; Psa 85:8; 1Tim 1:15.¹

4. A steady continuance in the approval of God's way of salvation, on the reason mentioned, will lead the mind into that exercise of faith which both declares its nature and is the spring of all the saving benefits which we receive by it. Now, this is such a spiritual light into, and discovery of, the revelation and declaration made in the gospel — of the wisdom, love, grace, and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and the way of communicating their effect to sinners by Him — that the soul finds them suited and able for the pardon of its own sins, and for its righteousness and salvation. And so it places its whole trust and confidence in this way, for these ends.

This being the very life of faith, that acts and exercises it — by which we are justified and saved, and by which it evidences its truth and sincerity against all temptations — I will insist a little on the explanation of the description just given of it. There are three things in it, or required for it:

(1.) A spiritual light into, and discovery of, the revelation and declaration made in the gospel of the wisdom, love, grace, and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It is not a mere assent to the truth of the revelation or the authority of the revealer. This, indeed, is assumed and included in it.

528

But it adds to it a spiritual discerning, perception, and understanding of the things themselves that are revealed and declared, and without which, a bare assent to the truth of the revelation has no advantage. This is called "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2Cor 4:6. The apostle earnestly prays for the increase of it in all believers, Eph 1:15-20.² So we discern spiritual things in a spiritual manner; and from this arises "the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," Col 2:2; or a spiritual sense of the power, glory, and beauty of the things contained in this mystery — to so know Christ as to know "the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings," Phi 3:10.

Faith affects the mind with an ineffable sense, taste, experience, and acknowledgment of the greatness, the glory, the power, the beauty of the things revealed and proposed in this way of salvation. The soul is enabled to see and understand in it, that all the things belonging to it are such that they become God, his wisdom, goodness, and love, as declared before. And a spiritual

¹ **Mic 7:18** Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will give truth to Jacob And mercy to Abraham, Which You have sworn to our fathers From days of old. **Psa 85:8** I will hear what God the LORD will speak, For He will speak peace To His people and to His saints; But let them not turn back to folly. **1Tim 1:15** This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

² **Eph 1:15** Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places;

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

light enabling them to do this, is of the essence of saving faith. Unless this is in us, we do not, we cannot, give glory to God in any assent to the truth. And faith is that grace which God has prepared, fitted, and suited, to give Him the glory that is his due, in the work of our redemption and salvation.

(2.) Upon this spiritual light into this revelation of God and his glory, in this way of saving sinners, the mind *by faith* finds and sees that all things in it are suited to its own justification and salvation in particular; and that the power of God is in them to make them effectual to that end. This is that act and work of faith on which the whole blessed event depends. It will not avail a man to see all sorts of viands¹ and provisions, if they are in no way suited to his appetite, nor fit for his nourishment; nor will it be to a man's spiritual advantage to take a view of the excellencies of the gospel, unless he finds them suited to his condition. And this is the hardest task and work that faith has to carry out.

Faith is not an especial assurance of a man's own justification and salvation by Christ; it will produce that, but not until another step or two in its progress is over.

529

But faith is a satisfactory *persuasion* that the way of God proposed in the gospel is fitted, suited, and able to save the soul in particular who believes — not only that it is a blessed way to save sinners *in general*, but that it is such a way to save him *in particular*. So this matter is stated by the apostle, 1Tim 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance" or approval, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." His faith does not abide here, nor confine itself to this — that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that this is the holy and blessed way of God for the salvation of sinners in general — but he puts in for his own particular interest in that way of salvation: "It is God's way, fitted, and suited, and able to save *me*, the greatest of sinners."

And this, as was said, is the greatest and the most difficult work of faith; for we suppose, concerning the person who is to believe, —

- [1.] That he is really and effectually convinced of the sin of man's nature, of our apostasy from God in it, the loss of His image in us, and the dire effects that ensue from it.
- [2.] That he has due apprehensions of the holiness and severity of God, of the sanction and curse of the law, with a right understanding of the nature of sin and its demerit.
- [3.] That he has a full conviction of his own actual sins, with all their aggravations, from their greatness, their number, and all sorts of circumstances.
- [4.] That he has a sense of the guilt of secret or unknown sins, which have been multiplied by that continual proneness to sin which he finds working in him.
- [5.] That he seriously considers what it means to appear before the judgment-seat of God, to receive a sentence for eternity, with all other things of a like nature, which are inseparable from him as a sinner.

When it is really this way with any man, he finds it the hardest thing in the world, and clogged with the most difficulties, to believe that the way of salvation proposed to him is suited, fitted,

¹ *Viands*: A stock or supply of delicious foods.

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

and in every way able to save him in particular, — to apprehend that none of his objections can rise up against it, or stand before it.

530

But in the second place, this is what the faith of God's elect will do: it will enable the soul to discern and satisfy itself that there is in this way of God, everything necessary for its own salvation. And faith will do this on a spiritual understanding and due consideration of, —

[1.] The infiniteness of that wisdom, love, grace, and mercy, which is the originating or sovereign cause of the whole way, with the ample declaration and confirmation made of these things in the gospel.

[2.] Of the unspeakably glorious way and means for procuring and communicating to us all the effects of that wisdom, grace, and mercy, — namely, the incarnation and mediation of the Son of God, in his oblation¹ and intercession.

[3.] Of the great multitude and variety of precious promises, engaging the truth, faithfulness, and power of God, for the communication of righteousness and salvation from those springs, by that means.

I say, on the just consideration of these things, with all other encouragements that accompany them, the soul concludes by faith, that there is salvation for itself in particular, to be attained in that way.

(3.) The last act of faith, in the order of nature, is the soul's acquiescence in, and trust to, this way of salvation for itself and its own eternal condition, with a renunciation of all other ways and means for that end. And because Jesus Christ, in his person, mediation, and righteousness, is the life and center of this way — as the one in whom alone God will glorify his wisdom, love, grace, and mercy; as the one who has purchased, procured, and wrought all this salvation for us; whose righteousness is imputed to us for our justification, and who in the discharge of his office actually bestows it on us — he is the proper and immediate object of faith, in this act of trust and affiancing. This is what which is called in the Scripture, "believing in Christ" — namely, trusting to him alone for life and salvation, as the whole of divine wisdom and grace is administered by him to these ends. For this we come to him, we receive him, we believe in him, we trust him, we abide in him, with all those other ways by which our faith in him is expressed.

And this is the second ground or reason on which faith accepts, embraces, and approves of God's way of saving sinners; by this it evidences itself to the comfort of those in whom it exists, in the midst of all their trials and temptations.

531

THIRDLY, Faith approves of this way, as that which makes the glory of God, in the giving and in the sanction of the law, to be as eminently conspicuous as if it had been perfectly fulfilled by every one of us in our own persons. The law was a just representation of the righteousness and holiness of God. And the end for which it was given was that it might be the means and instrument of the eternal exaltation of his glory in these holy properties of his nature.

Let no man imagine that God has laid aside this law, as a thing having no more use; or that God will bear a diminution of that glory, or any part of it, which he designed in giving it. Heaven and

¹ *Oblation*: a sacrificial offering. In Hebrew, *corban* [OT:07133], as in Lev 2.4.

I. HOW DOES SAVING FAITH APPROVE OF THIS WAY?

earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of the law will do so. No believer can desire, or be pleased with, his own salvation, unless the glory of God designed by the law is secured. He cannot desire that God would forego any part of His glory, that he might be saved. Yes, this is principally why he rejoices in his own salvation — namely, that it is that in which God will be absolutely, universally, and eternally glorified.

Now, in this way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ — by mercy, pardon, and the righteousness of another (all of which the law knows nothing about) — faith sees and understands how all that glory which God designed in giving the law, is eternally secured and preserved entire, without eclipse or diminution. The way by which this is done is declared in the gospel. See Rom 3:24-26; 8:2-4; 10:3-4.¹ Hereby faith is enabled to answer all the challenges and charges of the law, with all its pleas for the vindication of divine justice, truth, and holiness; it has that to offer which gives the law the utmost satisfaction in all its pleas for God. So this answer is managed in Rom 8:32-34.²

And this is the first way by which the faith of God's elect evidences itself in the minds and consciences of those who believe, in the midst of all their contests with sin, their trials and temptations, to their relief and comfort — namely, accepting and approving of God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, on the grounds and reasons which have been declared.

¹ **Rom 8:2** For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **Rom 10:3** For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

² **Rom 8:32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. ³⁴ Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

II.

THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – OBEDIENCE

The second way by which true faith evidences itself in the souls and consciences of believers, to their support and comfort under all their conflicts with sin, in all their trials and temptations, is by a constant approval of the revelation of the will of God in the Scripture concerning our holiness, and the obedience to it which he requires of us. Faith will never forego this, whatever trials it may undergo, whatever darkness the mind may fall into. It will abide by this in all extremities. And so that it may appear to be a particular effect or work of saving faith, some things are to be premised and considered: —

1. All men have by nature a light enabling them to judge of the difference between what is morally good and what is evil, especially in things of more than ordinary importance. This light is not attained or acquired by us; we are not taught it; we do not learn it. It is born with us, and it is inseparable from us. It pre-exists consideration and reflection, working naturally, and in a way necessarily, in the first acting of our souls.

And the discerning power of this light, as to the moral nature of men's actions, is accompanied inseparably with a judgment that they make concerning themselves as to what they do of one kind or another, and that is with respect to the superior judgment of God about the same things. The apostle expressly ascribes this to the Gentiles, who did not have the law:

"The Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; these, not having the law, are a law unto themselves: which shows the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another," Rom 2:14-15.

This is a most exact description of a natural conscience, in both powers of it: (1) it discerns that good and evil which is commanded and forbidden in the law, and (2) it passes an acquitting or condemning judgment and sentence, according to what men have done.

533

Thus, this approval of duties in moral things is common to all men. The light by which it is guided may be variously improved, as it was in some of the Gentiles; and it may be stifled in some, until it seems to be quite extinguished, until they become like the beasts that perish.^{Psa 49.20} And where the discerning power of this light remains, yet through a continual and obdurate practice of sin,¹ all the efficacy of its judging power may be lost. So the apostle declares concerning those who are judicially hardened and given up to sin:

"These, knowing the judgment of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but take pleasure in those who do them," Rom 1:32.

They still discern what is evil and sinful, and they know what the judgment of God is concerning such things; yet the love of sin and habit in sinning so far prevail in them, as to despise both their own light and God's judgment, so as to delight in what is contrary to them. The apostle describes

¹ *Obdurate*: resolute and opposed to change; unyielding and inflexible.

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

these in Eph 4:19, "Being past feeling" (all sense of convictions), "they have given themselves over into lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness;" such as the world is filled with at this day. It is, in some measure, in the worst of men.

But this is not that approval of obedience which we inquire about, nor does it have any likeness to that duty of faith which we treat, as will be immediately apparent.

2. There is a further knowledge of good and evil by the law, and this is also accompanied with a judgment that acquits or condemns; for the law has the same judging power and authority over men, that their own consciences have — namely, the authority of God himself. To sinners, the law is like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — it opens their eyes to see the nature of what they have done. For "by the law is the knowledge of sin," Rom 3:20: and the knowledge of duty also, for it is the adequate rule of all duty. There is, I say, a knowledge and conviction of duty and sin communicated to men by the law; and that knowledge and conviction is far clearer and more distinct than what is or can be found in men from the mere light of nature.

534

For the law extends to more instances which (as to many important duties and sins) are generally lost where that light is alone. And the law declares the nature of every sin and duty far more clearly than natural light can do of itself. This knowledge of good and evil by the law may be so improved in the minds of men, as to press them to perform all known duties, and to abstain from all known sins, with a judgment on them all. Yet that approval of holiness and obedience which faith will produce, does not consist in this; for, —

(1.) As to approval or condemnation of good or evil, that which is by the law is particular, or it has respect to particular duties and sins, as occasion presents them. But it does not extend to the whole law absolutely, and to all that is required in it. I do not say it is always partial — there is a legal sincerity that may have respect to all known duties and sins, though it is very rare. We will hardly find a person that is merely under the power of the law, who does not evidence an indulgence of some sin, and a neglect of some duties. But there may be such a thing; it was evident in Paul, in his pharisaism — "touching the righteousness which is in the law," he was "blameless," Phi 3:6. He did not indulge himself in any known sin, nor in the neglect of any known duty; nor could others charge him with any defect in it — he was blameless. But where this is found, this approval or condemnation is still particular — that is, they respect particular duties and sins as they occur. There is no respect to the whole righteousness and holiness of the law, as we will see. Therefore, a man may approve of every duty in its season, as it is offered to him, or any time he thinks of it by an act of his fixed judgment; and on the contrary, as to sin. Yet he will come short of that approval of holiness and righteousness which we inquire about.

(2.) It is not accompanied with a love of the things themselves that are good, as they are good, and a hatred of contrary things. For the persons in whom this exists, do not, they *cannot*, "delight in the law of God after the inward man," as in Rom 7:22, so as to approve of it, and all it contains, clinging to these things with love and delight. They may have a love for this or that duty, and a hatred of the contrary, but it is on various considerations that are suited to their own convictions and circumstances; but it is not on account of its formal nature, as being good or evil.¹ Therefore,

¹ In other words, the flesh may sometimes agree with the law that something is good. But approving of it because it happens to be in one's self-interest, and not because God's law requires it, is not what saving faith consists in.

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

535

(3.) No man, without the light of saving faith, can constantly and universally approve of the revelation of the will of God, as to our holiness and obedience.

To make this evident, which is the foundation of our present discovery of the acting of saving faith, we must consider, —

[1.] What is to be approved by it; and,

[2.] What this approval is, or what it consists in: —

[1.] What is to be approved is the holiness and obedience which God requires in us, in our natures and actions, and which he accepts from us or in us. It is not particular duties as they occur, taken alone and by themselves; but the universal correspondence of our natures and actions to the will of God. The Scripture gives us various descriptions of it, because of the variety of graces and gracious operations which concur in it. We may mention some of its principal concerns here, having handled the nature of it at large elsewhere. Holiness may be considered, —

1st. As to its foundation, spring, and causes: and this is the universal renovation of our natures into the image of God, Eph 4:24; or the change of our whole souls, in all their faculties and powers, into his likeness, whereby we become new creatures, or the workmanship of God created in Christ Jesus for good works, 2Cor 5:17, Eph 2:10; and in which we are originally and formally sanctified throughout, in our "whole spirit, and soul, and body," 1Thes 5:23. It is the whole law of God written in our hearts, transforming them into the image of the divine holiness, as represented in it. And this, next to the blood of Christ and his righteousness, is the principal spring of peace, rest, and complacency, in and to the souls of believers. It is their joy and satisfaction to find themselves restored to a likeness and conformity to God, as we will further see shortly. And where there is not some gracious sense and experience of this, there is nothing but disorder and confusion in the soul. Nothing can give it a sweet composure, a satisfaction in itself, a complacency with what it is, except a spiritual sense of this renovation of the image of God in it.

536

2ndly. It may be considered as to its permanent principle in the mind and affections; and this, because of its near relation to Christ — its conjunction with him, and derivation from him — is sometimes said to be Christ himself. Hence we live; and yet it is not so much we that live, as Christ lives in us, Gal 2:20; for "without him we can do nothing," Joh 15:5; for "he is our life," Col 3:4. As holiness resides in believers, it is a permanent principle of spiritual life, light, love, and power, acting in the whole soul and in all the faculties of the mind, enabling them to cling to God with purpose of heart, and to live to him in all the acts and duties of spiritual life. This is that by which the Holy Ghost is "in them a well of water, springing up into everlasting life," Joh 4:14. It is the spirit that is born of the Spirit; it is the divine nature of which we are made partakers by the promises; it is a principle of victorious faith and love, with all the graces that are in any way requisite to duties of holy obedience — and as to the matter or manner of their performance, it enables the soul for all the acts of the life of God, with delight, joy, and complacency.

This is holiness in its *nature*. However, as to the degrees of its operation and manifestation, it may be very low and weak in some true believers, at least for a season; but there are none who

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

are really so, that there is not in them a spiritually vital principle of obedience, or of living to God, that participates in the nature of what we have described. And if it is attended to, it will evidence itself in its power and operations to the gracious refreshment and satisfaction of the soul in which it operates. There are few who are so destitute of those evidences that they are not able to say, "Whereas I was blind, now I see, though I do not know how my eyes were opened. Whereas I was dead, I find motions of a new life in me, in breathing after grace, in hungering and thirsting after righteousness, though I do not know how I was quickened."

3rdly. It may be considered as to its disposition, inclinations, and motions. These are the first actings of a vital principle — just as the first actings of sin are called "the motions of sin" working in our members, Rom 7:5.¹ Such motions and inclinations to obedience work in the minds of believers, from this principle of holiness; it produces in them a constant, invariable disposition to all duties of the life of God. It is a new nature, and a nature cannot be without suitable inclinations and motions. And this new spiritual disposition consists in a constant complacency of mind² in what is good and according to the will of God, in an adherence by love unto it, in a readiness and fixedness of mind with respect to particular duties.

537

In brief, it is what David describes in the 119th Psalm throughout, and what is figuratively foretold concerning the efficacy of the grace of the gospel in changing the natures and dispositions of those who partake of it, Isa 11:6-8.³

Every believer may ordinarily find this in himself; for even though this disposition may be variously weakened, opposed, or interrupted by indwelling sin and the power of temptation; though it may be impaired by a neglect of stirring up and exercising the principle of spiritual life, in all requisite and graces, on all occasions — it will still be working in the believer, and will fill the mind with a constant discontent⁴ with itself when it is not observed, followed, and improved. No believer will ever have peace in his own mind, if he does not have some experience of a universal disposition toward all holiness and godliness in his mind and soul. This is what comprises that love of the law which, in those in whom it exists, is said to give "great peace, and nothing will offend them," Psa 119:165; it is that in which their souls find great contentment.

4thly. Holiness may be considered with respect to all the acts, duties, and works, internal and external, in which our actual obedience consists. Being made free from sin, and becoming the servants of God, on the principles mentioned, believers have their "fruit unto holiness" of which "the end is everlasting life," Rom 6:22. I need not stay to describe this. Sincerity in every duty, and universality with respect to all duties, are the properties of holiness.

¹ **Rom 7:5** For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law [KJV: the motions of the sins, which were by the law] were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

² Complacency: contentedness or satisfaction.

³ **Isa 11:6** "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.

⁴ Originally, displicency.

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification," 1Thes 4:3. It is that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," Heb 12:14; it is "that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" which we are to approve, Rom 12:2.

[2.] Our next inquiry is, what does that approval of this way of holiness consist in, which we place as an evidence of saving faith? And I say, it is what arises from experience, and is accompanied with choice, delight, and acquiescence. It is the acting of the soul in delightful adherence to the whole will of God; it is a resolved judgment of the beauty and excellency of that holiness and obedience which the gospel reveals and requires. And that is on the grounds which will shortly be declared, and the nature of which will be more fully explained.

538

This approval cannot be found in any unregenerate person; he is not under the conduct of saving faith; he is destitute of its light. So the apostle assures us, Rom 8:7, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." Whatever work the law may have wrought in his mind, or upon it, while it is carnal or unrenewed, it has a radical enmity to the law of God. This is the frame of heart which stands in direct opposition to this approval. Such a mind may think well of this or that duty from its convictions and other considerations; and so it may attend to their performance. But it utterly dislikes the law itself, in the universal holiness which it requires. Those with a carnal mind are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them," Eph 4:18. This life of God is that holiness and obedience which he requires of us in the principles and duties of it. And to be alienated from it, is to dislike and disapprove of it. Such is the frame of mind in all unregenerate persons.

Having thus prepared the way, I now return to the declaration and confirmation of the assertion, — namely,

That true and saving faith, in all storms and temptations, in all darkneses and distresses, will evidence itself to the comfort and support of those in whom it exists, by a constant, universal approval of the whole will of God,¹ concerning our holiness and obedience, both in general and in every particular instance of it.

We may explain that a little here: —

1. Faith will not allow the mind, on any occasion or temptation, to entertain the least dislike of this way of holiness, nor of anything that belongs to it. The mind may sometimes, through temptations, fall under apprehensions that one will be eternally ruined for lack of due compliance with it; this makes it displeased with *itself*, but not with the obedience required.,

"The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be to death; but the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good." "However it is with me, whatever becomes of me, though I die and perish, yet the law is holy, just, and good," Rom 7:10, 12.

539

It dislikes nothing in the will of God, even though it cannot attain compliance with it. Sometimes the conscience is under perplexities and rebukes for sin; sometimes the mind is burdened by the evasion² of the flesh to duties that run cross to its inclinations and interests; sometimes the world

¹ **Rom 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

² Originally, *tergiversation*.

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

threatens the utmost dangers for performing some duties of religion. But none of these are able to provoke the soul that is under the conduct of faith to dislike, or to think hard of, any of those ways and duties from which these difficulties arise. And, —

2. Just as faith will not dislike anything in this way of holiness, so it will not desire on any occasion that there be any alteration in it, or any abatement of it, or of any thing required in it. Naaman the Syrian in general liked the worship of the true God; but he wanted an abatement of duty as to one instance, in compliance with his earthly interest, which revealed his hypocrisy. Such imaginations may befall the minds of men, that if they might be excused in this or that instance, as to duties that are dangerous and troublesome (like making a profession in times of persecution), or if they might be indulged in this or that sin, which either their inclinations are very prone to, or their secular interests call for, they could do well enough with all other things. Accordingly, the practice of many corresponds to their inclination and desire. They profess religion and obedience to God, but they keep back part of the price — they will hide a wedge in their tents,¹ through indulgence of some corruption, or a dislike for some duties in their circumstances. They would set for themselves the measure of their obedience. And as men's practice is, so they desire that things indeed should be — that the practice which pleased them, should please God. *Faith abhors this*. The soul that is under its conduct is not capable of any one desire that anything would be other than as it is in the will of God concerning our holiness and obedience — no more than it can desire that God should not be what He is. No — even if it could be imagined that by some change and abatement in some instances, the soul might yet be saved (which now is uncertain whether that is possible or not), faith will allow no such composition, but will choose to stand or fall under the entire will of God.

540

We shall therefore, in the next place, proceed to inquire on what grounds faith thus approves of the whole will of God, as to our holiness and obedience; and also, how it evidences that it does so. And there are two grounds: — the one respects God; the other respects our own souls.

First, Faith looks at the holiness required of us as being suited to the holiness of God himself, — as that which it is appropriate for him to require, on account of his own nature and its infinite perfections. The rule is, "Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy;" — "I require of you what becomes and corresponds to my own holiness: because I am holy, it is necessary for you to be holy. If you are mine in a special way, then it becomes my holiness to require your holiness."

We have declared before what this gospel holiness is, what it consists in, and what is required for it. And they may all be considered either as they are in us, inherent in us, and performed by us; or else as they are in themselves, in their own nature, and in the will of God. In the first way, I acknowledge that, because of our weaknesses, imperfections, and partial renovation only, as to their degrees in this life, along with our manifold defects and sins, these requirements do not make a clear representation of the holiness of God. However, they are the best image of it that this world can afford, even in the lowliest of believers. But in themselves, and in their own nature, as it lies in the will of God, they make up the most glorious representation of him that God ever did or will grant in this world — especially if we comprise in it, the exemplification of the human nature of Christ himself. For the holiness in believers is of the same nature and kind with that which was and is in Jesus Christ, even though his exceed theirs inconceivably in their degrees of perfection.

¹ Achan's sin at Ai (Jos 7.20-21).

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

Therefore, we are required to be holy, as the Lord our God is holy; and perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. This we could not be, except that in our holiness and perfection, there is a resemblance and correspondence to the holiness and perfection of God. And if a due sense of it were continually upon our hearts, it would influence us to greater care and diligence in all instances of duty and sin than, for the most part, we attain and preserve. If on all occasions we sincerely and severely call ourselves to account as to whether our frames, ways, and actions bear a due resemblance to the holiness and perfections of God, it would be a spiritual preservative on all occasions.

541

I say then, faith discerns the likeness of God in this holiness, and every part of it; it sees it as that which it becomes God to require. And upon that, faith approves of it, reverencing God in it all. And it does so in all the parts of holiness, and in all that belongs to it.

1. Faith does so principally in the inward form of holiness, which we described before — in the new creature, the new nature, the reparation of the image of God in it: in the beauty holiness, it continually beholds the likeness and glory of God. For it is created *kata theon*,¹ — according to God, after him, or in his image, — "in righteousness and true holiness," Eph 4:24. "The new man is renewed after the image of him that created him," Col 3:10.

When God first created all things, the heavens and the earth, with all that is contained in them, he left such footsteps and impressions of his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power on them, that they might signify and declare his perfection — his eternal power and Godhead. Yet he did not and he is not said to have created them in his own image. And this was because they were only a passive representation of him in the light of others, and not in themselves; nor did they represent at all that in which God will principally be glorified among his creatures — namely, the universal rectitude of his nature in righteousness and holiness. But of man it is said, specifically and only, that he was made in the image and likeness of God. And this was because, in the rectitude of his nature, man represented the holiness and righteousness of God; which is the only use of an image. This was lost by sin. Man in his fallen condition no longer represents God. There is nothing in him that has anything of the likeness or image of God in it; all is dead, dark, perverse, and confused. This new nature of which we speak, is created by God for this very end: that it may be a blessed image and representation of the holiness and righteousness of God. Hence it is called the "divine nature," of which we are partakers, 2Pet 1:4. Someone who cannot see a representation of God in it, does not have the light of faith and life in him.

About this, I say that faith approves of the form and principle of this holiness, as the renovation of the image of God in us. Faith looks at it as that which is suitable for God to bestow and require, and therefore as that which has an incomparable excellency and desirableness in it.

542

Indeed, when the soul is ready to faint under an apprehension that it is not partaking of this holy nature — because of the power of sin in it, and of temptations upon it — it does not know whether it is born of God or not (as is the case with many). And yet, where this faith exists, it will discern the beauty and glory of the new creation in some measure, as that which bears the image of God. And thereupon, faith preserves a longing for it in the soul, or a greater partaking of it.

¹ *κατὰ Θεόν.*

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

By this work or act, faith reveals its sincerity; which is what we inquire about. While faith has an eye open to behold the glory of God in the new creature, while it looks at it as that in which the holiness of God himself is represented, and which it becomes God to require in us — and upon this, approves of it as excellent and desirable — faith will be an anchor to the soul in its greatest storms. For this is a work beyond what a mere enlightened conscience can rise to. Conscience can approve or disapprove of all the acts and effects of obedience and disobedience as to their consequents. But to discern the spiritual nature of the new creature, as representing the holiness of God himself, and thereupon to constantly approve of it, is the work of faith alone.

2. Faith does the same with respect to the internal acts and effects of this new creature, or this principle of new obedience. The first thing it produces in us, is a spiritual and heavenly frame of mind. Those who live according to the Spirit are "spiritually-minded," Rom 8:5-6.¹ Faith looks at the opposite frame — of being carnally-minded — as vile and loathsome, consisting in a readiness and disposition of mind to actuate the lusts of the flesh. But this spiritual frame of mind, in a just constellation of all the graces of the Spirit — influencing, disposing, and making the soul ready to exercise them on all occasions, and in all duties of obedience — *this* is the inward glory of the "King's daughter," which faith sees and approves of, as what it becomes God to require in us. Whatever is contrary to it, such as a sensual, carnal, worldly frame of mind, faith looks at as vile and base, unworthy of God, and unworthy of those who design the enjoyment of God.

3. Faith does the same with respect to all particular duties, internal and external, when they are enlivened and filled up with grace. Our "walking worthy at God," Col 1:10; 1Thes 2:12, consists in these duties — a walk that is fit for God to accept; that by which and in which He is glorified.

543

What is contrary to this, in neglecting the duties of holiness, or performing them without the due exercise of grace, faith looks at as unworthy of God, unworthy of our high and holy calling, and unworthy of our profession; and therefore faith constantly condemns and abhors it.

As we observed before, faith will continue to do all this constantly, under temptations and desertions. There are seasons in which the soul may be very weak as to the powers, effects, and duties of this spiritual life. The psalmist often complains of this in his own case, and it is evident in the experience of most believers. There are few who have not found, at one time or another, great weakness, decays, and great deadness in their spiritual condition. And sometimes true believers may be at a loss as to any refreshing experience of it in its operations. They may not be able to determine in the contest whether it is sin or grace that has dominion in them. Yet even in all these seasons, faith will keep the soul to a constant high approval of this way of holiness and obedience, in its root and fruits, in its principle and effects, in its nature, disposition, and duties. For when believers cannot see the beauty of these things in themselves, they can see it in the promises of the covenant, in the truth of the gospel in which it is declared, and in the effects of holiness in others.

And great advantage is to be obtained by the due exercise of faith in holiness. For, —

(1.) It will never allow the heart to be at rest in any sinful way, or under any spiritual decays that will estrange it from the pursuit of this holiness. The sight, the conviction of its excellency, the

¹ **Rom 8:5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

approval of it as that which, in us and in our measure, corresponds to the holiness of God, will keep the mind endeavoring after it; and it will rebuke the soul in all its neglects of holiness. Nor will faith allow any quiet or peace within, without endeavoring after a comfortable *assurance* of it. The soul is desperately sick when it has lost an abiding sense of the excellency of this holiness, in its correspondence to the holiness and will of God. Fears and checks of conscience are the whole of the soul's security against the worst of sins; but they are a guard that is not to be trusted in place of the peace of God. This is one great difference between believers and those who do not have faith. Fear of the consequent of sin, with an apprehension of some advantages which are to be obtained by a sober life, and the profession of religion, steer and regulate the minds of unbelievers, in all they do towards God or for eternity.

544

But the minds of believers are influenced by a view of the glory of the image and likeness of God in that holiness, and all the parts of it, to which they are called. This gives them love for it, delight and complacency in it, enabling them to look at it as its own reward. And without these affections, none will ever abide in the ways of obedience to the end.

(2.) Where faith is exercised in holiness, it will evidence itself to the relief of the soul, in all its darkness and temptations. The mind can never conclude that it is wholly without God and his grace, while it constantly approves of the holiness required of us. This is not of ourselves — by nature we are ignorant of it. This "life is hidden with Christ in God," Col 3:3, where we can see nothing of it; of ourselves we are alienated from it, and dislike it: "Alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us," Eph 4:18. Most men live all their days in contempt of the principal evidences and duties of this life of God, and of its principle, which they look at as a fable. Therefore, the mind may have great satisfaction in a sight of the beauty and approval of this holiness, as that which nothing can produce but sincere and saving faith.

Secondly, Faith approves of this way of holiness and obedience, as that which gives all that rectitude and perfection to our nature, which it is capable of in this world. It is the only rule and measure of them; whatever is contrary to holiness and obedience is perverse, crooked, vile, and base. Some men think their nature is capable of no other perfection than what consists in the satisfaction of their lusts. They know no other blessedness, nothing that is suitable to their desires, except saving their nature in the pursuit of its corrupt lusts and pleasures. They are described as such by the apostle, Eph 4:19.¹ The business of their lives is to make provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts: they walk in the lusts of the flesh, "fulfilling" (so far as they are able) "the desires of the flesh and of the mind," Eph 2:3. They neither know nor understand what a hell of confusion, disorder, and base degeneracy from the original constitution, that their minds are filled with. This sort of perfection is nothing but the next disposition to hell; it manifests its own vileness to everyone who has the least ray of spiritual light.

545

Some among the heathen placed the rectitude of nature in living according to moral virtues and operations; and this was the utmost that natural light could ever rise to. But the uncertainty and weakness of it are revealed by the light of the gospel.

It is faith alone that discovers what is good for us, in us, and to us, while we are in this world. It is in the renovation of the image of God in us that the good, the perfection, the order, the present

¹ Eph 4:19 being past feeling, they have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

blessedness of our nature consist — in the change and transformation of our nature into His likeness — in acting from a gracious principle of a divine life — in duties and operations that are suited to it — and in partaking of the divine nature by the promises.¹

Hereby the faculties of our souls are exalted, elevated, and enabled to act their original² powers with respect to God and our enjoyment of him; this is our utmost end and blessedness. Hereby our affections are placed on their proper objects (those which they were created fit for, and in engaging them, what their satisfaction, order, and rest consist in) — namely, God and his goodness, or God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the gospel.

Hereby all the powers of our souls are brought into a blessed frame and harmony in all their operations — whatever is dark, perverse, unquiet, vile, and base, are cast out of them. But these things must be distinctly explained a little more.

1. There is a spiritual, saving light in this gospel holiness, as the spring and principle of it, enabling the mind and understanding to know God in Christ, and to discern spiritual things in a spiritual, saving manner; for in this,

"God shines into our hearts, to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ,"
2Cor 4:6.

Without this in some degree, whatever pretense there may be or appearance of holiness in any, there is nothing in them of what is really holy, and thus accepted with God. Blind devotion — that is, an inclination of the mind to religious duties, destitute of this light — will set men to multiplying duties, especially those of their own invention, in "a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting the body," as the apostle says, Col 2:23. There is nothing of gospel holiness in this.

546

"The new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him," Col 3:10.

The apostle declares that this saving light and knowledge is the spring and principle of all real evangelical holiness and obedience. He gives us a description of the whole of it, both in its beginning and progress:

"We desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness," Col 1:9-11.

It is a blessed account that is given here, of that gospel holiness which we inquire about, in its nature, origin, spring, progress, fruits, and effects. And a serious consideration of it, as it is proposed here — a view of it in the light of faith, — will evidence how distant and different it is from those schemes of moral virtues which some would substitute in its place. It has a glory in it which no unenlightened mind can behold or comprehend. Its foundation is laid in the knowledge

¹ 2Pet 1:3 as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

² Owen used *primigenial* powers – first-generation, prior to the fall.

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

of the will of God, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This is that spiritual, saving light of which we speak. The apostle prayed for the increase of it in believers:

"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," Eph 1:17-18.

In Col 1.10, this light is called "increasing in the knowledge of God." And the singular glory of this saving light — in its origin, its causes, use, and effects — is most illustriously declared here. This light is in every true believer, and it is the only immediate spring of all gospel holiness and obedience; for,

547

"the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him," Col 3:10.

This light, this wisdom, this spiritual understanding, thus communicated to believers, is the rectitude and perfection of their minds in this world. It is that which gives them order, and peace, and power, enabling them to act all their faculties in a due manner with respect to their being and end. It is that which gives beauty and glory to the inward man, and which constitutes a believer an inhabitant of the kingdom of light. By this light we are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love," Col 1:13; or "out of darkness into his marvelous light," 1Pet 2:9.

That which is contrary to it, is that ignorance, darkness, blindness, and vanity, which the Scripture declares to be in the minds of all unregenerate persons; and they are really so, where they are not cured by the glorious working of the power and grace of God mentioned before.

Now, faith discerns these things, as the spiritual man discerns all things, 1Cor 2:15. It sees the beauty of this heavenly light, and judges that is what gives order and rectitude to the mind; and also that whatever is contrary to it is vile, base, horrid, and to be ashamed of. As for those who "love darkness more than light, because their deeds are evil," [Joh 3.19](#) — faith knows they are strangers to Christ and his gospel.

2. Again, this holiness requires a principle of spiritual life and love to God. This guides, acts, and rules in the soul, in all its obedience; and it gives the soul its proper order in all its operations. Whatever is contrary to it is death, and enmity against God. Faith judges between these two principles and their operations: faith approves of the former, in all its acting, as lovely, beautiful, and desirable, as that which is the rectitude and perfection of the will. And faith looks at the other as deformed, froward, and perverse.

3. The same may be said of its nature and operations in the affections, and also of all those duties of obedience which proceed from it, as described in the passage mentioned before.

It remains only that we show by what acts, ways, and means, faith evidences its approval of gospel holiness, as that which is lovely and desirable in itself, and which gives all that rectitude and perfection to our minds, which they are capable of in this world.

548

And faith does so, —

II. THE SECOND EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

1. By that self-displicity¹ and abasement which it works in the mind on all instances and occasions where it comes short of this holiness. This is the chief principle and cause of that holy shame which befalls believers upon every sin and miscarriage in which they come short of what is required in it: Rom 6:21, "Those things of which you are now ashamed." Now, when you see by the light of faith, how vile it is, and unworthy of you, what a debasement of your souls there is in it, you are ashamed of it. It is true, the principal cause of this holy shame is a sense of the unsuitableness sin has to the holiness of God, and the horrible ingratitude and disingenuity that there is in sinning against him. But it is greatly promoted by this consideration: that it is a thing unworthy of us, and in which our natures are exceedingly debased. So it is said of provoking sinners, that they "debase themselves even unto hell," Isa 57:9;² or make themselves as vile as hell itself, by ways unworthy of the nature of men. And this is one ground of all those severe self reflections which accompany godly sorrow for sin, 2Cor 7:11.³

And hereby faith evidences itself and its own sincerity: while a man is ashamed of and abased in himself for every sin, for everything about sin, in which it comes short of the holiness required of us — as what is base and unworthy of our [new] nature in its present constitution and renovation. Even though no eye sees it but God's and his own, the believer has in him that which will grow on no root but sincere believing. Therefore, whatever may be the disquieting conflicts of sin in and against our souls, whatever decays we may fall into — which are the two principles of darkness and fears in believers — while this inward holy shame and self-abasement is preserved, on account of the vileness of sin, faith does not leave itself without any evidence in us.

2. Faith does the same by a spiritual satisfaction which it gives the soul in every experience of the transforming power of this holiness, rendering it more and more like God. There is a secret joy and spiritual refreshment rising in the soul from a sense of its renovation into the image of God; and all the acting and increases of the life of God in it, augment this joy.

549

The soul's gradual return to its primitive order and rectitude consists in this renovation, with a blessed addition of supernatural light and grace by Christ Jesus. In this, the soul finds itself coming home to God from its old apostasy, in the way of approaching eternal rest and blessedness. And there is no satisfaction like that which it receives in this.

This is the second way in which faith abides firm and constant, and evidences itself in the soul of every believer. However low and mean its attainments are in this spiritual life, and in the fruits of it, even though it is overwhelmed with darkness and a sense of the guilt of sin, and even though it is surprised and perplexed with the deceit and violence of sin, yet faith will continue here firm and unshaken. It sees that glory and excellency in the holiness and obedience that God requires of us, as a representation of his own glorious excellencies, as the renovation of his image, and as the perfection of our natures thereby. Faith constantly approves of it, even in the deepest trials which the soul can be exercised with. And while this anchor holds firm and stable, we are safe.

¹ *Displicity*: dissatisfaction, discontent, or aversion.

² KJV. This is a more literal (and perhaps better) translation than most modern ones.

³ **2Cor 7:11** For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!* In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

III. THE THIRD EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – WORSHIP

Thirdly, Faith will evidence itself by a diligent, constant endeavor to keep itself and all grace in due *exercise* in all ordinances of divine worship, private and public.

This is the touchstone of faith and spiritual obedience, the most intimate and difficult part of this exercise. Where this is not done, there is no life in the soul. There are two things by which men may *deceive* themselves in this: —

1. By abounding in the outward performance of duties or multiplying them. Hypocrites have deceived themselves by this, in all ages, Isa 58:2-3.¹ And it was the covering that the church of Rome provided for their apostasy from the gospel: an endless multiplication of religious duties was what they trusted to and boasted in. And daily we may find those who pretend to scruples² as to the constant observation of outward duties, and yet they will abstain from no sin that comes in the way of their lusts. And men may abide constantly in them, especially in their families and in public, yes, even multiply them beyond the ordinary measure, thereby hoping to countenance themselves in other lusts and neglects.

2. By the assistance of gifts in the performance of these duties. But just as this may be done where not one dram of grace, of saving grace, is present, so when it is rested in, it is a most powerful engine to keep the soul in mere formality, to ruin any beginnings of grace, and to bring an incurable hardness on the whole soul.³

Wherever faith exists in sincerity,⁴ it will constantly labor, endeavor, and strive to fill up all duties of divine worship with the living, real, heart-acting of grace; and where it does not do so, where this is not attained, it will never allow the soul to take any rest or satisfaction in such duties, but will cast them away like a defiled garment. The one who can pass through such duties without a sensible⁵ endeavor for the real exercise of grace in them, and without self-abasement on performing them, will find hardly any other clear evidence of saving faith in himself.

551

There are three evils that have followed the ignorance, neglect, or weariness of this *exercise of faith*, which have proved the ruin of multitudes: —

¹ **Isa 58:2** Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God.

³ `Why have we fasted,' *they say*, 'and You have not seen? *Why* have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers.

² Owen used "conscience" here. Scruples are moral or ethical principles that govern our actions.

³ It's possible for someone to be a gifted musician, teacher, or public speaker, and to use these gifts effectively in the church, to the admiration of all; and yet for that person to be without saving faith. In the same way, it's possible for a believer to be extraordinarily gifted; and yet to exercise such gifts without grace – to rely on them or "rest in" them as personal skills, instead of using them as a means of God's grace – even to pursue personal glory through them, instead of God's glory. When we do this, it's self-deception, it's graceless, and it's lifeless. – WHG

⁴ **Eph 6:24** Grace *be* with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

⁵ *Sensible*: able to feel or perceive.

III. THE THIRD EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

1. This has been the occasion and origin of all false worship in the world, with the invention of those superstitious rites and ceremonies in which it consists. For men, having lost the exercise of faith in the ordinances of worship that are of *divine* institution, they found the whole of it to be useless and burdensome to them. For without this constant exercise of faith, there is no life in it, nor satisfaction to be obtained by it. They must, therefore, have something in it or accompanying it, to entertain their minds and engage their affections toward it. If this had not been done, this exercise would have been utterly deserted by most. On this basis, forms of prayer were invented in great diversity, with continual diversions and avocations¹ of the mind from what is proposed — because the mind cannot abide in the pursuit of anything spiritual, without the exercise of faith. This [man-made ordinance] gives the mind some entertainment by the mere performance of it, and makes it think there is something, where indeed is nothing. To this are added outward ceremonies of vestments, postures, and gestures of veneration, to the same end. There is no other design in them, than to entertain the mind and affections with some complacency and satisfaction in outward worship, upon the loss or lack of that exercise of faith which is the life and soul of it in believers. And as anyone decays in this, they find themselves imperceptibly sinking into the use of these lifeless forms, or that exercise of their natural faculties and memory which is not one jot better. Indeed, by this means some — from an eminence in spiritual gifts, and performing duties by virtue of them — have sunk into [reciting] an *Ave Maria*² or a *Credo*, as the best of their devotion.

2. This has caused many to turn aside, to fall away from and forsake the solemn ordinances of divine worship, and take to vain imaginations for relief — in trembling, enthusiastic singing and feigned raptures. From this, so many have forsaken their own mercies to follow after lying vanities.³ For a while they kept to the observance of the divine institutions of worship; but *not having faith to exercise in them*, by which alone they are life and power, they became useless and burdensome to them. They could not find sweetness, satisfaction, or benefit in them.

552

It is not possible that so many in our days, if they had ever tasted of the old wine, would go after new — if they had ever experienced that savor, power, and life, which is in the ordinances of divine worship, when acted and enlivened by the exercise of faith, would forsake them for that which is nothing: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." ^{1Joh 2.19} "If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." ^{1Cor 2.8} This, therefore, is the true reason why so many in our days, after they have for a season abided under, and in the observation of, the gospel ordinances of worship, have fallen away from them — namely, not having faith to exercise in them, nor endeavoring after it, they really found no life in them, nor any benefit by them.

3. Some, on the same ground, fall into profaneness, pretending to take up with a natural religion, without any instituted worship at all. We have multitudes of this sort in the days in which we live. Having nothing of the light of faith, they can see no form or attractiveness in Christ, nor in anything that belongs to him. By these means, souls are precipitated into ruin every day.

Therefore, I say that true faith will evidence itself, in all darknesses and distress whatever, in this: it will always endeavor to keep itself, and all other graces, in a due and constant exercise in all

¹ *Avocations*: distractions, side-tracks, rabbit-trails.

² The *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary) is a liturgical Roman Catholic prayer asking for the intervention of the Blessed Mother in the lives of individuals on Earth.

³ ^{KJV} **Jon 2:8** Those who observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

III. THE THIRD EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

duties of worship, private and public. It may sometimes be weakened in its acting and operations; it may be under decays; it may be asleep, and not only as to particular duties and seasons, but as to the inward habitual frame of the mind. But where faith is true and genuine, it will shake itself out of this dust,^{Isa 52.2} cast off the sin that so easily besets us,^{Heb 12.1} and stir itself up to its duty, with all might and contention. There is no more dangerous state for a soul than when it is sinking down into formality, and neglect of the exercise of faith, in a multitude of duties. Then is it assuredly ready to die, if it is not dead already.

If we are wise, therefore, we will watch, and take care that we do not lose this evidence of faith; it will stand us in stead when maybe all other things seem to be against us. Some have been relieved by the remembrance of this exercise of faith — when in such or such a season they experienced the work of faith in prayer. And when they have been at the door of desperation, this remembrance has been their relief.

553

An experience of it is a jewel, which may be of no great use while it lies nearby, locked up in a cabinet; but you will know the worth of it, if you ever come to need bread for your lives.

It is therefore worthwhile to inquire what we ought to do, or what means we ought to use, so that we may keep up faith to its due exercise in all the parts of divine worship, such that it may give us a comforting evidence of itself in times of temptation and darkness. And to this end, the ensuing directions may be of use: —

1. Labor to have your hearts always affected with a due sense of the infinite perfections of the divine nature in all our approaches to God, especially of his sovereign power, holiness, immensity, and omnipresence. This will produce in us also, a sense of infinite distance from him. Because this is necessary, from the nature of the things themselves, the Scripture gives us descriptions of God that are suited to generate this frame in us. This is what Joshua aimed to bring the people to, when he designed to engage them in the service of God in a due manner, Jos 24:19-22.¹ And this is what the apostle requires in us, Heb 12:28-29.² And to the same end, glorious descriptions and appearances of God are multiplied in Scripture. If we fail in this, if we do not on all occasions fill our minds with reverential thoughts of God, of his greatness and his holiness, faith has no foundation to stand upon in its exercise in the duties of worship. This is the only inlet into the due exercise of grace. Where it is lacking, all holy thoughts and affections are shut out of our minds; and where it is present, it is impossible for there not to be some gracious working of heart in all our duties. If we are empty of this in our entrance to our duties, we will be sure to be filled with other things, which will be clogs and hindrances to us. But reverential thoughts of God in our approaches to him, will cast out all excess of wickedness,³ and dissipate all carnal, formal frames, which will vitiate all our duties. Keep your hearts, therefore, under this charge in all your accesses to God, and it will constantly open a door to that exercise of faith which we inquire about.

¹ **Jos 24:19** But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He *is* a holy God. He *is* a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." ²⁰ "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good." ²¹ And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD!" ²² So Joshua said to the people, "You *are* witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him." And they said, "We *are* witnesses!"

² **Heb 12:28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire.

³ Originally, "superfluity of naughtiness."

III. THE THIRD EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

554

Hereby we will be affected with a sense of our infinite distance from God; which is another means to stir up faith to its due exercise in reverence and godly fear. So Abraham was affected, Gen 18:27. This is what the wise man directs us to, Ecc 5:2.¹

Carnal boldness in the lack of these things ruins the souls of men, rendering all their duties of worship unacceptable to God, and unprofitable to themselves.

2. Affect your hearts with a due sense of the unsuitableness of our best duties to his holiness and majesty, and of his infinite condescension in accepting them. Suppose that, in any of our duties, there is the best and liveliest exercise of grace we can attain to, the greatest fervency in prayer, with the most diligent attendance of our minds, the most humility and contrite trembling in hearing the word, the most devout affection of our minds in other parts of worship — alas! what is all this to God? How little it corresponds to his infinite holiness! See Job 4:18-19; 15:15-16.² Our goodness does not extend to him, Psa 16:2.³ There are no measures, there is no proportion, between the holiness of God and our best duties. There is iniquity in our holy things; they have need of mercy and pardon, of cleansing and justification by the blood of Christ, no less than our persons. And in God there is an infinite condescension to take any notice of us or them; indeed, it is something that we must live in all holy admiration of all our days.

Now if it is this way with our best duties, in our best frames, then what an outrage of sloth and negligence it is if we bring the carcass of our duties to God, for lack of stirring up faith to its due exercise in them! How great is this folly, how unspeakable is the guilt of this negligence! Let us, therefore, keep a sense of it on our hearts, so that we may always stir ourselves up to our best in duties of religious worship. For, —

3. A negligence in this, or the lack of stirring up faith to a due exercise in all duties of worship, is the highest affront we can put upon God, arguing for a great disregard of him. While it is so with us, we do not have, we *cannot* have, a due sense of any of the divine perfections of the divine nature. We turn God into a seeming idol, supposing that he may be put off with the outside appearance of things.

555

The apostle cautions us against this, Heb 4:12-13;⁴ it is what God detests, Isa 29:13;⁵ and He pronounces that man a deceiver, and cursed, who offers Him the lame and blind while he has a

¹ **Gen 18:27** Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: **Ecc 5:2** Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.

² **Job 4:18** If He puts no trust in His servants, *If* He charges His angels with error, ¹⁹ How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, Whose foundation is in the dust, *Who* are crushed before a moth? **Job 15:15** If *God* puts no trust in His saints, And the heavens are not pure in His sight, ¹⁶ How much less man, *who is* abominable and filthy, Who drinks iniquity like water!

³ **Psa 16:2** *O my soul*, you have said to the LORD, "You *are* my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You."

⁴ **Heb 4:12** For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

⁵ **Isa 29:13** Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

III. THE THIRD EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

male in the flock, Mal 1:14.¹ Yet, in some degree, this is how it is with us whenever we are negligent in stirring up faith into its proper exercise in holy duties. That alone is what renders them the male of the flock; and without it, they are lame and blind — a corrupt thing.

It is a sad thing for men to lose their duties, to be charged and in trouble for multiplying them, and attending to them to no purpose. Oh, how much sadder it is when they are all provocations of God's glory — when they tend to increase the formality and hardness of men's hearts towards the ruin of their souls! "Stand in awe," therefore, "and do not sin; commune with your own hearts," Psa 4.4. Do not cease until on all occasions you bring them into that exercise of faith in which you may glorify God as God, and not deal with Him as you would an idol.

4. To the same end, keep your souls always deeply affected with a sense of the things about which you are to deal with God, in all the duties of his worship. These are referred to two heads:

- (1.) Those which concern his glory;
- (2.) Those which concern our own souls.

Without a constant due sense of these things on our hearts, faith will not act itself rightly in any of our duties. Without this intimate concern and deep sense, we do not know whether we need faith in our prayers, or are exercising it; formality will drown all. The best of our prayers is but an expression to God of the sense we have of these things. If we have none, then we do not pray at all, whatever we say or do. But when these things dwell in our minds, when we think about them continually, when our hearts cling to them, faith will be at work in all our approaches to God. Can you not pray? Charge your hearts with these things, and you will learn to do so.

5. Watch diligently against those things which you find by experience are apt to obstruct your fervency in duties. Such are indispositions through the flesh, or weariness of the flesh, or distracting, foolish imaginations, or occasions of life revolving in our minds, and the like.

556

If such impediments as these are not removed, if they are not watched against, they will influence the mind, and suffocate the exercise of faith in it.

6. Above all, the principal rule in this, is that we always carefully remember the concern of Christ in these duties, with respect to his office. He is the high priest over the house of God. It is through him, and under his conduct, that we are always to draw near to God. And it is his work to present the prayers and supplications of the church to God. Now, we have no way to come to Christ for his assistance in the discharge of his office on our behalf, except by faith. And in all our duties of holy worship, we make a profession of doing so — of coming to God by Christ as our high priest. If we do not endeavor in this to exercise our faith, then how we mock, or make a pretense, of doing what indeed we endeavor *not* to do! There can be no greater contempt of Christ in his office, nor any greater undervaluation of his love. But a due consideration of it — namely, of our concern for Christ in all our duties with respect to the office which he discharges for us in heaven — is what directly leads faith into its proper exercise. For through Christ, in the discharge of his office, we believe in God. And when the mind is exercised with due thoughts of him, if there is anything of true saving faith in the heart, it will act itself to a blessed experience.

¹ **Mal 1:14** "But cursed *be* the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished-- For I *am* a great King," Says the LORD of hosts, "And My name *is to be* feared among the nations.

III. THE THIRD EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

These things may be of use to stir us up, and guide us to that exercise of faith in all holy duties, an experience of which, abiding in the soul, will evidence the truth of it to our support and comfort in all temptations and distresses.

Some, maybe, will say that their gift in prayer is mean and weak — that they cannot express themselves with earnestness and fervency. And so they do not know whether there is any faith being exercised in their prayers or not. I answer, there is nothing at all in this; for grace may be very high where gifts are very low, and that occurs frequently.

And it may be that others will complain of the meanness of the gifts of those whom they attend in prayer; it is such that they cannot accompany them in the exercise of any grace. I answer, —

557

- 1.** There is no doubt that there is a great difference in the spiritual gifts of men in this matter, some being much more effectual for edification than others.
- 2.** Take care that you are called in providence and duty to join with those whom you intend; that you do not first voluntarily choose what is to your disadvantage, and then complain about it.
- 3.** However mean their gifts, if grace in their own hearts is exercised by faith, so it may be exercised in ours. Where there is no evidence of it, I confess the case is hard.
- 4.** Let the mind still be fixed on the matter or things uttered in prayer, so as to engage and act faith about what the real object of it is, and it will find its proper work in that duty.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT – REPENTANCE

In the next place, I come to instance a particular way by which true faith will evidence itself — not always, but on some occasions. And this is by bringing the soul into a state of repentance. And three things must be spoken to, —

1. In general, what I intend by this state of repentance.
2. What the times and occasions are, or who the persons are, in which faith acts to this end.
3. What are the duties required for such a state.

1. By this state of repentance I do not mean merely the grace and duty of evangelical repentance; for this is absolutely inseparable from true faith, and no less necessary to salvation than itself. Whoever does not truly and really repent of sin, whatever he professes to believe, he is not a true believer. But what I intend now is something that is special, that is not common to all, by which faith on some occasions evidences its power and sincerity.

Nor do I mean a grace, duty, or state of another kind or nature, from that gospel repentance which is common to all believers. There are not two kinds of true repentance, nor two different states of those who are truly penitent. All I intend is an eminent *degree* of gospel repentance, in the habit or root of it, and in all the fruits and effects of it. There are various degrees in the power and exercise of gospel graces; and some may be more eminent in one, and some in another — such as Abraham and Peter in faith, or David and John in love. And there may be causes and occasions for the greater and higher exercise of some graces and duties at one time, than at another; for we are to attend to duties according to our circumstances, so that we may glorify God in them, and advantage our own souls. So the apostle James directs us in Jas 5:13, "Is anyone afflicted? Let him pray. Is anyone merry? Let him sing psalms." Several states, and various circumstances in them, call for the special exercise of several graces, and the diligent performance of several duties.

559

And this is what is intended here — namely, a particular, constant, prevalent exercise of the grace and duties of repentance, in a singular manner. What is required for this will be declared afterwards.

2. As to the persons in whom this repentance is required, and in whom faith will evidence itself by it, they are of various sorts: —

(1.) Those who, by the power of their corruptions and temptations, have been surprised into great sins. We have precedents that some true believers may be so, both in the Old Testament and in the New — such as uncleanness, drunkenness, gluttony, theft, premeditated lying, oppression in dealing, and failing in their profession during persecution; in the primitive church, this latter failing was never thought recoverable, except by faith acting in a state of repentance. Such sins will have great sorrows; as we see in Peter, and in the incestuous Corinthian who was in danger of being "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow," 2Cor 2:7. Where it has been this way with any, true faith will immediately work for recovery by a thorough humiliation and repentance, as it did in Peter.^{Luk 22.32} And in case any of them lie longer under the power of sin, through lack of effectual convictions, it will cost them dearly in the issue of it, as it did David. But in this case,

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

for the most part, faith will not rest in the mere joining again of the bone that was broken, or with such a recovery that gives them peace with God and their own consciences. Rather, by a just and due remembrance of the nature of their sin, its circumstances and aggravations, the shameful unkindness towards God that was in it, the grief of the Holy Spirit, and the dishonor of Christ by it, it will incline and dispose the soul to a humble, contrite frame, to a mournful walking, and the universal exercise of repentance all its days.

And, indeed, where it does not do so, men's recovery from great sins is justly to be questioned as to their sincerity. For lack of it is why we have so many palliated cures of great sins, followed by fearful and dangerous relapses. If a man who is subject to great corruptions and temptations, has been surprised by them into great actual sins, and he seemingly recovers through humiliation and repentance, if he again breaks the yoke of this stated repentance of which we speak, he will quickly be overcome again, and perhaps irrecoverably. In this, only he that walks softly, walks safely.

560

(2.) It is necessary for those who have given scandal and offense by their miscarriages; this will stick very close to anyone who has the least spark of saving faith. It is what God is particularly provoked by in the sins of his people; as in the case of David, 2Sam 12:14.¹ So also Eze 36:20; Rom 2:24.² This keeps alive the remembrance of sin, and sets it before men continually; it is a spring, in a gracious soul, of all acts and duties of repentance. It was so in David all his days; and probably in Mary Magdalene also. Where it has been this way with anyone, faith will keep the soul in a humble and contrite frame, watchful against pride, elation of mind, carelessness, and sloth. It will recover godly sorrow and shame, with revenge, or self-reflection, in great abasement of mind, all of which belong to the state of repentance intended. Those who can easily shake off a sense of scandal given by them, have very little of Christian ingenuousness³ in their minds.

(3.) It is so for those who have perplexing lusts and corruptions which they cannot subdue without being troubled and defiled by them; for where there are such lusts, they will, in conjunction with temptations, frequently disquiet, wound, and defile the soul. This brings upon it weariness and outcries for deliverance, Rom 7:24. In this state, faith will put the soul on prayer, watchfulness, diligence, in opposition to the deceit and violence of sin. But this is not all; it will not rest here, but it will give the mind such a sense of its distressed, dangerous condition, that will fill it constantly with godly sorrow, self-abasement, and all the duties of repentance. No man can hold out in such a conflict, nor maintain his peace on right grounds, who does not live in the constant exercise of repentance — indeed, who does not endeavor in some measure to come to that state of it which we will describe afterwards. For men who have unnamable corruptions working continually in their minds by imaginations, thoughts, and affections, and think to get past it by a general way of duties and profession, are mistaken if they look either for victory or peace. This sort of men, among all others, are particularly called to this constant state and duty.

¹ **2Sam 12:14** "However, 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."

² **Eze 36:20** "When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name-- when they said of them, 'These *are* the people of the LORD, *and* yet they have gone out of His land.' **Rom 2:24** For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

³ Openly straightforward or frank; honest with themselves.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

561

(4.) Those who would be found mourners for the sins of the age, place, and time in which they live, with the consequent of them, in the dishonor of God, and the judgments which will ensue from it. There are times in which this is an especial and eminent duty, which God highly approves of. Such are they wherein the visible church is greatly corrupted, and open abominations are found among men of all sorts; even as it is at this day. Then the Lord declares how much he values the performance of this duty. As He testifies, Eze 9:4,¹ they alone will be under his especial care in a day of public distress and calamity — a duty in which it is to be feared that most of us are very defective. Now, the frame of heart required for this cannot be attained, nor the duty rightly performed, without that state of repentance and humiliation which we inquire into. Without it, we may have transient thoughts about these things, but they will very little affect our minds. Where the soul is kept in a constant spiritual frame, it will be ready for this duty on all occasions.

(5.) It becomes those who, having passed through the greatest part of their lives, find all outward things issue in vanity and a vexed spirit,² as it was with Solomon when he wrote his Ecclesiastes. When a man recounts the various scenes and appearances of things which he has passed through in his life, and the various conditions he has been in, he may possibly find that there is nothing steady but sorrow and trouble. It may be so with some — I say, with some good men, with some of the best men — as it was with Jacob. Others may have received more satisfaction in their course; but if they also look back, they will find how little there has been in the best of their transient comforts; they will see enough to make them say, "There is nothing in these things; it is high time to remove all expectations from them." Such persons seem to be called to this especial exercise of repentance and mourning for the remainder of their lives.

(6.) Those whose hearts are really wounded and deeply affected with the love of Christ, so that they can hardly bear absence from him any longer,³ nor take delight in the things in which they are detained and kept out of his presence. The apostle describes this frame in 2Cor 5:2, 4, 6, 8.⁴ They live in a groaning condition, thoroughly sensible of all the evils that accompany them in this absence of the Bridegroom; and they cannot help but continually reflect upon the sins and follies which their lives have been and are filled with, in this their distance from Christ.

562

Therefore, though their hearts are filled with inflamed affections towards him, they cannot help but walk humbly and mournfully until they come to him. It may be said that those who have experienced such affection for the Lord Jesus, cannot help but have continual matter for joy; and so, of all men, they have least need for such a state of constant humiliation and repentance. I say it is so indeed, that they have such matter of joy; and with that, Christ will be formed in them

¹ Eze 9:4 and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."

² *Vexed*: causing difficulty in finding an answer or solution; much disputed. "What was it all for?"

³ Phi 1:22 But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better.

⁴ 2Cor 5:2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, ⁴ For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁶ So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁸ We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

more and more every day. But I say also, that there is no inconsistency between spiritual joy in Christ and godly sorrow for sin. Indeed, no man in this life will ever be able to maintain solid joy in his heart, without the continual working of godly sorrow also. Yes, there is a secret joy and refreshment in godly sorrow, equal to the greatest of our joys, and a great spiritual satisfaction.

These several sorts of persons, I say, are particularly called to that exercise of faith in repentance which we inquire about.

Before I proceed to show what this state that I intend consists in, and what is required for it (which is the last thing proposed), I will premise some rules for rightly judging of ourselves with respect to them. Such as, —

- 1.** Faith will evidence its truth (which is what we inquire about) in its sincere endeavor after the things intended, though its attainments as to some of them are but mean and low. Indeed, a sense of coming short of it in fully answering or complying with them, is a great ingredient in that state called to. If, therefore, faith keeps up this design in the soul, with a sincere pursuit of it, even though it fails in many things, and is not sensible of any great progress that it makes, it will evidence its sincerity in this.
- 2.** Though there are various things, as we will see, required for it, it is not necessary that they be found all equally in all those who design this state and frame. Some may be more eminent in one of them, some in another; some may have great helps and furtherance for some of them in a particular manner, and some may have great obstructions in the exercise of some of them. But it is required that they all be radically in the heart, and exercised sometimes, on their proper occasions.
- 3.** This description of the state of it, will sufficiently distinguish it from that discontent of mind for which some withdraw themselves from the occasions of life, condemning others rather than themselves, out of a mere weariness from the disappointments of the world; this has thrown some into crooked paths.

563

1. The first thing required for it is weanedness from the world. The rule of most men is that all things are well enough with them with respect to the world, while they keep themselves from known particular sins in the use of worldly things. While they do so in their own apprehensions, they do not care how much they cling to the world — even swallowed up in its businesses and occasions. Indeed, some will pretend to, and make an appearance of, a course of life that is more than ordinarily strict, while their hearts and affections cling visibly to this world and the things of the world.¹ But the foundation of the work of faith we inquire into must be laid in mortification and in weanedness from the world.

In ancient times, various persons designed a strict course of mortification and penitence, and they always laid the foundation of it in a renunciation of the world. But most of them fell into a threefold mistake, which ruined the whole undertaking. For, —

- (1.)** They fell into a neglect of those natural and moral duties which were indispensably required of them. They forsook all care of duties belonging to them in their relations as fathers, children,

¹ **1Joh 2:15** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

husbands, wives, and the like, taking themselves into solitude. And hereby they also lost all that political and Christian usefulness which the principles of human society and of our religion oblige us to. They took themselves to a course of life rendering the most important Christian duties — with respect to other men of all sorts, in all fruits of love — utterly impossible for them. They could no longer be useful or helpful in the places and circumstances in which they were set by divine Providence. This was a way in which they could not expect any blessing from God. No such thing is required for that renunciation of the world which we design. Christian duties interfere with nothing that would render men useless to all men. We are still to *use* the world while we are in it, but not *abuse* it. As we have opportunity, we must still do good to all. Indeed, none will be so ready for the duties of life as those who are most mortified to the world. Thoughts of retirement from usefulness, unless there is a great decay of outward strength, are but temptations.

564

(2.) They engaged themselves in a number of observances that are nowhere required of them. Such were their outward austerities, fastings, choice of meats, times of prayer; to which, at length, self-maceration and disciplines were added. In a scrupulous, superstitious observance of these things, their whole design at length gave rise and occasion to innumerable evils. Faith directs to no such thing; it guides to no duty that is not according to the rule of the word.

(3.) At length they began to engage themselves by vow, into those peculiar orders and rules of a pretended religious life, that were presented to them by some of their leaders; and this ruined the whole.

However, the original design was good — namely, such a renunciation of the world that might keep it and all the things of the world, from being a hindrance to us in a humble walk before God, or anything that belongs to it. We are to be crucified to the world, and the world to us, by the cross of Christ. ^{Gal 6.14} If we are under the conduct of faith, then we are to be crucified to the world in a particular manner: in a way of humiliation and repentance. And the ensuing things are required for this: —

(1.) The mortification of our affections to the desirable things of this life. The affections are naturally keen and sharp-set upon them, and tenaciously adhere to them. They are especially so when things have an inlet into them by near relations, such as husbands, wives, children, and the like. Persons are apt to think they can never love them enough, never do enough for them (and it is granted they are to be preferred above all other earthly things). But where they fill and possess the heart, where they weaken and blunt the affections to spiritual, heavenly, and eternal things, unless we are mortified to them, the heart will never be in a good frame, nor is it capable of that degree in the grace of repentance which we seek. It is so with most, as to all other useful things in this world — such as wealth, estates, and peace. While they are familiar with them, as they suppose in a lawful manner, they think they can never overvalue them, or cling too closely to them. But here we must begin, if we intend to take any one step into this holy retirement. The edge of our affections and desires must be taken away from these things. And for this, three things are necessary: —

565

[1.] A constant, clear view and judgment of their uncertainty, emptiness, and disability to give any rest or satisfaction. Uncertain riches, uncertain enjoyments, perishing and passing away things, are indeed, snares, burdens, and hindrances. The Scripture represents them this way —

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

and so they are. If the mind continually had this consideration of them driven home, it would daily abate its delight and satisfaction in them.

[2.] A constant endeavor for conformity to Christ crucified. It is the cross of Christ by which we are crucified to the world and all the things in it. When the mind is much taken up with thoughts of Christ, as dying, how and for what he died, if it has any spark of saving faith in it, it will turn the eyes away from looking at the desirable things of this world with any delightful, friendly aspect. Things will appear to it as dead and discolored.

[3.] Fixing the affections steadily on spiritual and eternal things. I have discussed this at large elsewhere. The whole of this advice is given to us by the apostle, Col 3:1-5.¹ This is where faith begins its work; this is the first lesson it takes out of the gospel — namely, that of self-denial, of which mortification is a principal part. In this, faith labors to cast off every burden, and the sin that so easily besets us. Unless some good degree is attained here, all further attempts in this great duty will be fruitless. Do you, then, any of you, judge yourselves under any of those qualifications mentioned before, which render this duty and work of faith necessary to you? Sit down here at the threshold, and reckon with yourselves that unless you can take your hearts more away from the world, — unless your affections and desires are mortified and crucified, and dead in you, in a palpable degree and measure — unless you endeavor every day to promote the same frame in your minds — you will live and die *strangers* to this duty.

(2.) This mortification of our affections towards these things — our love, desire, and delight — will produce a moderation of passions about them — such as fear, anger, sorrow, and the like. Men will be stirred to such passions in those changes, losses, and crosses, which these things are subject to. They are apt to be tender and soft in those things; they take everything to heart; every affliction and disappointment is aggravated, as if no one else ever had such things befall them; everything puts them into a commotion.

566

Hence they are often surprised with anger about trifles, influenced by fear in all changes, with other turbulent passions. Hence men are morose, peevish, froward, apt to be displeased and to take offense on all occasions. Subduing this frame, casting out these dispositions and perverse inclinations, is part of the work of faith. When the mind is weaned from the world and the things of the world, it will be sedate, quiet, composed, and not easily moved by the occurrences and occasions of life. The world is dead to them, and in a great measure unconcerned in them. This is that "moderation" of mind in which the apostle would have us excel, Phi 4:5.² For he would have it so eminent that it might appear to "all men," that is, those who are concerned with us, such as relations, families, and other societies. This is what principally renders us useful and exemplary in this world; and for lack of this, many professors fill themselves and others with disquietments,³ and give offense to the world itself. This is required of *all* believers; but it will

¹ Col 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. ⁵ Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

² Phi 4:5 Let your moderation [*epieikes* NT:1933] be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

³ *Disquietment*: lacking peace and tranquility; being uneasy or disturbed in heart or mind.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

be eminent in those in whom faith works this weanedness from the world, in order for a particular exercise of repentance.

(3.) There is required for this, an unsolicitousness about present affairs and future events. There is nothing given stricter charge in the Scripture, than we should be anxious in nothing, solicitous about nothing, take no thought for tomorrow, but commit all things to the sovereign disposal of our God and Father, who has taken all these things into his own care. But so it has come to pass, through the vanity of the minds of men, that what should be nothing to them, is almost their all. Care about present things, and solicitousness about things to come, in private and public concerns, take up most of their thoughts and contrivances. But faith will also subdue this on this occasion: where it tends to promote repentance, by weanedness from the world. It will bring the soul into a constant, steady, universal resignation of itself to the pleasure of God, and satisfaction in his will. Upon this, faith will use the world as if it did not use it, with an absolute unconcern as to what will fall out. This is what our Savior presses at large, and with so many divine seasonings, Mat 6:25-34.¹

(4.) A constant preference for the duties of religion before and above the duties and occasions of life. These things will continually interfere if a diligent watch is not kept over them. They will contend for preference, and their success is according to the interest and estimation in which the things themselves have in our minds.

567

If the interest of the world is prevalent there, its occasions will be preferred before religious duties; and, for the most part, they will be put off to those times in which we have nothing else to do, and it may be fit for little else. But where the interest of spiritual things prevails, it will be otherwise, according to the rule given by our blessed Savior,

"Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness," etc., Mat 6:33.

I confess this rule is not absolute as to all seasons and occasions: there may be a time in which the observation of the Sabbath must give way to pulling an ox or an ass out of a pit; and on all such occasions the rule is that mercy is to be preferred before sacrifice. But in the ordinary course of our walking before God, faith will take care that a due attendance to all the duties of religion, is preferred to all the occasions of this life. They will not be shuffled off on trifling pretenses, nor cast into such unseasonable seasons as they otherwise will be. Watching to prayer also belongs to that weanedness from this world, which is necessary for an eminence in degrees of humiliation and repentance.

(5.) Willingness and readiness to part with all for Christ and the gospel. This is the animating principle of the great duty of taking up the cross, and self-denial in it. Without some measure of it in sincerity, we cannot be Christ's disciples. But in the present case, there is an eminent degree required, which Christ calls hating all things in comparison to him — that is, such a readiness that it rejects with contempt all arguing against it — it renders the world not to be burden to any part of our race — it establishes a determinate resolution in the mind, that as God calls, the world and all its concerns are forsaken for Christ and the gospel. Our countenances and discourses in

¹ **Mat 6:25** "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

difficulties do not argue that this resolution is prevalent in us; but it is required in that work of faith which we are considering.

2. A second thing that belongs to this, is a particular remembrance of sin, and converse about it in our minds, with self-displicity¹ and abhorrence. God has promised in his covenant that he "will remember our sins no more," that is, to punish them; but it does not follow from this that we remember them no more, to be humbled for them.

568

Repentance respects sin always; therefore, wherever that is, there will be a continual calling of sin to remembrance. The psalmist says, "My sin is ever before me." [Psa 51.3](#)

There is a threefold calling of our past sins to remembrance: —

(1.) With delight and contentment. This is how it is with profligate sinners, whose bodies have grown unserviceable to their youthful lusts. They recall their former sins, roll them over in their minds, express their delight in them by their words, and have no greater trouble than, for lack of strength or opportunity, they cannot still live in the practice of those sins. This is to be old in wickedness, [Job 21.7](#) and to have their bones filled with the sins of their youth. [Eze 32.27](#) Many in this age likewise delight in filthy communication, unclean society, and all the incentives of lust — a fearful sign of being given over to a reprobate mind, a heart that cannot repent.

(2.) There is a remembrance of sin to disquietment, terror, and despair. Where men's consciences are not seared with a hot iron, sin will visit their minds ever and anon² with a troublesome remembrance of itself, with its aggravating circumstances. For the most part, men hide themselves from this visitor — they are not at home, not at leisure to converse with it, but put it off from day to day, like insolvent debtors, with a few transient thoughts and words. But sometimes it will not be put off this way — it will come with an arrest or a warrant from the law of God, that makes them stand and give an account of themselves. Upon this, they are filled with disquietments, some with horror and despair. They seek to pacify and divert themselves from this by further immersing themselves in the pursuit of their lusts. This is the case with Cain, [Gen 4:13, 16, 17](#).³

(3.) Former sins are called to remembrance to further repentance; and so they are a threefold mirror to those souls in which it has a treble object: —

[1.] It sees in them the depravation of its nature, the evil quality of that root which has brought forth such fruit; and they see in it their own folly, how they were cheated by sin and Satan; they see the unthankfulness and unkindness towards God with which they were accompanied. This fills them with holy shame, [Rom 6:21](#).⁴ This is useful and necessary to repentance.

569

¹ *Displicity*: dissatisfaction, discontent, or aversion.

² *Ever and anon*: time and again.

³ [Gen 4:12](#) "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. **A fugitive and a vagabond** you shall be on the earth." ¹³ And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment *is* greater than I can bear! ... ¹⁶ Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. ¹⁷ And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And **he built a city**, and called the name of the city after the name of his son — Enoch.

⁴ [Rom 6:21](#) What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

Perhaps if men recalled their former sins and miscarriages more than they do, they would walk more humbly and warily than they do for the most part. So David in his old age prays for a renewed sense of the pardon of the sins of his youth, Psa 25:7.¹

[2.] The soul sees in them a representation of the grace, patience, and pardoning mercy of God. "Thus and thus it was with me: God might justly have cast me off forever; he might have cut me off in the midst of these sins, so that I would have had no time to cry for mercy; and perhaps some of them were sins long continued in. O the infinite patience of God, that spared me! The infinite grace and mercy of God, who forgave me these provoking iniquities!" This frame is expressed in Psa 103:2-4.²

[3.] The soul sees in this the efficacy of the mediation and blood of Christ, 1Joh 2:2.³ "Why is it that I have deliverance from the guilt of these sins, that a way was made for advancing grace in the pardon of them? Why is it that my soul and conscience are purged from the stain and filth of them?"

Here the whole glory of the love and grace of Christ in his mediation, with the worth of the atonement that he made, and the ransom that he paid, with the efficacy of his blood to purge us from all our sins, is represented to the mind of the believer. So "out of the eater comes forth meat;" Jdg 14.14 and thereby a reconciliation is made between the deepest humiliation and a refreshing sense of the love of God and peace with him. Therefore, a soul which is engaged in the paths of repentance will constantly apply itself to this; and it is faith alone to which we are beholden for the views of these things in sin. In no other light will they be seen in it. Their aspect in any other light is horrid and terrifying, suited only to fill the soul with dread and horror, and thoughts of fleeing from God. But this view of them is suited to stir up all graces to a holy exercise.

3. Godly sorrow will ensue from this. Indeed, this is the very life and soul of repentance; so the apostle declares in 2Cor 7:9-11.⁴ And it comprises all that is spoken in the Scripture about a broken heart and a contrite spirit, which expresses itself by sighs, tears, mourning, yes, watering our beds with tears, and the like.

570

David gives so great an instance of this in himself, and that is so frequently repeated that we need no other exemplification of it. I will not insist on it at large, but only show, —

- (1.) What it respects; and,
- (2.) What it consists in — how faith works godly sorrow in the soul.

¹ Psa 25:7 Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD.

² Psa 103:2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: ³ Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, ⁴ Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

³ 1Joh 2:2 "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world,".

⁴ 2Cor 7:9 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹ For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!* In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

(1.) What it respects; and it has a twofold object: —

[1.] Those past sins which, by reason of their own nature or their aggravations, have left the greatest impression on the conscience. In general, it indeed respects all past and known sins that can be called to remembrance. But usually, in the course of men's lives, there have been some sins whose wounds, on various accounts, have been deepest and most sensible. These are the especial objects of this godly sorrow. So with David; in the whole course of his life after his great fall, he still bewailed his miscarriage in it; and he had the same respect to the other sins of his youth. None have been so preserved, that they will not fix on some provocation that may be a just cause for this sorrow all their days.

[2.] It respects the daily incursions of infirmities, in failings, negligence in our frames or actions — those which the best are subject to. These are a matter of continual sorrow and mourning to a gracious soul that is engaged in this duty and way of repentance.

(2.) What it consists in; and the following things concur in it: —

[1.] *Self judging*. This is the ground and spring of all godly sorrow, and upon this sorrow, of repentance, turning away the displeasure of God, 1Cor 11:31.¹ The soul does this continually with reference to the sins mentioned; it passes sentence on itself every day. This cannot be done without grief and sorrow; for although the soul finds it a necessary duty, and is well pleased with it for that sorrow, yet all such self-reflections are like afflictions: they are not joyous, but grievous.

[2.] *Constant humiliation* is the immediate effect of it. He that so judges himself, knows what frame of mind and spirit becomes him upon it. This takes away the ground from all pride, elation of mind, self-pleasing — where this self judging is constant, these can have no place. This is that frame of mind which God approves so highly, and has made such promises to.

571

The humble are everywhere proposed as the especial object of God's own care; he regards those with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.^{Psa 51.17} This humiliation will grow on no other root. No man, by his utmost diligence, on any argument or consideration, will be able to bring himself into that humble frame in which God is delighted, unless he lays the foundation of it in continual self-judging on account of his former and present sins. Men may put on a fashion, frame, and garb of humility; but they are not *really* humble. Where this is lacking, pride is on the throne in the heart, though humility is in the countenance and deportment. Godly sorrow greatly consists in this constant humiliation.

[3.] *Real trouble and disquietment of mind* is in it. For sorrow is an afflictive passion; it is contrary to that composure which the mind would constantly be at. However, this trouble is not such that it is opposed to spiritual peace and refreshment; for it is an effect of faith, and faith will produce nothing that is really inconsistent with peace with God, or that will impede it: but it is opposite to other comforts. It is a trouble that all earthly things cannot take away and remove. David on all occasions expresses to God this trouble of his mind, in his sorrow for sin; and sometimes it rises to a great and dreadful height. Such sorrow is expressed in Psalm

¹ 1Cor 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

88 throughout. Hereby the soul is sometimes overwhelmed; yet so as to relieve itself by pouring out its complaint before the Lord, Psa 102:1.¹

[4.] *Outward signs* of sighs, tears, and mournful complaints will express this inward frame of trouble, mourning, and contriteness, on all just occasions, Psa 31:10.² So David continually mentions his tears on a similar account; and Peter, on the review of his sin, wept bitterly; and Mary washed the feet of Christ with her tears; — as we should all do. A soul filled with sorrow will run over and express its inward frame by these outward signs. I do not speak of those self-whole, jolly professors which abound these days; but those who faith engages in this duty will on all occasions abound in these things. I fear there is among us too great a pretense that men's natural tempers and constitutions are uncompliant with these things. Where God makes the heart soft, and godly sorrow not only sometimes visits it, but dwells in it, it will not be wholly lacking in these expressions of it; and what it comes short of one way, it may make up for in another.

572

Whatever the case is as to tears, it is certain that multiplying sighs and groans for sin is contrary to no man's constitution, but only to sin that is engrafted in his constitution.

[5.] This godly sorrow will constantly incite the mind to all duties, acts, and fruits of repentance whatever. It is never barren or heartless, but being both a grace and a duty, it will stir up the soul to the exercise of all graces, and the performance of all duties that are of the same kind. The apostle declares this fully in 2Cor 7:11. This, therefore, is another thing which belongs to that state of repentance which faith will bring the soul to; and it will evidence itself on the occasions mentioned before. Indeed, if this sorrow is constant and operative, there is no clearer evidence in us of saving faith. Those who mourn thus are blessed. I had almost said, it is worth all other evidences, such that without this, they are no evidences at all. Where this frame is not found in some good measure, the soul can have no pregnant evidence of its good estate.

4. Another thing that belongs to this state of repentance, is outward observances suitable to it, such as abstinence for the due mortification of the flesh — though not in those things or ways which are hurtful to nature, and really obstructive of greater duties. There have been great mistakes in this matter; most men have fallen into extremes about it, as is usual with most in like cases. The Papacy retained — from the beginning of the apostasy of that church from the rule of Scripture — an opinion that mortification is necessary to a penitent state. But they mistook the nature of it, and placed it for the most part in what the apostle calls the "doctrine of devils," when he foretold believers of that hypocritical apostasy, 1Tim 4:1-3.³ The substance of their mortification was forbidding priests to marry, engaging one sort of men by vows against the use of that ordinance of God for all men, and enjoining abstinence from meats in various laws and rules, under a pretense of great austerity. To this they added habits,⁴ fasting disciplines, rough garments, and similar

¹ Psa 102:1 Hear my prayer, O LORD, And let my cry come to You.

² Psa 31:10 For my life is spent with grief, And my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away.

³ 1Tim 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

⁴ Habits: the distinctive robes of monks and priests.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

pretended self-macerations beyond count. The vanity of this hypocrisy has been detected long since. But with that, most men have fallen into the other extreme. Men generally judge that they are at full liberty in and for the use of things considered "refreshments" of nature. Indeed, they judge that they are not to be obliged to any retrenchment¹ in garments, in diet, or in the free use of all things that are lawful in themselves — when they are under the greatest need for godly sorrow and visible repentance.

573

But there is no less pernicious a mistake here, than in the former excess; and it is what our Lord Jesus Christ charges us to watch against, Luk 21:34-36.²

This, therefore, I say, is required for the state we inquire about: Those things which restrain the satisfaction of the appetite, with an aversion to the joyous enticements of the world, are necessary in such a time — walking heavily and mournfully, expressing a humble and afflicted frame of spirit. The mourners in Zion are not to be ashamed of their lot and state, but to profess it in all suitable outward demonstrations of it — however, not in fantastic habits and gestures, like various orders of the monks do; nor in affected forms of speech and vulgar deportments, like some among ourselves do; but in ways that naturally express the inward frame of mind inquired about.

5. What is required for this, is a firm watch over solitudes and retirements of the night and day, with a continual readiness to battle temptations in their first appearance, so that the soul is not surprised by them. The great design in the exercise of this grace, is to keep and preserve the soul constantly in a humble and contrite frame. If that is lost at any time, the whole design for that season is disappointed. Therefore, faith engages the mind to watch against two things: —

- (1.) The times in which we may lose this frame;
- (2.) The means by which we may lose it.

(1.) *For the times.* There are no times to be so diligently watched over as our solitudes and retirements by night or by day. What we are in them, is what we are indeed, and no more. They are either the best or the worst of our times, in which the principle that is predominant in us will show and act itself. Hence some are said "to devise evil on their beds, and when the morning is light they practice it," Mic 2:1. Their solitude in the night serves to think about, contrive, and delight in, all that iniquity which they intend to practice by day, according to their power. And on the other side, the work of a gracious soul in such seasons is to be seeking after Christ³ — to be meditating on God, as the psalmist often expresses it. Therefore, the humble soul is diligently watchful in this: that at such times, vain imaginations which are apt to obtrude themselves on the mind, do not carry it away, and cause it to lose its frame, though but for a season. Indeed, these are the times which the soul principally lays hold of for its improvement: then it recalls all those considerations of sin and grace, which are fit to affect it and abase it.

574

¹ *Retrenchment: restraint, austerity; showing extreme reserve rather than extravagance.*

² **Luk 21:34** "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

³ **Song 3:1** **THE SHULAMITE** By night on my bed I sought the one I love;

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

(2.) *For the means* of the loss of a humble frame. They are temptations; these labor to possess the mind either by sudden surprisals or continued sollicitations. A soul engaged by faith in this duty is always aware of their deceit and force. It knows that if they enter into it, and entangle it, though only for a season, they will quite cast out or deface that humble, contrite, broken frame, which it is its duty to preserve. There is none who has the least grain of spiritual wisdom, that will not understand what sort of temptations these are which he is liable to. Here, then, faith sets the soul on its watch and guard continually, and makes it ready to combat every temptation on its first appearance, for then it is weakest and most easily subdued. Faith will allow them to get neither time, nor ground, nor strength: and so it preserves a humble frame — delivers it frequently from the jaws of this devourer.

6. Although the soul finds satisfaction in this condition, however sinfully weary it may be of it, and impatient under it — indeed, though it labors to grow and thrive in the spirit and power of it — yet it is constantly accompanied with deep sighs and groanings for its deliverance. And these groanings respect both what it would be delivered from, and what it would attain to; between which there is an interposition of some sighs and groans of nature, for continuing in its present state.

(1.) What this groaning respects deliverance from, is the remaining power of sin. This is what gives the soul its distress and disquietment. Occasionally, indeed, its humility, mourning, and self-abasement are increased by it; but this is through the efficacy of the grace of Christ Jesus — in its own nature, sin tends to hurt and ruin. The apostle emphatically expresses this in his own person, as though bearing it in the place and state of other believers, Rom 7:24.¹

And this constant groaning for deliverance from the power of sin excites the soul to pursue sin to its destruction. No effect of faith, such as this is, is heartless or fruitless; it will be operative towards what it aims at — and in this case, that is the not-being of sin. This is what the soul groans after, and therefore contends for.

575

This is the work of faith, and "faith without works is dead." [Jas 2:20](#) Therefore it will continually pursue sin to all its retirements and reserves. As faith can have no rest from sin, so faith will give neither rest nor peace to sin; indeed, a constant intention for the not-being of sin, is a blessed evidence of a saving faith.

(2.) What it looks for is the full enjoyment of glory, Rom 8:23.² This, indeed, is the grace and duty of all believers, of all those who have received the first-fruits of the Spirit. All of them, in their measure, groan that their very bodies may be delivered from being the subject and seat of sin — that they may be redeemed out of that bondage. It is a bondage to the very body of a believer, to be instrumental to sin. We long for the body's perfect deliverance from it, which will complete the grace of adoption in the whole person. But it is most eminent in those who excel in a state of humiliation and repentance. They are the ones, if any, that groan earnestly, — this is what they sigh, breathe, and pant after continually; and their views of the glory that will be revealed, give them refreshment in their deepest sorrows. They wait for the Lord in this, more than they that wait for the morning. Do not blame a truly penitent soul if he longs to be dissolved; the greatness and excellency of the change which he will have by it, is his present life and relief.

¹ [Rom 7:24](#) O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

² [Rom 8:23](#) Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

IV. THE FOURTH EVIDENCE OF THE FAITH OF GOD'S ELECT

(3.) But there is a weight on this desire, by the interposition of nature for the continuation of its present being, which is inseparable from it. But faith makes a reconciliation of these repugnant inclinations, keeping the soul from weariness and impatience. And it does this by reducing the mind to its proper rock: it lets it know that it should not be absolutely under the conduct of either of these desires. First, faith keeps them from excess, by teaching the soul to regulate them both by the word of God. It makes this the rule of such desires and inclinations; while they are regulated by this, we will not offend in them. And it mixes a grace with them both that makes them useful — namely, constant submission to the will of God. "Grace would have *this*, and nature would have *that*; but," says the soul, "the will and sovereign pleasure of God is my rule: 'Not my will, holy Father, but your will be done.'" We have the example of Christ himself in this matter. [Luk 22.42](#)

576

7. The last thing I will mention, as that which completes the state described, is abounding in contemplations of heavenly, invisible, and eternal things. None have holier and humbler thoughts than truly penitent souls; none have higher and more heavenly contemplations. You might take them to be all sighs, all mourning, all dejection of spirit; but none are more above — none are nearer the high and lofty One. As he dwells with them, Isa 57:15,¹ so they dwell with him in a particular manner, by these heavenly contemplations. Those who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and are most filled with self-abasement, have the clearest views of divine glory. The bottom of a pit or well gives the best prospect of the heavenly luminaries; and the soul in its deepest humiliations has, for the most part, the clearest views of things within the veil.

¹ **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.