

RELIGIOUS
CASES OF CONSCIENCE

ANSWERED
IN AN EVANGELICAL MANNER:

BY THE
Rev. S. PIKE, and the Rev. S. HAYWARD.

TO WHICH IS ADDED
The Spiritual Companion
OR THE PROFESSING CHRISTIAN TRIED AT THE BAR OF GOD'S WORD;

AND SOME FREE THOUGHTS ON
THE CHARACTER OF THE HAPPY MAN.

NEW EDITION
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE
REV. HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D. D.

Originally published 1755

Philadelphia
1859

SMITH, ENGLISH & CO., 40 NORTH SIXTH STREET.
NEW YORK: R. CARTER AND BROTHERS.
BOSTON: GOULD AND LINCOLN.

Source:

<https://archive.org/details/religiouscasesofopi>

*Formatted, modernized, corrected, and annotated by
William H. Gross www.onthewing.org June 2021*

Last updated: 12/22/2021

Scripture in footnotes taken from the New King James Version.
Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

Editor's Preface	6
INTRODUCTION	7
PREFACE	10
CASES OF CONSCIENCE	11
CASE 1. How may we distinguish between the workings of natural affection, and the real exercise of grace in religious duties?	11
CASE 2. What methods must a Christian take in declining circumstances, to recover a healthful and vigorous frame of soul, so as to be able to maintain real and close communion with God amidst the hurries and busyness of the world?	17
CASE 3. A serious person, who scruples to comply with the usual practice of playing cards, desires to know whether these scruples arise from a needless tenderness of conscience, or from the faithful admonitions of the Spirit of God.	25
CASE 4. How may a person judge whether a promise or threatening comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the soul?	33
CASE 5. How far may a person judge the strength or weakness of his faith by the brightness or darkness of his frame?	40
CASE 6. Whether a person who has been a great sinner, has any ground to expect pardon and the comforts of the Holy Ghost; and whether he may partake of the ordinances of God?	47
CASE 7. What judgment should that person pass on himself, who knows he is in a dark and corrupt frame, but finds himself greatly unaffected by it, and stupid under it?	52
CASE 8. How may times of family and private duty best be regulated to the glory of God, our own comfort, and the advantage of those around us?	58
CASE 9. Is it presumptuous for a person to hope he has an interest in Christ, when he sees little or nothing in himself except reason to doubt and question it?	65
CASE 10. Is going to plays, and other theatrical performances, consistent with the profession and practice of Christianity?	69
CASE 11. How may a person who desires to follow the dictates of Providence in every respect, know the mind and will of God in any particular circumstances, whether temporal or spiritual?	76
CASE 12. Shouldn't a person who is not comfortably persuaded of his being a real Christian, abstain from the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, lest he eat and drink damnation to himself? And what method must that person take to satisfy a church of Christ of his being a real Christian, who cannot relate any particular experience of the dealings of God with his soul?	84
CASE 13. How may we distinguish, the suggestions of Satan from the corruptions of our own hearts?	90
CASE 14. How may a person know when he has the assistance of the Spirit of God in prayer?	95
CASE 15. How may we keep from spiritual pride after special enlargements in duty?	99

CASE 16. Is it necessary, in order to evidence a person's conversion, that he sees and acknowledges himself as the chief of sinners, even if he hasn't been guilty of outward abominations? Or, what is that sense of sin, which evidences conversion, and is therefore accompanied with salvation?	104
CASE 17. When a person has received a temporal mercy which he prayed for, how may he know whether it is granted in answer to prayer, and comes to him as a covenant blessing?	108
CASE 18. How may a Christian know that he is growing in grace?	113
CASE 19. How may a deserted believer discover the particular sin or sins by which he has grieved the Spirit of God?	118
CASE 20. How should we read the word of God, so that it may be for His glory, and the advantage of our souls?	124
CASE 21. How may a Christian attain to performing the duty of serious meditation, in a right manner?	128
CASE 22. When may a Christian be said to so pursue the affairs of this present life, that it prevents his advances in grace, dishonours God, and injures his soul?	132
CASE 23. How may a professor who fears that his experiences are counterfeit and not genuine graces, come to such a satisfaction concerning his state, that it will encourage his continued receiving of the Lord's Supper?	137
CASE 24. Can a person desire the blood of Christ to be applied to his soul, and yet be a hypocrite?	143
CASE 25. How may a person know whether the obedience he performs flows from true faith?	149
CASE 26. On Self-Examination.....	156
CASE 27. In what frame does the sinner come when he savingly closes with Christ?	162
CASE 28. A person has had a religious education, and cannot remember any time or place, when and where, God first worked upon his soul. What judgment must he form about his state, and what methods must he take to be satisfied that he is a child of God?	169
CASE 29. How may someone who has thrown aside his religion, but now delights in it, know whether this is only restraining grace, or saving grace?	176
CASE 30. What judgment must a person form about his state, or what must he do, if he is in total darkness and cannot see anything of a work of grace in his heart?	183
THE SPIRITUAL COMPANION	191
Question 1. How far may a person's heart and ways be rectified, and yet he be destitute of saving faith?.....	192
Question 2. How may we know whether our faith is saving, amidst all the weaknesses and doubts that may attend it?	197
Question 3. When may a person conclude that he enjoys God in the performance of duty? .	207
Question 4. How may a person know, in the exercise of prayer, whether he is under the influence of the blessed Spirit, or under the movings of his own natural spirit or imagination?	208

Question 5. How far may a child of God fall, and yet have true grace in his soul?	213
Question 6. What is the essential difference between a natural and a spiritual faith?	214
Question 7. How may a person distinguish between the genuine consolations of the Gospel wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God, and those comforts that spring from our own imagination or a delusive spirit?	215
Question 8. Why should the King of Moab, by the advice of his privy council in a time of imminent danger and threatening distress, apply for relief to a prophet of the God of Israel, as Balaam certainly was, and not to Baal-Peor, the god of the Moabites?	217
Question 9. How far should the master of a family concern himself about the eternal salvation of his children, servants, etc.? Is it his duty to read a portion of the Scripture to them morning and evening, and pray with them as often? Should he catechise or ask them pertinent questions at proper times?	219
Question 10. Is it possible for a person to be regenerated, or born again, and yet for many years after, fear that he is not? And may a person in no way doubt his regeneration, and at the same time be an unconverted person?	223
Question 11. What advice can be given to a person grievously distressed with fears, doubts, and unbelief?	226
Question 12. Are the death and sufferings of Christ, or his passive obedience, all that is required for the salvation and justification of a sinner? Does his active righteousness have no part in the work, or must it be imputed? Is the imputation of Christ's active righteousness an essential point of doctrine, or may a man be safe without it?	231
Question 13. Is it possible for a person who is enabled to bewail his own vileness, to be assured of an interest in Christ with eternal joy; and yet not have an astonishing view of the glory, fulness, and suitableness of the Mediator, engaging and constraining him to love his Saviour and delight in His ways? And is it possible to have such an affecting view of Christ before regeneration?	233
Question 14. As I apprehend that the practice of family prayer is unfashionable in our days, is it because this age is so much wiser than the last? Or is it because we are less acquainted with the life, power, and comfort of that religion which is pure and undented before God?	234
Question 15. How may a person know that he is justified, pardoned, and accepted by God? And how many ways does God take, according to scripture, to evidence and give comfort of such justification, etc.?	236
Question 16. May a person with doubts of his regeneration or personal interest in Christ, approach the table of the Lord without being guilty of presumption?	253
Question 17. What means must a person use to attain greater liveliness in devotional exercises, who desires it, and mourns under a sense of his formality in them?	255
Question 18. When and in what may it be said that believers grieve and quench the Spirit?	258
Question 19. How may a person know and be satisfied that he aims principally at the glory of God in doing this, that, or the other thing?	259

Question 20. How may we distinguish between what is moral, and what is typical, or merely ceremonial, in the books of Moses? Consequently, which of those precepts are still in force, and which have long since been abrogated?	262
Question 21. How may a person know whether a promise or threatening is brought to the soul by God, or by Satan?	268
Question 22. Does Satan know the thoughts and intents of the heart, or only the gestures and motions of the body, as he has had such long experience?	271
Question 23. Can a person who is daily harassed with unclean thoughts and desires, be a child of God? If so, what can, what should a poor unhappy person do, according to the direction of God's holy word, in order to vanquish and overcome them?	272
Question 24. How may a Christian know when he eats or drinks by faith, the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ sacramentally? Or, what does it mean to be a worthy communicant at the Lord's table?	276
Question 25. What is the true idea, or the most general and direct meaning of the term "grace" in Scripture?	280
Question 26. What is faith? How does it differ from hope, love, repentance, etc.?.....	283
Question 27. May hope, love, repentance, patience, etc., evidence that a person is regenerated, and on the way to glory, even if he should be more in doubt about the truth of his faith, etc.?	283
Question 28. What is the real difference between true faith and mere presumption?.....	285
Question 29. Is it possible for a person to be a true believer, who entirely neglects private prayer?.....	287
Question 30. Which is the best way to cure lukewarmness and trifling indifference in private prayer?.....	288
Question 31. What is the difference between the real spirit and the mere gift of prayer?.....	290
THE CHARACTER AND HAPPINESS OF THE HAPPY MAN.	292
THE CHARACTER OF AN HONEST MAN.	295
THE CHARACTER OF THE FAITHFUL MAN.....	295

Editor's Preface

If there's a theme to the series of questions and answers in this text, any number of topics might fit the bill — from assurance, to experimental religion,¹ to godly living. But perhaps “evangelical obedience” is best. The Puritans called it *inherent righteousness* (personal holiness), as distinct from the righteousness that's *imputed* to us from Christ. We are justified (declared righteous) by God's grace, because of Christ's righteousness alone. It's inherent in Him, and imputed to us by faith. God doesn't consider our righteousness at all, because it's tainted by our sinful nature.

That begs the question, if *Christ's* obedience is what justifies us, then what is the purpose of *our* obedience? Well, it's evidence of our submission to God. It's a testimony to the grace and goodness of God. It fulfills the moral law to love God and love our neighbor wholeheartedly. It's part of the sanctifying process that conforms us more and more to the image of Christ. It's pleasing to God, and honoring to Christ. It's part of communing with God. And *it serves to prove that our faith is not dead* (Jas 2:17).

But if we emphasize personal obedience too much, we're called *legalists*. And if we emphasize grace too much, we're called *libertines* (antinomians). Even in the first century, some claimed that Paul's emphasis on grace undermined the law of God, and encouraged rampant sin. Paul replied “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (Rom 6:15) On the other hand, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” (Gal 2:21)

The authors of this book understood the need to live out our faith in Christ, in a God-honoring way. Godly Christians in every generation may identify with the cases presented here, perhaps asking themselves some of the same questions. This book was written to them, so that they may follow Christ faithfully and confidently, quenching all those fiery darts of Satan. As William Gurnall wrote,

“You march in the midst of gallant spirits, your fellow soldiers, every one the son of a Prince. Behold, some, enduring with you here below a great flight of afflictions and temptation, take heaven by storm and force. Others you may see after many assaults, repulses, and rallyings of their faith and patience, have gotten upon the walls of heaven, *conquerors*. From there they look down... and call you, their fellow brethren on earth, to march up the hill after them, crying aloud: ‘Press on, and the city is your own, as it is now ours, who for a few days’ conflict are now crowned with heaven's glory, one moment's enjoyment of which has dried up all our tears, healed all our wounds, and made us forget the sharpness of the fight, with the joy of our present victory.’” — *The Christian in Complete Armor* (1662)

Indeed, may we each *press on*, to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of us (Phi 3.12).

William H. Gross

June 16, 2021

¹ Experimental religion is “experiential.” It is the practical (or *tangible*) expression of our faith in Christ, through the pursuit of holiness. Like a scientific experiment, it moves from theory to proof. It begins with, but goes beyond knowledge, doctrine, and fellowship gained through the means of grace. The believer is transported into a spiritual realm — without the *mysticism* of Madame Guyon, or the *enthusiasm* that Jonathan Edwards decried (detached from the tether of God's Word). It is a state of mind and spirit in which God is tangibly “experienced.” *The believer comes into the very presence of God*. This is a highly subjective experience, and rare — even for those who have known it. It is not a state to strive for, nor is it attained only by the “enlightened,” as in Buddhism. It is a grace of God, to reveal Himself to us, at the time and place of His choosing. Yet any believer may, at any time, “draw near to God” by the means of grace (Jas 4.8). This too is *experimental religion*. — WHG

INTRODUCTION

It is of wholesome augury,¹ that the American Publishers of this book should be called upon to issue a fresh edition. A century has elapsed since the Lectures which compose the body of the work, were delivered in the city of London; and the Christian public are not yet prepared to let the volume go out of print. A religious treatise which thus commends itself to the respect and confidence of four successive generations of readers, must have a real, intrinsic value. This fact, indeed, constitutes a recommendation of the work, which can derive little or no additional weight from the endorsement of any modern pen. All that can be expected or desired from such an endorsement is that it may serve to call the attention of parties to the book, who might otherwise overlook it.

It has been supposed that the class of subjects discussed in the following pages, excite less interest in the Church now than they did at a former period. It must be conceded that the present age has contributed only a few works to the department of casuistical theology,² to which this book belongs. Pre-eminently a book-making age, it is not in keeping with the spirit of the times, to publish works on experimental religion. Immutable in its principles, and insusceptible of the 'progress' which marks the development of the physical sciences, Christianity nevertheless assumes a somewhat different *type* at different *epochs*. Under the administration of the Providence and Spirit of God, it is polemic at one period, contemplative at another, aggressive at a third. The Divine wisdom so ordered events, that after the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, the church experienced a season of long and anxious conflict, which drove her to the earnest and diligent study of the Sacred Oracles. This, in turn, was followed by a season of comparative tranquility, in which her treasures of learning and piety were employed in preparing libraries of practical and casuistical divinity. And this was indispensable, not as a mere prelude to this age of *Missions*, but as a necessary part of the training of the Church for the activities — secular and spiritual — of the day in which our lot is cast. There is no extravagance in asserting that the works of the great Puritan and Non-conformist divines, could not have been produced in the age now passing over us. Nor, on the other hand, could the Church of our day have been what it is, without the potential influence of those writings.

Confining the observation to the Anglo-Saxon race, there are no uninspired works which have had so much to do with moulding our Christianity, as these. They are, next to the Bible, the armory to which we instinctively repair, to burnish 'the weapons of our warfare,' and equip ourselves for fresh conflicts with our spiritual adversaries. To annihilate the works of Owen, Baxter, Flavel, Henry and others, whose names have become household words with us, would be to despoil the Evangelical Church of one of its best earthly treasures. Even where the writings of these eminent divines are but little read in private families, their influence is felt both through the pulpit and the press: for they are not likely to lose their place in the libraries of Christian ministers. These, and such as these, are the writers who have brought their ample stores of biblical learning and religious experience to bear upon the discussion of questions of casuistry, like those presented in this volume. And there are probably few pastors who don't have occasion to consult them on 'cases of conscience' arising among their own people.

¹ *Augury*: an event indicating important things to come; an inauguration. — WHG

² *Casuistry*: here it means the process of answering practical questions *via* interpretation of rules, or of cases that illustrate such rules; it is case-based reasoning. More largely, it is the art of living to God, according to the word of God. It is *experiencing God* by looking for, seeing, and responding to Him, in all things. — WHG

It is quite to the point, in this brief introduction, to remark that these ‘cases’ occur as often in our day as they ever did. The formal consideration of them in extended courses of sermons and lectures, may have fallen into disuse (whether wisely or not, is for the ministry to determine), but the same perplexities and difficulties beset the ‘narrow path,’ and press heavily upon the mind of many a weary pilgrim. The appeal might safely be made to any faithful pastor, whether any of the sermons he preaches, excite a deeper interest among his people, or are more cordially welcomed by them, than those which are devoted to questions like these: “In what frame of mind must a sinner come to Christ?” “How may I know that I am a Christian?” “What are the forms, the causes, and the remedy, of spiritual despondency?” “How may a person detect and subdue his besetting sins?” “How may a backsliding professor ¹ regain his lost peace of mind?” It is only necessary for a preacher to announce one of these themes from the pulpit, to enkindle a feeling throughout his congregation, which will reveal itself by the most unambiguous tokens.

Not only so, but questions of casuistry are continually brought before pastors in private, even if they are eluded or overlooked in the sanctuary. And the frequency of these examples warrants the belief that there must be a very large number of Christians whose minds are harassed with spiritual doubts and difficulties. The presumption, indeed, is that there are few truly converted persons who escape these trials; although, for the most part, they shrink from unveiling them to any human eye.

This *must be* the case. For all true religious experience preserves a substantial identity from age to age. The Psalms in which David describes his hopes and fears, his misgivings and self-reproaches, his falls and triumphs, have supplied the Church with its favorite formulas of devotion for five thousand years. Every believer lives over and over again, the touching experience which the great Apostle of the Gentiles has recorded in the seventh chapter of Romans — a chapter perhaps of even higher value to the Church than the *eighth*, though the latter is often represented as the crowning gem of the New Testament. The “Confessions” of Augustine are virtually the “Confessions” of thousands in every subsequent age, who have fought the same terrific fight with error and sin, and achieved the same victory. And so, all along the centuries, the people of God, of whatever clime or tongue, have been perpetually reproducing the same experiences, which greet us in the records of the earliest saints whose names are transmitted to us. So long as nature and grace struggle together in the hearts of renewed sinners, these lights and shades must continue to chequer the Christian life; and ‘Cases of Conscience’ will plead for counsel and sympathy.

In this view, a work like the present one deserves to be well received by the Churches. It aims, on the one hand, to guard well against self-deception. The danger of embracing a false hope, and trusting to a form of godliness without its power, was never greater than it is now. And it seeks on the other hand, to comfort desponding believers, to point out the causes of inefficiency among Christians, to instruct them in the performance of duty, and to aid them in their struggles with sin and temptation. If a *doubting* Christianity is (as there is reason to fear) too much a characteristic of the *piety* of our country; if there is a lamentable lack of that simple faith which takes God at his word, and receives everything He says, just as a child receives every word that falls from his father’s lips; this book should find readers. It has a message for all these timid, halting disciples. Again, there are not a few most exemplary and useful persons, who are habitually anxious on the question of their conversion, because they are unable to recall any precise period at which they experienced a change of heart. They would do well to read what is written on Case 28:

¹ A *professor* is a person who professes belief in Christ; but may or may not be a genuine believer. — WHG

“A person who has had a religious education, and cannot remember any time or place when and where God first worked upon his soul; what judgment must he form of his state, and what methods must he take to be satisfied that he is a child of God?”

The recurrence of the Lord’s Supper is to many conscientious and devout believers, an occasion of deep mental solicitude. Whenever this ordinance is administered, they are ready to ask — not always of man, but certainly of God — “May a person with doubts of his regeneration, or personal interest in Christ, approach the table of the Lord, without being guilty of presumption?” They will find this question formally answered in the second part of this volume; and the whole subject is discussed in several other essays.

The snares and dangers of a business-life, more formidable in our day than ever before, will commend to Christian merchants and mechanics, the suggestions under Case 22: “When may a Christian be said to pursue the affairs of the present life, so as to prevent his advances in grace, to dishonor God, and to injure his soul?”

And since the question of dramatic entertainments is still agitated among professing Christians, it cannot be unseasonable to call attention to the remarks under Case 10: “Is going to plays and other theatrical performances, consistent with the profession and practice of Christianity?”

These examples may suffice to give some idea of the topics to which this book is devoted. It is not to be understood that a general recommendation of the work implies an approval of every sentiment and every expression it contains. All discussions of this sort borrow their complexion in some degree, from the age in which they originate, as they necessarily take their predominant tone from the author’s own mind. But the writers of this book were men taught by the Spirit, deeply skilled in the subtleties of the human heart, having a large acquaintance with Holy Scripture and with the mysteries of experimental religion. And therefore they are entitled to speak with some authority on these profoundly interesting subjects. The work well deserves the place it has so long held in the affections of the Church. May the blessing of God attend the further circulation of it.

H. A. B. ¹

Philadelphia, Jan. 7, 1859.

¹ Henry A. Boardman was born in Troy, NY in 1808. He studied at Yale College and Princeton Theological Seminary (founded 1812). In 1833 he was called to the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia (founded 1829). This was his only congregation; he served it for forty-six years. Boardman was General Assembly Moderator in 1854 (Old School). “Old School” meant the Assembly embraced the entire Westminster Confession of Faith; the New School did not. Boardman retired in 1876, but continued to serve the church as *Pastor Emeritus* until his death in 1880. – WHG

PREFACE.

The following answers were, among others, delivered in a weekly lecture during the last winter, with a view to remove the doubts of the timorous Christian, quicken him on his way to Zion, to guard against presumptuous hopes, and to promote the life of religion in the soul. That these important ends might be answered, the audience was asked to supply us with serious *Cases of Conscience*, arising from the difficulties they met with in the course of their experience. And they were asked to conceal their names, that they might with greater freedom propose their respective cases, and that we, in our solution of them, might be kept from the least degree of fear or restraint.

Through the repeated importunities of our friends, and from satisfactory evidences of usefulness, we have been prevailed upon to commit to the public view, a select number of these answers, though somewhat contracted.

And we hope that those into whose hands they may come, will read them with Christian candour. And may the Spirit of God, without whose peculiar blessing all attempts will be ineffectual to answer any saving purposes, make these a powerful means of bringing them nearer to Christ, and of making them more lively and active in his service! If this happy end is answered but in the least, we will rejoice and give God all the glory, disregarding all the little contempt that may be cast upon us and our imperfect labours.

It must be acknowledged to be a very difficult and critical work to distribute to every one their proper portion, and to divide the word of truth so as to give suitable encouragement to those to whom it belongs, and yet to leave the hypocrite or presumptuous sinner no room to hope. It is equally difficult to attempt to destroy the vain confidence of a sinner, without disturbing the peace, and discouraging the minds of those who are the real followers of Jesus. Who is sufficient for these things? We readily confess our insufficiency; but we yet hope that the Lord has enabled us to be in some measure faithful, so far as our spiritual knowledge extends. And may He enable you who read, to deal faithfully with your own soul, so that neither your labour, nor your perusal, may be in vain!

LONDON, S. PIKE,
May, 30, 1755. S. HAYWARD.

As the *Cases of Conscience* have already been well received by the religiously disposed part of mankind, the Editor thought that additional Questions of the same nature selected from the *Pious Thoughts* published in the *Spiritual Magazine*, which breathed the same evangelical spirit, would be acceptable to serious persons. And he does not doubt that those who have a regard for gospel doctrine, will find the same useful instruction and comfort from perusing the *Questions* that are now added.¹

¹ Included under the title, *The Spiritual Companion*. – WHG

CASES OF CONSCIENCE

CASE 1. How may we distinguish between the workings of natural affection, and the real exercise of grace in religious duties?

This serious question recently came into my hands in these very words. Upon reading it, I could not help but see that it contained a query of the greatest importance, and therefore thought it might be very proper to take it into consideration, and give it as clear a solution as lay in my power.

I confess it is a very close and interesting inquiry that requires some skill to answer it, but much more spiritual skill to apply it to our own hearts and cases. You will easily see both the importance and difficulty of the question, by stating it in this free and familiar manner.

There are many who go to, or come from, Gospel ordinances entirely stupid,¹ careless, and unaffected — having no real regard for the power or spirit of religion, and aiming at no more than the *form* of it. To such as these, the present query is an indifferent matter. And their very indifference is evident proof that the state of their persons, or the frame of their hearts, is really sad and deplorable, though they don't know it, or are utterly unconcerned about it.

There are others who, when they attend upon, or engage in religious duties such as reading, hearing, singing, and praying, have their affections strongly moved. So that, these persons can and do frequently weep under ordinances for grief or joy; they often attend the means of grace with much pleasure in their countenances, and many tears in their eyes. These appearances, I confess, are very pleasing and promising in an assembly; and sometimes they indicate that the Spirit of God is at work in their hearts. Many Christians are ready to take it for granted that those ordinances are truly beneficial where the passions are thus agitated; and where this is not the case, to esteem those as lost opportunities.

But here I must observe that we have great reason to be suspicious of ourselves, and we should not make this the rule by which to judge the usefulness of an ordinance. But let us make a further inquiry whether these motions within us, or these impressions upon us, are the workings of natural affection only (as they certainly may be), or are they the real exercise of spiritual grace?

And *this* is the very question under consideration. Many, I fear, are awfully deceived with the mere workings of nature, by thinking they are sufficient evidences of the presence and blessing of God in his own institutions. While, on the other hand, many are groundlessly discouraged because they don't feel such strong emotions as others do — thinking that this is an evident token of the barrenness and uselessness of ordinances.

That we may not be either deceived or unreasonably discouraged by these means, let me therefore now attempt a serious and plain solution for this query, looking up to the Divine Spirit to make the whole clear to your understandings, and to apply it close to your consciences. I would offer the following considerations as preparatory to a direct answer, and then proceed to the solution itself. *Observe:*

I. That the affections of the mind may be excited in a merely natural way under divine ordinances. The proof of this point will be best introduced by endeavouring to set before you some of those ways in which mere nature may be impressed or raised under the means of grace.

¹ *Stupid*, as Pike uses it, isn't about lack of intelligence, but being oblivious to spiritual things; in a stupor. — WHG

1. The affections of the mind may be excited by a natural impression. Thus, when a person is attending upon the ministrations of the word, he may find himself moved only by the beauty of the style, or the propriety of the language, or by the loudness or tone of the preacher's voice, or the apparent fervency of his address. Such circumstances as these may move the affections in a purely mechanical way, without being attended with any spiritual or saving effects. For hereby only the animal nature is touched, or the speculative powers employed in a pleasing or disagreeable way. This seems to have been the case with the hearers of the great prophet Ezekiel, as mentioned in Eze 33.32: "Indeed, to them you are like a very lovely song of someone who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear your words, but don't do them." Let none therefore conclude that ordinances are profitable to them, merely because they are pleasing and delightful to their ears. For the manner of the preacher's address may make a natural impression upon his hearers, without having any spiritual or useful effect.

2. The affections may sometimes be raised by a natural sympathy which regards not merely the *manner* of the preacher, but also the *matter* which he delivers. If the preacher himself appears very earnest in his address, and very much affected by what he delivers, this often effectually works on the natural affections of his hearers by way of sympathy. If he appears concerned, they feel a sympathetic concern along with him. If he seems raised and delighted, then by sympathy, they partake of his pleasure to such a degree as to actually weep and rejoice with him. Again, if the minister is setting forth something in expressive language that is very affecting in its own nature, then here the power of oratory produces in the minds of the hearers a sympathy with that which he is relating or describing. Thus, if the minister is setting forth in very mournful strains the sufferings and agonies of Christ, his relation of these tragic occurrences may move the affections of the people merely in a *sympathetic* way, without making any saving or *spiritual* impression on their hearts. And there may be no more in these workings of affection, than what most persons, I believe, are obliged to feel when attentively reading that memorable history of Joseph and his brethren, by which the affections of joy and sorrow, resentment and pleasure, are alternately excited in a way that is purely natural.

3. The affections are sometimes raised under ordinances, from a purely natural or notional inclination. A person may meet with something in a sermon which suits his taste, or falls in with his previous sentiments. It is natural for us to be pleased with, and fond of, our own opinions. And therefore, whenever we meet with what corresponds to them, we are necessarily pleased and delighted with it. If what is advanced in a sermon strongly confirms or beautifully illustrates what we believe, this will certainly draw forth the pleasure and agreeable affections of the mind. But let us not conclude from this, that we have received any spiritual advantage, or that there has been anything more than the *natural* effect of a *natural* cause. For in all this satisfaction there may be nothing spiritual or evangelical, even though what we are pleased with is Gospel truth.

On the other hand, we may meet with something in a sermon that may disgust or displease us; and this may excite corresponding affections. We may be ready to esteem these affections as a true zeal for the truth, in opposition to error. Yet, after all these emotions of the mind, there may be nothing spiritual or savoury brought home to our hearts, nor any working of true grace in the soul. Once more,

4. Whether the affections are raised more or less, may very much depend upon our natural constitutions. For we know that some are of a softer, tenderer, and more affectionate disposition than others. And these are more easily touched and moved by what occurs in an ordinance than

others; and they are more frequently melted into tears. Therefore, this must not always be ascribed to a greater degree of the Spirit's operations, since it may frequently be accounted for by a cause that is merely natural. Thus we see how natural impressions, natural sympathy, natural inclination, and natural constitution, may be the sole cause or occasion of raising the affections under an ordinance.

But to prevent any discouraging mistake, let me proceed to observe,

II. That the affections being thus moved in a natural way, is an experience that is no way evil in itself. There is no sin in this natural inclination, sympathy, or constitution. It is only right for us to be thus moved, unless these impressions lead us away from the gospel, or unless they are mistaken for the operations of saving grace. If indeed we fall into this mistake, it may have a very dangerous consequence, and it will be an awful means of making us misjudge our frames and experiences — being deluded by *natural*, instead of *spiritual* impressions.

This discourse is not designed to engage you to restrain or suppress such natural workings of the affections, since they are what the God of nature has formed in us. But it is only to teach us how to distinguish them from what is truly spiritual and saving, so that we might not mistake *nature* for *grace*. For this reason, I would further observe,

III. That the workings of natural affection maybe a means, in the hands of the Divine Spirit, to excite and promote the exercise of spiritual grace. God may bless a natural constitution or sympathy, and make it a means of spiritual good. Many a person, by the means of his natural affections, has been brought and kept under the ministration of the Gospel with delight; and this has been the first occasion of his being begotten through the Gospel. Many have been so captivated by the fervency or oratory of a Gospel minister, as to introduce them into privileges which have been blessed to everlasting advantage. Remember the case of Ruth the Moabitess. Though raised in idolatry, the strong affection that she had for her mother-in-law Naomi, induced her to come into the land of Israel with her mother. And in this sweet, gradual, and insensible way, she was prevailed upon to forsake her false gods, and to put her trust in the shadow of the wings of the God of Israel. How beautifully her natural and spiritual affection united in these words: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1.16). As many are caught to their ruin, by those things which lay hold of their natural affections at first, so (blessed be God) some are brought to Christ in the very same way. Once more, it is needful to take notice,

IV. That the exercise of saving grace in ordinances, frequently stirs up our natural affections into sensible exercise. Grace working strongly in the heart has an effect even upon the animal frame. The emotions of the soul, by the influences of the Divine Spirit, will occasion and produce a great change in the posture of the animal spirits. So that the case is mutual: natural affection may be so blessed, as to be an occasion of our receiving spiritual grace and comfort; while on the contrary, the exercise of saving grace may be the occasion of many impressions upon our animal frames.

But though these things are thus frequently linked together, and co-operate with one another, yet still there is a most important distinction between them.

This, therefore, brings me to collect the whole together, in order to give a direct solution to the question proposed.

What has been said will alter the form of the query a little. For since natural and spiritual affection are so connected, the question is not whether our natural affections are moved, or *only* our spiritual affections are excited in ordinances — but how will we know whether there is anything

more than what is purely natural in the motions of our affections under divine ordinances? There may be, and generally is, a great deal of what is *natural* along with that which is *spiritual* and saving. And there may be nothing of what is spiritual and saving, where there is much of that which is natural. In order to distinguish things that differ in this case, let us put the following queries seriously to ourselves:

1. Whether that which moves our affections under an ordinance, is what is truly spiritual and evangelical. Sometimes we are affected by the oratory of the language, the tone of the voice, or the suitableness of the phraseology. And if this is all, certainly nothing but nature is here. Sometimes we are affected by the *matter* delivered, as well as by the *manner* of the delivery; but perhaps what touches and moves us is the mere superficial or historical part of the discourse, without being at all moved by the interesting, important, *spiritual* part of it. In this case, nothing but natural sympathy is here. It is like the daughters of Jerusalem (Luk 23.27-28) who beheld the sufferings of Christ with tears of compassion, without seeing or being impressed by the spiritual end of his sufferings, or attending to the awful consequences of them upon the city and its inhabitants. But if our affections are worked on in a *spiritual* manner, it is by our regard to the evangelical parts of the discourse. For, so far as true grace works, what chiefly affects the mind are those things which respect the method of grace, the salvation of the soul, the suitableness and excellence of Christ, and the like. And if we are made to feel the power of these things upon our minds, so as to be impressed by the thought of the sinfulness of sin, the fulness of the covenant, the riches of grace, and the way of the Spirit in convincing, converting, sanctifying, and comforting the soul, something more than nature is here now, because nature will never teach us to regard such spiritual things in a spiritual way.

2. We should inquire not only whether our affections are moved, but likewise whether our very hearts and consciences are touched. There is a vast difference between the affections and conscience in subjects of this nature, and it is of the highest importance for us to discern this difference — because, unless the conscience is impressed, all other motions and impressions are of no saving avail. Let us therefore ask ourselves whether we see and feel our own concern in the word delivered, and whether the thought of its respecting our own state, frame, or duty, is that which makes the word pleasant or powerful to us? To familiarize this matter to us, let us be concerned to bring it home to our souls in particular cases. When we are hearing or thinking about the doctrine of the depravity of nature, does this affect us in a humbling way, because we see and feel it is our own case? When we are attending to the doctrine of Christ, in his redemption, atonement, and righteousness, what is it now that affects our minds? Is it merely because we like the doctrine, and are pleased with the manner of handling it? Or is it because these important truths are applied to our consciences as the only ground of our hope, and the proper matter of consolation for our souls, under a real sense of the sinfulness and guilt of our own sins? When the nature and necessity of the Spirit's gracious and powerful influences are displayed so as to affect us, is it only because we like the subject, the preacher, or his manner? Or is it because we have in our own souls, at that time, a sight and feeling of our *need* of them, and because we hope and desire to be made *partakers* of them? Once more: when we hear a searching discourse, a discourse that plainly sets forth the marks and signs of a safe or dangerous state, of a good or bad frame, let us then observe if this touches our affections. If it does, is the reason because we are led by it to a serious examination of our own heart, state, and frame, and have our hopes or our fears excited upon this principle?

Thus, in all cases, inquire whether what affects us in reading or hearing the word, is the sight we have of our own concern with, or interest in, the things declared. If so, this is an effect that is more than natural, because nature of itself will never thus apply the word to our own heart and conscience. And we may be sure that a very great point is gained by the word and ordinances of the Gospel, if they come close to our own state or frame in this way. On the other hand, it is to be feared that many are *pleased with*, and in some way *impressed by* the word, but are never in this way *touched to the quick* by it.¹

3. Let us inquire whether our heart is so impressed as to stir up the graces of the Spirit into exercise in our soul? This can never be done without such an application of the word to the *conscience*, as has been just described; and where there is this self-application, it seldom fails to quicken and excite these graces. But so far as it is possible for the word to be misapplied — so as to promote a false hope, or beget an awful despair — it is therefore necessary to add this question to the former. Do the declarations of the word humble us under a sense of our own meanness, unworthiness, guilt, and pollution? By the word, are we emptied of self, and made to abhor ourselves because of our defilement and abominations? Are our desires raised for Christ, his sanctifying grace, and his justifying righteousness? Are we hereby stirred to flee to Christ, to depend upon him, to seek conformity to him, and to love him as one who is altogether lovely? In a word, , by the means of grace, are we drawn *away from* self, sense, and sin, and *to* Christ Jesus for righteousness and strength? If motions such as these are produced or excited in our hearts — in reading, hearing, or prayer — then it is evident that the graces of the Spirit are exercised. And even though it is under an *ordinance* where such experiences are felt, there may be much of natural sympathy or impression. Yet we have no reason to question the operations of grace, merely because these are the workings of nature; but rather, we should bless God that he is pleased to turn the natural affections into a spiritual channel, or to make them a means of promoting what is truly spiritual and evangelical. But in order to prevent all mistakes on this topic, that we might not be deceived with counterfeit for *real* graces, it will be necessary to make one more inquiry:

4. Whether these motions of affection have any holy *tendency*, and produce a holy *effect* on our hearts and lives? These workings of soul under ordinances, however strong they may be, however pleasant or evangelical in appearance, are certainly delusive if they don't have the stamp of holiness upon them. If these pleasing impressions tend to make us *less* watchful against sin, or *less* careful to perform our duty — if they fill us with a pleasing imagination that we need not be so afraid of sinning, or need not be so diligent in duty, because all is safe — this turn of thought, included in these motions of affection, is an infallible mark that the experience is delusive, detrimental, and diabolical. But if these workings of soul tend to *increase* our hatred of sin and our watchfulness against it, and to *promote* our love for Christ and true holiness; if they leave such a savour behind them upon our spirits, that it embitters sin, and gives us a relish for and delight in the ways of the Lord; if they promote our reverence for God's name, and our love for his people, his ordinances, and his precepts — we may be certain that they are of a spiritual and saving nature.

Let us now collect the whole together, and apply it by a few remarks for instruction and examination.

¹ To be touched or cut *to the quick*, is to be struck to deepest, tenderest part of our soul, where we "live." It is a level of conviction that alters us, and changes the way we live, in thought, word, and deed. — WHG

1. From this, learn that there is no grace of the Spirit that does not have its *counterfeit*. Nature can mimic a true faith by a notional belief; a true hope by presuming on the enjoyment of Gospel privileges; a true love by a love for the means of grace built on natural principles; a true godly sorrow by a sympathetic weeping under an affecting discourse; and a true joy in the Lord by a delight in Gospel ordinances, based on self-righteous and carnal principles.

2. From this, learn that judging the degree of our profiting under an ordinance by the degree of our affection, is a deceitful way of judging. We may be most profited when least affected, and least profited when most affected. For it is not the *degree*, but the *nature* and *kind* of the impression that we are to attend to when examining whether the word is profitable to us or not. This thought, if properly regarded, will afford matter for the conviction of some, and for the consolation of others. Are you *often* delighted with and melted into tears under an ordinance? Don't immediately conclude that you are a thriving Christian. For most, if not the whole of this experience, may arise only from a natural softness of temper, or from the natural impressions made on you by the liveliness of the preacher, or the beauty of his style. On the contrary, are you *seldom* affected in a lively manner or to any sensible degree under an ordinance? Do not therefore at once discourage yourself. For notwithstanding this defect, you may have a solid love for Christ, a hatred of sin, and a desire for holiness, promoted and confirmed. And if this is your case, you are not a forgetful hearer, but a *doer* of the work, even though you may not be so affectionate as some others are.

3. From this, learn how to put proper questions to yourselves, to know whether you are truly advantaged by any divine ordinances. When you reflect back upon any means of grace you have enjoyed, or upon any spiritual duties you have performed, converse with your souls in some manner such as this:

"My soul, you have now been engaged in a precious duty, enjoying a spiritual privilege, but how has it been with me under it? Have I been totally stupid, or have I not been, in some measure, affected, impressed, or delighted? If I have been absolutely unaffected in hearing, prayer, etc., then surely I have great reason to be humbled and ashamed that my heart has been so hard, and the powers of my soul so sadly wandering, or so inactive and unemployed when things of infinite importance have been transacting. But if I have been melted, pleased, or impressed, don't I have some reason to still be jealous over myself, lest what has passed in my soul should be what is merely natural, instead of being truly spiritual?

"Let me then come to a close and serious examination. What was it that made me weep or rejoice, that pleased me or impressed me? Did those glorious truths that were delivered in preaching, or those important concerns that I transacted with God in prayer, affect my mind? Was I enabled, under the ordinance, to apply these things to my own case? Was I affected with my own interest in them, or my own concern with them? And did these impressions stir me to go outside of myself, and cast my soul upon Christ for righteousness? Were my affections of hope or fear, of joy or sorrow, so excited as to draw me away from self and sin, to Christ and his grace? And did these experiences have anything of a holy stamp upon them — have they left a savour behind them to make me more desirous after Christ and holiness, and to be delivered from the power, pollution, and practice of sin?

"If *this* is my case, then I have great cause to bless God for the presence of his grace and the influences of his Spirit; and so far as I find my experience defective in these particulars, so far I am called upon to humble myself before God for the barrenness and unfruitfulness of my heart in these spiritual duties."

Thus, on the whole, we may see how to distinguish between the workings of *natural affection*, and the exercise of *spiritual grace*. But let me entreat you to be earnest for the teachings of the Holy Spirit, which are absolutely necessary to apply what has been stated to your own heart, and to enable you to pass a right judgment for yourself in a case so spiritual and so important.

CASE 2. What methods must a Christian take in declining circumstances, to recover a healthful and vigorous frame of soul, so as to be able to maintain real and close communion with God amidst the hurries and busyness of the world?

This question is formed from the following letter: —

“I have, through a great multiplicity of worldly affairs, and a deep engagement in them, lost that savour and relish for divine things I once experienced, and have become a sad stranger to that real communion with God, which was previously my chief joy. And I have so greatly declined in the Christian life, that I can sometimes omit the duties of private prayer and meditation; and at other times, I perform them with formality and coldness, and I am in no way suitably affected with my sad defections. Indeed, sometimes I have been helped to bemoan my sad case before God, and to plead with the blessed Jesus, the great and good physician, to heal and help me. But alas! things remain with me as before; and if there is any alteration in my case, I really think it is for the worse.”

This is a question which, I have no doubt, is suitable to the cases of many of God’s people in the present dark and degenerate day, when there are so many temptations and difficulties to cool their zeal, damp their joy, and fill them with formality and indifference of spirit in the service of the Redeemer. It is not with us as it was with our forefathers. We do not have their zeal, their faith, their love. We are not humble as they were, nor so watchful as they were against the temptations and sins to which we are exposed. We don’t discover that acquaintance with the power of religion which they had. We don’t walk so closely with God as they did. In sum, we have the name, the *form*, but we don’t have so much of the life, the spirit, the *power* of godliness, as our forefathers had, who are now in glory. We are more worldly, more selfish, more proud and haughty, more careless and negligent of our frames and our conversation, and in all respects, we have more of the *appearance* of “almost-Christians” than they did.

Yet blessed be God, this is not the case with every individual. There are a few who desire to honour God by a lively faith, a becoming zeal, and a close and humble walk — a few whose concern it is to make the greatest advances in grace, and to maintain daily communion with God, amidst the various hurries of life. They cannot live long without God. They are never easy except when they are feeling his animating and quickening Presence with them; and their souls, in consequence of it, are warmed, enlivened, and breathe out desires for Him. This seems to be the case with the person who sent in the above question.

You know something of the excellence of communion with God, my dear friend. You have found what it is to have a sweet relish for divine things. And now you are full of uneasiness at the sad loss you have sustained through the hurries and enjoyments of this life, and desire to have your former experience revived, and to find your soul again in a lively, healthful, and vigorous condition. You are not alone in this. I am persuaded that many speak the same language you do, feel the same things, have the same desires, and are equally at a loss as to what to do. It is a case of some importance. May the Spirit of God enable me to answer it in such a manner as may, through a Divine blessing, be effectual to bring your soul and the souls of others, nearer to God,

and quicken you to the pursuit of that which has a tendency to promote your growth in grace, and make you nourishing and lively Christians!

But before I directly answer your question, I would make two or three observations on it, that may be an *encouragement* to persons in such circumstances, as well as be a *caution* to those in the pursuits of this world. —

1. It is a peculiar mercy, when we find our soul in a declining condition, to be immediately alarmed at it, and sensible of it. When God is about to bestow the blessings of salvation, he first makes the sinner sensible of his need of them. So too, when He is about to revive his work in the soul who has been running astray from him, He first gives him a sense of his decline, shows him where he has fallen from — what a stranger he is to the life of religion, what ingratitude he has been guilty of, how much he has lost of the pleasures of the divine life, and how much he has dishonoured the God who called him out of darkness into His marvellous light. To lie asleep, as David did after his adultery and murder, is awful. Oh! sin is of a hardening nature. The Christian is often stupefied and benumbed with it. It shuts his eyes, and hardens his heart. He has lost in some measure his zeal and liveliness. His graces are withering. His duties are cold and formal — indeed, he can oftentimes omit them. He doesn't have that communion with God he once enjoyed; and yet he appears to be contented. This is a *melancholy case*! Bless God that it is not *your* case. You appear to be sensible of the unhealthy condition your soul is in. You see it is not with you as it was in months past. Bless God, Christians, if you are sensible of any decays, if your eyes are open, and your soul is impressed with a deep sense of the loss of communion with God, the neglect of your duty, or mere formality in it.

2. We should esteem it a mercy if, when under decline, we earnestly desire a revival. This appears to be the case with you, my friend. I think I see you viewing former seasons of communion, falling down before God, and under a deep sense of your declining circumstances. I hear you humbly addressing him in the following manner: —

“Lord, show me what you would have me do. I would acknowledge my many omissions of duty, my great carelessness and negligence, and would be deeply sensible of the loss I have sustained. Oh! revive your work in my soul, and let me not remain at this languishing rate! Lord, quicken, *quicken* this slothful heart, enkindle the sacred spark afresh, and let me be all alive for you!”

How happy it is when we are enabled to speak such language, and find our soul in such a frame as this! But on the other hand, to be careless and unconcerned, to be easy and contented in such circumstances, is an awful sign that religion is languishing in our soul, and that there is no present appearance of an alteration. David, when awakened, was not only sensible of the dangerous condition he had been in, but he desired a revival of the work of God in his soul — that he might again enjoy communion with Him, and nourish and prosper in the divine life. Therefore, he earnestly prayed that God would graciously look upon him, and return to him, *Psa 51.7.*¹

3. It is a difficult thing to have much to do with the world, *and* to grow in grace. Through the degeneracy of our hearts, the world has become an enemy to our souls, a hindrance in our way to heaven. Many, like the young man,² keep their enjoyments to the loss of their souls. The Christian himself who has found the emptiness of the world, and its insufficiency to satisfy an immortal

¹ *Psa 51:7, 11* Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

² *Mark 10.17-22.* “The rich young ruler.”

desire — notwithstanding that, is ready to be too fond of it. He finds it a sad clog and hindrance to him at times. He would often leave it behind him when he goes to worship God. But it will follow him from duty to duty, interrupt his communion with God, lead his heart aside, and damp the exercise of every grace. How ready is the Christian to swell with pride on account of his flourishing enjoyments? We need great grace to keep us humble in prosperous circumstances, either of soul or body. Is the Christian immersed in cares? Here he is in danger of being filled with too much anxiety, and of employing too much of his time in the world, to the neglect of some important duties of religion. It is in the suitable discharge of these, that the divine life is kept up in the soul.

Thus it is difficult for those who have much to do with the world, to grow in grace. I mention this to quicken the Christian to diligently attend to those means that are necessary for keeping up his lively sense of the things of God in his soul — and to keep him from being discouraged if at any time he sees that he has lost his frame through his many anxious cares, or through the temptations arising from this world. I don't doubt that this is the case with many. Many of *you*, my dear friends, have known what it is to lose communion with God through the hurries of life; what it is to have your soul out of tune; what it is to be tempted to the omission of duties. I would include myself with you, and lay my hand upon my mouth, crying out *guilty, guilty*. What then shall we do in such unpleasing circumstances?

This leads me to directly answer the case; specifically, what methods we must take to recover a healthful and vigorous frame of soul, so as to be able to maintain real and close communion with God amidst the hurries of life? It requires a person of great experience to give a suitable answer to so important a question. Sensible of my own weakness here, I hope I have earnestly entreated the assistance of the Spirit of God. In consequence of this, my mind (I trust) has been directed to the following things, which I would now humbly suggest to you as necessary in this case: —

I. Examine carefully the occasion of your decline. It is plain, if we look into his word, that God brings some afflictions upon his people in a way of sovereignty. But when he withholds the special influences of his Spirit from us — the consequences of which are loss of communion with him, the withering of our graces, and a decline with regard to the life of religion in our souls — we may immediately conclude that we have dishonoured God in some instance or other, and provoked him to thus leave us partly. It is necessary, then, to inquire into the occasions of God's withdrawal, not only for our present but for our future guidance. Was Job anxious to know why God contended with him in a way of affliction, and will we not be solicitous to examine into the reasons for our present decline? To lose spiritual enjoyments is much more melancholy than to be under temporal afflictions. Come then, my soul, and come my Christian friends, and particularly, come my dear friend who sent in the above case, and who desires a revival — come, and let us examine how we have provoked God to withdraw. What has been the reason for our recent coldness and formality? How did we come to lose any of our zeal for Christ? How is it that we have been led to omit the spiritual duties of prayer, meditation, etc. Why haven't we experienced the presence of the Spirit in ordinances, drawing our souls after Jesus, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts? Oh! why is it that it is not the same with us as in months past, when we sat under the shadow of the Lord, and his presence filled our souls with unspeakable joy? We have reason to be jealous of our wicked hearts, and to fear that they have led us aside. And so we have grieved the Holy Spirit, and he has revealed his displeasure.

Let us make the inquiry: —

Perhaps we have been too elated with pride. Pride is a great enemy to the divine life. It has often provoked the Spirit to withdraw his presence, so that being in some measure left to ourselves, we

might be humbled and not think of ourselves beyond what we should. It was pride that provoked God to leave Peter; and see how shamefully he fell, Luk 22.33, 57-60. The Apostle Paul was likely to be carried away with pride, even under those high enjoyments he was favoured with. Therefore, he had a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, 2Cor 12.1-7. Some are proud of the world. They grow in riches; and their hearts are lifted up, as if they were more amiable or had more interest in God than others. Is this your case, my friends?

Examine: have temporal or spiritual enjoyments lifted you up too much? Have these vain hearts been flattering you as a person of some peculiar worth? And have you been ready to swell with that thought, and then from such an apprehension, to look at others with an unchristian air?

Again, perhaps you've been led by your enjoyments to indulge a security and a carelessness of spirit.¹ Through the sad wickedness of our hearts, we have often been guilty here, and so we have suffered an unspeakable loss. It has often been suggested to us after spiritual enjoyments, that our state is safe and secure — that there is no depriving us of the promised inheritance. God has given us an evident token of His everlasting love for our souls. Therefore, we need not be in our duty so much, but may indulge a little liberty, and enjoy a few of the pleasures and comforts of the present life; and we may do all this consistent with our hopes of a better life. These thoughts, perhaps, we have too eagerly imbibed, from their having a plausible appearance; but they have proved to be a poison to our souls. For, while we have been taking this innocent liberty, we have insensibly grown careless and secure, and have lost our spiritual joy. This may also be the case as to temporal enjoyments. Inquire, therefore, have these led you to a carelessness and security of spirit? God has perhaps increased your substance, and given you everything richly to enjoy. You are like many in the world: you abound with comforts; and you too must be like them in frame and spirit. Oh! there is great danger here! They apprehend themselves to be too rich to be religious, that God will pay deference to them on account of their station. And hasn't this been a temptation to you at times? And so you have sunk in your zeal and in your close communion and converse ² with God.

Again, perhaps you have loved this world too much. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1Joh 2.15. Though you may not love the world in the sense of the apostle, your affections may yet be so set upon it, as to make a jealous God withdraw the special tokens of his love from you. It is in every way unsuitable to our profession of love for God, to be so fond of present things. It is offering the greatest affront to our adorable Immanuel — as if there were more excellence in the world than in Him, or as if He was not a sufficient portion for us. My Christian friend, inquire how your heart stands as to the world. Have you been slighting your Lord, your Husband, your best of friends, by valuing the world too much?

Again, perhaps through a multiplicity of engagements, you have been tempted to neglect those duties in which Christians meet with God, and by which they find their souls enlivened. Every duty is beautiful in its season. There is a time to mind the world, and a time to attend to the affairs of the soul. To be diligent in our calling is doubtless a duty. A Christian who is careless and slothful in his worldly affairs is no honour to religion. I would not throw one reflection upon industry in the pursuit of our lawful business, if not to *applaud* it. But then we should remember that the world does not have a right to *all* our time. Martha was encumbered about making provision for

¹ Security here means a *false* sense of security — becoming complacent about our salvation. "Once saved, always saved." We pervert having no fear of hell, into having no fear of God. — WHG

² *Converse* or *conversation*: to deal with or interact with others; how we conduct ourselves publicly. — WHG

our Lord, when she ought to have been at his feet, hearing his doctrine: Luk 10.38-42. So the Christian often is in the *world*, when he should be in his *family*, or in his *closet*.¹

Perhaps your engagements are great; you are obliged to be in company with many. This is a temptation to you to neglect some important duties; duties that have been made sweet and pleasant to your soul. You will permit me, my dear friends, to be quite free. The case under consideration gives me an opportunity for it; and the prosperity of our souls is a matter of such importance that it requires it. I can only be inclined to think that evening clubs, which are so frequent even among professors, are injurious to the Christian life. Let me explain myself here, for fear of mistake. I don't mean that we are to avoid all company and conversation in an evening. Christian conversation is necessary, and greatly useful. No, while we are engaged in the affairs of this life, it will often be necessary for a Christian to mix with those who perhaps are not. But when so much time is spent in evening visits, clubs, etc., that it interferes with, and often sets aside, the duties of the family and the closet, or it leaves but little time for these things. It's no wonder that we must lose ground in the divine life, especially if this is too much our practice. We should remember that real religion does not lie in much talking, but in private converse with God, and in an experience of His quickening presence and grace. Christian conversation, indeed, has an excellent tendency to promote this — and oh, that it was found more among us! But great beauty, and a good deal of Christian skill, lie in the timing of these things. One duty should not jostle out or prevent the discharge of another.

Let me appeal to your conscience, professor, and ask you a few questions. Is it your usual practice to spend your evenings about the town? What is the consequence? Do you find your family in a suitable disposition to attend to social worship at your coming home? Are they not rather wearied with the hurries of the day, and wishing for rest? In such a circumstance, the duty is oftentimes sadly curtailed, if not totally neglected. And how is it with the closet that seldom has an evening visit? You have no time to look into your soul, to mourn over the sins of the day, or to recall its mercies; no time for reading or meditation. One neglect of this kind makes way for another; and the professor can content himself with it. Oh! Christians, has this been the case with any of you? Has this been the case with you, my friend? Has the multiplicity of your affairs, or have your engagements prevented your often being in your closet? What have you lost? But, alas! you are contented, and think that none can blame you, so long as you have been in company with some of the friends of Jesus. Go on so, and see what the consequences will be. You will gradually lose a relish for the power and pleasures of religion, and your zeal will too much degenerate into controversy. You may talk much of God; but you will walk little with him. Pardon my freedom, my dear friends. I bring no charge against you but what I would bring against myself; and I would therefore inquire of myself, as well as you.

Thus examine the occasions of your decline. I have given you some instances to direct and help your inquiries. But do not stop here. Carefully examine everything by which you may have provoked God to withdraw his special presence from you.

II. When you have found the occasions for your decline, humble yourself before the Lord, guard carefully against them for the future, get your heart sensibly affected with your loss, and earnestly pray that the Spirit may not depart from you, but graciously return to you. This was the case with David, of whom we have already spoken. When he was brought to a sense of his sins, how humble he was! He fell down prostrate before God — acknowledged and bewailed his backslidings. He

¹ That is, a prayer chamber (den, study, office) — absorbed in meditations, in communion with God (Mat 6.6) — WHG

was jealous, lest he had provoked God to entirely withdraw his presence and Spirit from him. Therefore he reasoned with Him for the return of his favour, and that he would restore those divine consolations which he had experienced before, but had lately lost, Psa 51.11-12. Though we may not have been provoking God to withhold from us his special presence by the commission of such open and public sins as David, yet have we been too closely attached to the world? Have we neglected some of the great and important duties of the Christian life? Have we been too proud, too careless and secure in our frame, our walk, and behaviour? Have we been trifling with God? It certainly becomes us to humble ourselves before him if we expect his return to us. We should draw near to him with weeping and lamentation; should often endeavour to impress our heart with a sense of our ingratitude; should often mourn before the Lord; and should set a mark upon those things that have been the occasions of our decline, that we may watch against them for the future. Often reflect upon the loss you have had. Consider the sickly condition your soul has been in while the Spirit was withdrawn from you. Consider how justly God might have left you, had he been strict to mark your backslidings. And oh! admire his infinite patience, and earnestly pray for his Spirit to return and breathe upon your dry bones. Let it be your daily concern, to beg of God, that he would keep your heart, your affections, quicken your soul, and not leave you to coldness and formality. When Israel was exhorted to return to the Lord after they had sinned, they are directed to return by prayer, and instructed *how* to pray, or *what* to say. Hos 14.2, “Take words with you, and turn to the Lord. Say to him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously — so we will render to you the sacrifices of our lips,” etc., etc. Prayer suits all cases, and is never to be neglected. Is anyone afflicted? Let him pray, Jas 5.13. So has any fallen, grieved the Spirit, and lost in some measure that liveliness and vigour of soul he once experienced? Let him return to God by prayer. Take words with you, even those words which God has furnished you with, and *come to him*. Take a promise in your hand, and come and plead it with God for the return of his presence and Spirit.

III. Often make use of your covenant relation to God, in pleading with him and with your own soul. The person who sent in the case that is under consideration does not appear to doubt being a Christian. The very form in which the question stands, supposes it; and upon this supposition, I proceed to give you this necessary direction. Some indeed may say they *cannot* plead a covenant relation for they are greatly in the dark about it, and they are therefore afraid to do it. In answer to this in general, observe this: So long as you find that your viewing and pleading your covenant relation quickens you, humbles you, sets you against all sin, and tends to fill you with love for Jesus and his service, you may look upon this as evidence of your interest in the covenant. Therefore, my friends, plead this covenant relation to God if you would have it better with your souls, and be in such a frame as to maintain communion with God.

1. Plead it with God. A sense of it greatly tends to give you faith and fervency in prayer, and to fill you with hopes of the divine presence and favour. Here is a glorious argument to make use of with God. Rejoice in it, my dear friend, and make frequent use of it. Often throw yourself at the footstool of God’s throne and address him in language such as this:

“Lord, am I not yours? Father, didn’t you choose me from eternity, and determine to bestow salvation upon me? Mighty God, didn’t you undertake for me, agree to put my name in the book of life, and in consequence of this, come, and suffer, and die in my stead? And haven’t you renewed me, eternal Spirit, and set the broad seal of heaven upon my soul? If I am not yours, Lord, what do such instances of communion with you mean? What does this love for Jesus, and these desires for conformity to his image mean? Aren’t these like so many evidences of your

everlasting love? And, oh! will you leave me to wither and languish, to grow cold and formal? Won't you come and kindle this sacred spark afresh, and carry on your work with an almighty efficacy? I acknowledge, Lord, I am unworthy of your favour: I have sinned, and I deserve your everlasting displeasure. But didn't it please you of your infinite grace, to enroll my name among your chosen ones in the volume of eternity? And will you leave me? Lord, it was your own act, your free act; and I would humbly plead it. Therefore, come and visit my soul, shed abroad your love in my heart, pardon my backslidings, and may I be enabled to rejoice in your covenant love, and walk and act as one who has a real interest in it."

Thus plead with God, and follow the example of the Psalmist, who in all difficulties, temporal and spiritual, addressed God as his God. Oh! the sweetness, the happiness, that is couched in these two words, "*my God!*"

2. Often make use of the same argument, and *plead this covenant relation with your souls*. When you find your soul in danger through sin; when you have lost your frame, and feel a coldness and formality, and the hurries of the world tempting you to a carelessness in and a negligence of duty; plead with your soul in a manner such as this —

"O my soul! Am I acting like an heir of glory, to be thus encumbered, thus anxious, and thus careless? What, didn't the Father love me from eternity, and give me to his Son? Didn't Jesus suffer and die for me? And hasn't the Spirit actually renewed me? In consequence of all this, isn't heaven my portion? Am I not born to glory? Oh! Then why so cold, so formal? I will not leave you, O my soul, in this withering condition. I will plead with you of the Father's everlasting kindness; I will beseech you by the tender compassions of the Son of God, who gave himself for you. I will press upon you the infinite love of the Spirit, who said to you, *live!* I will not leave till I find things better with you. May the Father not justly complain of you?

"Hear, my soul, what He says.

What, didn't I look upon you from everlasting with infinite kindness, and are these the returns you are making? Is this like one of my chosen vessels? Didn't I pass by thousands, and look upon you? And is *this* all the sense you have of your obligations to me?

"Hear Jesus gently chiding you, my slothful soul — saying,

What, didn't I love you so as to die for you? Wasn't the day of your redemption upon my heart from everlasting? And will my cause, my glory, lie so little upon yours? Behold my wounded soul; see my bitter agonies; and all to rescue you from everlasting death! And will you not love me more?

"Hear the Spirit bringing his charge against you, expostulating with you,

Haven't I — in consequence of the Father's everlasting love, and the Mediator's purchase — come and brought you out of darkness into light? What evidences have I given you of covenant love? How have I calmed your troubled conscience, shed abroad a Saviour's love in your heart, been a spirit of grace and supplication in you, and a spirit of adoption too? And *what*, are you so ungrateful, so cold, and secure?

"Thus may God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, upbraid and chide you, my soul: and shall this not move you? Lord, my heart begins to melt; it softens, it yields to so much love! Oh, come and do with me what you please! May I hate sin; may I love you with greater fervency, and view every earthly enjoyment with indifference, and use all to your glory."

Thus plead with your soul, your covenant relation to God and all its consequences. Do it frequently. And through the divine blessing, you will find it a happy means of enabling you to live above this world while you are in it; of humbling you for sin; quickening you under all decays; and of bringing you into a spiritual and heavenly frame, so as to maintain some communion with God amidst the hurries of life.

IV. If you would keep up communion with God while you are engaged in the affairs of the world, take care and watch over your frame, your ends and views. You may lawfully follow the world with diligence; but take care that you pursue those measures that are necessary to keep your heart at a proper distance from the world, lest it too be carried away with it, and entangled in it. Improve what time you can for God. Particularly take care of your frame *before* you actually enter upon your secular affairs. Be concerned, so the world doesn't creep into your heart when you rise in the morning. Your morning frames are of great importance. Labour to throw aside the world; and don't enter upon business till you have earnestly sought the presence and blessing of God with and upon you. In your closet, consider well the affairs of the day — the temptations you are likely to be exposed to; be earnest with God for his special presence to keep you; endeavour to get your heart impressed with the love of Jesus — and you will be in less danger of being carried away by the temptations of the day. You read in the life of Col. Gardiner, that the great man always had his two hours with God in the morning.¹ If his regiment was to march at four, he would be up at two. I don't doubt that the frame he had in his closet, often went with him through the day. I would not intimate by this, that it is the duty of every one of you, my friends, to spend two hours in your closets every morning. But I am satisfied that if no care is taken to set apart some time to God, that person can never be in a flourishing condition as to his soul. Let me tell you, rising early is not only good for the health of the body, but for the health of the soul too, provided some time is spent with God, and communing with our own heart.

My friends, strive, *wrestle* with God in your morning hours for His presence during the day; and labour to get love for Jesus enkindled in your breasts *before* you go out of your closets; and watch over your frame during the day. Examine your ends and views, the principles and springs from which you act. Watch over your deceitful heart. Walk as in the presence of God. In sum, let the glory of Christ lie near upon your heart, and be afraid of anything that may dishonour God and provoke his Spirit to withdraw from you. In thus endeavouring to cultivate a spiritual frame and temper, and to walk with humility and circumspection, you will give evidence of your being Christians indeed. You may expect the presence of God with you; and I have no doubt that through His divine blessing, you will find your soul in a thriving condition.

I would now close these few hints, with two remarks.

1. From this we find that it is not an easy thing to be a flourishing Christian. We must live much in the exercise of faith; we must be much on our guard against sin; we must be much in our closets, seeking God by prayer, examining ourselves, and keeping a strict watch over our hearts, lest they deceive us. A careless Christian cannot be a flourishing one. If you would grow up like tall cedars, and flourish as trees of righteousness, then you must not be cold and lifeless, careless as to your frames and conversation. Like sentinels, you must be ever on your watch; like persons running a race, you must press towards the mark with all your might; and like soldiers, you must be prepared for the battle, and enter the field with your armour on, so that you may get daily advantages over your spiritual enemies, and may go from strength to strength, from one degree of grace to another.

¹ Col. James Gardiner's Life, p. 60. He was slain at the battle of Prestonpans, September 21, 1745.

To be *lively* Christians — those who glorify God in every circumstance of life — requires grace to be greatly exercised, to be much of the presence of God, and to obtain constant supplies out of our Redeemer's inexhaustible fulness.

2. We should each be concerned to inquire how it is with our soul; and if we are on the decline, to attend to the directions that have been given. Put off a matter of such vast importance no longer; but examine whether or not you are Christians indeed, and in what circumstances — whether thriving, or declining. And if you are on the decline, let me entreat you to consider what has been said on this subject, and to think it is high time to awaken out of sleep. Oh! if you have any concern for the honour of Christ, any concern for the peace and welfare of your precious soul, labour to have things better with you. Let your loins be girded, and your lights burning; and may none of us be under the least alarm when death approaches — but then, through grace, be enabled to say,

We have fought the good fight; we have finished our course; we have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give us on that day, and not to us only, but also to all those who love his appearing (2Tim 4.7-8).

CASE 3. A serious person, who scruples¹ to comply with the usual practice of playing cards, desires to know whether these scruples arise from a needless tenderness of conscience, or from the faithful admonitions of the Spirit of God.

The above question is grounded upon, and extracted from the following epistle:

“Reverend Sir — I humbly take the liberty to recommend for your consideration a subject which has been of great concern to my mind. In times past, I had a great liking for and frequently practised the game of cards — without remorse, as I believe most young people do. But since I have tasted that the Lord is gracious (which I hope is my happy case), I directly laid aside the general practice of it, as what I apprehend is unbecoming the Christian character. I have withstood frequent temptations offered for compliance; but once I am in company, I warm to the game, and upon their solicitation I complied, but not without sharp reproofs of conscience — upon which I secretly purposed to have no more to do with it; and up to now I have kept my resolution. Whether my refusals are needless scruples of conscience, or faithful admonitions from God, is my question. And as the season is coming on, in which the game of cards is commonly practised, and I may possibly fall in the way of temptation to it, I desire to know if by compliance, I will sin against God; and (if so) what the evil of it particularly consists in.

I am, sir, yours, etc.

P.S. I leave it to your judgment to frame a question from these thoughts suitable to the occasion.”

As such a conscientious spirit runs through the above epistle, I think it may speak the language of many hearts; and therefore I more readily address myself to the consideration of the subject.

The serious request contained in the foregoing letter cannot be answered without entering into the merits of the cause. For there is no other way to know whether the scruples in our mind are needless or just, as to any particular practice, except by applying to the divine word as the rule of duty. We want to see what we can gather from there by just consequence concerning the point. Therefore, so far as my judgment reaches, I would endeavour to recommend myself seriously and faithfully to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2Cor 4.2).

¹ *Scruple*: to hesitate on moral grounds.

Let me first say a few things which apply in common to the game of cards and other diversions. Then I will consider what is specific to this game and others of a similar kind. And so I will show you by degrees, in what and how far this game is lawful or unlawful.

1. This diversion, with every other, is certainly evil whenever it is attended with those circumstances that are detrimental and disgraceful — *e.g.*, if it is practised with wicked company; if it is pursued at unseasonable hours; if it infringes on the regular duties of the family, whether civil or religious; if it sets aside or drives into a corner, the private duties of prayer; if it occasions putting up high stakes; or if it stirs up the corruptions of anger, envy, revenge or lays a foundation for swearing, quarrels, and confusions.

And it is still more particularly abominable whenever a person's heart is so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3.13), as to presume to practice it on the Lord's day.

Those who are acquainted with this game, and indulge a free use of it, cannot help but be sensible that it is very, very often attended with such abominable circumstances. And as it is for the most part attended with or productive of these evils, everyone who has any sense of religion, and any conscience towards God, should therefore be very wary and cautious how he ventures upon it.

2. This diversion, with every other, is certainly evil so far as it is a disgrace and dishonour to the profession of religion.

For a professor to give himself up to any diversion immoderately, is a reproach to him. But for a professor of Christianity to be a professed *card-player*, is a brand and an infamy. When any of them are known to be followers of this practice, their characters are sunk in the esteem of all truly serious Christians and Gospel churches. And this report that is spread concerning them, or this practice that is seen among them, raises their credit only among the loose, frivolous, and vain part of the world, and exceedingly hardens the hearts of those who have not set God before them.

That this is a reproachful diversion is practically and publicly acknowledged by the form of the indentures ¹ by which youths are bound as apprentices. For in these indentures, they are bound to abstain from cards, dice, and other unlawful games. Doubtless this form was established in those indentures under a conviction that these diversions are particularly ensnaring to youth.

Therefore, if professors have any conscientious regard for their reputation as Christians, they are bound by this principle, to abstain from the disreputable practice.

3. This diversion, with every other, is certainly evil so far as it is ensnaring in its own nature. Now it is very evident from a matter of fact, that this game has something peculiarly bewitching and entangling in it. How strongly it captivates the affections; how strangely it draws away the heart; and how powerfully and effectively it fills the mind with vanity! It is to such a degree that a person must be extremely on his guard to escape receiving an unspeakable prejudice to his soul. This diversion, therefore, must certainly be unlawful when it bewitches the mind and produces vanity and carnal affections. Besides, it is known that this game has such a pernicious pleasure in it, that it actually enamours the affections; it makes persons extremely fond of it, and set upon it as if it was a matter of the highest importance to have *opportunities* for it, and to be *indulged* in it. Generally speaking, this influence on the mind is so efficacious, that all arguments and

¹ *Form of the indentures*: the usual requirements of a contract covering a paid apprenticeship. – WHG

persuasions, all warnings — even the very experience of disadvantages arising from it — prove altogether too weak to detach the mind from it.¹

Many persons are so fond of it that they will forego almost everything, rather than be debarred from the infatuating pleasure. What unaccountable eagerness some pursue it with; how they are vexed and grieved at heart when disappointed of having a game; and what resentment rises in their minds against those who are so faithful as to reprove or debar them! That person who attempts to speak a word against it, must be accounted a precisian, a zealot, an enemy to pleasure. Whenever matters have run to such a length as this, or to anything like it, it is evidence that the gamesters are absolutely intoxicated with carnal pleasure.

4. This diversion, with every other, must certainly be evil when it unfits the soul for spiritual duties. It is readily granted that some diversions are certainly lawful; and it is as readily allowed that some diversion is really necessary. But then, it is only so far as it is suited to unbend the mind for a season from severer thought, or to relax the body to render it more capable of performing necessary duty. Diversion is graciously allowed and designed to fit the body and mind for spiritual and natural duties. But surely a gracious person must acknowledge the following maxim to be a just one: that whatever diversions actually *unfit* the frame and spirit of the mind for devotional exercises, they so far prove themselves to be hurtful and criminal. And therefore, every person who has any regard for the power of godliness in his own soul, must judge and condemn himself as guilty before God whenever he engages in such diversions, or engages to such a degree as to unfit his soul for this communion with God. If every professor seriously attended to this rule, and examined himself by this test, I have no doubt that he would soon be obliged to decline this practice from his own experience.

Give me leave here to put one question to your consciences, a question that needs to be put seriously to you, and by you to yourselves. After a game of cards, do you actually find yourselves unfitted by it for spiritual devotion? I strongly suspect that if every one of you who knows what communion with God means, would be faithful to yourselves, then all of you would find by sad experience, that this game is an absolute enemy to vital religion.

Having brought this subject down to experience itself, I beg your leave to offer the following considerations to your thoughts.

Since this game is found to be so peculiarly attended with many evils, to be so peculiarly dishonourable and infatuating, and in fact, to be such an enemy to vital godliness, what can be the reason for it? Isn't there some ground to suspect that it is evil *in itself*? If it is not so, how does it come to pass that such evils should necessarily cling to it, or necessarily be produced by it? But if it is indeed unlawful, what does its particular evil consist of? I would be far from exaggerating matters of any kind unjustly; though I am apprehensive that many who may see these lines, will imagine that any attempt to prove that this game is evil in itself, must be owing to an overly narrow, precise, or scrupulous conscience. But let me crave your patience a little, while I attempt to display my thoughts on this topic with all freedom and plainness.

The whole of what I have to say on this subject is founded on a plain, but too neglected passage of sacred writ: Pro 16.33, "*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing of it is from the Lord,*" *i.e.* whenever a lot is cast, the entire decision or determination of it is from Jehovah himself. He claims it as his sole prerogative. This proverb will appear to be true concerning all sorts of lots,

¹ In other words, it has become an *addiction*, an *idol* to be worshipped. — WHG

whether civil or religious — wherever, however, or whenever they may be cast. For, in all cases whatever, when a lot is cast, and cast fairly, an event is thereby rendered casual and uncertain. It is not within the reach of human skill or power to ascertain, foresee, or determine the event. And if it is beyond human contrivance or art to decide the affair, then to whom does it belong, or whose prerogative is it? Therefore, whoever believes in the universal providence of God, must of necessity acknowledge that all events *universally* are under divine direction, especially those that are casual. And if God is to be owned in those events which come upon us daily — unforeseen, unsuspected, and undesignated by any creature — then surely Divine Providence should be still more especially regarded by us whenever we voluntarily render an event uncertain and casual.

We must therefore conclude from the above plain text of Pro 16.33, and the reasoning upon it, that we should in no case designedly consider an event casual with respect to us, without some real dependence upon and submission to Divine Providence. With this frame of spirit, lots may be cast or established on proper occasions, without any harm or crime.¹ And without some such frame of mind in casting or receiving a lot, we are really defective in our regard to Jehovah as a God of providence, even supposing that the occasion of the lot is proper and justifiable. But if we venture to cast a lot on *trivial* occasions — occasions on which it would be profane to address Jehovah — we are then guilty of trifling with what should be treated with serious regard to the Lord as the supreme decider of all events; and especially of those events whose outcome we designedly put out of our own reach.

It may perhaps be readily asked here, what reference does all this reasoning have to the present subject, or how can this be applied to the game of cards and dice? Let me then briefly state this affair to you, with a view to the diversion in question.

I confess that in this game much of the success depends on the skill and attention of a person who engages in it; for a skilful player can sometimes make a greater advantage of a bad hand, than others can of a good hand. But still, whether a person has a good or a bad hand, depends entirely on the cutting, shuffling, and dealing out of the cards; and this is a very important circumstance in the game. I will put the affair of a lot in the present case, only on this issue. The one who shuffles, or cuts, and deals out the cards, either does it fairly or unfairly. If it is done unfairly, then there is cheating, knavery, fraud, and dishonesty practised in the game. But, if he does it fairly, it is done in such a manner that no person can foresee which side should have the advantage. So then, here is an event designedly put into a properly casual or uncertain state. And this *is*, this *can be*, none other than the very act of *casting a lot*. So we are necessarily reduced to this dilemma: that either a lot is cast, or else the game is conducted in a cheating and dishonest way. Therefore, if justice takes place in the game, here is an event of considerable consequence in the play, designedly put out of the decision of human skill, forethought, or contrivance. And so the outcome of this event must necessarily be referred elsewhere, to some invisible power.

Can it then be improper or unnecessary to ask where the decision is referred to? Is it to God, to the devil, or to chance and fortune? If the decision is referred to God himself as a God of providence, this can be esteemed no less than profanity; and we are assured that God will not account him guiltless who takes His name in vain. And being at a game of cards, can we say in our

¹ In cases of necessity and importance, where we cannot without falling into destructive contentions, decide a point in question, the Lord graciously permits us to refer the decision of the affair to Himself by lot, provided we do it with a proper eye to him, as the Grand Arbiter and Disposer. Pro 18.18. "The lot causes contentions to cease, and parts between the mighty."

heart with any seriousness or decency, Lord, give a perfect equitable lot? *I* know we cannot; *you* know we cannot. Such language of heart or action can never be esteemed decent in diversion. And those who have any seriousness in their spirits, are far from the thought, and cannot bear the reflection in their own consciences.

I ask further, then, if the decision is not referred to the Lord, is it to the devil? No, by no means, you will say. This you detest as much as the former, as it has a species of witchcraft in it. It only then remains that the reference is made to chance, or to nothing. To say that it is referred to nothing, is to say that it is not referred at all, which is contrary to the matter of fact, because the event is actually and designedly referred away from yourselves, and from all human skill and contrivance. And therefore it must be referred to luck, chance, or fortune. This thought is more tolerable than the former. And it is extremely evident that it is referred to this, from the universal language which obtains in this diversion; nothing is more common than to talk about luck, chance, and fortune. But remember, then, if the reference is made to chance, what is this but substituting, *practically* substituting, fortune in place of Divine Providence? This is a species of heathenism and idolatry.

It may indeed be said, in order to satisfy or soothe the conscience, that you have no thought or design in shuffling the cards, to make an appeal or to refer to anything whatever — neither to God, the devil, nor chance — and therefore you cannot be charged with either of these suggested or supposed evils. But it is easy to reply that even if your remote intention is only to divert yourselves, and to conduct the game fairly, yet a more immediate design professedly intervenes. Namely, it is your actual intention (if you are honest and fair) to put an event out of your own reach, and out of the reach of your partner and company, in order for you to divert yourselves *by it*, and *upon it*. And if you designedly and professedly refer the event away from the determination of all human skill and forethought, then it highly becomes you who cast this lot, to seriously inquire where you refer it to then — remembering at the same time, that whatever your thought is, or whether you have any thought about it or not, it is still a universal truth that *when the lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposal of it is of the Lord*. Do *not* say, professor, that the providence of God has nothing to do with such trifling concerns; for whether we would have it or not, the above quoted text is, and must be, of universal extent. Are these concerns too trivial for divine providence, when *not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, and the very hairs of our heads are all numbered?* Mat 10.29, 30.

I am sorry that I am obliged to inculcate and enforce such plain and universal truths, because they are so evidently infringed upon even by professors themselves, through their being habitually ignorant of the evil included in chance diversions. And surely those amusements can scarcely be called harmless, whose innocence cannot be otherwise supported than by excluding, contracting, or abridging the providence of God.

But I have another serious thought to offer for your consideration, which I cannot but conceive has some weight in it to a serious mind.

You know yourselves that whenever this lot is cast in the diversion, you are more or less concerned about, or concerned with, the event in your mind. Your affections are more or less at work in a way of expectation and hope, to see what advantages chance will give you or deprive you of in the game. And the difference is not very great if you play for but a trifle, or even for nothing. For every person is solicitous and desirous in some degree, to have the advantage of a good hand, either from a principle of interest or of honour. For if you are totally indifferent about the event of the game, and having the advantage in it, you actually lose all pleasure and amusement in the

diversion. It is this hope and concern that is the spring of all your pleasure attending the diversion; and it is this that keeps your attention to it. Accordingly, there is in some degree, a hope of having a good hand, or a fear of having a bad hand. And there is a certain joy and pleasure if the former falls to your lot, and a certain sorrow or grief if the latter comes to your share, by the shuffling and dealing of the cards.

Let me then entreat you to seriously reflect what these affections of the mind are excited by; what they are built upon; and what is their object and their foundation. Isn't it chance, luck, or fortune? If not, then what else can be the ground of these motions and affections from which the primary pleasure of the amusement springs? Certainly you agree to refer the outcome of the event (which raises these internal motions, these hopes, fears, or dependencies) away from all the creatures, from all human skill and power, and to refer it to chance or fortune. If so, isn't it an experimental as well as a constructive substitution of fortune *in place of providence*? See whether this isn't the true state of the case whenever your mind is in any measure agitated with hopes or fears, pleasure or sorrow, about the goodness or badness of the hand. And if this is so, or so far as it is the spring of your attention and pleasure in the game, then what name should we give to this sort of pleasure? And can we wonder that it is so peculiarly ensnaring and intoxicating, as we generally find it to be?

But if what has been said in the way of reasoning on the nature of a lot, and the necessary workings of the mind on the event decided by it, doesn't convey any conviction, then I would try one more method. And that is by making a plain and close appeal to the hearts and consciences of those who have any fear of God before their eyes, concerning the working of their minds, the sentiments of their hearts, and the words of their lips, in the practice of these amusements.

It is possible that you may think there is very little in all this argumentation, concerning the nature and design of a lot. Let it be so, then. But let us next see what the unavoidable consequences and effects of thus trifling with providence are, under the feigned name of *luck* and *fortune*. For frequently, the innocence or evil of anything is best seen in its immediate and universal fruits and effects.

Now I will venture to affirm that this very practice *generally*, and as it were *necessarily*, produces these effects on professors of Christ:

1. Heathenish *sentiments*;
2. Heathenish *language*;
3. Heathenish *affections*; all of which together often introduce,
4. Heathenish *practices*.

You may well be startled at the very proposal of these particulars. However, all I desire is that you give them that weight which, upon a proper examination, they in fact appear to have on yourselves and your experience.

1. *Heathenish sentiments appear to be the unavoidable consequences of this practice*. It actually contracts your notions of divine providence. It makes you ready to imagine that God leaves some events to chance or fortune. And indeed, you dare not be clear, consistent, and properly extensive in your sentiments concerning the divine determination of casual events — not without making some breach upon, or causing some suspicions in your consciences concerning this practice, in which you professedly agree to refer the determination of an event with which you are concerned, away from yourselves, to you know not where. Or at least you dare not think whether it is in fact referred according to the true doctrine of Providence.

This diversion naturally leads you into an opinion that chance presides over and rules the game; that fortune sometimes takes one side and sometimes another, in a sort of arbitrary way. It naturally tends to make you think that some persons are lucky and fortunate, while others are unlucky and unfortunate. To this we may add that there is a multitude of heathenish notions arising from or making their way into your mind, such as: that fortune smiles upon some, and frowns upon others; that if the cards are shuffled in some other manner, or if we change places, etc., this will turn the power of chance another way. Let me ask you freely, whether you find that such imaginations gradually obtain some place in your mind? And surely these conceptions are not only idle, but heathenish and foolish in the highest degree, and have more evil and infection in them than we may be ready to allow at first view. I am indeed very sensible that no judicious, conscientious Christian can embrace such opinions in his sober thoughts. Yet a frequent practice of these games will unavoidably leave their infection on the imagination. And sometimes this is to such a degree that a person actually desires to divert himself this way *because* of the amusement and entertainment that he finds in seeing (he thinks) how fortune shifts sides — desiring and hoping that it may turn about in his own favour. All this will be further confirmed by observing,

2. *That heathenish language appears to be the unavoidable consequence of this practice.* How constantly do we hear the terms *luck, chance, fortune*, in the process of this game? How freely do the gamblers talk of *lucky* persons, *lucky* hands, and fortunate or unfortunate places? This everyone knows is the dialect of the card table. And let me ask you, professor, whether such expressions as these are fit for the lips of a Christian? One would rather think that the very sound of them must be offensive to his ears, and drive him away from the diversion, when he knows that the whole of his phraseology expresses sentiments directly opposite to the Christian doctrine of divine providence. Even further,

3. *Heathenish affections are the unavoidable consequence of this diversion.* From this naturally arise such motions of the soul as these: wishing that fortune may favour us; a hope that it will; and a real dependence upon it for our success in the play; grieving and being uneasy at our fortune if we are particularly unlucky; and envying another whom fortune seems to favour more than us; being pleased and rejoiced when a good hand becomes our share; and then in our minds, insulting those who are not so happy and prosperous in that respect. And therefore, as all persons know that the success of the game very much depends upon chance, so far as a person's heart is concerned with the event (because his interest or honour is involved in it), so far these various affections of the soul are unavoidably moved.

So that, here a vast variety of passions is *fixed* upon chance, and *excited* by it. The desire is moved towards it; dependence is upon it; and when it frowns, there is either submission to it, fretting at it, or envying and grieving at the good fortune of another. It cannot but be acknowledged that these affections, thus excited, frequently work with great strength, and visibly reveal themselves in the countenance, words, and actions. Now, some of these affections are evil in themselves, such as fretfulness and envy. All of them are generally agitated to an immoderate degree. Even those affections which are lawful in themselves — such as hope, fear, submission, dependence and joy — become heathenish and criminal, so far as they have *fortune* for their object and motive.

And if we were to try giving another turn to our account of these affections, and suppose them to be excited *not by chance* but by the view of the *divine decision*, this would only make the matter worse, by introducing apparent profaneness. For certainly you would not choose to call the pleasure felt in having a good hand, “thankfulness to God,” nor this submission if you have a bad hand, “submission to the divine providence” — any more than you would choose to call any degree

of fretfulness or envy in the game, *fretting at the divine disposal*, or call envying another *the advantage that God has given him*.¹

Therefore, look into your own experiences under such diversions, and see how far these sentiments, this language, and these motions of heart, are chargeable against you. Then you will be obliged to allow that the game is very pernicious and intoxicating to you, whether you grant the justness of the foregoing reasonings about the nature of a lot, or not. One can scarcely think that a person who finds and observes these heathenish effects upon himself, would be at any loss to judge where they proceed from. For the very nature of these evil experiences, and the very nature of the evil that is in them, proclaims that they are a practical and experimental substitution of fortune in place of Providence. Upon these principles and observations, we need not wonder if a fondness for, and a pursuit of this diversion, will produce,

4. *Heathenish practices and effects*. It naturally tends to make persons lose their reverence for God in the common affairs of life, and to make them forget that casual events are under the disposal of the great Governor of the universe, by ascribing them to *chance*, without looking any higher. It tends to draw the heart away from God, and to discompose the spirit for devotional exercises. It fills the mind with imaginations, sentiments, wishes, hopes, and dependencies, that are unsuitable to a serious Christian, destructive to the power of godliness, and a never-failing hindrance to the spirit of devotion. It generally precludes the worship of God in the family and in private, or it drives it into a corner. As a relish for this diversion increases, a regard to and a relish for spiritually vital religion proportionally declines. And those who are the most attached to it, are those who live without God in the world.

All this may be turned into an address to all those who occupy themselves in these diversions. Are there any of you whose consciences are struck by these representations and appeals? How deeply you should be humbled before the Lord, that you have walked in the counsel of the ungodly, stood in the way of sinners, and even sat in the seat of the scorner! (Psa 1.1) Beg of God the Holy Spirit to fasten the conviction in your heart like a nail in a sure place, so that you may never more be polluted with these corruptions.

But are there any of you who make a profession of religion, who are still found in and fond of these practices? Give me leave to expostulate matters with you: What is there in this diversion that is so relishable and enchanting to you? Is the pleasure so great, or do you have such a regard for your honour or interest at a game of cards, as to bring them into competition with your reputation as Christians, or the interest of your precious souls?

I would hope that many of you dare not pursue this game with those circumstances of evil that most do, by attending to it at unseasonable hours, with high stakes, in public, or in vain and irreligious company, etc. If any of you are going on in this way, I must proclaim that the fear of God is not before your eyes; and your profession of religion is none other than a snare to your own soul, and a means of hardening the hearts of others. But are there not *some*, even *many* of you, who make no scruple of this game occasionally? You satisfy your mind with this thought: that you practise it but seldom, and you do it at convenient times and in proper company, and can therefore see no harm in it, or find any bad effects from it. Come, let us seriously inquire into this matter.

¹ In other diversions in which the success entirely depends upon the exertions of our own skill or strength, there is no such snare; because in those our hopes or fears, etc. are founded upon a *reality*, and may therefore be very innocent. But in *chance* games, a person is in the utmost danger of letting his affections loose upon that which, if anything, is and can be none other than the Divine Providence, which certainly should not be thus played and trifled with.

Though you may avoid swearing, quarrelling, bad society, and unseasonable hours in this game, does it follow that it is therefore harmless to you? Have you never observed how unfit your frames have been for spiritual devotion after it? Have you never observed it to be a means of contracting or setting aside your family and private duties? Have you never observed what ill effects this occasional practice has upon your children and servants? To come closer, can you avoid its polluting your own mind with unchristian imaginations; or its defiling your lips with a language contrary to the language of Canaan? For my part, I could never see that when Christians meet together for this amusement, they could avoid this heathenish phraseology, or these heathenish perturbations of mind in the game, more than others do.

And although it is too natural for you to make light of these things, yet I must affirm that these workings of affection, and these forms of language you are led into by it, are far from being trivial crimes. I know, indeed, that things of this nature appear very trifling and inconsiderable to those who do not pay a spiritual regard to the first risings of the mind, or to the idle words they speak. But surely, if you have any considerable degree of the fear of God before your eyes, and the love of Christ in your heart, you will think it your indispensable duty to avoid hearing of that which is so heathenish, and to keep yourself from being drawn into those sentiments and affections which such language expresses. These things undoubtedly have in them a species of enthusiasm¹ and infatuation by which the thoughts, the affections, and language, are conversant about a *nonentity* (for such is chance and fortune, separate from the providence of God). And what can be more irrational, what can debase human nature more, than to have its hopes, desires, and dependencies, founded and fixed upon what is really *nothing*? And according to the scriptural and rational account of what you are conversant with in these games, you have the highest reason to suspect you are guilty of, or on the very margin of profaneness and idolatry.

I must now commit the whole to your serious consideration, and to the divine blessing, desiring you to remember that, as it is a game so very dishonourable to professors, so very detrimental in its tendency, and so very infatuating in its influence, its lawfulness *in itself* must be justly suspected. It must be the safest way, to *abstain from it entirely*; and it can only be hazardous to *practise it on any occasion*. If you would keep your consciences clear, and abstain from all appearance of evil, it is highly necessary that you keep at a distance from this diversion lest your ears be defiled with heathenish sounds, your lips with heathenish language, your mind with heathenish sentiments, and your heart with heathenish affections. And don't think it's an easy matter to avoid these evils while falling into the practice; for if you truly attend to and examine your own heart, you will find it really impossible to indulge the game, and yet avoid its snare.

As for you who go on voluntarily and presumptuously in this diversion, making it your constant practice and your great delight, to the neglect or contempt of family or private devotions² — it is very evident that you don't have the fear of God before your eyes. However easy your consciences may be in the midst of these pursuits, take this solemn hint along with you: that for every evil thought, and for every idle word, you must give an account in the day of judgment. (Mat 12.36)

CASE 4. How may a person judge whether a promise or threatening comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the soul?

This Question you will find contained in the following letter:

¹ *Enthusiasm*: derogatory term for an irrational passion or fancy; self-delusion; an ecstatic or frenzied state.

² Originally, “family or closet religion,” referring to praying and worshipping privately (Mat 6.6). — WHG

“Rev. Sir, I am a person who has for some years been a professed follower of Jesus. I have had a place in his house, enjoyed great privileges, and have advantages above many, sitting under a sound, faithful, and tender minister. But under these means of fruitfulness, alas! I seem barren and unprofitable. I am afraid that I go backward in religion, and make advances in sin; and what is worse, my heart is so hard that I don’t mourn over these declensions as I should. Therefore, I fear that I am not properly affected by them. No sooner does a temptation offer itself, than I fall in with it. So that, I often think whether my refraining from gross immoralities is not more for lack of temptations, than from a real hatred of them, and a love for holiness. And yet I hope I sincerely strive, and pray, and resolve against sin in Christ’s strength, being convinced that I have no strength sufficient of my own. But can I sincerely do this, and fall so frequently? I attend on Gospel ordinances; but I fear it is to little purpose, being cold and lifeless under all. I hear the love of Jesus sweetly displayed; but this icy frozen heart is not melted; these languid and lifeless affections are not raised to, nor fixed upon, the divine Redeemer. I cannot call him my Redeemer lest I deceive my own soul; and yet I dare not say that I have no part in him, lest I be ungrateful, and deny his work. Thus I am in a strait. But this I must say, that I desire to call the glorious Saviour my Lord and my God.

Another thing that appears discouraging is this — In an answer to a question sometime since, you proved that Satan often produced passages of Scripture to terrify the trembling Christian. Now, this being the case, may he not transform himself into an angel of light, bring promises to our minds, and so deceive us? If so, how can a poor creature judge when a promise or a threatening comes from God or from Satan; especially when sometimes promises have seemed to be sweetly, seasonably, and powerfully set home upon the soul; and afterwards awful threatenings have appeared to come with equal strength? I beg you will take these things into your consideration, if you think them of sufficient importance. And may the eternal Spirit, whose work it is, direct you to a suitable answer, that I may be capable of judging in some measure about my condition; whether I am but a painted hypocrite, or a real, though I am sure, then, a poor unworthy believer! Oh, that I could experience this made good to my soul! Those who wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength. Now, God is faithful, and the promise is absolute; they shall, etc. Surely then, if I waited properly on the Lord, or was within the bond of the everlasting covenant, this would be my case. I think if I am more lifeless at one time than another, it is at the Lord’s Supper, so that I sometimes think I should sin less in neglecting, than in attending in such an unbecoming frame, as I almost constantly do.

Oh, hard rebellious heart! stupid and ungrateful creature! Surely, if you could see my vileness, you would never judge favourably of my state.”

This case consists of a variety of particulars, which it would not be well to pass over without notice. I would, therefore,

I. Consider some of the particular circumstances mentioned here; and then,

II. Answer this important question: How may a person judge whether a promise or threatening comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the soul?

I. Let’s take a view of the particular circumstances or complaints which this case consists of. These we find are various. Here is barrenness and unfruitfulness under the abundant means mentioned. Here coldness and lifelessness are complained of. Here there is a fear of going backward, and yet a mind that is not suitably affected by it. This person particularly complains of deadness at the Lord’s Supper, and of being carried away with temptations. These occasion a fear, lest his

abstaining from gross immoralities arises from a lack of temptations, rather than from a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness. He is in a strait whether to conclude he has an interest in Christ or not. He is afraid that his frequent falls are inconsistent with an experience of the grace of God. And lastly, he is ready to conclude that he would sin less in neglecting the Lord's Supper, than in attending the ordinance, because of his great coldness there. These are the various complaints this person makes, all of which are suitable to the experience of the Christian, and therefore deserve consideration.

Time indeed forbids our taking particular notice of every one; yet I would not wholly neglect them. And therefore I will make a few general observations which will refer to them all in some respect, and tend to direct, encourage, and strengthen the Christian under his various fears.

1. It is an unspeakable mercy when we have a deep and humbling sense of our barrenness, deadness, and unprofitableness, and to be enabled to spread it before the Lord. Some persons are indeed mere cumberers of the ground. They bring forth no real fruit, and yet they are entirely unconcerned about it. They enjoy all the privileges of the Gospel; they are favoured with all the means of grace; and yet they are absolutely unaffected by the great concerns of eternity. They are strangers to all real religion. But notwithstanding all this, they think well of themselves, and say hypocrite-like, *Stand by yourself, and don't come near us; for we are holier than thou*. How awful to be in such a condition! But is this *your* case, my dear friend? You find a coldness and indifference under these means, and are afraid you are going backward rather than forward. You complain of hardness and insensibility; but remember, *felt* hardness is not *real* hardness. It is a blessing rather than a judgment, and therefore it calls for thankfulness. It is a stupidity that is felt and lamented over, but not like the absolute stupidity of the impenitent sinner. Don't you carry your complaints to God, and tell him of your coldness, your fears, your insensibility? Don't you appear humble in your own eyes on this account? Aren't you accusing yourself of your ingratitude, and abhorring yourself for your vileness? This is no evidence of a hypocrite, but rather of a real Christian. A hypocrite who abstains from outward immoralities, thinks all is well with him; but the Christian appears vile and odious in his own eyes on account of the sinfulness of his heart. Though he has no public sins to charge himself with, yet when he looks within, he finds enough to make himself appear vile and despicable. It is a peculiar mercy to be made sensible of the plague, the wickedness, the coldness of our heart, and to be deeply humbled under it. The Spirit of God always shows the Christian what he is, so that he may the more readily acquiesce in the method of salvation exhibited in the Gospel. Be thankful then, Christians, that your souls are not absolutely frozen and benumbed, but that you are sensible of, alarmed at, and humbled for your indifference and lukewarmness, barrenness and unfruitfulness, under the means of grace.

2. It is good evidence of our being Christians indeed, when we are not easy and contented under such a sense of our barrenness and coldness, but find our heart filled with desires for, and enabled to endeavour after greater holiness. Are you satisfied with complaints? Or do you think it is enough to mention them? Do you willingly rest here? Do you find no self-abhorrence on account of these things, no desires for liveliness of soul, no concern to have things better with you? Don't you pray for, endeavour and strive after, greater degrees and measures of grace? Then you are asleep indeed, and it is high time to awake! It is an awful circumstance to be like the door on its hinges, and to have no desire for an alteration! — awful to sit down, and feebly wish to be better, but cannot find a heart to pray and endeavour for a more spiritual frame and a growing conformity to God! This is sometimes pretty nearly the case with the Christian when he is under the power of any particular corruption. Sin has caused too great an insensibility in his soul, and all his spiritual

powers appear asleep; this was the case with David when Nathan came to him. But is it thus with you, my Christian mourner? May I answer for you, and say, No? Are you satisfied to be in such a condition? Don't you desire and long to have it otherwise with you? Indeed, don't you pray, and cry, and strive to have all things altered with you? Are you contented with feeble wishes? Sometimes, my friend, you may appear to yourself to be in such a condition. But at other times aren't you full of holy concern about it? Don't you call upon your sleepy soul to awake? Don't you beg to feel the love of Christ melting your hard and stony heart? Before your duties, aren't you concerned to be kept from coldness and indifferency? And at the close of your duties, aren't you humbled and ashamed under a view of your great imperfections? And don't you apply afresh to the blood of Christ for pardon? And isn't all this evidence of the Christian? Isn't there in all this a sense of the excellence of holiness, a real love for it, and therefore an evidence of a work of grace in the heart? Oh, bless God, that it is thus with you: that you can appeal to Him, that you would have your soul filled with greater love for Him, and brought into a warmer and livelier frame!

3. We should not make our fluctuating frames, nor our being led away by a particular temptation, a mark of our being hypocrites. We are not to judge ourselves by *one particular action* in our lives, or by an unbecoming frame — which we may be led into through the power of temptation — but by the *general tendency* of our desires, frames, and conversation. Sometimes you find all dark within; you cannot call Christ your Saviour. Sometimes you find a sad numbness; your soul seems like the earth in winter-frost, hard and incapable of impression; the love of a compassionate Saviour does not melt you when you hear it. All this is consistent with the real experience of the grace of God. These different frames are not uncommon. What must we conclude from them? They only show us the difference between earth and heaven, intimate the state of imperfection we are in, and the sad influence of sin even in a renewed heart. But they do not by any means give us reason to conclude that we are but almost-Christians. The hypocrite is generally in *one* frame, but the Christian's frames are ever fluctuating. His sky is not always clear: but just as the natural sky is sometimes serene, and appears beautiful and pleasant, and other times is stormy, dark, and tempestuous, so is it with a Christian's soul. Do not then draw any discouraging conclusion from your various frames. Let a consideration of it keep you humble, make you watchful, and fill you with warmer desires for the heavenly world, where your love will never grow cool, nor your enjoyments meet with any interruption. But do not conclude from this that you are not Christians indeed.

4. We should ever maintain a godly jealousy over our heart; we should take care and guard against unbelief. We should ever rejoice with trembling. Upon every irruption of sin and interruption in our frames, we should take the alarm, inquire into the reason for it, and watch the heart with all diligence, knowing it is *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*.^{Jer 17.9} Yet we are not to give way to disputes and unbelief, because our hearts are indeed treacherous. If we did so, we might always be under the power of distressing fears, and never enjoy any satisfaction or peace — saying to ourselves, “We may be deceived.” There is a great difference between a godly *jealousy*, and *unbelief*. If, after examination, our conscience does not condemn us, we have no reason to be uneasy. The person who submitted this case doesn't know what conclusion to draw concerning himself. He is afraid to say he is a Christian, for there are so many circumstances that appear discouraging; and yet he would not deny what God has done for him. Don't hesitate between two opinions.^{1Kng 18.21} If (so far as you know your own heart) you have been enabled to surrender yourself to Jesus Christ, and receive him in all his characters — if your conscience does not contradict you when you say you hope you love the Redeemer — you may, and should draw a favourable conclusion concerning your state, and wait for the clearer testimony of the Spirit to

make it plain to you. Do not, my friend, be always disputing; that can be of no service to your soul. It will break in upon your peace, dishonour God, and perhaps provoke him to leave you in the dark. Oh, hope and trust! Do not cast away your confidence. Endeavour to live in a thankful frame, considering what God has done for you; and rejoice in the evidences of his distinguishing grace; and give God all the glory.

5. We may be growing Christians, and yet not find our affections always lively. If we judge our state and our progress in grace by our affections, we will be in danger either of running into all the wild reveries of enthusiasm, or else of falling into despair. Affections may be raised, and yet there be no grace. And on the other hand, we may have our affections dull, or seem almost to be void of affections when compared with some persons; and yet we may not only *have* grace, but be *growing* in grace. Our affections may not be lively, and our souls all on fire; and yet we may really love Christ, and be making some progress in the divine life. Young Christians are often led by affection; therefore their hopes are ever fluctuating. If they are not lively, they conclude they are no better than hypocrites. Constitution makes a great difference as to the liveliness or dullness of our affections; and so does the present state of the body. These things should always be considered. Some can weep at pleasure; while others are incapable of shedding a tear. Some appear all alive; others are of a heavier cast, and yet are solid growing Christians, and have a rich experience in divine things.

It is doubtless pleasant and profitable too, to have our affections raised by divine truths. When our chariot-wheels move on swiftly, and the fire burns within us, it is sweet meditating, praying, reading, hearing, or conversing. Yet we must not altogether judge the work of God in the soul, by the liveliness of our affections. Indeed, when a person who is naturally of lively affections, finds a growing coldness and indifference to spiritual duties, and is all alive when pursuing the things of the senses, it is a sad sign of at least a bad frame. But even if he doesn't find his soul lively in duty, if he is labouring after a greater deadness to the world — if he is secretly mourning after God, and lamenting over sin; if he is pressing on towards the mark and seeking after a greater conformity to Jesus; if he is more careful against sin, and watchful over his own heart — then he is a growing Christian, even if in waiting upon God he may not find his affections so lively as he would. The tree not only grows in summer when it appears in all its gaiety, but even in winter, when it appears to the eye as dead. So the Christian in his winter seasons may grow in humility, in a knowledge of his own heart, and in love for Christ and holiness, though clouds and darkness are round about him, and his countenance may wear an awful gloom.

6. Lifelessness and coldness in ordinances, should not discourage us from waiting upon God in them. If we must leave off waiting upon God for this, then the ordinances must not be administered — because all Christians at times feel this coldness.

We should be humbled for it, but not discouraged. It is unpleasant to find a deadness in our spirits; but it should not cause us to stumble. We should search into the reasons for it. Perhaps you have taken no pains with yourself to get your soul into a warm frame before you came to ordinances. Don't be surprised then, that the Spirit was withdrawn. Perhaps you were not so concerned as you ought to be, to keep a strict watch over your heart in ordinances. Or perhaps there is some sin you have been guilty of, which is not yet lamented over. God may therefore stand at a distance, and your souls be cold and lifeless. Inquire, therefore, into the reason for your coldness, and endeavour to get it removed; but don't be discouraged. This person particularly complains that if he is more lifeless at one time than another, it is at the Lord's Supper. Therefore he imagines that he would sin less in neglecting it, than in attending to it. This is no natural consequence. It may

be your duty to attend at the Lord's table; yet in some circumstances you may be out of the way by duty. Perhaps you may have placed too much dependence on the ordinance, and thought that there you must always be comfortable and lively. God has therefore disappointed your expectations, so that you may be taught not to lay such a stress upon ordinances. Perhaps you depended too much upon your preparations; or else you have rushed too boldly upon the ordinance. Or perhaps God may, for the trial of your faith and patience, withdraw his special presence from you, to *humble* you and to lead you to a greater *dependence* on Jesus Christ.

If you desire to wait upon Christ with spiritual views, and in a spiritual frame — if you are watchful over your heart, and labour after a quickening view of the love of Jesus, and a true sense of the nature and design of the ordinance — then go on waiting upon him. In time, he may give you his comforting presence. Remember, you are not singular in your complaints; and you may receive real advantage from an ordinance, even though you may not be in so desirable a frame as you could wish. Having given you these few hints for your encouragement and direction, I now proceed to consider the particular question proposed here:

II. How may a person judge whether a promise or a threatening comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the soul?

The occasion of this question is as follows: this person found some of the promises of God's word brought with a peculiar sweetness and power upon his mind; and these were succeeded by awful threatenings which appeared to come with equal force. Now, it is of great importance to know whether these come from the Spirit of God, or from Satan; or which of these properly belong to us and points out our state, whether the promise or the threatening. Thus we may not deceive ourselves with false hopes on the one hand, and not give way to unbelief on the other, if we have encouragement to hope. Satan often transforms himself into an angel of light, as well as appearing in the character of a roaring lion; and he makes use both of Scripture promises and threatenings to carry on his purposes. It is thus a matter of importance to be able to distinguish when these come from Satan, and when from God. I will therefore hint at two or three things which I hope will be sufficient to direct and guide us in this interesting affair.

1. Let us inquire, how we may know whether a promise, or any comfortable portion of Scripture, that is brought to our minds, comes from God, or from Satan. And to guide us in our determination of this, we should always consider the circumstances and state of our soul at the time when the promise comes to us, and the immediate end and design — the tendency and influence it has upon us.

(1.) We should consider the circumstances we are in when a promise or a comfortable portion of Scripture comes to us. For instance — Are we living in the practice of known sins? Are we secretly or openly gratifying any particular lust? Are we living in the omission of evident appointed duties? If a promise comes to us in such circumstances, to encourage us with the hopes of heaven, we have reason to question that it comes from God, because we cannot suppose He will manifest himself to any who are walking in evident disobedience to his commands. Is a Christian under the power of any particular corruption? Is he sleepy, dead, and careless? He has reason to question whether a comforting promise comes from God, if any such promise comes before his mind, unless he has been humbled for his backslidings, and has fled to the blood of Jesus for pardon. God has always chastised his people and frowned upon them, when running astray from him. *Psa 89.30-33*. Therefore David himself was sorely distressed after he had been guilty of adultery and murder. All antinomian principles and practices are justly detestable in

the sight of God; and so they ought to be detestable in ours. Will God comfort a creature that is wallowing in all the mire of sin? No: if you are a lover of sin, you have no promise from God to support you; and whatever promise of that kind comes before you, is brought by Satan, who endeavours to entertain the hypocrite with the pleasing hopes of heaven, and so to lead him into a dangerous security. *Examine then your circumstances.* How is it with you when a promise comes? Has your case been represented as above? Then your circumstances are awful and melancholy indeed! But if your soul is in darkness, mourning and longing after an absent Lord; if you are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. If you are seeking after a sense of the love of God, walking humbly with him, and pressing towards greater degrees of holiness, or in this case, when any promise is brought to your mind with any degree of power, you may conclude that it comes from the Spirit of God.¹

(2.) We should inquire into the immediate end and tendency of a promise brought to us, and its influence upon us. For example — If it lulls us to security, and gives us any hopes of eternal life, even if we are careless and indolent; if it leads us to presumption, encourages us to sin, and yet assures us of an interest in Jesus Christ — then we may look at it as coming from Satan, who is willing to give us all possible encouragement, provided it doesn't produce in us a hatred of sin, and a love for holiness. But if, on the other hand, when the promise comes, it melts our hard heart and fills us with admiration for the love and rich distinguishing grace of God; if it not only scatters our fears, and fills us with joy, but makes us humble; if it more endears a Saviour to us, and tends to bring us into a greater conformity to God; if in the end it leads us into a more evangelical frame, even that frame that honours God, and is suited to the scheme of salvation in the Gospel, then we may conclude it comes from God and not from the enemy. A promise, having such an influence upon the soul, answers all the ends for which it is revealed. Now, we cannot suppose that Satan would bring a promise to answer these important purposes. This would be acting against himself, and destroying his own kingdom. For the humbler we are, the more Christ is endeared to us, and the less is Satan's influence upon us. Thus we have reason to conclude that a promise in these circumstances comes from God.

2. Let us now consider threatenings and awful passages of Scripture. There are a variety of these in the word of God, and they are designed for usefulness; yet they are often made use of to answer other purposes. So it is of importance to us to know when these come to us from the Spirit of God, and when from the enemy. Now, we may take the same method in judging these, as we did in judging promises, namely, consider the circumstances we are in, view the end and design of threatenings when they come, and then examine their influence on us. Thus, if threatenings or awful passages of Scripture come with a design to rob us of our spiritual comfort, to stagger our faith, and bring us into despair, then we may conclude they come from Satan, and not from God. But if we are slothful and secure; if we have been running into sin, omitting known duties, and are not yet awake; if the means that have been used have not been effectual to revive us, and these threatenings or awful passages seem brought to our minds with a design to rouse us and to stir us up to greater diligence in our Christian course; if, in the end, they have this influence on us, then

¹ I may here add one way by which we may know whether we have an interest in the promises we find in the word of God. We may generally observe something in a promise, that is descriptive of the persons who have an interest in it. Thus, that glorious promise in Isa 41.10; "Fear not; for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." This promise is evidently made to those who fear God is not with them, and are dismayed, lest God should not be their God. Those, then, that are in these circumstances, have an interest in this promise. Thus we may find something in most other promises and comfortable passages of Scripture, to direct us whether we have an interest in them or not.

we may conclude they come from God. For these are the purposes they are designed to meet. We have a variety of passions to work upon. Promises, endearing representations of the love of Christ, etc. are designed to touch the finer springs of human nature, and to move the softer passions. Threatenings and awful representations of hell, etc. are designed to alarm us, to compel, and as it were, *drive* us. Thus God makes use of various arguments to begin and carry on his work in us.

We should make this use, then, of the more awful parts of Scripture. A view of them, should make us admire that grace which has plucked us like brands out of everlasting burnings; fill us with a godly jealousy over our heart; make us seriously inquire whether we are Christians indeed; and stir us up to press forward with growing cheerfulness, towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. When threatenings appear to be brought with this view, and when they have this influence on us, they are used as means in the hands of God for our good. But when they forbid our hopes, and draw us to despair, we may conclude there is the hand of Satan in it. On the whole, so far as threatenings promote our greater holiness and spiritual advantage, they are useful and fit their end. But so far as they weaken our hands, discourage our souls, and lead us from God, they are made use of by the enemy of souls for our spiritual hurt. Thus, you who have had promises or threatenings, or both, come upon your mind with any degree of force, inquire what circumstances you were in, what the direct tendency of these promises or threatenings was, and what influence they had on you. And from this you may in some measure determine whether they came from God, or from the enemy. I will now conclude with one remark.

How glorious is heaven, and how happy is the believer there! *Here* we are fluctuating between hope and fear; we often “hang our harp upon the willows;” ^{Psa 137.2} we water our couch with tears and are exposed to the fury of the roaring lion. Oh, what a happy alteration, when we reach the mansions above, to find all sin perfectly destroyed, and every fear scattered! No longer to know what it is to be in darkness, or what the least degree of coldness means! Oh what a desirable state! to be present with the Lord, and to find his presence animating our souls with the noblest ardour in his service! to have the whole conduct of providence laid before us, and every mystery sweetly unravelled! to look back upon the many instances of divine wisdom and grace in our salvation! to find ourselves safely gotten over Jordan, and appearing in all the glory of the children of God, and triumphing as kings and priests! Blessed world!

“Hail, happy day when it will be thus with me! Come, you important period, when this earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved! Haste that joyful moment when I will at once be delivered from all my sins, and all my sorrows; when I will no longer stand in need of promises or threatenings — the one to comfort, the other to quicken me — having the glorious uninterrupted views of my exalted Mediator; and the sweetest, fullest manifestations of his love to keep the sacred fire ever burning in me! — to fill me with joy unspeakable, and to engage my unwearied and everlasting praises!”

Thus may we long and breathe for the heavenly state, and in God’s own time, make the glorious change. Amen.

CASE 5. How far may a person judge the strength or weakness of his faith by the brightness or darkness of his frame?

The growth of grace in the heart of a true believer is a very mysterious thing. And there is scarcely any particular thing by which Christians in general are more puzzled, and in which they are more frequently mistaken, than in judging the strength or weakness of their graces. It is very common for those to judge they are declining in spiritual experience, who are in reality growing apace in

the divine life; and for those to esteem themselves improving, who are in reality decaying and withering. I cannot help but apprehend that the foundation of these mistakes, does not lie in their improperly distinguishing between faith and frames. We are apt to judge the former by the latter — accounting our faith and other graces to be strong, when our frames are comfortable and lively; and thinking that faith must certainly be weak when our frames are very dark and distressing. But if this rule were just and valid, there would be no manner of difficulty in measuring the degree of grace in us, because no believer can be at a loss to know whether he is in a comfortable or uncomfortable frame. But it is very evident that this is an improper standard by which to measure the degrees of grace, because nothing is more variable than our frames, as they are continually waxing and waning. In this respect, we are scarcely a day at a standstill. Indeed, an hour often makes a great alteration in this. By contrast, it cannot be supposed that grace itself is so very changeable — for “the path of the just is like the shining light, that shines more and more till the perfect day.” Pro 4.18.

This case is taken under consideration in consequence of two distinct letters transmitted to me. The one regards comfortable frames, and the other uncomfortable ones. These two letters contain several experimental queries and difficulties, all of which, centre in, and may be solved by, a proper answer to the single question specified above. The letters themselves, you will find afterward inserted in their proper places, where a distinct answer is given to them.

Therefore, if you would, please attend seriously to the following observations relating to *faith* and *frames*.

1. A strong faith tends to produce and promote a bright and comfortable frame. This must be granted from the nature of saving faith, and from the express declarations of the divine word. Nothing tends more to take away our doubts, to clear up our evidences, and to comfort our heart, than the strong and lively exercise of a living faith in the Lord Jesus, as a free and complete Saviour. Faith is often set in opposition to distressing fears. “I will trust,” says the church, “and not be afraid.” Isa 12.2 We read likewise of the joy of faith, and the assurance of faith; of being filled with all joy and peace in believing, and of rejoicing by faith in Christ, with “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” 1Pet 1.8 These Scripture phrases sufficiently testify that there is no better way of having our evidences clear, and our comforts strong, than by exercising our faith, trust, and dependence on a free and glorious Saviour. If we would be truly comfortable, then let us desire and endeavour to live by faith in Christ, and aim at direct acts of reclining on him. For the more we can, by the realizing and appropriating acts of faith, the more we can see of the freeness and fulness of divine grace in Christ, the more we will experience evangelical supports and consolations.

On the contrary, we must observe that,

2. The weakness of faith tends to promote and produce dark and uncomfortable frames. For since fear and faith are set in direct opposition to each other, as faith declines, so our fears will prevail in proportion. The declining of faith in its strength and activity, gives way for our corruptions to work — for temptations to assault and overpower us, and for distressing fears to arise. Then the light of God’s countenance withdraws, and our evidences for heaven are darkened and clouded. As soon as we begin to distrust the power of Christ, the faithfulness of the promises, or the absolute freeness of grace, we are sinking. Thus Peter, walking on the water at Christ’s command, and in Christ’s strength, is upheld as if walking on firm ground — so long as his faith in Christ’s power and kindness is maintained. But no sooner does he attend to the boisterousness of the wind, and withdraw his dependence from Christ, than he begins to sink — his heart sinks within him, and his body sinks in the waves. And mark what a tender and instructive rebuke Christ gives him

on that occasion, Mat 14.31, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Much doubting argues for little faith. Nothing can be more prejudicial both to our comfort and holiness, than to suspect the almighty power and free grace of Christ.

These two observations being made and proved, some may be ready to imagine it necessarily follows that we are to judge the strength or weakness of our faith, in all cases, by the brightness or darkness of our frames. And that conclusion would be just, if it were not for the two following observations. For notwithstanding all that has been said or allowed, yet,

3. A believer may be in a dark and uncomfortable frame, and yet be strong in faith. And that is not only in the grace of faith, but in its exercise too. I acknowledge that at first view, this may seem mysterious, and contradictory to what has been declared. And it is this one thing that perplexes and stumbles our friend, who wrote one of the letters, when he asks, “Are not light and peace the peculiar privileges and effects of faith?” This consideration, my friend, is perplexing not only to you, but to many others. Let me, therefore, attempt to show you in a plain and evident manner, how this case really stands. “Are light and peace the peculiar effects of faith?” I answer, *yes*; but not in such a way that it supposes all our distress and darkness must arise from the want or weakness of faith. A few scriptural instances will make this appear abundantly evident. What do you think of the condition of the church as expressed in Mic 7.8? The church at that time was in great darkness, and under heavy complaints, and yet it was strong in faith, very strong, as it appears from the language used there, “Do not rejoice against me, my enemy! When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light to me.”

Again, wasn’t Job in a very dark frame, and under great agony of spirit, when he says, “Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him”? Job 13.15.

And what will we say concerning the poor woman of Canaan, mentioned in Mat 15.21-28, who renewed her petition, and would not be driven away by the seeming repulses she met with from the Lord Jesus? Wasn’t her agony great, her soul in deep distress, when she heard our Lord say, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to dogs”? But it is undoubtedly clear that her faith was *real* — yes, that it was very strong, vehement, and skilful in its exercise under this distress when she replied, “Truly, Lord; yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Such instances which I have adduced here, are frequently brought out as proofs of real faith, even though attended with weakness, doubts, and fears. But in reality, these are specimens of faith in its *strongest* efforts and acts.

Therefore, you may well ask, how can these things be? If the strength of faith tends toward a bright frame, and the weakness of faith toward a dark frame, how is it possible that faith should be so lively and strong, and yet the experience of the soul be so distressed and complaining? I will endeavour to explain this paradox by a familiar simile. Compare spiritual things with natural; and let the strength of faith be represented by bodily strength. A person may indeed be very strong in his body, and exercise that strength to the utmost when under a very heavy burden, and not be so easy or comfortable as someone who has only half his strength, and has no burden, or only a light one to carry. We are not to judge that a person is weak merely because he faints, and pants, and labours; nor are we to judge a person is strong, merely because he seems lively and active. We must consider the burdens a person has to bear, or the difficulties he has to encounter, in order to pass a right judgment on his ability. Now apply this to a similar case in spiritual affairs. If a person who is strong in faith is tested, has many great duties to perform, or many and heavy trials to struggle with, or many weighty burdens upon him — these things may so bring his strong faith to a standstill or difficulty, as to make him ready to sink and fail. These may take away or suppress

all the sensible pleasure and joy of faith, and make him complain as under distress and darkness. Thus you see faith may be very strong, and very strong in its exercise too, and yet yield no sensible pleasure or exultation because of the great things it has to conflict with and fight against.

These thoughts may likewise help our conceptions in the last observation, which is that,

4. A person may be very weak in faith, and yet his frames be bright and comfortable. This is a case that is not at all uncommon among Christians. Observe the newly converted person, who has just been brought out of darkness into light; he has the principle of grace *newly* implanted. We cannot suppose that such a person, commonly, is strong in faith, when the seed has only just been sown in his heart, or has just sprung up. And yet we find this newborn babe in Christ is frequently favoured with peculiar joys and consolations. And it is very clear that this newly regenerate person does not have his faith strengthened or established yet, notwithstanding all his exultations and spiritual delights. For if there is but a little withdrawal of the light of God's countenance, or if he is assaulted by just a small temptation, we find his faith then appears to be exceedingly weak or unskilful. It is not able to withstand the shock of the temptation, or is not sufficiently skilful to expound the meaning of the spiritual withdrawal. A very little change in experience often stumbles the faith, shakes the hope, and discourages the heart of someone who is newly convinced and comforted. This surely is an infallible indication that his faith is weak, even though he may be favoured with much spiritual sweetness and delight. A little child may well imagine he is a strong man, because he is bounced on his father's knees, and enjoys his father's smiles — just as a newly converted person may conclude his case is firm, because his spiritual comforts are enlarged.

Nor should we confine this remark to the newborn babe in Christ; because there are many who have had some standing in the grace of Christ, and yet remain very weak in knowledge, and very feeble in their faith. And these we find are sometimes favoured with great spiritual enjoyments. Their corruptions are suppressed, their evidences clear, by the Spirit shining on his own work. And for that reason, they cannot help but be comfortable and joyful in their frames for a season. Now their souls are saying, "My mountain stands strong, and I will never be moved." *Psa 30.6-7* Yet, no sooner does God hide his face, or permit a corruption to arise, than their souls are frightened, and their hearts discouraged. This is a plain token that their *faith* is really weak, at the very time when their *comforts* are strong. And thus it comes to pass that those who are weak in faith, are sometimes the most comfortable; and those who are strong in faith, often have less of these spiritual enjoyments.

These things being premised, may we not gather from this a true answer to the questions proposed in the two letters, which occasioned this discourse? They may thus be disposed:

1. How will we know whether the darkness of our frames arises from the weakness of our faith?

This query, in substance, seems to be aimed at in one of the letters which runs like this:

"Sir — I am one who, through rich grace, has been taught to know and feel I am a sinner. And I have been favoured with a clear manifestation of the love of God in Christ Jesus, by the teachings and witnessings of the Spirit. Yet I sometimes walk in darkness. I humbly beg leave to propose the following questions to you: What is the cause of this darkness? Doesn't it proceed from corruptions within, from temptations without — from the omission of duty, or the commission of sin? How may I be able to judge the cause when I am under such a dark experience and clouded evidences, that I cannot see the one whom my soul loves? Aren't light and peace the peculiar privileges and effects of faith? O, sir, I am often apt to distress my soul, thinking I have sinned and caused the Lord to hide away his face from me."

In answer to these affecting queries, I must say, If you, my friend, are conscious of the commission of any particular sin, or of the omission of any particular known duty, this consciousness will certainly enfeeble your confidence in God, and it will cause you to walk in darkness and distress. And you can never arrive at true comfort again until you have been enabled to frankly confess your sin with humble shame and self-abhorrence, and to make a fresh application *for*, and a fresh application *of*, the atoning blood of Christ, by a living faith. Witness what the holy Psalmist wrote in Psa 32.3-5: while he kept silence, and would not — whether through shame, fear, or pride — genuinely admit before the Lord his guilt and sin. His distress increased, and he could gain no ease or relief. But when his heart was opened, and he said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” *then* he received a sweet sense of free pardon.

Contracted guilt is a very sufficient cause of darkness; and you can expect nothing else than that God should frown upon your soul, or hide his face from you, and leave you to sorrow, and anguish of spirit. Your conscience should therefore seriously inquire into this matter. And if upon inquiry, it is found that something done or neglected lies at the bottom of the spiritual complaint, you can receive no true consolation until you have, with humble shame and by a humble faith, cast your burden on the Lord. ^{Psa 55.22} And let me entreat you to beware of any consolation that does not come in by this door.

With regard to corruptions from within, or temptations from without, these likewise may be the cause of the darkness of your frames, and cast a cloud over your evidences. But in this case, it does not directly follow that your faith is weak. If these corruptions are unallowed and lamented, and these temptations are opposed and resisted, there may be great grace and strong faith exercised in these circumstances. It is true that such corruptions and temptations will necessarily rob you of your comfort, and hinder you from a free and delightful enjoyment of God, so long as they are permitted to assault and perplex you. But if these disagreeable trials and experiences do not sink you into discouragement, and only quicken and excite you to fight against the temptations, and to mortify the corruption, in the strength of Christ, then your faith is strong, even though your soul is disquieted. While faith is acting under these disadvantages, it is incapable of filling you with joy and consolation until it has gained some conquest over these enemies of your peace. But it may yet be vigorous in its exercise, to withstand these temptations and to plead the promises for deliverance from the power of these rising corruptions.

By the foregoing thoughts you may judge whether the darkness of your frames arises from the weakness of your faith, or not. If under these complaints, your heart sinks, and your spirits are discouraged, so that you are ready to lay down the weapons of opposition and to quit the field of battle — then this is a sign that your faith is weak. But when a veil is cast over your evidences, if you are enabled to exercise direct acts of reliance and dependence on Christ; or when corruption arises or temptation assaults, if you are not sunk but only humbled by it, and quickened to fly to Christ for strength to mortify sin and overcome temptation; and you are determined still to fight and pray, to pray and fight against these spiritual enemies — then the darkness of your soul does not arise from the weakness of your faith, but it should be looked at as only a trial and proof of its strength.

2. How will we know whether the brightness of our frames arises from the strength of our faith?

Some believers have little or no notion of any comfort or spiritual satisfaction, except what arises from reflection or self-examination. And therefore they bend their whole course this way in order to attain bright frames and comfortable evidences; and they are ready to look at the satisfaction they obtain in this manner as the assurance of faith, and almost as the only proof of the strength

of this excellent grace. Others are for paying such regard to the comfort arising from direct acts of faith upon Christ, that they are tempted to despise or neglect the great duty of self-examination. But it is highly necessary to keep a proper balance between these two extremes in order to know whether the degree of our consolation and satisfaction proceeds from the growth and exercise of this noble principle.

It will be proper to introduce in this place, the substance of the other letter, which runs to this effect:

“Sir — I have for many years past made it my constant practice to set apart a serious hour for self-examination; and as the word of God is the only unerring rule by which to judge spiritual things, I have (after earnest prayer for the assistance of the blessed Spirit) taken some text of Scripture, such as “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” In prosecuting the solemn inquiry, I have endeavoured to discover the account of faith, its fruits and effects, as described in the word of God. The effect of this practice as to my comfort, has been various, as I could more or less discover the Spirit’s work on my heart. Now sir, the question I would humbly propose is this: “Whether a believer may not warrantably take comfort from the Spirit’s work on his heart, as evidence of his interest in Christ?”

This serious letter describes a practice that I would earnestly recommend to all those who desire to go safely and comfortably on the way to heaven. As for the question proposed here, I would answer without the least hesitation, that a believer may and should, upon serious examination and prayer, take comfort from, be thankful for, and rejoice in, every evidence of true grace as so many seals of the Spirit, by which the believer is sealed up until the day of redemption. But then remember that the comforts arising from this are, of themselves, no evidence of the growth or strength of faith. For if a believer receives the whole of his comfort from the satisfaction that he gathers this way, it is proof that his faith is really very weak — indeed, the comfort itself will prove wavering and uncertain. Our friend justly acknowledges this in his letter, when he says that the effect of his practice has been varied as to its comfort. And it is no wonder; for if a person builds his hopes on his evidences, they will be found a very uncertain basis — these evidences are sometimes clear, and sometimes cloudy and dark. But blessed be God! *These* are not the ground of our hope; for that hope does not consist in anything wrought in us, but in the absolute freeness of grace in Christ. It is for any poor distressed soul to lay hold of, fly to, and rest upon. This freeness of grace is an everlasting and stable foundation which does not change with our frames. And I am truly persuaded that many believers are so attached to comfort drawn from *evidences* (as if it were the only comfort), that they have very much lost the strength and skill of *faith*. For the business of faith is not to live and depend on a work of grace in us, but to refer ourselves humbly and confidently to the free and powerful grace of God outside of us — under a real sight and conviction of our own weakness, emptiness, pollution, guilt, and unworthiness.

But, if you would know whether the comforts you obtain by self-examination are attended with the growth and vigour of faith, it is necessary that you inquire into their nature and kind. Perhaps it may be only a cold *speculative* satisfaction. By the exercise of reason, you compare your experience with the word of God, and so you coldly draw the important conclusion, but feel no endearing, enlivening, and sanctifying effect from it. If this is all, then there is nothing here of the work of faith, or the exercise of grace in it. Indeed, it is possible for the comfort obtained in this way to be of a soul-stupefying nature. Once you have drawn this conclusion, it is used only to still the anxieties and relieve the distresses of the soul, in order to make you more contented under the prevalence of some corruption, under the consciousness of some guilt, or under the power of a

carnal frame. If this is the tendency of the satisfaction you gain by self-examination, then it is a sad sort of comfort indeed! Let the inference be drawn with ever so much justness or clearness, it will yet prove the soul is in a dangerous or declining frame.

Once more: a believer in performing the duty of self-examination, ought to take especial care about the *ends* he has in doing it. What is it that you aim at in searching after evidences of grace within you? Is it to obtain an assurance that your state is safe, so that you may silence the clamours of a guilty conscience; or remove that uneasiness which your mind feels because of the power of corruption or carnal security; or to soothe your mind with the thought that all is well because you have a secure interest in Christ, and in the covenant? If this is your aim and desire, give me the freedom to say that this is to *continue in sin, because grace abounds*.^{Rom 6.1} And therefore evidences thus obtained and thus employed, are exceedingly dangerous and very suspicious.

But if you seek after and improve the evidences of a work of grace in your soul, to help you forward in further acts of faith in Christ — to encourage you to be more frequent, fervent, and confident in your application to Christ for fresh supplies of soul-sanctifying, sin-subduing, and heart-strengthening grace — then your comfort is of the right kind, and the brightness of your frame proves the strength of your faith.

On the whole, we may gather —

3. How we may know whether our faith is strong or weak, whatever our frames may be? It is not our being in a dark frame, but our being so *discouraged* by it as to lay down our weapons against sin and Satan in a kind of despairing way. This is what proves the weakness of our faith. It is not our being in a bright frame, but our being quickened and encouraged by it to fly to Christ, and to trust in him for further grace and strength. This is what proves the strength of our faith. If our frames are dark, gloomy, and distressing; and these distresses quicken our desires for saving grace; and we are excited to make earnest prayers and fiducial pleadings for the blessings of grace, and to fight against sin and temptation in the strength of Christ — this proves that our faith is strong, even if our comforts are be very low, and our sorrows very great. If our frames are bright and delightful, and our souls take all our comfort from what we *feel*, and we begin to trust in or rest satisfied with grace received — this proves that our faith is weak and unskilful, even if our comforts are strong, and our evidences are clear to ourselves.

I will conclude the whole with the following very brief and compendious advice to believers concerning their frames.

Are your frames comfortable?

You may make them the matter of your *praise*, but not of your *pride*.

You may make them your *pleasure*, but not your *portion*.

You may make them the matter of your *encouragement*, but not the ground of your *security*.

Are your frames dark and uncomfortable?

They should *humble* you, but not *discourage* you.

They should *quicken* you, and not *obstruct* you in your application for necessary and suitable grace.

They should make you see *your own emptiness*, but not make you suspect *the fulness of Christ*.

They should make you see *your own unworthiness*, but not make you suspect *the willingness of Christ*.

They should make you see *your own weakness*, but not cause you to suspect *the strength of Christ*.

They should make you suspect *your own heart*, but not the firmness and freeness of the *promises*.

CASE 6. Whether a person who has been a great sinner, has any ground to expect pardon and the comforts of the Holy Ghost; and whether he may partake of the ordinances of God?

This question is supported by the following letter:

“Rev. Sir — I take this opportunity to ask for your judgment on the state of my soul, which is as follows: I am a young person who has had a religious education; but alas! I soon followed the base inclinations of my own heart, and balked at nothing, however vile — till it pleased God, by a conversation with a good man on the evil nature of sin, to fasten deep convictions on my mind. Then what terrors, torture, and anguish I felt! How my mind was filled with horrid blasphemies! So that I concluded I was given up to a reprobate mind, and there was no place for repentance, however carefully I sought it with tears. I continued in this awful condition eighteen months, when it pleased God to magnify the riches of his grace to the very chief of all sinners, in sending the glorious Comforter to set my soul at liberty, and make me rejoice with unspeakable joy. But notwithstanding this, when I look back, and consider my great vileness, I am ready to question the reality of my pardon. Therefore, I have sent you the above question. May the Lord enable you to give a comfortable and speedy answer to it.”

This is a case that we frequently meet with. It is a case that deserves our serious consideration, as it may tend to encourage many distressed sinners in a proper application to Jesus Christ for salvation, and give them the most admiring and animating views of the riches of divine grace manifested in it. In hopes that these ends may be answered in some measure, I would consider these two things:

- I. Whether a person who has been a great sinner, has any ground to expect pardon, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost? And,
- II. Whether he may partake of all the ordinances of God?

I. I am to show whether a person who has been a great sinner, has any ground to expect pardon and the comforts of the Holy Ghost. If he continues hardened, and is obstinately determined to live in the gratification of any criminal lust and passion; he has no reason to expect either pardon or the consolations of the Holy Ghost. But under a conviction of sin, if he applies to the Mediator, is willing to receive him, and submit to him in all his characters (which I apprehend is the case with this person), then we may readily answer this question in the affirmative, and support it by the following considerations.

1. It is perfectly consistent with the grace and mercy of God, that he should pardon the greatest sinners, and visit them too (if he pleases) with the consolations of his Spirit; therefore there is ground for hope. The grace of God is absolutely free in the salvation of his people. When he chose them from eternity, he viewed them in the character of rebels, and therefore unworthy of his favour and deserving his everlasting wrath. And when he comes to them in time to apply salvation, he finds them dead in trespasses and sins. Free grace laid the foundation, and free grace will finish the spiritual building, and lay the top stone on it. When our Lord asks his Father why he had revealed the mysteries of his kingdom to such babes as his disciples, and had hidden them from the wise and prudent, he says, “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight,” Mat 11.25, resolving it all into the free sovereign pleasure of God. If God is then absolutely free in our salvation, and does not refuse its blessings in consideration of the least demerit or unworthiness in us, then he may as well pardon the greatest sinners, as those who have not run into such excess

of riot — especially, if we consider that God exalts the riches of his grace in our salvation, Isa 55:7; Rom 5:17,¹ and that indeed, this is the great end he has in view in the whole of our salvation.

None should now be discouraged at a view of the greatness of their sins, or question the reality of those spiritual enjoyments God has given to them, just because they are unworthy of them. The riches of the grace of God infinitely exceed all the demerit of sin, and triumph in the full pardon of the most heinous transgressions. I think I see the awakened sinner impressed with a deep sense of his vileness, and hear him objecting to the pardon of his great unworthiness. But my soul! Are you indeed exceedingly vile? Are your sins exceedingly numerous, and attended with every aggravation? Are you the unworthiest of creatures? Then the more exceedingly abundant will the grace of God appear in your pardon, comfort, and salvation; and the more the great end he has in view in the salvation of sinners will be answered; and the more glory will redound to him. Under a view of this infinite, abundant grace, you may sweetly encourage yourself, and say —

“It is true, Lord, I am unworthy; indeed, I would call myself the unworthiest of your creatures. But, Oh! I would not, I dare not even distrust and say that I am too great a sinner for a God of so much grace to pardon. Wouldn’t this lessen the riches of your mercy, Lord? Oh! if I am the greatest sinner you ever yet saved, then I will be the wonder of heaven; I will claim a right above all my fellow-saints to adore the riches of your grace. And you, Lord, will be admired by all, for your mercy manifested to a creature so unworthy.”

2. It is consistent with the glory of all the divine perfections to pardon and comfort the greatest sinners; therefore they have ground for hope. If anything appears to forbid it, it is the justice, the holiness of God, etc., the necessity of inflicting punishment on the offender to secure the moral government of God from any stain or abuse. If there had been no Mediator, no surety to stand in the sinner’s stead, to make satisfaction and purchase spiritual and eternal blessings, then these would have stood as everlasting obstructions to the pardon and salvation of the sinner. But as there is a Mediator provided; as this Mediator is God and man; as he has in our nature obeyed the law, and borne the punishment that sin deserved; as the sacrifice he offered had an infinite virtue in it, and so was accepted — so there is a way open for bestowing upon the sinner, indeed upon the *greatest* sinner, every saving blessing, in perfect consistency with the honour of the law and the Lawgiver. For the virtue of this infinitely atoning sacrifice exceeds the utmost malignity and demerit of sin. What glorious encouraging news this should be for every guilty creature! Behold mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other, all being perfectly harmonious in the salvation of the most unworthy!

See justice laying aside its awful sword, and joining with grace and mercy in holding out the golden sceptre! See the law receiving the highest honour by the obedience of the Lawgiver! See all the demands of every attribute of the Deity fully answered in Christ’s mediation — the glory of each secured, and yet encouragement given to the vilest sinners to hope for and seek salvation! Behold, God is just, and yet He is the justifier of those who believe in Jesus, Rom 3:26. He is faithful and just in the forgiveness of sins, and in cleansing from all unrighteousness! 1Joh 1:9. And can you now despair of salvation, or say that God cannot or will not visit you with the consolations of his Spirit? Have you ever considered the sacrifice that has been offered, its appointment by the

¹ **Isa 55:7** Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. **Rom 5:17** For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Father, its atoning virtue, its perfect acceptableness? And can you say that your sins are too great to be forgiven? My dear but doubting friend, have you applied to Christ, as a suitable, all-sufficient Saviour, and been enabled to commit your soul without reserve into his hands — to be justified, sanctified, and eternally saved? Let me then tell you, God can be just, even in pardoning your sins, however great; and in comforting and saving your soul, however unworthy. When we look upon our unworthiness, abstractedly from Christ, we are filled with sad confusion. But when we look to Jesus the Mediator, our fears are scattered, and our souls revived with the hopes of a glorious immortality. You do not question the virtue of the blood of Jesus, surely! His blood cleanses from *all* sin, 1Joh 1.7. God, considered absolutely in himself, would appear as a consuming fire to us in our guilty condition; his justice and his truth would make us tremble. But view him through this Mediator, and you will see his wrath appeased, and his countenance wearing a glorious smile. You will see his justice and truth too on your side, even speaking peace to your troubled conscience, and securing your pardon and salvation. You sensible and awakened sinners, look upon a crucified Redeemer! View his bloody agony in the garden! See the mighty God hanging on the cross! And then rejoice and say, “Oh, there is hope for us! We will not give up our souls as lost, so long as the blood of Christ has an infinite virtue in it. We will humbly hope that God will pardon such sinners as we are, though we deserve the lowest hell; and He will wash our polluted souls in that overflowing fountain that is set open for sin and uncleanness.”

3. If we ever find any sense of sin, any humiliation for it, and any desires for salvation, in the way God has determined to bestow it, then we may conclude that there is pardon and salvation for us. Some persons are afraid that they have committed the unpardonable sin. Satan makes this awful suggestion to their minds, and they go under distressing apprehensions of it from day to day, and are ready to think that all ground of hope is gone. But whatever the unpardonable sin is, without inquiring into its nature, we may conclude without hesitation that we have not been guilty of it, if we find any humbling sense of sin, any relentings for it, any desires for salvation, and any willingness to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, as he is represented in the Gospel. For here I would ask — How did you come to have a humbling sense of sin? Where do these desires for salvation come from? Where does this subjection of the soul to Jesus Christ come from? Isn't all this from the Spirit of God? A view of the threatening law may terrify and alarm us; but it is the peculiar work of the Spirit of God, bringing home the Gospel to our hearts, that fills our souls with self-loathing, and draws out our hearts in holy longings for communion with, and a conformity to Christ! And why does the Spirit of God do this? Isn't it a plain intimation that we haven't sinned the unpardonable sin? Isn't it an encouragement to us to hope that there is salvation for us? Isn't it a token for good, that God will give us the blessings we desire to enjoy? There may be some convictions, and often are, in those who perish. But would God show us the odiousness of sin; would he humble us for it; and fill us with desires for deliverance from it; would he show us the excellence of Jesus Christ, and make us willing to receive him in all his characters; and then leave us to perish? No he does not. You thirsty sinners have His promise to plead, Mat 5.6. You willing souls have Christ's own words to encourage you, 2Joh 7.37. If *you* are willing, Christ is too. Inquire then, does Christ have your will? Do you see a beauty in him, and is your soul drawn in affection to him? This is an assurance that he will pardon and save you, and give you all those consolations by the way, that he sees are needful for you. The greatness of your sins will be no objection to him.

4. God has pardoned, comforted, and saved great sinners. As God has graciously represented himself as a God who pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin — that is, all sorts of sins — so he has done it in all ages and generations. Let us look into the Old Testament, and we will find it furnishing us with many instances. Thus Lot was guilty of drunkenness and incest, Gen 19.33, etc.

David was chargeable with adultery and murder; and he was pardoned and comforted too. Solomon fell into idolatry. Manasseh was guilty of such abominations that exceeded even those among the heathens; yet he is made a monument of mercy, 2Chr 33. And we have a most striking and remarkable instance of rich distinguishing grace in Ephraim. Isa 57.17-18: "For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angered, and struck him. I hid myself, and was angry; and he went on in the waywardness of his heart." What could we expect to hear an offended God saying if not this, to let him alone to receive the fruit of his doing! Shall I manifest my grace to such an obstinate rebel? He might have spoken in such awful language as this. But behold the might of God, how astonishing it is! "I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and will restore comforts to him and to his mourners."

The timorous soul may say these are instances under a dark dispensation, and therefore they do not address the case. Let us now look into the New Testament, therefore. And here, the first instance that strikes us is Peter's denying his Lord, and with dreadful oaths and imprecations. Mat 26.72, etc. We have another instance in Saul the Pharisee, a fiery persecutor, a bold blasphemer. Yet he not only obtained pardoning mercy, but enjoyed much of the consolations of the Holy Ghost. And he says of his conversion, that it was a pattern of what Christ would do in later ages — that is, that He would pardon and save the greatest sinners, 1Tim 1.16. But we have all sorts of sinners mentioned among the sanctified Corinthians. 1Cor 6.9-11, "*Such were some of you;*" that is, some were fornicators; others idolaters; adulterers; effeminate; of lascivious tempers and practices; others were abusers of themselves with mankind, or guilty of the detestable sin of Sodom; others were thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners. *But you are now the triumph of rich and sovereign grace; being justified;* and in some measure sanctified, too.

Thus we see that all sorts of sins, even the most unnatural, have been pardoned. And can you now say, my friend, that yours are too great to be forgiven, or that God would not comfort such an unworthy creature as you are? Are there many peculiar aggravations attending your sins? Were they committed after great mercies and deliverances? So were Lot's and Solomon's. Have they been committed with great deliberation? So were David's. Have they been often repeated? Peter repeated his three times. In sum, all these instances show that God can consistently pardon, indeed, that he *does* pardon the greatest of sinners, and favours them too with the consolations of his Spirit. Sometimes, indeed, great sinners have felt great terrors; but these have often been sweetly succeeded by great joys. In the life of Colonel Gardiner we read of the sore and long distress he was under. But God was pleased, after some time, to scatter the cloud, to change the scene, and to turn his bitter cries into cheerful praises. Thus we should not be discouraged at the greatness of our sins.

5. That we may know whether those consolations with which we have been favoured, are the consolations of the *Spirit*, we must inquire what influence they had upon us. You see, God in perfect consistency with all his perfections, bestows the blessings of salvation on the unworthiest of his creatures. So that you may be more particularly satisfied about yourself — that those consolations you have enjoyed came from God — look back at the frame of mind you were in then, and inquire what influence they had on you. If the joys you felt made you careless, and left in you a greater relish for sin; if you can with greater ease pursue the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life; then you have reason to conclude that all was a delusion. But if you were humbly seeking salvation when your soul was thus set at liberty; if the joys you felt made sin appear odious, endeared the Redeemer more; if you were more weaned from the world, filled with admiration at a view of distinguishing grace, and put more upon prayer and other means towards

promoting the power and life of religion in your heart — then you may conclude that God has been comforting your soul with those consolations with which he comforts his people. And consequently, you have no reason to be discouraged at a view of the greatness of your sins, as if they were effectual obstructions to the manifestations of pardoning and saving grace.

Having thus endeavoured to answer the first question, I will now proceed to the second:

II. May someone who has been a great sinner, but has been enabled to apply to Jesus for salvation, partake of all the ordinances of the Lord? This is a question easily answered. If the greatness of our sins does not exclude us from pardoning mercy, then it does not exclude us from the ordinances of God. If through grace, we have an interest in and a title to the glories of an *eternal world*, then we may by that same grace claim a right to all the privileges of God's house *here*. If you were not baptized in your infancy, it is certainly your duty now, that so you may publicly enlist yourself under the banner of the mighty God. As to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, if you have been humbled for sin, and desire to be delivered from it; if you have been enabled to surrender yourself to Jesus; if you desire to love him more, and to grow in conformity to his image, and you would wait upon Christ in all His ordinances, so that these ends may be answered — then it is your *duty* to come to the table of the Lord. And you may do it with a comfortable expectation of the blessing and presence of Christ to make the ordinance effectual to strengthen every grace of the Spirit in you, and to train you up more and more for the heavenly inheritance. You are not to consider the greatness of your sins, when you are inquiring whether it is your duty to wait upon Christ in this ordinance. Rather, you are to consider the frame and temper of your mind, the ends you have in view, and the principles from which you act. *These* are to determine your duty, and not your unworthiness.

Permit me, then, to call you to an examination. You have been a great sinner. And have you been humbled on this account? Are you filled with shame and self-abhorrence? Have you, in the frame of the prodigal son, thrown yourself before an offended God, confessing as he did,

“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Oh, no! It is more, Lord, than I deserve to be treated as a hired servant. I deserve to be banished forever to the infernal regions. But Lord, stretch out your hand, pluck me as a brand out of the burning, take me into your family, and let me not perish for ever. I am loathsome; but clothe me with change of raiment, so that the shame of my nakedness does not appear. I am unclean; but wash me in that fountain that is set open. Lord! I would be yours. Adorable Mediator! I would love you. Behold! Here I surrender myself entirely to you. But I am not indeed worthy of your acceptance. For Lord, you must do all *for* me and *in* me. Yet, as I have your promise, I lean on that for my encouragement.”

Isn't this your case, my friend? Have you thus been enabled to come to Jesus? Then you have a right to all the ordinances of the Lord. Come humbly, under a sense of your own unworthiness of the divine favour. And yet come cheerfully, casting yourself upon the Lord, expecting that, in waiting upon him, he will fulfil his promises of grace in your complete and everlasting salvation.

Having thus answered these two questions, I would close with three reflections: —

1. From this we learn that, of all the works of God, those of our redemption and salvation by Jesus Christ are the most glorious. In the creation, God has manifested his wisdom, power, and goodness. But here you see the manifold wisdom of God; here you see the riches of his grace. When we consider the character of those who are saved, what the blessings of salvation are, and the method which God took to secure these blessings, we cannot help but be filled with the highest

wonder. What heights, what depths of wisdom and love: that God will pardon and save rebels! that he has formed a plan for doing this, consistent with his justice and holiness!

“While others are viewing the various phenomena of nature, my soul, let me behold this mystery of divine grace! Let me see an incarnate God, and view the King of Glory stooping to take upon him the form of a servant, to obey and suffer in the room of guilty rebels! Let me see, in consequence of this, grace displaying itself in the salvation of sinners, conquering hard hearts, pardoning the greatest transgressions, plucking brands out of the burning, and raising the vilest creatures from a state of dishonour, distress, and misery, to be kings and priests unto God!”

Oh, what entertainment, what pleasure this must give to a rational mind! It is the song of the saints above, the admiration of creatures who have arrived at a state of the utmost perfection. They are forever employed in searching into and admiring the mysteries of the grace of God. And shall we not esteem these fit subjects of our contemplation *here*? Oh, the blindness and stupidity of those who see no beauty, no glory, in the scheme of salvation!

2. From this we learn that none should despair of salvation, because of the greatness of their sins. There is a secret despair which lies in the breast of the sinner, and it slays its thousands, even its tens of thousands. When any conviction is made upon the mind, it is immediately suggested to the poor sinner, that it is in vain for him to hope for mercy; his sins have been attended with such aggravating circumstances that no pardon will be granted. Besides, the difficulties of the divine life are so great, that he can never expect to surmount them. Therefore, he may as well continue his pursuits, and enjoy as much pleasure as he can, and give up all thoughts of being a Christian. With these suggestions, the sinner stifles every conviction, and eagerly pursues sensual gratifications, regardless of the awful consequence. Is this the case with any of you? You may immediately conclude that it is an invention of Satan to further secure you under his power. Your sins are not too great to be forgiven; nor are the difficulties of the Christian life insurmountable to those who depend on the strength of Christ. Many have been pardoned who have been as vile as you. Therefore, do not despair, and so continue in sin. Oh, that I could convince you, sinner! I would use all possible means. I would endeavour to set before you all the riches of the grace of God, take you to the cross of Christ, and show you an *infinite sacrifice*. I would present you with a long catalogue of atrocious sinners, pardoned and saved. Do not entertain the dangerous thought, then, that there is no mercy for you; but attend to the important convictions made at any time upon your mind, and look to Jesus to justify and save you.

3. Though what has been said tends to encourage every sinner to look to Jesus for salvation, yet it encourages none to continue in sin. Those who conclude from this, “Let us sin that grace may abound,” are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. There is no mercy, no salvation for those who continue in sin. “Whoever covers his sins, shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them, shall have mercy.” Pro 28.13.

CASE 7. What judgment should that person pass on himself, who knows he is in a dark and corrupt frame, but finds himself greatly unaffected by it, and stupid under it?

This very interesting and important question, is taken into consideration in consequence of the following letter. Though it is very long, it will not be found tedious to those who have experienced any variety in the Christian life, because the whole of it is so spiritual and experimental. It runs to this effect:

“Sir — Having long walked uncomfortably, and apprehending my case to be different from the common experience of the people of God, under their darkness and doubts, I would desire your judgment and advice upon it. I know it is no uncommon thing for those who are renewed by grace to complain of indwelling sin, of the strength of their corruptions, of the weakness of their graces, of the hiding of God’s face, and of distressing doubts and fears on these accounts. But in the midst of it all, there is love for God, and desires for him, which are manifested by their earnest seeking of him. As the church says: ‘The desire of our soul is for your name, and for the remembrance of You. With my soul have I desired You in the night,’ etc. Isa 26.8-9. Christ is precious to them. And if you could assure them of their interest in Him, they would rejoice and be comforted, knowing that in Him they would have all they want — wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. *But it is not so with me.*

“My heart, alas! is alienated from God, backward and contrary to the exercise of religion. I have lost all delight in spiritual things. I cannot call the Sabbath a delight, nor attend to any ordinance with pleasure. My character is very different from what is described in Psa 1.2: ‘His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law he meditates day and night.’ And my language must be just as different from what the Psalmist uses in Psa 119.97, ‘How I love Your law,’ etc. Those words in Isa 53.2, ‘He has no form or beauty,’ etc. seem more like the language of my own heart and ways. And God may complain of me, as in Hos 8.12.¹

“When I bow before the Lord in secret, it is with a servile temper — not thankful, as in enjoying a privilege, but from a sense of absolute necessity, being convinced of my need for mercy.

“When I am not altogether in a stupid, dull, indolent frame, I bewail before Him the wretched depravity of my nature, and the dreadful effects of it throughout the whole man, appearing in pride, unbelief, neglect of God, and the like. But I am more affected by these things as my *misery*, than as my *sin*. And therefore, I fear I do not come to Christ as those do who are drawn by the Father.

“I set my name to that inventory in Rev 3.17: wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. And one would think that where there is a sense of these things, the kind, condescending, and encouraging language in the next words ² would excite some sense of gratitude; and there would be some delight in the exercise of it. But it is far otherwise in my experience. It is true, I cannot help but acknowledge that the Saviour whom God has appointed, and the method of salvation He has established, exactly suit my miserable and helpless condition. And it is owing to the free, unconditional promises and invitations of the Gospel, that any hope is kept alive in my soul (but you know that hope deferred makes the heart sick). ^{Pro 13.12} In the exercise of this free hope, I can sometimes plead with God, that if I am to this day wholly under the power of a carnal mind, He can, by the exercise of his sovereign grace, renew and save me, consistent with all the glorious perfections of his nature. Yet the Lord knows how unaffected I am *by*, and how unthankful I am *for*, these encouragements.

¹ **Hos 8:12** I have written for him the great things of My law, *But* they were considered a strange thing.

² **Rev 3:18** "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

“If I look back to past experience, when I walked more comfortably, I remember the suspicions which then arose in my mind — doubting that I did not, in reality, love Christ above all, and give preference to spiritual and heavenly things,

“As these doubts arose from what I found working *within*, so too a reflection on my *outward* conversation tends to confirm them while I judge by this rule: “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” Mat 12.34. For I know of no duty in the Christian life which I have more neglected, than speaking of the things of God. This is partly through the reservedness of my natural temper; but chiefly it is through a lack of being suitably impressed with a sense of those great, glorious, and gracious revelations He has made in his word.

“Since this night of inward darkness, I have been visited once and again with bereaving providences. And I find that under these, my affections work strongly toward the creatures, and very faintly toward God. In the midst of all this, I have many and great mercies; yet for lack of thankfulness, I lose the enjoyment of them. You will easily allow that the case of someone who can neither look to earth or heaven, within or without, with any comfort or pleasure, must be very distressing. If for a few minutes I find the pressure of inward troubles a little lightened, the weight of outward ones presses in, and keeps down my spirits. And so the clouds are still gathering, and God’s anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.

“I think I have taken care, in representing my case, not to exceed on the dark side, which perhaps persons under darkness may be apt to do. And now, sir, I ask, if the Lord were to call me out of this world in my present condition, can you see any room to hope that I would be made a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light? Oh! that the Lord, who perfectly knows the state of my case, and how far my true character is drawn in these lines, would give you a discerning judgment in this important affair!”

Thus you have the case drawn out at large in a train of experiences, which is comprised in a compendious way in the question now under consideration. And after you have read over and reviewed this case attentively, I will venture to appeal to you, if you have had any considerable experience of that variety which is found in the Christian life, whether this case is so peculiar or so uncommon as our friend imagines. *Far from it*. I am truly persuaded from my own experience, and the various observations I have made upon the experience of others, that a far greater number of true believers can adopt almost every particular of these complaints to themselves at times. When our friend intimates that he apprehends his case to be different from the common experience of God’s people — though his thoughts are in some measure just — yet he evidently magnifies the workings of grace in others, and he diminishes them as to himself. But remember, my dear friend, if you were to enter into serious conversation with those complaining believers, whose spiritual love and desire you speak so strongly of, you would find them absolutely unwilling to allow the whole truth concerning themselves, and they would make the same complaints as you. And in their conversation, you will find them as ready to think and speak favourably of *you*, as you are to think and speak favourably of *them*.

This spirit of *complaining modesty*,¹ is too common among Christians at present — even if there is something of that amiable disposition in it, of esteeming each other better than themselves. Do you think their case is better than yours? Go to them and enter into free spiritual discourse, and you will find them thinking your case is better than theirs. Every heart knows its own bitterness,

¹ Excessive self-deprecation.

and is too ready to magnify it. But you have no more reason to discourage your soul because you think you see that grace working in *them* which you cannot observe in *yourself*, no more reason than they have to discourage themselves because they observe that grace working under your complaints, which they do not see in themselves. Don't say your case is peculiar and uncommon; for you may take it for granted that most other complaining Christians conceive theirs is likewise peculiar.

Having thus prepared the way to prevent such soul-sinking thoughts, I would do these three things:

- I. I would go through the particulars contained in this case distinctly:
- II. Give my opinion upon the whole, taken in one view; And then,
- III. Conclude with a few words of advice.

And oh, that the Spirit of God might drive it home on the hearts of all those who make the same complaints, and are under the same distresses and doubts!

I. The particular complaints contained in this letter are numerous, but they may all be comprised under the following heads, in the order the letter places them.

1. *As to your religious duties.* You complain that you are backward to them, can take no delight in them, and can see nothing of the beauty of Christ through them. This is doubtless a very melancholy frame of soul, and one as calls for deep "humiliation. But don't think it is a complaint which the children of God are strangers to. The best of believers are, at seasons, in a carnal, dull, and stupid frame of spirit. But then they cannot be satisfied with it, nor properly contented under it. They are out of their element, while thus out of frame for spiritual duties. And isn't this your case? If it is, let me assure you that while this spiritual disorder proves the badness of your frame, your uneasiness under it, and dissatisfaction with it, it is a promising indication of the renewal of your nature, and of the safety of your state. I have no doubt that you really dislike these frames of soul, and you desire from the very bottom of your heart to be delivered from them, and to have a spiritual delight in divine ordinances restored to your soul, and to see God's glory as you have seen it in the sanctuary. Though you cannot take pleasure in divine ordinances, yet you *desire* it; though you cannot see the beauty of Christ in them; yet you say, *I desire to see Jesus*. And if this is a fair description of the bias and tendency of your soul, then it must be said that the desire of your soul is still for his name, and the remembrance of him.

2. *As to your private devotions and supplications.* You complain that they are performed with a servile spirit, not as enjoying a privilege, but as driven by absolute necessity. Bless God that by the spirit of conviction and by an intimate knowledge of yourself, He drives you to the throne of grace.¹ It is a sign you are not quite lifeless, ignorant, stupid, or prayerless. It is a mercy that at any time you can plead with God for spiritual blessings, and can wrestle with him, as one in a necessitous, helpless condition.² And it is evident you are not entirely destitute of all encouragement, or devoid of all the drawings of the Father; because you are directed to the throne of grace. Do not call this a merely servile disposition; because though necessity drives you, yet some glimmerings of free grace invite you. It is true, we should always esteem it an invaluable privilege to be admitted to the mercy seat of the Lord. But what is it that makes it a privilege? It is principally this: because the necessity of our case, and the helplessness of our condition, *requires* it. And when you go to

¹ Originally (and curiously) "*a* throne of grace," as if there were several. – WHG

² *Necessitous*: poor enough (materially or spiritually) to need help from others.

God in Christ, under a sense of your absolute need, you really go to embrace a privilege — as the man-slayer fled to the city of refuge, accounting it a great mercy that he had such a city to fly to. Therefore, endeavour to learn the value of the privilege, from the feeling you have of your need; since the real value of it will be heightened by however much more your condition is necessitous.

3. *As to your occasional awakenings out of your usual stupidity.* Under these, you bewail the depravity of your nature, and its sad effects; but you complain that you bewail these things as your *misery* rather than as your *sin*. But let me ask, what is it that makes your depravity and its effects in pride, unbelief, neglect of God, and the like, esteemed to be your misery? Your pride would be your pleasure, your unbelief would be your boast, your neglect of God would be your ease and content, if you didn't have some real sight and sense of their sinfulness. Can the depravity of nature be a misery to someone who doesn't see the sinfulness of it? Can pride be a burden to the one who doesn't see the shamefulness of it? Can unbelief be a grief to someone who doesn't see the unreasonableness of it? Can neglect of God be an unhappiness to the one who doesn't see the fault of it? Surely not. Whenever such things as these are felt as *miseries*, it is because they are seen as *sins*. It is this sight that lies at the bottom of these complaints, and makes them so burdensome and disagreeable.

4. *As to Gospel encouragements.* You complain that notwithstanding seeing yourself wretched and miserable, you are sadly unaffected by them, and unthankful for them. This is indeed a sad evidence of the weakness or inactivity of faith. But you yourself have given a very sufficient reason why you don't feel sufficiently thankful for these glorious and encouraging invitations, by hinting that "hope deferred makes the heart sick."

And have you become thus sick at heart because of the deferring of your hope? Remember, this is no other than what the spouse in the Canticles ¹ calls being "sick of love," Song 5.8. This is a very peculiar experience: for generally speaking, as faith increases or decreases in its exercise, so does every other grace. But this is a case in which love, working in *desire*, is strong; but *faith* is weak and ready to fail. And can you wonder that you feel no lively thankfulness in your soul for these Gospel promises? For everyone knows that it must be a high degree of faith which enables a person to be sensibly thankful for a bare promise, while the fulfilment of the promise is delayed, and the soul is groaning and sinking for lack of the promised blessings.

5. *As to your past experiences.* You mention that when you reflected upon them, you had, even at the best of times, a jealousy in your mind, lest the whole was no more than a superficial work — that it was not sufficiently deep and spiritual. From this you seem to conclude that these jealousies arose from the faithful monitions of the Spirit of God. And so they intimate that all was not right between God and your soul, even when you walked more comfortably than now. But give me leave to draw another conclusion from the same observation. This experience seems to intimate that *even then*, you were jealous over yourself with a godly jealousy. And these suspicions in your soul, are so far from being indications that the work in your heart was superficial, that their being attended with this holy jealousy, is a circumstance which makes them more likely to be true and saving. And if you did *then*, and can *now*, beg of God seriously and sincerely, that he would search you, and see if there is any wicked way in you, you have great reason to hope that both your past and present experiences have something of a true work of grace included in them.

¹ *Canticles*: Song of Solomon (abbrev. Song, or Sol). – WHG

6. *As to your present conduct and conversation.* You remark that a reflection upon this tends to confirm your former suspicions. But why? Do you live voluntarily in the commission of any known sin? Do you allow yourself to be in constant neglect of any known duty? Or are you practising any secret iniquity, industriously hiding it from the eyes of the world, when you know you cannot hide it from the omniscient eye of God? If either of these is the case with you, then indeed, you have abundant reason to suspect yourself to be no better than a painted hypocrite.

But what you mention is something of a quite different nature. You cannot speak so freely of the things of God as you should; and you would if you were suitably impressed with a sense of the great things of God. This neglect that you admit, arises in part from a reservedness in your natural temper, for which gracious allowances are made. And on the whole, you are sensible of, complain under, and strive against this defect. Surely then, nothing can be gathered from this to confirm your suspicions concerning your state; but it only proves that the frame of your soul is not so spiritual and lively as it ought to be. This affords matter for lamentation and agitation, but not for suspicion and discouragement.

7. *As to the bereaving and merciful providences you have been visited with.* You complain that the former do not appear to wean you from the creature, and that the latter do not promote a spirit of gratitude. This, again, is another experience that calls for deep humiliation of soul. But if serious persons ought to continually question their state because providences are not so sanctified to them as they desire or expect, we must all give up our hope. The purifying effect of afflictive providences is often undiscerned for a considerable time. And the endearing effects of merciful providences are often prevented for the present, because they are accompanied with inward or outward troubles; such is evidently your case.

Thus I have offered a few thoughts, freely and briefly on the particulars of complaint in this epistle, and I now proceed,

II. To give my opinion upon the whole taken together in one view; which will be done in the few short hints that follow.

I conceive that the whole strain of these experimental complaints intimates,

1. That you have really fallen into what you seem so cautious against — namely, of exceeding on the dark side, setting forth the worst of the case, without attending to or observing what groanings that cannot be uttered, are working under these complaints.

2. That the Lord has given you eyes to look into yourself, to attend to the experimental part of religion, as someone who cannot be contented with the form of it; and so you are well skilled in the duty of self-examination. But you had the art of improving what you find in yourself, *not* to discourage or sink you, but to quicken, animate, and encourage you to fly to and depend upon Christ for grace and righteousness.

3. That in the midst of all these complaints, there is a real desire in your soul for Gospel holiness and Gospel comfort. And though your frame is so dark, your heart so fearful, your soul so corrupted, and your affections so stupid, yet there is a love for Christ and holiness in your soul. Only, the delight and pleasure of this spiritual love is suspended or suppressed by the power of these heavy complaints. And if this is so, then you exactly reflect the character of those whom Christ has pronounced blessed. Mat 5.3-6.

4. That all the fundamental graces of the Spirit are not only wrought in you, but are really acting *under* and *against* these spiritual disorders. It is the principle of *faith* that makes unbelief your burden. It is the principle of *hope* that struggles with your fears. It is the principle of *love* that makes your stupidity your complaint. It is the principle of *humility* that makes your pride your abhorrence. And it is a latent principle of *gratitude* that makes you see and lament the power of *ingratitude* in your soul. The deeper your distress is on account of these spiritual diseases, the stronger the evidence of your having some principles in your heart, which are opposite to these inward corruptions.

III. I come now to conclude with a few words of advice. Don't aim at getting ease under the power of these soul-maladies, so as to be in any danger of resting contented in your present sad frame of spirit. Rather, be concerned to come out of it, and be delivered from it. And in order to do this, go on in the way that you have mentioned and taken — subscribing that you are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; acknowledging that the method of salvation by Christ exactly suits your necessitous case; entreating God upon the footing of his free, sovereign, and powerful grace, that if you are still in the gall of bitterness, he would renew and sanctify you. Encourage yourself before him with this thought: that he can renew, pardon, and save your soul, in full consistency with all the perfections of his nature; and pleading with him, that he would glorify himself more by saving, than by condemning you; more by delivering you out of this sad frame, than by leaving you in it; more by giving you his quickening and enlivening grace, than by allowing you to remain in such a stupid, corrupt, and carnal frame. With these arguments, you may fill your mouth, and encourage your heart before the Lord.

CASE 8. How may times of family and private duty best be regulated to the glory of God, our own comfort, and the advantage of those around us?

This question was sent to me with the following letter:

“Reverend Sir — The consideration of your answer to the question on the thirteenth of November, has renewed some difficulties I have often had on my mind with respect to the times of family and private religion. You there remarked that evening clubs and visits, so frequent among professors in the present day, are greatly injurious to the divine life. Now, it is our duty to make religion appear amiable to all about us, and particularly to our families. And a regular uniform practice of religion may have a tendency to engage those about us to at least pay reverence to what perhaps they despised before. Therefore, may not frequently bypassing times of family religion bring reproach upon it in the eyes of our children and servants, and performing it sometimes at one season, and sometimes at another, make them imagine that religion is only an incidental work? And yet, on the other hand, many unexpected circumstances turn up, and often oblige us to omit it when perhaps it is the proper season, and to put it off to the last hour of the day — a time when we are generally unfit for the service of God. As to the religion of the closet, I would be glad to have it always performed when in the best frame of mind, which cannot be when we are drowsy through the fatigues of the day. But, alas! this latter has been too much my case. To prevent this, I have sometimes thought, “I now have some time, and therefore I will make good use of it.” Yet, through the business and occurrences of the day, my thoughts have been far from being composed, and I have been in suspense whether to perform this duty or not. I have therefore sent you the above question, hoping an answer to it may give me satisfaction as to the path in which I should walk.”

This is a subject of great importance, which calls for our consideration. Oh! may we be enabled to attend to it with the utmost seriousness; and with a full determination, through divine grace, to pursue every conviction that may be made upon our mind concerning our duty! That I may answer this question so as not to be suitable only to this particular person, but also to all those who trifle with these sacred duties, I would throw my thoughts into the following method:

I. Family and private religion, morning and evening are in every way becoming to the Christian character, and they are necessary and important branches of Christian duty. There is certainly no impropriety in these duties, but rather an entire suitableness to the profession we make. They show the Christian to be all of a piece — how ornamental, how adorning uniformity is in someone of that sacred character! Some have all the public appearances of zealous, active, and growing Christians. They plead for Christ and testify of their love for him at his table. But look into their families, and you can see nothing that savours of real religion. What an inconsistency is here! Joshua resolved that he and his house would serve the Lord, Jos 24.15. And Abraham had a mark of commendation put upon him by God himself, for his care and diligence to teach his children and household the way of the Lord, Gen 18.19. Family prayer may not be essential to the Christian; but it is no honour to the heads of families who profess godliness, to have it said that they have no religion in their houses. Some, not willing to wholly omit it, attend to it on the Lord's day; others every evening. But is this filling up the character of a Christian as head of a family? Isn't there as great a necessity for worship, and as great a beauty in it, in the morning as in the evening? Isn't it a more comfortable thing to pray for preservation from sin in the morning, than to confess those faults we have fallen into for lack of it, in the evening? It was a practice that our forefathers were found in — a practice I must say, necessary to our being flourishing Christians. It was a practice which God has for all ages set his seal to, by blessing those persons and families who have seriously attended to it. As for private religion, I persuade myself that no professing Christians can object to it, though too many neglect it; and therefore their souls must be starving. We cannot be thriving Christians, and be but little with God in private. It is here that we meet with God, as well as in public ordinances. And He that carries on his work in our souls, gives us communion with himself, and trains us up for glory.

II. Family and private religion should be performed in such a manner, and at such seasons, as may tend the most to honour God and promote the good of souls. We should not therefore pray, or read the scriptures, in a slothful, indifferent manner, as if these were duties of no importance. This is teaching our children and servants to look at them as trifling, and therefore as what may either be performed or not. We should not attend to family duties in haste, or hurry past them, as if we wanted to be gone, or thought them a burden; nor should we perform them at unseasonable times, when it is most unlikely that God would be honoured, or our souls profited. We should attend with the utmost seriousness, pray with great affection, great reverence and importunity of soul, so that we may strike the minds of those about us with an awe of God, convince them of the excellence of real religion, and bring them to an esteem of sacred things. We should likewise attend to them at those times when the great ends of these duties are most likely to be answered. Thus, in the closet we should not think it is enough just to mention a few things in prayer in a lifeless manner, or as a parrot talks by rote, and then hurry away again, as if the duty were over. Nor should we choose those times when we cannot attend to our duty as we ought. We should endeavour to enter our private duties in the most serious frame, and in general, aim to have enough time to read a portion of God's word, think it over in our own mind, take a view of our own heart, and then seek the Lord by prayer and supplication. In thus attending to these duties,

we may hope for the presence and blessing of God to make them useful to our own soul, and the souls of our families.

III. We should not wait till we find ourselves in a lively desirable frame, before we enter upon these duties. The person, who sent us this case says that when he has had time to attend to private worship, he has often found himself out of frame, and so he has found it difficult to decide whether to engage in that duty or not. To guide us in this, we may observe that if we are not to wait upon God till we find our souls in a suitable frame, then we may not wait upon him at all. For instance — suppose, with regard to this private duty, you have an opportunity for it in the afternoon, but you find your soul out of tune. The world crowds into your mind, and unfits you for waiting upon God; or some difficulties you have met with perplex your thoughts, or you find a sad slothfulness and drowsiness of soul. On this account you wait till the close of the day, hoping that it will then be better with you. But alas! it is much the same, perhaps even worse for you. The hour of rest has almost come, and our feeble nature wants some refreshment. Must you omit your duty now, because you find your soul is still out of frame?

For the same reason you may put it off from day to day, and so live in the total neglect of it. If we are indisposed for the duty, and yet we apprehend that this the most suitable opportunity we will have for private duty, let us embrace it. Let us call upon our soul to awaken; let us read the word of God, and proceed to prayer. Before the duty is over, our soul may be better; our affections may be enlivened; our hard heart may be softened; we may feel the powerful influences of the love of Jesus, and we may rise from our knees quickened and strengthened. In sum, if we wait for a good frame, we may neglect *all* duty, even public worship. It's not that we are to encourage slothfulness, and grow careless about the temper of our mind, and rush into the presence of God without seriousness. We should take some pains with our cold, frozen, and wandering heart before we enter upon our public or private duties, and consider what we are going about. An attempt in some manner such as the following, may be a means of raising our attention and of filling our souls with a peculiar solemnity:

“My soul, I am going to be the mouth of my family to God, to read his word, and go before them in religious duties. But oh, why this trifling, sleepy frame? Consider what you are going about, and let me be on my watch, lest my family see anything in my spirit or behaviour that may give them a distaste for any part of religion. Lord, warm my heart, so that with lively affection I may seek You for my dear children and servants, may mourn over their sins, and commit them to your grace and protection, that they may be satisfied about the reality of religion, and that I have a true concern for their immortal souls.”

Or, if you are entering upon your private duties, endeavour to get your mind composed. With some degree of solemnity, say to your soul:

“I am going to separate a few moments from the world, and engage in the worship of the closet. But my heart! Why so cold? Why this indifference? Come, my soul! Let your loins be girded and your lights burning — who knows but that I may meet with my Lord? He may favour me with his gracious presence, and I may find it to be a pleasant hour. Away then, these trifling thoughts. Where is my faith, my zeal, my love?”

Thus, just as we shouldn't wait for a suitable frame, so we shouldn't rush boldly upon our duties, but labour to get our mind freed from dullness and distractions, and filled with that seriousness of spirit which is suited to the solemn duties we are called to.

IV. Just as there is no particular hour appointed in the word of God for family and private religion, so we must attend to these duties at those seasons we judge are most suited to the conveniences of both, and correspond to the ends for which they are calculated. As to the time or hour of family prayer, it is a prudential thing, and should be suited to the circumstances of families, so that we may make this part of religion as easy as possible — that those under our care may not esteem it burdensome, and attend to it grudgingly. If a master exercises sovereign authority in this case, and determines the time without asking what may be most suitable to his family, then he may, by such imprudence, prejudice the minds of some of his family against him, and against that worship that is of so much importance. Because much depends on a person's prudence, let me give you the following directions:

1. Look at it as a matter of great concern to have family and private religion suitably attended to. Your family is concerned in the one; your own soul in the other. Therefore, don't treat these things as trifling matters, but as things that deserve much study, care, and thought, to perform them in a manner that may be useful to those who are to join with you, win the minds of your children and servants, and convince them that there is a reality and importance in religion. As to private religion, the prosperity of your own soul is concerned. If you are negligent or careless here, you are likely to go on in a customary lifeless manner, and not get one step forward to appearance on your way to heaven. It requires, therefore, your serious consideration of how and when to perform these duties, so that it may suit the most valuable purposes.

2. Carry the matter to God by prayer for direction. In all circumstances we should look up to God, especially in those affairs in which his glory is most evidently concerned. This affair calls for a great measure of prudence, seriousness, faithfulness, and resolution. Therefore, you should often look up to Him for guidance, and for everything that is necessary towards profitably discharging the duties of the family and the closet. Beg of God, that he would impress you with a sense of the importance of these duties to your family and to your own soul; that he would enable you to have his glory in view in them; and that he would make you desire to attend to them in such a manner, and at such seasons, as may satisfy some great and valuable ends for those who join with you in them. In doing this, you may expect the blessing of God upon you, and all that direction he has promised in Pro 3:6,¹ and that is suitable to your particular difficulties.

3. Just as there is no particular direction or command in the word of God as to the hour of private and family worship, so there is nothing criminal in not observing a stated, fixed time. Some families have but little interruption. Their circumstances will easily permit them to settle a particular hour for worship. Yet at times, even these may be prevented by some unexpected occurrences, from observing the time appointed. Let them not think they are criminal in this, for it is not the time that is so much to be regarded, as the worship itself, and the manner of its being conducted. Other families cannot fix upon any particular hour; their circumstances are so situated as to render it impracticable without the highest and most evident inconvenience. To observe a settled rule is not absolutely necessary to make the family think well of religion. Through habit they may fall into formality, and lose the spirit of worship. When you perform it sometimes at one time, and sometimes at another, it doesn't tend to lessen their esteem for it, provided that it isn't owing to any apparent negligence in you, and that you perform it in a suitable manner. Your families will in general see the reasons for your not keeping to an hour; they will in some measure weigh them in their own minds, and pass their verdict on your conduct. Therefore, we should be

¹ **Pro 3:6** In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

careful how we act, so as to keep in their minds honourable thoughts of religion, and yet so as to avoid sinking into formality and superstition. Thus, as to private worship, we are not to pay any superstitious regard to a particular hour, but chiefly regard the *manner* in which we attend to it.

4. Seriously and thoroughly examine your case, and take that method that appears to you most conducive to honour God, and to promote your own and your family's good. Here I would be a little particular as to morning and evening worship.

(1.) *As to morning closet* ¹ *worship* — it seems evident that if those duties are profitably performed, the best time is before we set about the world. If we neglect these till after we have been engaged in our secular affairs, we will find it difficult to perform them in a suitable, serious manner, with a mind free from distractions. It is most fitting that we give God our *first* hours. It is good to begin the day with Him. Watch over your frames then, when you rise; and if you would spend much time with God in a morning, ;that it may be for your growth in grace and for your spiritual advantage, then get used to early rising. You sluggish Christian! If you but knew what sweet communion some have with God in the duties of the closet, while you are slumbering on your bed, it would certainly rouse and awake you. Oh, the precious moments that slide away, while you are crying, *A little more sleep, a little more slumber, there is time enough to rise!* No wonder you find your heart so cold, and the divine life so feeble and so languid in your soul. You have but little time to attend to it. you spend so many hours in sleep, that as soon as you rise from your bed, your business calls for your attention. And so you must either neglect your closet, or sadly curtail its duties, and perform them in a cold and trifling manner.

As to family religion in the morning — Which appears the most fit and proper, to call the family together as soon as possible, or to defer it till after we have refreshed our animal nature, and sat down as a family to our morning meal? The first certainly seems to be the most suitable; yet all families are not in the same circumstances, and therefore all cannot do alike. By this I would not encourage you to be indifferent to, or neglectful of these duties, but leave it to your prudence as to the time. Seriously weigh the matter; and if you can call the family together, or as many as can be spared from the necessary affairs of life, let it be done as soon as possible, because yours and their minds are then freest from distractions. But if you should meet with unexpected interruptions, don't neglect the worship, but catch the first opportunity to attend to it.

(2.) *As to evening worship.* — Consider your engagements in the evening, and embrace that time which appears most convenient for yourself and your family.

As to yourself in private, if you can spend some time with God before you go out, let it be done — because this may be a means to preserve you in the midst of any temptations that may fall in your way, and of keeping you from a frame of mind that may be dishonourable to God, and injurious to your own soul.

As for your families, you may take the same method with them too, provided your engagements appear necessary, and attending to them would put off family worship to an unseasonable hour. If in general you have your evenings to yourselves, it appears fittest to worship God before the evening meal. Then your spirits are freest, your bodies have the least fatigue. Otherwise, if you defer it to the last hour, you may be rendered unfit for it through the hurries of the day; and your families wanting rest, may think it rather burdensome, instead of joining in it with any degree of pleasure and willingness. This would be to offer the limping and the lame in sacrifice

¹ That is, as to your private devotions apart from your family. — WHG

to God; therefore avoid this if you possibly can. But, if through some unexpected occurrences, it cannot be prevented, then guard your families against being burdened. If your evenings are not your own, you must then embrace that time that Providence offers you. Don't mistake me here: I would not encourage anyone to make a habit of spending their evenings abroad, to the neglect of their families and their closets. But as this cannot be avoided at times, use that prudence which becomes your character as Christians.

In brief — Don't be over-scrupulous on the one hand, or negligent on the other. Don't think that because you cannot keep to a fixed hour, or because through interruptions you cannot fulfil your resolutions, you are criminal — provided that the souls of your family lie upon your mind, you desire to honour God in your house, and you are enabled to attend to family duties in a serious, solemn, and instructive manner. And don't willingly indulge any slothfulness or negligence; but carefully guard against everything that has a tendency to dishonour God, and to give those around you any trifling thoughts of religion.

Having thus given you a few thoughts on this important subject, I would close with a particular address to different sorts of persons.

1. *To those who neglect family and private religion.* Are there any among you? Do you call yourselves Christians? Do you make a profession of faith in Christ? What, and yet you never pray — neither in the family nor in the closet? I pity you with my whole soul. Permit me to expostulate with you a little on this topic. I dare not say that you are not Christians because you don't pray in your families; but I may certainly say that you don't act like it. Oh, don't you ever consider the sad example that you are setting before your dear children and servants? Don't you ever consider the cruelty you are guilty of to their souls? Don't you ever view that awful day when you must give an account of your stewardship? Are you professors, and yet there is nothing of God in your families? Have your servants seen as much in a *heathen* family as in yours? What a dishonour you are, you irreligious parents and masters, what a dishonour to the Christian cause! Never complain about your children's wickedness, or your servants' impiety — you never taught them better by an example in the family; you never prayed with them.

And do you neglect *private religion* too? I may then warrantably say, you are no Christians, except in name. Your hopes of salvation are all in vain; you are still in your sins. Oh! let me importune you to consider, before it is too late! Your souls are perishing, starving, sinking, and will soon be lost forever, unless sovereign grace plucks you like brands out of the burning. Oh, while you are crying *Peace, peace*, how awful if sudden destruction should come upon you, as travail upon a woman with child! Then you will not, you *cannot* possibly escape! Oh, that I could draw or drive you to your knees!

2. *I would address those who keep up family worship in part, but not regularly.* Some of you, perhaps, attend only on the Lord's day. You cannot let this day slip by without showing your families that you have some regard for religion, even though all week long you can slight it. And why is this? What, is religion of no importance on a weekday? Are your families never to be put in mind of God and eternity during the week? Perhaps you cannot find the time. Your engagements are such that you cannot be at home till an unseasonable hour, and then in great measure you are unfit for it, and so you neglect it. Thus you would gratify an inclination to pleasure or company every evening, and neglect your soul and the souls of your family.

Excuse the liberty I take with you. It is, I hope (if I know my own heart), out of regard for the honour of my Redeemer, and tender love for your own souls. Others attend every evening, but not

in the morning. Your greatest objection to morning worship, I apprehend, is lack of opportunity. But if you were to leave your beds a little earlier, and manage your affairs with discretion, you would soon see the vanity of this excuse, and easily find time for morning worship. Can you rationally expect the blessing of God upon you during the day? Isn't it worth asking for as a family? Remember, an excuse may pass with man, but not with God. Can you tell *Him* you have no time? Oh, consider seriously this weighty affair!

3. *I would address those who keep up the worship of the family morning and evening.* And I would call upon you to examine your ends and views in all you do, to inquire into the frame in which you generally attend to family religion, and be humbled by what you have been defective in. How lame your duties have often been! How imperfectly performed! How often hurried over, as if a *task*! Have you been concerned to impress your children and servants with a real sense of religion? Have you been contented with mere prayer; and not added instruction to this too? Oh, have the souls of your family lain upon your heart? Have you prayed for yourself and them, like a person in good earnest? And have you endeavoured to walk according to your prayers? Has it been your concern to live in the discharge of those duties which you have recommended to your family? Is it your endeavour to so walk, that they may not think meanly of that religion which you profess? Go on, my dear friends, in your families and your closets, and let nothing discourage you.

4. *I would address those who are just entering into the world, and becoming heads of families.* It is oftentimes a difficulty with such persons to set up family religion. But my friends, what is there for you to be ashamed of? Can't you pray with that connection and fluency of expression that you think may be useful? Don't be discouraged, but attempt it in the strength of the Lord, and you will find Him far better to you than all your fears. God doesn't always make the finest prayers the most useful, but blesses *weak* means to carry on His work. Fear not, he will encourage your small beginnings. If you give way to fears, they will grow upon you, and consequently your difficulties of setting up religion in your families will increase. Go to God, therefore, and beg that he would give you courage and resolution to walk *before* and *in* your family, suitably to your character. Set up religion, therefore, in the name and strength of the Lord; and fear not, you will find him a good master to serve. Let me entreat you, do *not* neglect family worship. If you expect the blessing of God upon your worldly endeavours; if you would enjoy peace in your own mind; if you would have a religious family, and prosperity in your own soul; in brief, if you would honour Christ in your day, then set up family worship! Oh, begin with God, and let all around you see that amidst your pursuits of this world, you desire to have your eyes chiefly fixed upon another, and to make the concerns of your soul your principal business!

5. *I would address those who have the privilege of being in families where religion is kept up.*

(1.) I would speak to children — And you, my young friends, who have the privilege of religious parents, and all the privileges of family religion, have reason indeed to be thankful. How many children hear nothing but blasphemies from their parents, and see nothing but what tends to poison their minds, and to increase that hatred of divine things with which they were born! But you have been instructed in the principles of religion; you have had a good example before you. You know your parents love you, for they watch over your soul. They weep over you; they carry you to the throne of grace, and would rejoice to see you the children of God. Happy souls! What numbers of petitions have been, and are daily sent up to heaven for you! Happy souls, to have a visible interest in the promise: Gen 17.7. *I will be a God to you, and to your seed after you!* Surely your heart has been melted often! Surely you highly esteem your privileges! You cannot be profane and careless, *surely!* Oh, for you to sin costs you much! For you to live and die

strangers and enemies to Christ will be inexpressibly awful! What must the punishment be, that will be inflicted upon you! May we not suppose the Judge saying, “Here is the child of religious parents. Here is one who had all the privileges of a religious education. But he wouldn’t hearken to the entreaties of his parents; he was deaf to every argument, and hardened under all their tears. Take him away, you ministers of vengeance. Heat the furnace seven times hotter for him, and let him have his dwelling with everlasting burnings.” Oh, tremble, *tremble*, my dear young friends; tremble at the thoughts of being found enemies of Jesus. And beg of God, that he would enable you to prize your privileges, and give you the teachings of his Spirit, that you may grow under all your enjoyments, and be the real followers of a gracious Mediator!

(2.) I would speak to you who are servants in such families. Do you prize your mercies? Bless God, that he has cast your lot where you hear of Jesus and salvation; where you are under the care of praying masters, those who long for the salvation of your soul. How many have been under some convictions? But being in irreligious families, their convictions have been stifled, and through the influence of an evil example, they have gone back to folly. But you are not only where you *hear* of salvation, but where every conviction upon your mind will be cherished and encouraged, and all means used to bring you to a saving acquaintance with Christ, and promote your growth in grace. Oh, *prize* your privileges; highly *esteem* those you serve; attend to their instructions, and let your walk and conversation be suitable to your character and enjoyments. Oh, if you should perish, how many will rise up against you, and say, “We didn’t have the privileges of a religious master; we heard nothing of Jesus; but you had daily opportunities to hear of salvation, and to attend to the concerns of your soul!” Oh, how cutting the reflection, to consider that once you were prisoners of hope, that you were invited and exhorted to seek an interest in Jesus Christ; but now it is over with you forever!

Oh, that you may be sensible of your invaluable enjoyments, that you carefully and seriously attend to family worship, and be concerned to know God and the Gospel of his dear Son! Amen.

CASE 9. Is it presumptuous for a person to hope he has an interest in Christ, when he sees little or nothing in himself except reason to doubt and question it?

This question came to me in almost these very words; and upon an attentive view of its nature and design, I could not but apprehend that a distinct solution of it would have a great tendency to convince the presumptuous, and encourage the fearful. Some presumptuously endeavour to persuade themselves that they have an interest in Christ, that their sins are pardoned, and that their state is safe; and so they deceive themselves to the ruin of their souls. Nothing is more dangerous than such a presumptuous hope, because it is a strong barrier in the way of receiving that conviction of their sin and misery that is necessary to drive them out of themselves and their sins, to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, some are as much afraid of receiving the true hope of the Gospel, lest they be guilty of presuming upon Christ and the promises, when they have no right to either — and nothing is more uncomfortable, distressing, and deterring, than the prevalence of such a fear. It must be acknowledged to be a very difficult matter to steer the right course between these two extremes. For some abuse the freeness of the Gospel by imagining that, since Christ and his grace are entirely free, they therefore have nothing to do but cast away all their suspicions, and positively and absolutely believe that Christ is theirs. While a serious person, being sensible that there is such a thing as a false, vain hope, is therefore very reluctant to embrace the glad tidings of salvation in Christ for himself. He makes the sight he has of his own vileness, unworthiness, and pollution, a bar in the way of his hope, because he can see nothing in himself to ground it upon. The fearful soul reasons in this manner: “It is certainly presumption in all cases to believe

without evidence; and no sort of persuasion can be more dangerous than a groundless belief of an interest in Christ. And since I have no ground in myself to believe in or hope for this, I must therefore never venture to apply Christ to myself until I can see and feel some solid evidences in myself, of a work of true grace in my soul.” Thus the serious person argues against himself, and prevents himself from embracing Christ as a free Saviour. It is in this view, and with this difficulty in the mind, that the present question seems to be put: “Wouldn’t it be presumptuous for me to hope concerning an interest, when I know and feel that I am so guilty and corrupt, and can see nothing in me except what tends to dampen a hope of this kind?” A direct and immediate answer to this question cannot be given; for we cannot positively say in all cases, that this is either presumptuous, or it isn’t. This is because that hope which we endeavour to receive, encourage, and maintain, may in one case be the false hope of a hypocrite; and in another case, it may be the struggling of the spirit of faith, in opposition to the fears and doubts suggested by the power and prevalence of unbelief.

That I might carry this matter so as not to encourage a false hope, nor discourage a true one, I would mention the cases in which such hope is presumptuous, and under each particular, as I proceed, I would show in what cases this hope is such that it may and ought to be entertained and encouraged.

1. It is presumptuous to persuade yourself of an interest in Christ, when *you have no real, hearty concern about it*. Perhaps your soul makes it a very light matter to believe in Christ, or to believe that he is your own. You can easily and calmly persuade yourself into this opinion. You don’t care much about the matter, having never had a real, heart-impressive sense of your guilt, danger, pollution, and need of an interest in Jesus. You only persuade yourself that all is well with you because God is merciful, and Christ is free; and you entertain this opinion on purpose to make yourself feel easier and more satisfied with where you are. This is certainly a *presumptuous* hope. Whoever receives and maintains it, is in the utmost danger of deceiving and ruining his own soul.

But this seems very different from the case of someone who considers this question with proper seriousness and concern. Your soul, in considering the query, looks at it as a matter of the greatest importance. You would give all the world to be certain of an interest in the atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and sanctifying grace of Christ. Your heart is set upon these things. But because you cannot arrive at this comfortable satisfaction, you therefore hang your head down, and go about mourning all day in darkness and fear.

You concerned souls, remember for your encouragement, that if you really desire, and cannot be satisfied without, the blood of Christ for your pardon, the righteousness of Christ for your justification, and the Spirit of Christ for your purification — then under this concern and these desires, you may apply yourselves to Christ, and apply Christ to yourselves, without any danger of presuming. This is because you may be sure that the grace of Christ is so free, that if a whole Christ is welcome to you, then you are welcome to Christ and all his salvation.

2. It is presumptuous to persuade yourself of an interest in Christ if the persuasion is *contrary to the tenor of your conduct*.¹ If you are profane in your words, immoral in your practice, or indulge some secret iniquity in your heart, then surely in this case, it must be daring presumption for you to persuade yourself of an interest in the favour of God, and the salvation of Christ — for Christ is not, and *cannot* be, the minister of sin. It is a presumption of the same nature mentioned in Micah,

¹ *Tenor*: a settled, prevailing or habitual course of a person’s life.

“The heads of it judge for *reward*, and the priests of it teach for *hire*, and the prophets of it divine for *money*; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, ‘Isn’t the Lord among us? No evil can come upon us.’” (Mic 3.11) See here, that there is such a thing as leaning on the Lord in the love and practice of sin; but it is a very presumptuous trust.

But if you are, and really desire to be, conscientious in your conduct, circumspect in your behaviour, and to be found walking blameless in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord, hating every false way; and you come to Christ for strength against sin, and for grace to purify your heart and life, as well as for the removal of your guilt — then this is a desire that ought to be promoted, and a hope in Christ that ought to be encouraged.

3. It is presumptuous to persuade yourself of an interest in Christ if the persuasion is *contrary to the conviction of your own conscience*. This point in some measure coincides with the former. But I mention it so I might take the occasion to explain a text, and obviate a difficulty which has perplexed some serious minds. The passage referred to is 1Joh 3.20-21. “If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, then we have confidence toward God.” The difficulty drawn from these words is to this effect. The distressed soul speaks this way:

“In how many things does my heart condemn me? What backwardness to duty, what deadness and inactivity in the ways of God my heart convinces me of and condemns me for! I have these and many, many more things to lay to my own charge! How then can I have any confidence towards God? Or how can I dare to hope in him, or depend upon him for pardon and salvation?”

To this I reply, if your conscience condemns you, as to the secret indulgence of, and delight in, any particular known sin, or as to the voluntary, stated, allowed omission of any known duty; and you endeavour to stifle these convictions, and suppress or silence these rebukes of conscience by attempting to persuade yourself that Christ is yours; this is indeed truly and awfully presumptuous. In this case, your own conscience forbids you to think that you have an interest in Christ, and it plainly tells you that *in this state and frame of soul* you have no part or lot in these matters. Oh, do *not* attempt to stifle, silence, or suppress these convictions! Rather, yield to them, and pray that God would fasten them upon your spirit, and that he would not let them subside; that he would continue and fix them, so that you might no longer lie asleep in sin, but may fly to Jesus Christ for pardon and purification! And take it for granted that so long as you maintain a voluntary love for, and delight in, any particular sin which your conscience condemns you for, that is how long your soul and Jesus Christ are parted asunder.

But how very different is this from the case of someone whose great, whose *chief* desire, is to be delivered from the power and practice of every sin; who sees and laments the corruption of his nature, the deadness of his frame, and the carnality of his heart; and who would gladly hope concerning an interest in Christ for his deliverance from these spiritual evils! And if this is the real temper of your soul, do *not* say, “My heart condemns me, and how can I have confidence towards God?” Rather say,

“My conscience does *not* condemn me as to any allowed guile or indulged iniquity. For it is the real desire of my soul, that God would search me, and try me, and see if there is any wicked way in me. And therefore, I may with humble confidence go to God in Christ for pardoning and cleansing grace.”

4. It is presumptuous to persuade ourselves of an interest in Christ, if the hope is *contrary to the proposal of Christ in the gospel*. This thought will be found a particular turning point with respect

to the *nature* of our hope. If our souls fly to and receive Christ as he is proposed in the Gospel to us, then the hope arising from this is such that it ought to be encouraged, because it will not make us ashamed. But if we do *not* apply to and receive Christ under those characters,¹ and for those blessings which the gospel displays, then there is an essential flaw in our hope. For the Christ we hope in, is not the Christ of God. Give me leave here just to mention three important particulars concerning the view in which the Gospel proposes Christ, and true faith receives Him; namely,

- (1.) As a *free* Saviour.
- (2.) As the *only* Saviour.
- (3.) As a *complete* Saviour.

(1.) *As a free Saviour.* Some persons, in their first application to Christ, endeavour to persuade themselves of an interest in him because they think they have something *in themselves*, or have done something *by themselves*, that will recommend them to his regard. They seek after this, and can never think they have a right to lay hold of him until they can find something of his nature *in them*. And thus they hope in him not as a *free*, but as a *conditional* Saviour. Now, if this is the first ground of your hope, then it is a proud and therefore a false or suspicious hope. Whereas, every soul who hopes in Christ rightly, sees himself as utterly unworthy of, and unprepared for Christ, and so he runs to him as an entirely free Saviour. Now, if you see and feel you are utterly unworthy, guilty, weak, and polluted, and have nothing in yourself to hope in, but endeavour to hope in Christ as a free Saviour, this endeavour is by no means presumptuous. See here, how completely the scale is turned from what unbelief would suggest. A discouraged, distressed person, is apt to think it is presumptuous for him to hope about an interest in Christ, unless he sees or can find something within himself to encourage that expectation. Whereas, if he imagined anything within himself as the ground of his encouragement, then this very circumstance tends to render the whole of it suspicious. Is it presumptuous to receive a free gift, to plead a free promise, to come upon a free invitation, or to build upon a free foundation? Surely not. Whereas, if you are determined to force a condition upon Christ, or to come to him with a price in your hands,² *that* is what Christ will reject and disdain.

(2.) *As the only Saviour.* If you hope you have an interest in Christ, but you don't make him the whole of your salvation, and would add your own duties, righteousness, qualifications, or attainments, then this will be found to be a false or suspicious hope. But if you trust in him *alone*, casting aside all your own strength and righteousness as bearing any share in your justification, then the language of your heart corresponds with the sentiments of the pious Psalmist whose soul was built upon a right foundation: Psa 62.5, "My soul, wait only upon God; for my expectation is from him." And if you can heartily say, as in the next verse, "He alone is the rock of my salvation," then you may add what immediately follows, "He is my defence; I shall not be moved."

(3.) *As a complete Saviour.* Christ and his salvation are entirely free; but if any condition is allowable, it is this: if you would have Christ, you must have a *whole Christ*; if you would have salvation, you must have a *complete salvation*. Christ is not divided, nor his salvation. If you are for only half a Christ — for his righteousness and blood to pardon and justify you, but not

¹ *Characters*: the marks or characteristics of gospel truth, which include our sinfulness, God's justice, our inability, God's grace, Christ's atoning sacrifice, and our faith in Him alone. Pike will now focus on our perception of who Christ is, as the measure of our understanding of gospel truth. – WHG

² That is, to pay for or merit your salvation, as if the gift were owed to you, and was not of grace. (Rom 4.4) – WHG

for his Spirit and grace to renew and sanctify you — your hope in him is false and dangerous. But if it is your desire and aim to receive him whole and entire; to receive his doctrines, instructions, and illuminations as a *prophet*; to receive his righteousness and merit as a *priest*; and to receive or submit to his government and sin-subduing grace as a *king*, then you need not fear to hope in him.

Thus, as Christ stands in the Gospel under the character of a free and complete Saviour, and the *only* one, we are to hope in him accordingly. Once more,

5. It is presumptuous to persuade ourselves of an interest in Christ, if the persuasion is *contrary to the designs of the Gospel and its promises*. These designs may be briefly expressed thus: to humble the sinner, to glorify the Saviour, to purify the heart, and to comfort the soul. Now then, do you endeavour to hope concerning an interest in Jesus Christ? Then ask your soul what your design is in this attempt and endeavour. Is it to have your state safe, and your conscience easy in the way of sin? Is it that you may be rendered able to justify yourself in part by your own righteousness, or to sanctify yourself by your own strength? Is it to gratify your pride, so that you may be able to make such a profession, or to perform such services, as may make your name honourable? If such things as these are the motives for your desire and endeavour to know your interest in Christ, they are all detestable and destructive.

But if your desire to have, and to *know* that you have, an interest in Christ are motives such as these: that you may be more spiritual in your frame; enjoy holy consolation in your soul; be purer in heart and life; may live more entirely upon Christ for righteousness and strength; may be humble in yourself and exalted only in Christ's grace and righteousness; may be able to honour Christ more, serve him better, and have more strength for and delight in spiritual duties — then surely such endeavours, such desires, and such hopes, are lawful, and laudable, and they are by no means presumptuous. You may see little in yourself but reasons to doubt and question your interest. Yet, with such views and desires as these, don't be afraid to lay hold of Christ for yourself, and to lay a humble claim to him. You will find that nothing will be more helpful to regulate your ways, to subdue your sins, to strengthen you for duty, and to render you capable in every way to glorify Christ (which are the very things you desire), than a real hope and hearty belief that Christ is yours, and you are his.

But perhaps you will still be ready to ask, "How can I hope or believe that I have an interest in Christ, when I have no evidence in myself to *prove* it?" I answer, this is only an abstract argument, which is urged by carnal reason, to promote discouraging unbelief, and hinder a Gospel hope. Is there no such thing as hoping against hope? Isn't Christ set before you as the *only* Saviour, as a *complete* Saviour, and as an entirely *free* Saviour? Then look into the proposals and promises of the Gospel. And in *them*, not in yourself, you will find sufficient ground to encourage your application to Christ, and your application of Him to yourself, for your consolation, sanctification, and salvation.

CASE 10. Is going to plays, and other theatrical performances, consistent with the profession and practice of Christianity?

You will find that the answer to this question is in consequence of the following letter:

"Reverend Sir — I have often been asked by my acquaintances to go to a play. But having had the blessing of a religious education, and the good example of pious relatives — and being apprehensive that such diversions tend to diminish, if not entirely extinguish the zeal we should

have for the honour of God, and the purity of religion; to eradicate all serious impressions; to cloud our evidences, and make us careless about our precious and immortal souls; and indirectly incline us to impurity and irreligion — I have up to now resisted their solicitations. But their entreaties becoming more frequent, and there being many truly religious persons who have gone to the theatre at times, and still go, my resolutions are almost broken. Therefore, I beg that you will resolve the above query.”

The question I am now called to answer, doesn't need much consideration. It is, I apprehend, evident at first view, that going to plays and such pleasing entertainments, cannot be suitable to our character as Christians, as they greatly tend to the injury of our immortal souls. Yet, because there are many who are captivated with these bewitching vanities, and are willing to find excuses for their pursuit of them, and say there is no harm in it, there are many who are in great danger of being carried away with these enchanting pleasures — and yet they would be glad to be fortified against the snare. So I would take this case into particular consideration, and endeavour to convince you of the unsuitableness and danger of such practices. May what I have to offer on this subject strike your minds with a peculiar force! May you lie open to conviction, and upon a consciousness of any evil attending this practice, be enabled to resolve, through divine strength, to guard against this and every other pleasure that has a tendency to injure your everlasting welfare, and break in upon the peace of your souls! For I would have the truth of what I say, appeal to the consciences of those who attend plays and other diversions of the like kind. I only beg this favour, that you would give everything that is said its due weight, and let conscience have its full liberty. Let that but speak, and it will soon decide the point. Having thus in some measure prepared the way, I would recommend to your consideration the following things:

I. Attending plays and other diversions of like kind is by no means *profitable* to our souls. If upon examination we find that no real advantage can be gained, then this should be a means to curb our inclinations, and make us suspect that it may be our duty to guard *against* all such diversions. Some, indeed, plead as an excuse, that persons may be improved by the theatre, and gain as much advantage from a play, as from hearing a sermon. This is a sad reflection upon preaching the word. And however true it is as to some particular sermons — those which are only empty harangues, contrary to the genius of the Gospel, and designed only to tickle the ear and please the fancy — yet preaching, abstractly considered, is a divine institution. And therefore we may expect a divine blessing upon it to make it effectual to promote our spiritual advantage. This cannot be said of a play, which is a mere human invention; it is not designed to conform us to God, but only to amuse us. We cannot, therefore, reasonably expect the blessing of God upon it, to make it effectual to our real advantage. Such excuses as these are very trifling, and will not bear even the most superficial examination. There is so much that tends to eradicate all serious impressions, to corrupt the mind, and to promote dissolute manners; and so little tends to usefulness. And this little is attended with such circumstances that there is not the least probability of our being real gainers by a play.

Who would go to the theatre, or to public diversions, to learn to hate sin, to love holiness, and to be brought nearer to God? Does anyone really attend with these views and desires? I appeal to you. Is it so? You, who have frequented the playhouse, what led you there? Was it a desire for spiritual advantage? I may answer for you — *no*; and I say you didn't have the least view to this. It was a love of pleasure, of mirth, that carried you there, and not any view to the glory of God, or to your spiritual profit. You may perhaps say there is something peculiarly awful in a tragedy. You've seen the assembly struck with a solemn silence; indeed, many faces were all bedewed with tears. This is no proof that any real advantage is gained. Music likewise has all the charms of

eloquence, all the force of oratory in it; and those who have a musical soul cannot withstand its influence. Its effects upon us, either to fill us with melancholy or to elate us, will vary according to the suitableness in the music to our natural frame and constitution. Therefore, you see this is something of a *mechanism*. So the passions may be touched and wound up to the highest pitch, by the manner of action upon the stage, etc. — but no saving spiritual impressions are made, nor is any good received. But if there was anything in a tragedy to strike the mind and fit it for serious thoughtfulness, if there was any part of the performance that tended to convict the spectator — yet the evening generally concludes with some indecent entertainment, or something that tends to remove all gloom from the mind and put an entire stop to all solid thought. Thus, not being calculated to promote our *spiritual* advantage, plays have nothing in them that would appear sufficient to engage our attention.

II. Much time is spent in these diversions, that might be spent to better purposes. Time is a precious thing, an invaluable jewel. None can speak of its worth but a dying person, or those who have entered the regions of an awful eternity. And must this time be spent in vanity, or thrown away upon the empty unsatisfying pleasures of the present life? Time! Oh, what is it?

Time, the supreme! — Time is eternity:
Pregnant with all eternity can give: —
Who murders time, he crushes in the birth
A power ethereal, only not ador'd.¹

The inimitable Young had such a sense of time when he wrote those lines. And oh, that we all had the same striking view of it! Couldn't you spend to better advantage that time which is spent in plays? You may say indeed you may as well be at the theatre, than to spend your time unprofitably as many others do, *e.g.* in reviling their neighbours, or in frothy, even injurious conversation. But if others spend theirs unprofitably, is that a sufficient excuse or reason for you to do so too? Whatever we see in others that is unsuitable to the character of a Christian, we should endeavour to carefully avoid. For it is inexcusable for someone to condemn anything in others, who is guilty of the same thing or worse himself. But when you are in the playhouse, consider — How many are in their closets, examining the state of their souls, or looking up to God by prayer? How many are with their families, engaged in social worship, or employed in religious and most instructive conversation? Hadn't this better be the case with you? You may sport with time now, in the midst of health, but the awful period is coming when you will see the value of it. Will so many hours spent in these public diversions afford a pleasing review? Will it give you any satisfaction in the near view of eternity, to look back and consider how many important duties have been neglected while you have been gratifying a low inclination, among crowds of vain and irreligious persons at the playhouse. Will such a reflection as this soften a dying pillow, silence the clamours of an awakened conscience, or soothe the horrors of that critical and important hour? Hear what a soul under the force of alarming conviction says on the subject; hear the reflections of an expiring sinner! —

“Oh, the time I have foolishly — no, *wickedly* spent in the playhouse, and in other vain and ensnaring diversions! Oh, that I should have no concern for my dear immortal soul! Oh, how gladly I would call back the hours I have wasted in such a criminal and stupid manner! But they are gone, gone and never to return; and all before me is eternity! Oh, what a review! It fills me

¹ Dr. Young's *Night Thoughts*, Night II.

with shame and confusion; and the pleasures that once entertained me so much, and raised my laughter, now sting and wound me to my very heart.”

I would to God that every person who has any fondness for the diversions of the stage, may see them in this light, and be deeply humbled for spending so much precious time in so unprofitable a manner! On this account it is highly unsuitable to our character as rational creatures, especially as Christians, to frequent the theatre.

III. Attending plays and other such pleasures greatly unfits us for the discharge of spiritual duties, and leads us to neglect them. If the diversions of the stage could be used only as a relaxation of the mind, to unbend our thoughts for the present, so that we may be better fit for engaging in religious duties, and go to them with greater eagerness and delight, then there would be some show of an argument for pursuing them. But do these diversions meet this purpose? You who have been there, I leave your consciences to answer these questions: Is it an easy transition from the playhouse to the duties of the family or closet? Can you then read the word of God, and seek him by prayer, with as much composure of mind, and freedom and regularity of thought? Can you expect Him with you in spiritual duties, after you have been wasting so much time in these empty pleasures? Have you gone into your private times with the same quietness of mind and met with the presence of God as usual?

Oh! be faithful to your soul in this point; don't smother the truth. Indeed, I would charge you, in the name of the Lord, to give your conscience its full scope, and let it speak matter-of-factly. Stand the test then, and answer these questions if you can. When you come away, isn't your mind full of what you heard? Don't the pleasing scenes which struck your fancy, follow you into your closet? Oftentimes, isn't it some days before you can shake off the diverting thought? Haven't you found a shyness toward duty after attending the stage? Could you go to God with that confidence as before, till you had humbled yourself before Him, and applied afresh for the blood of sprinkling? After you have been at the playhouse, have you had time to perform family and private duties, or arrived late to an assembly? Oh, the duties that have been curtailed and often neglected by attending such public diversions! If this is the case, then, it manifestly appears that going to plays and to pleasures of that kind, is by no means suitable to the profession and practice of Christianity.

IV. Attending plays and other such diversions, has a particular tendency to set persons against the power and life of religion, and to make them take up with a mere *form*.¹ That religion which will not permit the pleasures of the playhouse, is disregarded by all the admirers of the stage. What will they do, who have had a religious education, and have been followed with repeated convictions? They endeavour by all possible means to satisfy their consciences, that attending plays may be innocently done, and that it is perfectly consistent with real Christianity. Thus the child who has been accustomed to family and private duties, begins to look at such things as unnecessary, and to think a pious parent is too severe for abridging his children of amusement that is so “innocent.” The young person, now frivolous in his behaviour and wild in his sentiments, is ready to think a godly minister is too stiff and precise, because he faithfully reproves the lovers of pleasure. He cannot think so much duty is required; that so much praying, self-examination, and mortification are necessary. Therefore, by degrees, he loses all that regard for religion, and

¹ Consider the plays of Shakespeare, written in the late 1500s. There was (and is) much that is bawdry and tawdry. They are filled with pretend violence, immorality, and depravity. *Twelfth Night* mocks Puritans in particular. Observing such things repeatedly over time, desensitizes us to the sins they portray, but *also* to the things of God. Scripture sanctifies the mind and heart of a believer, in *opposition* to the things of this world. So if we let the world influence us more than Scripture, we'll become increasingly worldly (2Pet 2.18-22). We imitate what we see and hear. – WHG

for the people of God, that he once professed to have. And at last, he boldly sits in the seat of the scoffer. I need not ask you, my friends, whether this is the case or not. No doubt you have known many awful instances of it, and thereby you see the evil tendency of plays, and other pleasures of that kind.

If there are any of you who visit these houses of pleasure, let me again appeal to your consciences for the truth of what I say. Let me particularly appeal to you who have had a religious education, but have been led aside by these captivating pleasures. Isn't what I have said agreeable to truth? You dare not deny the awful fact; but you would gladly smother it. You once discovered a serious disposition; but plays, assemblies, etc., gave you a disrelish for strict, practical religion, and led you to look at it as unnecessary and burdensome. And now you would gladly vindicate your present practices. But you cannot; conscience will at times speak and remonstrate. How awful that anyone should attempt to defend a practice so injurious! Do you ever see any persons attend the playhouse, who are growing and flourishing Christians? As soon as they begin to make their appearance there, and to relish the stage and other such diversions, they begin to dwindle, and to sink into sad formality. If this is the case, then it clearly shows how unsuitable attending the theatre is to the profession and practice of Christianity.

V. Attending plays and other such diversions is accompanied with the greatest evils. This practice is a sad inlet into all manner of sins, opening a door to the greatest extravagances for which, to support them, the most desperate measures are often taken. These bring the poor unhappy creature to an ignominious end. The stage may boast of thousands and tens of thousands that it has led captive, and ruined both as to time and eternity. How many lovely youths, who once were fair bid for heaven, here lost all their convictions, were introduced into evil company, turned out the greatest debauchees, consumed their substance, destroyed their constitution, broke the hearts of their aged relatives, and by their intemperance and debaucheries, did not live out half their days! We have too many awful instances to deny that this is the case. And it is no wonder when we consider the degeneracy of our natures, and the tendency of plays to lead to profaneness in conversation, and to promote impurity of thought by the wanton songs, the filthy jests, and the blasphemous speeches with which many of them are crowded.

A youth who has lost his religion here, becomes an easy prey to the great enemy of souls; for what does he have to ballast him? Intoxicated with pleasure, he is like a drunken man; he has nothing to prevent his complying with every temptation that is presented before him. Oh, how many upon a dying bed have lamented their frequenting the stage and other public pleasures! How many have cursed the day that brought them to see a play, and entangled them in such company as proved to be their ruin! —

“Oh, how happy if I had never stepped out of the road I was directed to by my religious relatives! I was guarded against running into such dangerous paths, cautioned about the consequences. But alas, I would not hearken to the tender solicitations of my affectionate friends! I thought I might innocently go — and oh, there my unwary feet were caught! The net was carefully spread, and I was taken! Oh, lament, lament, my soul, the time, the hour I first gazed upon those pleasing, but destructive scenes! Now I am going into eternity to give an account of the proof of it, to an infinitely just and holy God. And oh, how awful the view! What can I expect after a life of such irreligion and profaneness!”

Thus many have been led to infidelity and impiety. And they will have, it is to be feared, an eternity to bewail their folly and stupidity.

VI. For professors to attend plays and other such entertainments, is to set a bad example. Thus our young friend mentions it as being a temptation to him, and as an argument almost sufficient to answer every objection — namely, that many truly religious persons have, and still do at times, attend the theatre. This is an awful consideration! What! a Christian seen at the playhouse! It is something indeed amazing! It is no wonder to see an immoral person crowding after public diversions; one who has no sense of the worth of his soul, and the importance of eternity. But to see a professor of religion, one who is willing to be esteemed a Christian indeed, one who perhaps appears at the table of our Lord — to see such a person amidst a crowded assembly at the theatre. And to hear him excusing his attendance by saying there is no harm in it, is something awful! Well may a poor giddy sinner make a bad use of such an example. Well may an unsteady youth say, “I may certainly go now, when such a person attends. I may now conclude it is not inconsistent with a religious character, and therefore I may indulge my inclinations when an opportunity offers.” Oh, see the melancholy consequences, and the destructive influence of a bad example! Remember, if *you* go, *others* will go too. And suppose you could go to the theatre innocently. Yet many who are perhaps prevailed upon to go through your example, may be ruined forever. They cannot withstand the force of those temptations that are before them. Therefore, a concern for the glory of God, a consideration of the influence of our example, and a regard for others, should keep us from the playhouse, and from every pleasure that we think may be injurious to the souls of others, even supposing it were not so to our own.

Thus I have hinted a few things, that are, I apprehend, sufficient to show that going to the theatre, etc., is unsuitable to the profession and practice of Christianity. If any among you have an inclination to attend the stage or other public pleasures, and can answer to God, to yourselves, and to others, that none of these things will be the consequences, then go. But I may venture to say that the above hints are so near the truth, that none who have frequented public places of pleasure can deny them, if they would faithfully relate their own experience. I would now, therefore, accompany what I have said with a warm and affectionate address.

1. *To masters and heads of families* — particularly, to those who attend the theater themselves. Let me entreat you to consider the bad example you are setting before your families. Consider the unhappy use they are likely to make of it. No wonder you find them desirous to walk in your steps. To see you frequently setting out for the theatre, and to hear you perhaps recommending some of the parts you have seen acted — this cannot help but raise a curiosity in them to see the same thing. And they apprehend that they may boldly ask to go, or even take the liberty if it should be denied. And what can you say to discourage them? You cannot consistently represent the danger of such practices. This would be an argument against your own attendance as well as theirs. How can you forbid them going, or curb an inclination in them to attend the theatre? How can you complain of their extravagancies, or correct them for being there so frequently? You lead them there yourselves. You may justly chide yourselves, and say,

“How can I wonder to see in my children and servants such a desire for the pleasures of the stage, when I have done enough to raise it in them? Must I not blame myself for all the frivolousness and extravagance of my child? I first taught him to go to a play — and see what evils I have introduced into my family by this! I gave my son a taste for the playhouse, and see what the consequences are! He has contracted an acquaintance with those who will be his ruin! How extravagant he is in his expenses! How he enfeebles his constitution by intemperance, etc. And what will be the end of it all? A tragic one, I fear; and all occasioned by my own folly!”

Let me speak a word to those who permit their children and servants to frequent those diversions. Is it so? Do you take no care how your children and servants spend their evenings? Do you never inquire into the company they keep? Do you never guard them against those houses of pleasure that are so ruinous to youth? Can you connive at the liberties they take, the hours they spend abroad, and allow them to wantonly indulge every criminal inclination? Oh, how can you answer for it to God, to your own consciences, and to those who entrusted their children and relations to you? Do you never consider that the souls of your family are committed to your care? Do your consciences never check you for acting so cruel a part by your children, and so unfaithfully by your servants? Oh, how you are helping your family to ruin! — seeing Satan hurrying them on to destruction, and yet never endeavouring to prevent it! Alas, alas! Use your authority! Let the souls of your family lie weightily on your mind; and don't allow one in your house to press on in the road to everlasting destruction, without *warning* them of the danger, and endeavouring to do all you can to promote their salvation.

2. I would address myself *to professors of religion* on this subject. Need I ask whether any of such character attend the theatre? This city presents us with too many awful instances of it. See among the crowd that is pressing into the playhouse, how many are professors! They cheerfully mingle with the throng, appear as eager as any in the pursuit of pleasure, and as much delighted with those scenes of vanity. Weep, my soul, that this is the case! And won't everyone who has a zeal for Christ, shed a tear that He should be thus dishonoured? How should I address you, you cold professors? Do you have you any real love for Jesus? Doesn't your heart deceive you? Is it surely so? It is a sign that your love is but cold, your faith weak, and that you have but little concern for the glory of God when you can hurry to such places of profaneness. Let me entreat you to consider how inconsistent your conduct is! How can you answer for it to your fellow-Christians, to God, and to your own consciences? Oh, you stumble, you discourage — indeed, you harden many. You occasion many poor reflections upon Christ and his interest. May He not justly complain of you, and say,—

“What, have you no regard for my glory? What, do you bear my name, and yet harden the hearts of so many against me, encourage sin, and bring such a dishonour upon me! Have I done anything to deserve such coldness, you lazy professors? Consider my love; consider my service. And let a zeal for my glory continually animate your souls, and guard you against everything that tends to weaken your hands, and to bring any poor reflections upon me or my cause.”

3. I would close all this with a particular address *to young persons*. You are the persons who are more particularly under temptation of being carried away by such bewitching vanities. I would therefore guard you against them. Have any of you attended these houses of pleasure? Haven't you found that they tend to give you looser thoughts of religion than you once had, and to lead you to take greater liberties than you once did? Let this satisfy you that there is danger in them. Therefore be persuaded to carefully avoid them; and be deeply humbled before God, that you have ever frequented them. I hope you are not determined against your own conviction. I would set before you the worth of your souls, the importance of eternity; and call you to view the transactions of the Great Day, when you will receive a sentence of everlasting life, or of everlasting condemnation. Oh, consider how you will answer to an infinitely holy God for spending so much time in such empty pleasures! View the vast assembly that will be gathered! See thousands of thousands at the right hand of Jesus, and a numberless throng at his left hand! See all earthly scenes closing forever, and the state of each person fixed! Oh, if your mind were just once suitably impressed with a sense of these important things, you would soon see the impropriety and danger

of plays. Your mind would be taken up with viewing subjects of infinitely greater importance than these low and perishing things.

Oh my dear young friends, I cannot leave you, knowing the snares you are exposed to. I would entreat you; I would warn you; I would *beseech* you. If you have any concern for your souls, if any love for your friends, any desire to honour Christ, let me beseech you to guard against these and similar bewitching pleasures. Oh, I cannot leave you. I would try once more to convince and move you. I would beseech you by the love of the mighty God. Oh, see him willingly veiling his glory, and coming to rescue poor souls from everlasting misery! Behold him nailed to the accursed tree! Hear him groaning! See him bleeding, dying! And all to redeem precious souls, and to purchase for them the blessings of salvation! And can you now dishonour this Jesus? I wouldn't think so hardly of you. Surely you cannot!

In sum, labour to follow Solomon's advice — Pro 1.10, "If sinners entice you, do not consent." Let me beg you to follow the instructions of your religious friends. And, while others are spending their time in the pursuit of pleasure, you should be considering and pursuing the concerns of your soul. You will find it to your unspeakable satisfaction, both in life and at death, that while others are trembling and shuddering on the brink, you will stand and look into eternity; you will be enabled to say with the apostle, 2Tim 4.7, 8: "We have fought the good fight, we have finished our course, and have kept the faith;" Oh! it is impossible to express the pleasure this will give you. If, then, you have any concern for your peace, living and dying, beg of God to keep you from sin, and to enable you to improve and use your time, that it may be for your everlasting advantage. Amen.

CASE 11. How may a person who desires to follow the dictates of Providence in every respect, know the mind and will of God in any particular circumstances, whether temporal or spiritual?

This is a question of so large an extent, and such great importance, that when it came into my hands, the very sight of it raised in me a great desire to give some solution. But when I looked more attentively into the nature and meaning of it, I found it to be a question attended with so much difficulty, and so much subtlety in many cases, that I was made to almost doubt whether I should attempt to answer it or not. However, looking up to the Spirit of God, and into the word of God, for direction in an affair of so much moment I have ventured upon it. And I will now offer you my thoughts on the subject in the freest and most open manner. Although I cannot pretend to give such a particular or extensive answer to it, as the case may require, yet I won't account my labour in vain, if I am enabled to exhibit some general rules which may be helpful to the serious Christian in determining his course of duty. As for those who don't have the fear of God before their eyes, they are unconcerned about the matter. They go in the ways of their own heart, and in the sight of their own eyes, and at best advance no higher than to follow the maxims of human prudence and worldly wisdom. But the truly serious person desires to follow the dictates of Divine Providence in every respect, and is concerned to have the Lord going before him in every step, pointing out his way, and marking out his path for him. He would not, he *dare* not, walk randomly, knowing that the path of duty is the only path of safety and comfort. But how the Christian should know or discover his path, is the great question before us.

Here, then, it will be necessary first to explain the terms of the question, and then give an answer to it, both negatively and positively.

I. As to the explication of the meaning of the question itself: this is so very needful, that unless you attend to it you won't be able to see the nature and suitableness of the answer. For I apprehend

that a great part of the difficulty belonging to the subject, arises from a misunderstanding or a misapplication of the terms in which it is conceived. A clear conception of the meaning of the case proposed will, of itself, prevent many mistakes, and will give a general clue for its solution.

There is some reason to fear that by the mind and will of God in a particular circumstance, many understand something that is absolutely unknown to us, or is not to be known by us, without a special, fresh revelation. And therefore, when they are seeking or praying for the knowledge of the divine will, they aim at some peculiar illuminations or impressions which are neither to be sought, nor to be depended upon. By this means they are unnecessarily perplexed, and often sadly deluded. In this case, therefore, we must be particularly on our guard against a species of enthusiasm ¹ which we may be too easily inclined to and ensnared by.

To prevent mistakes of this nature, let it be observed that phrases like *the dictates of Providence*, and *the mind or will of God*, though they are quite proper to the subject, are truly metaphorical. Let me, therefore, express what we mean by:

1. the dictates of Providence;
2. the mind and will of God in a particular circumstance, and
3. following these dictates of Providence, or conforming ourselves to this will of God.

1. *What is meant by the dictates or voice of Providence?* We are not to imagine that, abstractly considered, Divine Providence of itself makes anything known to us; rather, we must include His word of revelation in the affair. For in reality, what we mean by the voice of Providence, is the voice of God *in His Word* concerning our duty as to the particular providences we are attended with. Thus we say that afflictive providences have a humbling voice in them. What I presume is meant by this, is that when we are under afflictive dispensations, the divine word directs and teaches us to *submit to*, and be humble under, the mighty hand of God. Prosperous circumstances call us to *thankfulness*, *i.e.* God requires us to be thankful for all his mercies to us; and when such favours are bestowed upon us, it then becomes our duty to be thankful for them. A situation of special temptation or ensnarement has a voice in it to call us to *watchfulness* — *i.e.*, it is the mind and will of God, by His Word, that we should be peculiarly on our guard when Providence brings us into such circumstances of trial.

These particulars are introduced in this place as familiar instances, to give an idea of what we mean by the voice of Providence. And if we clearly conceive the true import of the phrase by these hints, then we may proceed and apply the thought of those circumstances which more nearly concern the present question in this manner: whenever Providence hedges or blocks one way of safety, comfort, or duty, so that we cannot proceed any farther in it, and at the same time opens another way to go in, then it is evidently the voice or dictate of this providence, that we should leave the former way, and resort to the other, which appears to be most conducive to our safety, usefulness, or comfort. This is the same as saying that God makes it our duty, by His Word, to take those steps which appear most conducive to His glory, and our real good, in all circumstances in general. And so, by this general rule it becomes our duty in the circumstances supposed above, to leave one path of life and pursue another. And now it will be easier to learn,

2. *What is meant by the mind and will of God in any particular circumstance.* For it cannot intend any secret that is locked up in the divine breast, which must be made known by a special revelation. Rather, we must understand by it the *revealed* will of God which, by its more general

¹ *Enthusiasm*: a fanciful imagining.

or more particular rules, gives us proper directions for duty, and safety, and usefulness, in any distinct circumstances of life or providence, And therefore,

3. *To follow the dictates of Providence*, must mean none other than acting agreeable to the laws of duty, prudence, and safety in any particular circumstance, according to the directions and determinations of the Word and Law of God. Someone who follows these dictates takes a due survey of the situation he is placed in, compares that with the rules of the Word which apply to the case, and acts accordingly. Such a person neither delays when Providence calls, nor hurries on *before* it calls.

Having thus explained the terms of the question, I have no doubt you see that the very explication itself tends to solve many difficulties and prevent many mistakes, and gives you a general clue for your conduct. Let us now bring down what has been said into the question itself. It supposes that you have some particular affair depending, whether temporal or spiritual. You are at some loss to determine which way to act, or what method to take; and you desire to know what is the mind and will of God in the present case. Here then let me beg you to recollect in your thoughts, what you mean or should mean by this *will of God*. It certainly means no more than for you to be able to understand and judge what is the most proper course to take, agreeable to the situation you are in, and agreeable to the rules and directions of the divine word in your case. If you mean any more than this, I apprehend you aim at, and intrude into those things which are not seen, and which it is not your business to know — for *secret things belong to God*, Deu 29.29.

In order to come to the knowledge of what is proper and necessary for us to be acquainted with, we are taught by prudence and conscience to make use of (1) deliberation, (2) consultation, and (3) supplication.

Our *deliberation* should be serious and attentive. We should look around us; and observe what condition and circumstances we are in. We should turn our thoughts about in every way we can, in order to view our situation in every point of light in which it appears. And we should then compare it with the rules of prudence and duty laid before us in the Word.

Our *consultation* with friends should be sincere and prudent, with a design to receive whatever light their conversation may convey. For in most cases it is true that in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. (Pro 11.14)

Our *supplication* to the Lord for direction, should be serious, earnest, and submissive. Without this, we are in great danger of being led astray, notwithstanding all previous consideration and consultation. For the Lord will be owned and acknowledged; and if He is neglected, we are guilty of leaning on our own understanding, or depending on the wisdom of men. We are strictly required to be submissive to divine direction. For it is the *meek* that He will guide in judgment, and teach his way, Psa 25.9. And we have the greatest encouragement to hope for safe conduct in this course, because it is added in the following words, Psa 25.10, *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies*. Yes, we have a positive and gracious promise of divine conduct. Psa 25.12, *Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him he will teach in the way that he chooses*.

But when you are thus seriously employed in seeking direction from the Lord, take heed that your speech, your thoughts, and desires, are rightly ordered. Let me ask you here, what do you really mean by *seeking divine direction*? Do you desire by this any discovery of His secret will by any unaccountable impulses or irrational impressions? If so, then I really question whether this very desire is either warrantable or safe. I will tell you briefly what I would mean by such a practice.

When I pray for His guidance and direction in a particular perplexity, I beg of him, that he would lead my thoughts by his Spirit into such a view of the directions of His Word, and of the conduct of his providence, that I may be able to judge from there what my path of duty is; that He would so order affairs in his providence, as to make my way clear to me upon the principles of duty, prudence, and conscience; and that He would so fix my view, and so incline my heart, as to make me ready and willing to *take* those steps, or to *pursue* those measures, that may be most conducive to secure the peace of my conscience, to advance the glory of His name, and to promote my real good. Having so distinctly explained and guarded the question, I now proceed,

II. To give an answer to it. The question then returns in this form: having made use of proper consideration, consultation, and supplication; what must we look at, after all this, as marks or tokens of the divine will and pleasure in any particular case that now lies before us? The reply must be made both negatively and positively.

1. *Negatively.* We are often prone to increase our perplexity, or run into the way of danger, by mistaking the rule, and following those things as guides, which have no certainty or safety in them. And this renders it highly necessary that false rules be laid aside in order to make way for a clear answer to the important query.

(1.) We should not make our *inclinations* the rule of our conduct. For through the depravity and vanity of our hearts, we may often find a propensity to that which prudence and conscience, if consulted, would recriminate against; and we may find an aversion to that which the word and providence of God make our duty. In some cases, indeed, it is necessary to consult our inclination, genius, or capacity, and take it into consideration, while we are weighing and pondering what course of life will be the most suitable to us, or to our friends. But after all, inclination has no standard or rule, either of duty or prudence.

(2.) We should not make our particular frames the rule of our judgment and determination, because sometimes we find ourselves in a frame for something which is not our present duty; and so, when duty and prudence call, our frames may be unsuitable and reluctant. It might not be improper in this place to say a little about a method which some serious persons take by forming their judgment from the enlargement or contraction of their frames in solemn prayer. If they are engaged in serious devotions, seeking the Lord for a particular favour in providence, and they find themselves peculiarly *enlarged* [elated] they gather from this, that the favour will be granted; but if they are peculiarly *contracted* [deflated], they take it as a token of divine denial. And so they frame their actions according to these views or expectations. But this, I apprehend, is an erroneous and uncertain rule of judgment. For although many a time the event may come to pass agreeably to this rule, yet many times it has proved just the reverse. And so, if we lay any considerable stress upon these frames of mind, we are in danger of being misled as to the way of duty, and of having our faith and hope shocked and tripped up by an unexpected disappointment. As this rule of judgment is not given to us in the Word, it is therefore uncertain. And yet we should be ready to acknowledge this much: that so far as the liberty of our frames excites and encourages us to use proper means, and so far as the contraction of our frames prevents us from being presumptuous or too forward in our conduct, it is that far a mercy to us that we are thus encouraged, or thus cautioned. It is very likely that God may sometimes enlarge our hearts in prayer, with a design to excite and encourage us; or contract our hearts, with a design to prevent us from using those means, or taking those steps, which may be detrimental. But still, the rule of judgment and duty is to be gathered from the appearances of providence, and the directions of the Word.

(3.) We are not to be guided by the bare form of Scripture phrases. I would be far from laying aside the use of the Holy Scriptures in these points; but I would only guard against abusing it. There are some Christians who are fond of using the Bible as if it were a fortune book: when a difficulty in prudence or duty occurs, they open the Bible at random, and observe what texts meet their eye first. And however their wild imagination applies that passage to the point in question, so they think it their duty to act on it. This is a very weak and dangerous practice, and a sad abuse of the word of God — applying it to a purpose for which the Holy Ghost never intended it. Others make a random application of a passage of Scripture (which suddenly occurs to, or is strongly impressed upon their minds) to their present case and difficulty, never looking into or attending to the proper meaning of the text, but straining it and applying it to something very foreign to the intention of the Holy Spirit. For instance, if the query is whether you should follow the practice of a neighbour or friend, and you have those words impressed on your mind, “Go, and do likewise;” you are assuredly apt to gather from there, that it is the mind and will of God that you do as your friend does. This method of judging concerning prudence and duty is extremely weak, precarious, and dangerous — for it can never be supposed that the Holy Spirit intended these words in the Bible to be thus applied and used at random. But this brings me to observe,

(4.) That we are not to be guided by any unaccountable impulses and impressions. There are many who frequently feel such impressions on their minds, and are inclined to pay strict regard to them. Indeed, some carry this point so far as to make it almost the only rule of their judgment. They will not determine anything until they “find it in their heart” to do it, as they phrase it. Others take it for granted that the Divine Mind notifies them by sweet or powerful impressions of some passage of sacred writ.¹ There are others who make their determinations by visionary manifestations, or by the impressions made in dreams and the interpretations they put upon them. All these things, being of the same general nature, may justly be considered together. It is a matter of doubt with many, how far these things are to be regarded or attended to by us, and how we may distinguish any divine impressions of this kind from the delusions of the Tempter, or of our own evil hearts.

Give me leave here to say that whoever makes any of these things his rule and standard, forsakes the divine word. Nothing tends more to make persons unhappy in themselves, unsteady in their conduct, or more dangerously deluded in their practice, than paying random regard to these impulses, as notifications of the divine will. To take it for granted that it is our duty to act in some such way because it is impressed on our mind, or because our dreams bear such an interpretation, or even because a passage of Holy Writ is applied to our mind in a powerful and unaccountable way — I say, to judge this way, is an enthusiastic delusion. It ought to be avoided and detested by all sober Christians, as a bold intrusion into the secret will of God; as a

¹ By these sweet and powerful impressions of Scripture phrases or sentences upon the mind, I do not mean their being impressed on the heart and conscience, agreeably to the true meaning and proper design of the Holy Spirit in them. For whenever this is the case, it is evident that they are very desirable and valuable as the effect of God’s Spirit upon the heart. Rather, I mean those unaccountable occasional impressions of Scripture passages, which are foreign to the proper meaning of the Holy Ghost in them. We are not to consider these any rule of conduct, nor to immediately act according to them, as if they were notifications of the divine will — for they may be *delusive* instead of *directory*. However, it may be granted that so far as these false impressions excite in our minds those thoughts which are according to Scripture truths, though not the truth of the passage impressed, they may be really useful in both providential and spiritual concerns.

withdrawal of the heart from the proper rule of duty; as regarding lying vanities and forsaking our own mercy (Jon 2.8).

But you may say, “Aren’t some of these impressions *divine*? Hasn’t many a Christian found himself mercifully led in the proper path by these impulsive methods? Indeed, haven’t some believers been comforted and directed — yes, and some sinners awakened, and brought savingly to Christ in this impulsive way — by dreams, visions, or powerful impressions of some parts of sacred writ? And, if so, there is certainly some reason to regard them, to desire them, wait for them, and be thankful for them.” I would answer, “And aren’t many of them purely enthusiastic, if not diabolical?”

The question therefore returns, How may we distinguish those impressions that are delusive, enthusiastic, or diabolical, from those that are true and divine? Now, here it is natural to observe that just putting or admitting this question, supposes and proves that these impulses *cannot* be the standard of duty, nor can they, of themselves, be indications to us of the mind and will of God. Rather, we must resort to some other rule to *test the spirits, whether they are of God*. For this reason, they are not to be depended upon. And those who find themselves frequently acted upon in this impulsive way, ought to be earnestly on their guard, lest they be so deceived or deluded as to depend upon them. Doubtless, it is a mercy and privilege for anyone to be so impressed as to thereby be excited or directed into the right path of duty; and we may be thankful for whatever impulses quicken us to that. But, after all, they must not be accounted the rule or standard of right and wrong. You may therefore take this as a general rule: that whenever these impressions are such that they lead us to *depend upon them*, and to absolutely direct our course *according to them*, they are really enthusiastic, or very much to be suspected on that account.

I am therefore obliged to put the matter on this issue plainly: either these impulses excite thoughts and reasonings in our mind concerning the path of duty, or they do not. If they do not, and have nothing to offer as a reason for why we should follow them, except that we find ourselves so excited and impressed by them, then they are properly *enthusiastic*. But if they awaken our thoughts and concern, and turn our mind to think about some spiritual or prudential reasons for our conduct, then the thoughts suggested are to be brought to the *standard* of prudence and duty, and are to be determined from *there* whether they are right or wrong. We may vindicate the promised leadings of God’s Spirit without giving encouragement to enthusiastic pretences, on this principle: that the Spirit of God has access to our minds, and works upon us so as to lead our thoughts to the Law and Testimony, and to direct our minds to those truths of Scripture, and those rules of prudence, which are most adapted to direct us in our present difficulty. Let me add,

(5.) We must not make the event our rule of judgment. My meaning is this: if we have taken a step conscientiously in the fear of God, and it doesn’t succeed, we need not therefore reflect upon ourselves as if we had done wrong, but rather submit to God’s sovereign providence. And if we have taken a step carelessly, presumptuously, or without proper reason to vindicate it, and it succeeds beyond our expectation, we should not therefore sooth our consciences as if we had done right. But rather, we should encourage a thankful admiration that God should deal with us in kindness, so contrary to what we deserve.

But it is high time to come to —

2. *The positive answer to this interesting question.* The Spirit of God by his operations always makes use of, and directs us to the Word and Providence compared together, in order to open to us the path of duty. So that the general rule for us to judge by is this: that which evidently appears to be impracticable, unlawful, or imprudent after serious deliberation, proper consultation, and earnest supplication, we are to esteem *not* to be the mind and will of God in the case. And whatever appears to be proper duty, true prudence, or real necessity, we should esteem to be His will. To render this general rule familiar and easy, I would conclude with the application of it to some extensive particulars.

(1.) Unless something different from your present situation offers itself to your serious consideration, you are not to desire changing your state, except in such cases as the following. Perhaps Providence begins to render your present situation very uncomfortable, and really unprofitable to yourselves or others, or makes your continuance in it truly impracticable. If so, we may assuredly gather that we should look out for and seek some alteration. Or perhaps, though your present condition may be easy and profitable, yet there may be such changes attending it, as to render it unlawful for you to continue. You cannot remain in this business or place any longer, without making a breach of your conscience, without violating the divine law, without omitting some incumbent duty, or depriving yourself of some necessary privilege, or being exposed to the prevailing power of some sin or temptation. Whenever your situation appears such as to render it impossible for you to abide in it without sustaining such sad consequences, you may assuredly gather that it is now the will of God that you should immediately look for some other place or employment. You are not to be given to change; but in such cases as these, we are warranted and required by prudence and duty to change our state or circumstances, and to seek something else, whether there is any immediate proposal of another nature, or not.

(2.) When an alteration of circumstances is proposed to you, or Providence lays two or more things before your eyes — to choose whether to continue where you are, or enter upon a different situation; or to choose which of two different situations to accept — endeavour to take a distinct view of each proposed case, so far as it comes within the compass of your knowledge. Compare them with one another, and with the condition of you or your family, etc., and then determine by such maxims as these:

— Of two *natural* evils choose the least evil; this is a plain rule in prudence.

— Of two *moral* evils, choose neither, but fly from both upon every consideration.

Nor let your conscience be soothed or silenced with that sad principle in Rom 3.8, “Let us do evil that good may come” of it. For whoever does so, their condemnation is just, however easy or pacified their consciences may be about it. Always determine on the safest side in affairs of conscience. If your mind scruples the lawfulness of anything, and you can abstain from it with a safe conscience, then duty *requires* you to abstain. For whoever doubts and yet ventures upon it is self-condemned, because he doesn’t do it of faith. “For whatever is not of faith is sin. Happy is the man who doesn’t condemn himself in the thing that he allows.” Rom 14.22, 23.

— Of two *moral* or *spiritual* good things, choose the greatest if you have the capacity and opportunity for it; for duty requires us to be ready to every good word and work. You should embrace that situation in which you can do and receive the greatest real good for yourselves or others, and that situation in which you can best promote the glory of God and serve your generation according to His will.

— Of two *natural* good things, you are not always to choose the greatest, but fix upon the one that, even though it is the least, appears best to subserve the real and spiritual good of yourself and others. Do not set your eye and heart upon worldly riches, honours, or pleasures. “For those who would be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition,” 1Tim 6.9. These things are to be sought after only in strict subservience to real and spiritual advantages. For this reason you must take special care about your motives and views in affairs of this kind. For by lack of this guard on yourself, you will be in danger of embracing anything that is shining and promising to an eye of sense. And that is to the loss and detriment of those things which alone can make you truly happy, comfortable, and useful.

(3.) When, upon due consideration, nothing appears in the necessity of the case or pointings of providence to make your way clear, do not hurry providence. But remain in a state of suspense, or abide where you are, waiting upon the Lord in the way of prayer, and waiting for the Lord in the way of his providence. And you need not fear; for as soon as it is needful for you to determine, God will by his providence hedge up the wrong way by making it impracticable, uncomfortable, unprofitable, or imprudent for you, and conducting you into his chosen way. Or else he will soon give you such a turn of affairs, and so turn the scale, that conscience, prudence, or a desire for usefulness will be sufficient to determine you, without making any felt impressions or supposed revelations the rule of your conduct.

(4.) I would lay before you the following general rules which suit every case, and so conclude:

- In all cases, as much as possible, let it be your perpetual concern to keep out of the way of temptation to omit any duty or commit any sin. Let the sixth petition of the Lord’s prayer be yours always, and act accordingly: *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*
- In all cases, take the word of God for your rule. See whether there is anything in it which, according to its proper meaning, suits your case — whether its rules of duty and its prudential maxims won’t help and direct you in deciding the point. Compare the declarations of the word with the dispensations of providence towards you; and from there, learn what the Lord requires of you in your present circumstances. Be earnest with God, that his Spirit would bring such texts or truths to your mind as may be proper to direct you; that He would give you a true insight into them, and help your thoughts apply them to your case; and that you might rightly judge based on the principles of prudence and conscience. Thus you will experimentally *prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God;* and you will find the sacred oracles to be *a light to your feet, and a lamp to your path.*
- In all cases, keep a reverence for the word and providence of God upon your heart. Whatever these render unlawful or imprudent, look at it as *against* his will, and accordingly avoid it. And whatever these render necessary from conscience and prudence, esteem it *agreeable* to his will, and accordingly comply with it — not merely as your choice, nor as invented by your prudence, but as the will of the Lord himself.
- In all cases, have a steady eye to his glory. Let this be the grand view of your mind, the grand principle of your conduct, and the grand spring of your actions. And if his glory and your real spiritual good lie uppermost in your mind, it will be a most useful, valuable, and effectual directory for your actions. Lay to heart the excellent caution, direction, and encouragement, which are found together in Pro 3.5-6: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him.*

Acknowledge his word by consulting it, his hand of providence by observing it, his wisdom by admiring it, his sovereignty by acquiescing in it, his faithfulness by relying on it, and his kindness by being thankful for it — and he shall direct your path.

(5) *Finally*, in every case, let it be your great concern and desire to behold God *in covenant*, as managing every providential circumstance in subservience to his gracious purposes in Christ Jesus. As a covenant God, he has committed the management of the kingdom of providence, as well as of grace, into the hands — the faithful, powerful, and gracious hands — of our exalted Redeemer. For Christ has all the power both in heaven and earth. And this power is given to him for the purpose of giving eternal life to as many as were given to him. Beholding every circumstance as thus conducted by the Lord Jesus, in pursuance of the designs of the everlasting covenant, will alleviate every trial, will sweeten every cross, and add a double sweetness to every providential favour.

If Providence renders our present situation uncomfortable, a sight of God's love in Christ will make us content till there is an opening for our escape.

If Providence renders abiding in our present state impracticable or unlawful, viewing Jesus Christ at the helm of all affairs, will enable us to boldly venture out, in his name and strength, into any unknown or rugged path which necessity or duty may drive us into. When two different situations are offered for our choice, here now is a trial of our love for God in Christ. For the Head of the Church brings his people into such a state of suspense in order to test what influence our love for his name, our regard for his word, and our view to his honour, will have upon deciding our conduct. If we could always view such circumstances in providence as *trials of our choice*, then this very thought would be a great means to quicken and direct our way.

If Providence keeps us for a time in such a state of suspense, we should look at this as a trial of our patience, to see whether we can wait upon the Lord, and believe in his salvation. Thus, whatever our circumstances are, a real belief of God's love and faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ, and a realizing view of providence as in his hands, will be found of eminent service to keep us close to our duty; to keep us from entering into any forbidden path; to keep our view upon the honour of Christ; and to keep our faith from failing, our patience from being exhausted, and our souls from misinterpreting and misemploying the dispensations of Providence towards us.

CASE 12. Shouldn't a person who is not comfortably persuaded of his being a real Christian, abstain from the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, lest he eat and drink damnation to himself? And what method must that person take to satisfy a church of Christ of his being a real Christian, who cannot relate any particular experience of the dealings of God with his soul?

These questions are of great importance, and therefore deserve a distinct consideration. They were occasioned by two letters sent to me, one of which is as follows:

“Reverend Sir — I should be glad if you would resolve the following case as soon as an opportunity will permit. A person has some hopes that he has experienced a real saving change, and therefore desires to wait upon Christ at his table. But he is greatly discouraged, from a view

of what the apostle says on this subject in 1Cor 11:27-29.¹ This passage has occasioned the following thoughts, namely, If he has really experienced a saving change, he *shall* be saved, whether he is a partaker of this ordinance or not. But on the other hand, if he should be deceived with regard to the state of his soul, must he then eat and drink damnation to himself, and so be excluded from even any future hopes of being saved at all? What, therefore, must he do in these circumstances?”

This short letter expresses the sentiments of many a Christian. The person who wrote it, desires to attend the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, but isn’t satisfied that he is a child of God; and he is therefore afraid of eating and drinking damnation to himself. The word *damnation* fills him with a peculiar awe, and sets his soul a trembling. “Is this the consequence?” he asks. “Oh! what will I do? How must I act? Must I attend, in these circumstances, when I don’t know if my soul may be ruined forever? Isn’t it rather my duty to abstain from the ordinance, as it isn’t absolutely necessary to my salvation? Here are two things that present themselves before me: (1) I may be saved, and yet not attend the Lord’s table; (2) I am not sure, but upon attending I may eat and drink damnation to myself. — What, therefore, must I do?”

Thus we see the difficulty this person is under. To endeavour to remove it, and to quicken all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, to the cheerful discharge of their duty, I would,

I. Inquire whether a person may not satisfy himself in abstaining from the Lord’s Supper, because it is not a saving ordinance? This is too often pleaded as an excuse by those who don’t come to the table. But it will appear weak as well as ungrateful, if we consider these two things: —

1. Though the Lord’s Supper is not a *saving* ordinance, it is a *useful* one. A person may be saved and never appear at the Lord’s table. This consideration should be an encouragement to those who are deprived of the opportunity by the providence of God. But it should not encourage us to negligence when we are called to attend. Even if it isn’t necessary to the *being* of a Christian, it is necessary to his *well-being*. Some make a Saviour of the ordinance — they are never easy till they have had it administered to them, as if the bare receiving of it were sufficient to wipe away every sin, and at once entitled a person to the salvation of Christ. Others slight and neglect it. How happy to be kept from these two extremes!

This ordinance was not designed to be a standing means of awakening and converting sinners; rather, it was a means of carrying on the work of grace in the heart, and of training up the soul for heaven. Particularly, it is designed to give us a greater hatred of sin, and fill our souls with a deeper humiliation for it. It does this as it exhibits all the riches of a Redeemer’s love, and all the glories of his cross. A view of these, under the influences of the Spirit, powerfully, though sweetly, works upon an ingenuous mind, and comes with an energy that nothing can withstand.

“Oh,” says the Christian, “the hatefulness of sin! Can you love sin, my soul? Can you fondly embrace and pursue it? Melt, *melt*, my hard heart! Why aren’t you moved to see your pierced Saviour, a Saviour pierced *for* you, pierced *by* you? Will you not rise with resentment against the cruel and obstinate Jews, who thus put the Son of God to a painful and ignominious death? But *oh*, stop your resentment against *them*, and look homeward! *Your* sins, my soul, were the murderers of your Lord! *These* were the nails that fastened him to the accursed tree! These were

¹ **1Cor 11:27** Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

the spear that wounded his side, that covered his body with a bloody sweat, and prepared the bitter cup he drank! Weep, *mourn*, my soul! Be ever humble under a sense of sin, and do not dishonour that Jesus, who loved you and gave himself for you!”

Again, this ordinance tends to enliven and strengthen our graces, and to bring us to a greater conformity to God. When we are sitting and viewing the matchless love of Christ, it tends to fasten the deepest convictions of our obligations to him upon our minds, and to increase our love for him. It tends to strengthen our faith in him, under a sense of our guilt and unworthiness — to reconcile us to every difficulty, to quicken us when slothful, to restore us when wandering, to wean our affections from earthly things, and to carry on the work of God in the soul.

“Oh,” says the Christian, “see what love! And will I loiter this way? Will I be so cold to Jesus? Oh, why doesn’t the fire burn within me? Why so slothful? *Up*, my soul! and let your Redeemer’s glory ever be your concern, as your everlasting salvation was his.”

Again, this ordinance greatly tends to promote our spiritual comfort. Here, behold a Father’s love! He parts with his only begotten Son, and delivers him up to an accursed death for us! Here, see the Saviour’s heart, how much it is set upon our salvation! View here the virtue, the glory of an infinitely atoning sacrifice! See justice sheathing its awful sword, death and hell vanquished, the uttermost farthing paid, and all the blessings of salvation fully purchased! Oh, here behold a righteousness provided, the promises confirmed, and grace and glory both secured to every chosen vessel! How animating, how comforting is such a view!

“Oh how glorious,” says the Christian. “See, my soul, your Saviour’s love! And will you any more distrust him? View the triumphs of the cross! And will you any longer be afraid? Oh! what a foundation is laid here for a strong faith and a lively hope! “

Again, this ordinance tends to increase our love for one another. It is a cementing ordinance. It cannot help but raise in us a mutual affection, while we view each other as purchased by the same blood, members of the same body, and children of the same family. Thus, then, though it may not be absolutely necessary to our salvation to wait upon Christ at his table, yet it is necessary to our growth in grace, our greater comfort here, and fitness for a better world. And therefore, it is our duty and privilege to appear among his people there.

2. Christ himself instituted this ordinance, and he invites his followers to wait upon him here. What our Lord said to his disciples, he also says to us in this distant age, *Do this in remembrance of me*, 1Cor 2.24. And where is the expression of our love, where is our gratitude, if we refuse to obey?

“Oh,” says the soul, “has my Redeemer commanded those who love him to wait upon him here? This command is enough for me; I cannot help but obey. Who can resist his love? Who can hear the compassionate Jesus, who came and suffered death — who can hear him inviting his dear followers to his table — and say, I won’t come, for I may be saved without it? How disingenuous this is!”

What, has he who so loved us as to give himself for us, *called* us? And will you not obey his call, because you may get safely to a better world, and yet never attend to this ordinance? Where is your concern to honour your Redeemer? These hints, I hope, are sufficient to show the weakness of this argument that the Christian is so ready to make use of for neglecting this institution. May they stir him up to a diligent and cheerful discharge of his duty, that he may glorify his once dead, but now exalted Saviour, and gain some saving advantage to his own soul.

II. I now proceed to consider the other objection which our friend makes to his waiting upon the Lord in this ordinance, namely, a fear that he might eat and drink damnation to himself. This objection seems to lie in your mind, my dear Christian friend, this way:—

“If I should eat and drink unworthily, I will eat and drink damnation to myself; and I am not sure that this won’t be the case. Therefore, will I attend when the consequences may be so awful? Oh, that word *damnation*, it strikes me with a peculiar terror!”

Thus the greatest stress appears to be laid upon this alarming word. If I can set this circumstance in such a light as to remove these distressing fears, then I hope the case will be in some measure resolved. That this may be done, I would consider what *unworthy eating and drinking* is, which is brought in as the cause of this damnation, and then consider the damnation itself.

First, Let us inquire what it means to eat and drink unworthily. Whoever does so, attends upon this ordinance in a manner, and with the ends and views, that are different from those for which it was appointed. This was the case with the Corinthians, 1Cor 11.18-22. They didn’t have the glory of Christ in view when they met together to administer this ordinance. They fell into contentions and confusions, so that there couldn’t be that harmony which was necessary to be found in a church sitting down together at the Lord’s table. They didn’t come to view the body and blood of Christ, nor to remember his matchless love, but to satisfy their craving appetites, and refresh their animal nature. And they were so disorderly, that some even eat and drank to an excess, while others didn’t have enough to satisfy their hunger. Thus we see what it means to eat and drink unworthily — namely, when we attend in an irreverent, disorderly, and carnal manner, and for ends that are different from those for which the ordinance was appointed by our Lord; when we prostitute it to some earthly purposes, and have no regard for the frame of soul in which we attend, nor to the great ends for which it was designed.

Secondly, Let us now consider what this damnation is.

1. Taking the word in the most awful sense, as signifying eternal condemnation, it should not deter us from waiting upon Christ in this ordinance. In this case, it doesn’t signify that there is no forgiveness after an unworthy receiving. Many have sat down at the table of the Lord, who were enemies to him, and yet have afterwards seen the triumph of sovereign grace. Thus, you timorous souls, you who are so often distressed with a view of this awful word, and entertain from this such solemn thoughts of this ordinance, *see*: here is nothing to frighten you, any more than from any other sacred institution. You may as well not read, hear, or pray, because if these are not the means of your salvation, the consequence will be your damnation. Doubtless, all the ordinances that the impenitent sinner has attended upon, will appear against him, and increase his misery in the infernal regions. This should not drive us from the house of God, but fill us with a serious concern that waiting upon God may be effectual to bring our souls to Jesus Christ.

2. The word *damnation* is to be taken in a softer sense. Such as,

(1.) It signifies temporal judgments or afflictions, Luk 23.40, and 24.20. 1Pet 4.17. This is how the apostle explains it when he adds in the next verse, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” It’s as if he had said, *As you come to the table of the Lord in so disorderly a manner, and have perverted the end and design of this ordinance, so God has manifested his displeasure, by laying his hand upon you, insofar that many of you are in an unhealthy, feeble, and sickly condition, and many have been removed out of time into eternity.* Thus this word *damnation* carries nothing frightful in it.

(2.) It signifies here those afflictions which are a means of our spiritual good. Thus the apostle says in 1Cor 11.32, "But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned with the world." That is, when we are thus under outward afflictions, we are mercifully chastened and gently corrected by God, so that we may not continue prostituting his sacred ordinances to the vilest purposes, and so be condemned with the world; but that we may be convinced, humbled, and reclaimed. Thus these considerations take every frightful idea from the mind viewing this formidable word, and consequently tend to remove those distresses and discouragements occasioned by it.

Some may perhaps say, this is encouraging indeed! You say a person's unworthy receiving doesn't expose him to eternal damnation, but only brings a few temporal afflictions upon him, which in reality are *blessings*. By this you encourage persons to come and trifle with this sacred ordinance! God forbid, that I should have such a view as this! I am certain this is far from being the conclusion a real Christian will draw from what has been said. To do evil so that good may come, is not the character of a true follower of Jesus. Because God only gently chastises and corrects our negligence and slothfulness, and makes these corrections a means of our spiritual good, will we therefore rush boldly upon this ordinance? *No*. What has been said only tends to remove the distressing fears of the Christian about the word *damnation*; and to encourage him to come to the table of his Lord. It does not promote a carelessness of spirit, nor will it have this influence on a mind under the power of Gospel truths.

Come, then, you fearful souls who start at the mention of this ordinance. Don't you love Jesus? Haven't you made a choice of him as your Saviour? Would you not love him more, and be brought into a greater conformity to him? You are the very persons that Christ invites. Would you prostitute this ordinance to any vile earthly purpose? Would you eat and drink in a disorderly and indecent manner? *No*. You would come to remember the love of a dying Redeemer, and to view all that is exhibited here. You would come to be quickened, to behold a suffering Saviour, to admire the riches of distinguishing grace in the sacrifice of the Son of God. But you are afraid you are unworthy, unfit persons to make such an approach to God, and be indulged with such a privilege. If it is this way with you, don't be discouraged. Venture near your Redeemer. Come humbly to view your expiring Lord, and to plead and rest upon his atoning sacrifice, and you will be far from eating and drinking damnation to yourselves. If you were to come for some selfish ends, such as the way to worldly advancement or profit, and to pay no regard to the body and blood of a Saviour, then you might have reason to conclude you were unworthy receivers. But if you have a humble sense of your sinfulness, if you desire to come looking to Jesus so that you may be strengthened, sanctified, and quickened, then you need not be afraid, but come with liberty and cheerfulness. He that has invited you, will make you welcome, and carry on his work in you by all the ordinances he has appointed.

Thus I have endeavoured to answer the first question.

Since I received this, the second question was sent to me, which I thought it was not improper to add here.

"A person looks at it as his duty to wait upon Christ in this ordinance; but the church with whom he would walk, requires him to give an account of the dealings of God with his soul. As he cannot relate any particular experience of this; so he wants to know what he must do in this difficulty."

This, you see, is a general question, and it leaves us at a loss to know where the particular difficulty of this person lies. I will therefore endeavour to state it in two or three different views, and then show what a person must do to satisfy a church in such circumstances.

You desire to wait upon Christ in all the ordinances of his house; but you cannot relate any experience of God's dealings with you, so as to satisfy the church in admitting you to the enjoyment of such a privilege. Perhaps you mean by this that you cannot relate the particular time and circumstances of your conversion. This was the case with many of those happy souls who are now standing before the throne of God. And I have no doubt that it is this way with many of those of whom the churches of Christ are composed. God sanctifies some from the womb. In others, the change, though effectually made, is done imperceptibly. To inquire about such an account of their conversion, or to refuse them because they are incapable of giving it, is what no church of Christ has a right to do; and therefore it should not be a stumbling to you.

Again, perhaps you have had no extraordinary remarkable circumstances in the course of your experience to relate to the church; and this therefore may involve you in some difficulty. God doesn't deal with all his people in the same way. Some are led smoothly and silently on from step to step. They are savingly enlightened and brought to Jesus, carried on through the divine life, and get safely to glory, without any turmoil or anything very remarkable in their experience. They always appear to be almost the same, and yet they go on from strength to strength. This may be your case, my friend. Others can give an account of great distresses, great consolations and enjoyments, great meltings of their soul in ordinances and duties, etc. And because you cannot do the same, you are afraid that you have no real experience of renewing grace. You have but very little to say, and that is to no purpose in your own apprehensions. But consider, those accounts are not always genuine which appear to be the most striking. Nor do those always turn out eminent Christians who are so long and so circumstantial in their declarations. But your question returns. What must you do in your present case?

1. If you cannot remember the time and circumstances of your conversion, and how the work has been carried on, inquire into the evidences you can give of a change, and relate them to the church. You know, my friend, whether or not you have made a practice of sinning — whether sin has been the object of your delight. If this has been the case, you have no experience of the grace of God. But if you hope it has been your concern to hate sin, to have your corruptions subdued, and to have your heart cleansed from those secret evils which have appeared detestable to you, and have caused you to daily mourn before God; if you have striven and prayed against them, and longed for deliverance from them; you have a comfortable evidence of your being a Christian indeed.

Again, Have you been diligent in the use of those means which God has appointed? And what are your views in this? Is it to atone for the sins you have committed, to establish a righteousness of your own to justify you before God, or for some other selfish purposes? Then you have then no reason to conclude that you are a Christian. But if it has been out of obedience to the command of God, to meet with him, to feel the quickening, sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and to be more fitted for heaven, then this is another evidence of your having received the grace of God.

Again, Is Christ precious to you? Have you committed your soul, so far as you know yourself, into his hands? Do you see a suitableness in all his characters? In sum, is he your all and in all? If so, then never say that you have no saving experience, for what is this? Go my friend, and tell the church that though you are not able to fill up a sheet with a long detail of remarkable circumstances, yet you hope that you see yourself as guilty; that you hate sin and have fled for refuge to Jesus the Mediator, and have left your soul with him; that he is precious to you; that you

have taken him for your Lord, your portion, your all, and you desire to bear his image, and to live to his glory. Isn't this enough to give you satisfaction? But perhaps you cannot positively say this is the case with you. You are under great fears lest your heart deceive you. Declare your fears then, as well as your hopes, and leave your case to the decision of the church, praying that they may be guided in their duty towards you.

2. Examine the present frame of your soul with regard to this ordinance. You say that you have no account to give of God's dealings with you, and yet you are convinced that it is your duty to wait upon Christ at his table. Now, if you have no real experience of the grace of God, then you have no proper claim to this privilege. I would ask you, therefore, and I would beg you to ask yourself, why it is that you are satisfied that it is your duty? A due examination of this will, in some measure, lay before you the ends that you have in view in desiring to attend this solemn institution, and it will be a means to furnish you with something to say to the church to direct them as to your admission among them. Do you apprehend, then, that it is the duty of every common professor, and therefore *your* duty, to appear at the Lord's table? If this is all we have to say, then we are guided by a blind and ignorant zeal. But further, do you desire to come to this ordinance because by it you will be more peculiarly entitled to the divine favour, or that it will gain you a reputation among those you converse with? This shows you how much you are unacquainted with the nature of the ordinance, and the Gospel method of salvation, and that it is far from being your duty to attend. I would hope better things of you, my friend.

But where is it, then, that you see it your duty? Have you any reason to hope that you have given yourself to Jesus Christ, and do you see your presence at the table necessary to testify your love publicly to him? Do you look at it as useful to quicken, strengthen, and comfort your soul? Do you see any excellence in it as being peculiarly adapted, and made effectual by the Spirit, to crucify our lusts and corruptions, to enliven our graces, to kindle a fire of love for Jesus, and help to keep alive a sense of our obligations to him? In sum, do you desire to come here so that you may view a crucified Saviour, feel the influences of his love more on your heart, and be engaged to a more lively obedience? Do you desire to come as a miserable, guilty, naked creature to Christ as exhibited in this ordinance, to plead his sacrifice, and to lie at the foot of his cross mourning for your sins? These are views that are suitable to this institution; they show that you are a Christian indeed, that you have a real experience, and that you have a right to all the privileges of God's house. To sum it all up, if this is the case with you, then God has been manifesting himself to your soul, as he does not do to the world, and you have reason to be abundantly satisfied. Go then, and tell the Church what you have seen, and what you have felt — what is your present frame, the foundation of your hopes and your trust — what your desires, your ends, and your views are. And I have no doubt that all this will appear to them as sufficient evidence of a work of grace in your heart, and therefore, of your right to all the ordinances that God has appointed.

CASE 13. How may we distinguish, the suggestions of Satan from the corruptions of our own hearts?

This question is taken into consideration in consequence of a letter recently received, in which it was put almost word for word. And certainly it is of great importance that a question of this nature should be seriously and solidly answered, in order to prevent some very uncomfortable or very delusive mistakes, which different persons are apt to run into. For there are some who awfully deceive themselves by casting off from themselves all their sinfulness, and charging it upon the devil; while there are others who frequently distress themselves unnecessarily by laying to their own charge all the evil which they feel in themselves. The unrenewed person is most apt to run

into the former mistake, while the serious Christian is most ready to indulge the latter. Those who don't know the plague and corruption of their own hearts, are certainly in great danger of deluding themselves; while those who see their own sinfulness and corruption are frequently under a temptation to distress themselves. The carnally secure person, when he has been carried into some enormity, which galls his conscience or damages his reputation, is strongly inclined to seek all manner of excuses for himself. And among the many methods which the pride and corruption of his heart take is this one: namely, to charge the fault upon Satan, in order to discharge himself from it, and ease his mind under the guilt of it. But surely this is a sad way of acting. And we have reason to think that the devil is truly innocent of many of those things which are laid to his charge. But we find the serious soul is of a contrary disposition. Knowing himself to have all manner of sin in him, he is therefore apt to charge himself with almost everything. From this it appears that it is one artifice of the devil to suggest evil thoughts, and then to persuade the gracious person that he is chargeable with them. And if he can prevail upon the poor believer to take those charges home to himself, this produces the most melancholy distress, and it has a tendency to drive him to despair. And I have no doubt that many gracious persons have been brought almost to the very borders of desperation, by being inclined to charge themselves with what was not properly their *sin*, but was only their *affliction*.

The foregoing thoughts make it appear very evident, that this question should be attended to with great diligence. And if I can be a means of giving a satisfactory solution to the important query, it may, by the blessing of God, be a happy means of rousing the carnally secure, and of comforting the distressed believer.

Therefore, in order to introduce a proper answer to this question, it will be necessary to premise two or three things.

1. That our own hearts can tempt us to the worst of sins, even without the concurrence of the devil. There is nothing too bad, vile, or abominable, for our corrupt hearts to suggest to us. For our Saviour tells us that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, blasphemies," and the like, Mat 15.19. And the apostle James confirms this awful truth, by telling us that "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed," Jas 1.14-15. So there is great need to be attentive to, and watchful against, the first risings of our depraved nature.

2. That Satan may suggest evil thoughts to us, even without the concurrence of our own hearts. This was undoubtedly the case with our Lord Jesus Christ who, though perfectly free from sin, was tempted to the vilest iniquity in the wilderness, as recorded in Mat 4.3-10. And it was likewise with respect to our mother Eve, when Satan made his first attack upon her. And I have no doubt that this has been the case with many true believers, as will be made evident in the sequel to this discourse.

3. That sometimes both Satan and our own hearts concur to produce the same evil thoughts within us. Sometimes our own corrupt hearts are first in the sin; and then we may be said to *tempt the devil to tempt us*. Thus it was with the Corinthian converts, 2Cor 11.3: "I fear lest somehow, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his craftiness, so your minds may be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ." For we find that these Corinthians had preferred one Gospel minister to another, by regarding the oratory of speech, and by having itching ears. This, it is evident, was their own fault; and from this we find that Satan grabs a handle to draw them away from the true simplicity of the Gospel. At other times Satan is first in the evil, by suggesting wicked thoughts to the mind, which are suited to our nature and corrupt disposition. He takes advantage of our circumstances and tempers, and then our hearts readily fall in with the suggestion. And so we are beguiled and

betrayed. In many cases, Satan and corruption so concur together, that it is difficult to know which is first, or which has the greatest influence on the sin committed, or the corruption indulged.

But I apprehend that we may in some measure know when Satan has the chief or only hand in the temptation, by the following rules.

1. *When the temptation is unnatural, or contrary to the general bias or temper of our minds.* We know that every person has a disposition to some one sin more than others; and this is the sin that most easily besets us, as it arises from our natural temper. Now observe, when a temptation falls in with this disposition, it is difficult to know whether it arises from Satan or ourselves. But sometimes persons are tempted to what is directly contrary to this general bias. In the former case (our natural inclination), we ought to be very cautious, lest Satan take advantage of us, and we are ignorant of it. But in the latter case (an unnatural inclination), it is very evident that the temptation must be chiefly or only from the devil. We have a remarkable proof of this in Peter, who was rather inclined to an over-heated *zeal* for Christ and his cause. And yet we find him betrayed into the contrary sin, namely, the most abject *cowardice*. We find this expressly ascribed to Satan. Luk 22.31, “Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.”

2. *When the temptation is opposite to the present frame of the mind,* then there is reason to think that Satan has a hand in it. The soul of a believer, we know, is in very different frames in different seasons — sometimes being more carnal, and at other times more spiritual; sometimes more comfortable, and at other times more dejected. Now, if a temptation falls in with the present temper of our minds, then it is very likely our own hearts have the chief agency in it. For instance: if when we are in a comfortable frame, we are tempted to *presumption*; or if in a dejected frame, we are tempted to *despair*. Satan may have a great influence even in this case, though it is more indiscernible; as we see in the Corinthian church. There we find that the church was brought into an utter detestation of the sin of the incestuous person. But Satan takes advantage from this to drive them to extremes, to swallow up the excommunicated person with excessive sorrow, which is ascribed to the devil. 2Cor 2.11, “Lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” On the contrary, it is very apparent, that Satan has the chief hand in the temptation that runs counter to our present frame. For instance, if profane thoughts are injected into the mind when we are in a devout frame; or if presumptuous thoughts come in while we are in a disconsolate frame; or despairing thoughts are injected when our minds are in a comfortable and spiritual frame — in any of these cases, it seems evident from the nature of the thing, that Satan has the chief influence.

3. *When the temptation itself is irrational, being contrary to whatever we could imagine our minds would suggest to us.* Here is reason to think that Satan has the chief agency. Suppose a serious Christian is tempted to disbelieve the Bible, or to call into question the very being of a God, or is hurried on towards some unnatural crimes. Such circumstances as these are plain intimations that the cause is the temptation of Satan, rather than our own corruptions.

4. *When the temptation is detested in its first rising or appearance.* This is a sign Satan has the chief hand in it. For when our hearts tempt us to anything, the temptation is attended with a secret delight at its first rising, because it is suited to our natures and wills. We cannot help but feel pleasure in the suggestion itself, because it proceeds from ourselves. But when an injected thought is abominable in our sight, and detestable to our soul at its first appearance, and it is an affliction and burden rather than a gratification — this is an indication that it comes from Satan. As in the case of our mother Eve who, though she was at length overcome by the temptation, yet at its first

appearance, her heart disliked and rejected it. And it is a comfortable reflection to remember that while this detestation *remains*, it is a sign that nothing in it is to be laid to our charge.

5. *When the temptation is violent.* This is another indication of Satan's agency. We are perhaps hurried on with a kind of impetuosity, and urged to commit a sin in the utmost haste. The temptation says, "you *must* do this;" and the suggestion won't allow us time to think, but drives us on *nolens volens* (without a choice) into the iniquity. And what can we judge from such an experience as this, but that we are under some evil influence from the wicked one?

Further, perhaps the suggestion pursues us from day to day. We want to get rid of it. We strive, we pray against it, but still it follows us, and it will not take a denial. Rather, it forces rather than persuades us into the abomination we are tempted to. This likewise is another plain indication of Satan's agency.

I would finish these remarks with a particular thought that reaches to all the foregoing headings, and from the nature of the thing, appears to be an evidence of Satan's influence. And that is, the temptations are external, or from without. Here I must desire every one to look distinctly into his own experience, to discover the difference between what proceeds from *within*, and what comes from *without*. You may easily know in what manner your own thoughts usually arise. You may, as it were, feel them coming forth from your own heart. And so, by this inward feeling they appear to be from within. But at other times the thoughts seem to be produced from an impression made upon you. They dart into your mind, rather than proceed from there. This I must leave to everyone's attentive observation of himself. I hope that by frequent inquiry, you may be able to distinguish one from the other, from your own experience. If you have clear reason to think that the evil thoughts are injected into, and not produced from your mind, then you may safely ascribe them to the agency of Satan. For he does not have direct access to your heart, but can only work on the imagination, and so dart or suggest thoughts to the mind.

Having thus endeavoured to give as clear and as scriptural an account as I can of this intricate matter, let me conclude with a few advisements and directions.

1. *Take heed and do not charge all against Satan.* This is too common a case, especially among those who don't have the fear of God before their eyes. When I hear persons continually casting the fault of their sins upon the devil's temptations, and suggestions, I cannot help but suspect that they are awfully ignorant of themselves. They have never known the corruptions of their own hearts, nor seen the excellence of Jesus Christ. But if we are inclined seriously and conscientiously to take the whole fault upon ourselves, this is an error on the right hand. For it is a great sign of a tender conscience to take too much upon ourselves, rather than too little. And doubtless everyone who has truly seen the plague, deceitfulness, and corruption of his own heart, will be inclined to suspect himself rather than strive to pacify his conscience by laying the guilt upon Satan, or any other. But you may perhaps say, "How will I know when to charge anything upon myself, and how far am I personally guilty of what I find working in me, or injected into my mind?" I answer, you needn't be much at a loss on this topic. For I must tell you in real faithfulness that you are to charge every suggestion upon yourselves, as your own fault, so far as you yourselves are either *active* in them, *consent* to them, or feel any *pleasure* in receiving them. Indeed, so far as you don't seriously and heartily oppose them, you bring blame and guilt upon yourselves.

2. *Yet, do not charge all upon yourselves.* I have to recommend this advice to all those who are perpetually troubled with, and perplexed by, those workings in their mind which are exceedingly grievous and offensive to them. Are you, poor soul, troubled with blasphemous thoughts, or do

you find yourself hurried on into what is contrary to the frame of your mind and the temper of your heart? Remember for your comfort, that these things are only to be viewed as *afflictions*, and that they will not be imputed to you as *sins*. You are indeed ready to say, “Oh! I am filled with so many evil thoughts, with so many blasphemies against God, with so much questioning about the truth, that surely my heart must be very bad, and my case very desperate. Surely never a poor sinner was ever so vile as I am!” Is this the language of your soul? Remember this very complaint is a happy token that these things are not to be laid to your charge; nor will they be imputed to you by the One who knows the secrets of all hearts. The great and gracious God, who sees all the ways and workings of the wicked one, and knows the workings and strugglings of your heart against his violent and abominable suggestions, will have compassion on you. He will consider your frame, and resent the indignities that are offered to you by Satan, as if done to himself. And you have great reason to bless God under all this spiritual affliction, if you are enabled to still withhold the consent of your will, and still abhor and detest those suggestions from your very heart. Let these thoughts encourage and excite you to go on resisting the devil, being confident in the faith, and he will flee from you.

3. When you find on examination, that it is difficult or impossible to decide where the temptation comes from, it is best way to take the fault of it upon yourselves. Sometimes experiences of this kind are so intricate that we cannot come to any certainty whether Satan or our own hearts have the chief hand in the present evil. Now I apprehend that in such cases we need not be too curious to know whether Satan began first, or our own hearts. For whatever it is, or wherever it may come from first, it is our own if it suits our natural inclination, if it aligns with the temper of our own minds, and is received with any delight in our souls. Besides, this is a general rule which we may always take: namely, that whatever is difficult to be known, it is of little importance to decide it. We maybe sure it is thus in the present case, because what makes it difficult to distinguish, is the coincidence of our own hearts with the temptation. Perhaps some want to indulge a curious mind in solving this question, and so they may spend their time and thoughts in inquiring which is most guilty, Satan or themselves. Whereas, their thoughts and time would be better employed in humbling themselves for the share that their own hearts have in the iniquity, and in setting about to resist the temptation.

4. Lastly, remember, that neither temptation nor corruption can bar the door of hope, nor be a sufficient reason for any soul to sink into desperation. I say this for the encouragement and direction of those who perpetually entertain gloomy thoughts concerning themselves, because they feel so much corruption working in them, or find themselves so much under the power of temptation. Many serious persons continually pore over themselves, and complain under their burdens to such a degree that it prevents them from taking the comfort, and embracing the hope, which the Gospel holds forth. Therefore, let this be a general rule with you: that whatever corruptions are seen and lamented, and whatever temptations are felt as a burden, however bad they are, they can be no reason for discouragement. Though you may be continually buffeted by Satan’s temptations, or continually distressed by the rising of your own corruptions, remember that the hope of the Gospel is gloriously full, and completely free — so free, that the corruptions of your heart cannot destroy it, nor the temptations of Satan deprive you of a right to lay hold of it. No indeed, the more violently you are tempted, and the more you see yourself as corrupted, the stronger is the call upon you to fly to the Lord Jesus Christ for strength against both sin and Satan. For the Lord Jesus Christ is a ready succour to all those who are harried and perplexed either by their internal or external enemies. These are the very persons that Christ has promised to save, for it is said in Psa 72.13-14, “He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the

needy. He will redeem their souls from deceit and violence; and their blood shall be precious in his sight.” Believe, therefore, this gracious promise, and lay hold of it for yourself; and you may then be sure of this, that “the God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly,” Rom 16.20.

CASE 14. How may a person know when he has the assistance of the Spirit of God in prayer?

It is not one of the least of our privileges to have the Spirit promised as a Spirit of grace and supplication, Zec 12.10; and to have encouragement to expect his assistance in our approaches to the throne of grace. And it is of great importance for the Christian to know that he has the Spirit with him in prayer, because it has a peculiar tendency to satisfy him that he is a child of God, gives him hopes of acceptance, and it is a means of promoting a steady dependence upon Him, and encouraging his expectations of all suitable supplies from Him.

Now, the Spirit is not always equally present with us in the duty of prayer. We often provoke him to leave us in some measure, so that he may test and humble us; and then how heavily we go on! We perform the outside of the duty, but we are too much strangers to the spirit and life of it. The Spirit indeed is often present with the Christian, and he doesn't perceive it. This is our present inquiry, so that we may therefore be able to rightly distinguish here.

I will only mention three things from which I apprehend that we may conclude whether we have the Spirit or not in prayer; namely, we may know it, (I.) from the spiritual light and discerning that he gives us of spiritual things; (II.) from the manner and frame in which he enables us to pray; and (III.) from the ends we have in view in the duty.

I. The Spirit, as a Spirit of prayer, opens to us a view of those great and important things which it is necessary for us to know, so that we may pray rightly. This appears in two things: in opening our eyes and giving us a sight of our various wants; and in setting before us the nature, variety, and excellence of those blessings that are suited to our circumstances.

1. *The Spirit opens our eyes, and gives us a sight and sense of our various wants.* The Spirit in prayer acts as a Spirit of illumination. He first gives us a view of our state, and then He affects our minds with it. He opens our hearts to us, and reveals those things that would otherwise have lain concealed. He impresses upon us a sense of our guilt, and gives us a view of it. He shows us the awful demerit of sin, and the numberless instances in which we have been chargeable with it. So that, to use the apostle's language, “Sin revives, and we die.” Rom 7.9. We see ourselves lost and undone without an interest in pardoning mercy. The Spirit brings to our view those secret evils of pride, lust, vain thoughts, wanderings in duty, and other heart-sins, which escape the notice of the unrenewed sinner. He shows us how filthy our nature is, and what need we stand in, of sanctifying grace. He lets us see the imperfections of our best duties, and therefore how insufficient they are to justify us before God. He reveals to us the power that sin has within us, and our weakness and inability to withstand its opposition, and to keep on in our Christian course. He shows us our nakedness and poverty, our weakness and folly, our blindness and stupidity — and all to sink us in our own esteem, and to stir us up to seek Him in whom all our help is found. This, therefore, is a necessary part of the Spirit's work.

2. But the Spirit also sets before us the nature, variety, and excellence of those blessings which are represented in the Gospel. Does he show us our guilt? He shows us pardon too; by whom it is purchased, and how it is to be had — namely, in an application by faith to Jesus Christ. Does he set before us the sins of our services, the depravity of our nature, our weakness, folly, and

emptiness? At the same time, He directs us to an infinitely pure and everlasting righteousness to justify us; grace purchased and prepared to sanctify us; strength to preserve us; treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and an inexhaustible fulness in our exalted Redeemer, to supply every want. He opens to us the promises of the Gospel, and shows us their fulness and glory. And finally, he gives us a view of that great salvation exhibited in the Gospel, the blessings of which it consists, their riches, suitableness, and excellence — and all this is to direct our petitions, and add fervency to our desires.

Through ignorance, we are often ready to ask amiss, Jas 4.3; to be importunate for a *temporal* blessing when we should rather have had our eyes fixed upon those of a *spiritual* nature. It was ignorance that made the mother of Zebedee's children ask that her sons might sit, one on the right hand, and the other on the left hand of Christ in his kingdom, Mat 20.21. This part of the Spirit's work, therefore, is of great importance. And if, when drawing near to God, we have a view of our guilt, vileness, weakness, etc. and of the glories of the Gospel, the blessings of the everlasting covenant, and the fulness that is in Christ, we have reason to conclude that the Spirit is with us.

II. We may know in some measure whether we have the assistance of the Spirit or not, from the frame of soul in which we pray. Such as,

1. *If we have the Spirit with us, we are in the most humble frame.* Thus, when Abraham was pleading for Sodom, Gen 18.23-32; with what humility he did it; what awe and reverence filled his soul at a view of the infinite majesty of that God he was speaking to; and how he admired his amazing condescension in admitting such a weak imperfect creature to stand before him! A proud spirit is an abomination to the Lord, and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. When a Christian comes under the influence of the Spirit to the throne of grace, what a sense he has of his vileness, his ingratitude, his unworthiness of every mercy! How ready he is to renounce all his own righteousness, and to reckon them as but filthy rags! How willing he is to receive salvation as a free gift, and to admire infinite rich grace in the bestowment of it! This, *this* is the frame that shows the Christian, and runs through all his duties, when the Spirit is with him.

See him: there he is, falling down before God. View his humble posture, an emblem of the deeper humility of his soul. Hear his confessions, how he laments his numerous backslidings, chides his slothful soul, and dares not even lift up his eyes to heaven — but when he does, how sweetly he admires divine grace to such a wretch! Oh, he sinks into nothing! What is his errand? See how humbly he delivers it! He dare not dictate to God. Does he have an affliction in prospect, or is he actually under the exercise of one? Though he would rejoice to have the one averted, and the other removed, yet he desires to be all submission. And therefore you hear him saying, "Father, if it may be for your glory, let not such an affliction come upon me, or take away this thorn in the flesh; yet, will I presume to direct you? No, like my dearest Lord, I would say, Not my will, but *your* be done," Mat 26.39. Thus Eli received the news from Samuel concerning his children. 1Sam 3.18. And thus David committed himself and his affairs into the hands of God when Absalom, in a most unnatural manner, rose up against him, and obliged him to leave Jerusalem, 2Sam 15.25. When a son comes in this humble frame to the throne of grace, it is a sign that he has the Spirit of God with him.

2. *We may conclude that the Spirit of God is with us, when we are enabled to pray with continued earnestness and importunity.* The Spirit is said to make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, Rom 8.26 — intimating, that our desires are sometimes so strong, that we cannot find suitable words to express them by, and therefore we utter them by groanings and broken sighs. Haven't you found such seasons, when your souls were filled with such longings after God, that you couldn't express them? This seemed to be the publican's case. He had such a

sense of his filthy, miserable condition, and such desires for salvation, that he could not properly utter them. He opens his heart first by outward signs, and then in those short but comprehensive words, “Lord, be merciful to me, a *sinner*.” Luk 18.13. The Christian oftentimes, under temporal or spiritual difficulties, comes and pours out his heart with a peculiar degree of earnestness, as the disciples did when they came and awoke their Master, saying, “Lord, *save us*; we perish!” Mat 8.25. The words point out a peculiar eagerness and vehemence, a mind in distress, having more than the tongue can well utter. When we are slothful and formal in this duty of prayer; when we are, as it were, unconcerned about what frame we are in, or what we pray for; when we come only out of custom, and half asleep, to present ourselves before God, and our words die upon our lips, it is a sign that we know nothing of the Spirit’s assistance in that duty.

Saul did not pray thus when he was converted. He might indeed while he was a Pharisee. But if you had seen him on his knees after Christ called to him from heaven, you would have heard him wrestling with holy importunity, under a deep sense of his numerous sins, and of the importance of spiritual blessings. The Spirit sweetly filled his mouth with arguments, and helped him to expostulate with God. Thus Jacob wrestled with the Lord: “He would not let him go, unless he blessed him.” Gen 32.24-26. How happy when the Christian is able to do so too! This shows that he has the Spirit of God with him, opening his mouth, quickening his desires, melting his soul, enabling him even to turn discouragements into arguments, and to hold on pleading as the woman of Canaan did. Who but the Spirit helps the Christian to take a promise, and come and plead it with God? “Lord, here is your word; the word by which you have caused me to hope. I would plead it with you, Lord. Isn’t it your own promise, and will you not fulfil it? Oh, permit me to expostulate with you! I cannot be silent, but *must* speak. I am miserable, and will be forever, unless you will look upon me. Lord, stretch forth your hand, and for your great Name’s sake pardon, sanctify, and save me.” Such wrestlings show that we are in good earnest, and that we have the Spirit of God with us.

3. *We have the Spirit with us, when we are enabled to pray in the name of Christ.* Thus our Lord tells us that there is no coming to the Father, but in and through him; and that whatever we ask in his name, he will do, Joh 14.6, 13. It is not intimated by this, that it is enough to mention the name of Christ, but that in our addresses to God, we look to, and depend upon Christ the mediator for acceptance. That we come renouncing all merit of our own, taking the sacrifice of Jesus into the arms of our faith, presenting it before God as a sufficient atonement for our sins, and pleading its infinite merit for our pardon, and for the bestowment of every blessing we want. Hear the language of the soul, when drawing near to God, and see the ground of his dependence:

“Lord, I would venture near your throne in the name of my Mediator. It is in him alone that it has become a throne of grace, and I would ascribe all the glory to him. Lord, behold! see what he has done and suffered. View the sacrifice you have appointed, you have accepted, and receive a poor unworthy creature. I have nothing to recommend myself to you, but — adored be your infinite grace — my *Redeemer* has. On his mediation I would rest my soul, and come with boldness, and though guilty, expect pardon, and a whole salvation.”

To exercise this faith in Christ, to sink ourselves and our services, and exalt him, is more than a creature can do. Therefore, whenever we are enabled to lie at the feet of Christ, and to thus come in his name, we have the Spirit of God with us, whose peculiar business it is to render the Mediator glorious in the eyes of a poor guilty creature.

4. We may conclude that the Spirit is with us when we find a sweet acquiescence in, and a love for God in prayer; when we are enabled to view the emptiness of all earthly enjoyments and rest in

God as a sufficient portion; when we find an entire acquiescence in him, and are helped to draw near, crying *Abba Father*; when we come in a child-like frame, valuing the favor of our heavenly Father before all inferior things, finding a sweet subjection and obedience of soul, and are satisfied with that communion which we have with him. For instance, that Christian has the presence of the Spirit, when he is enabled to draw near to God in some such manner as this:

“Lord, whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is none on earth that I desire besides you. Just say to my soul that You are my salvation, and I will rejoice more than if my corn, and wine, and oil increased. I am satisfied, Lord, I am *satisfied*. It is enough that you are mine. You are portion enough. Oh, the everlasting love of you, my Father! What will I not render to you for thinking of a creature so unworthy? Oh your infinite love, O mighty God, in coming to rescue me from darkness and ruin! How amiable is your person, and how easy your yoke! Oh, my soul would love you, and serve you with greater diligence and affection than I have done up to now. I would esteem your love better than wine. Oh, my Prophet, my Priest, my King, you shall be all to me, and I will give my all to you.”

This shows we have the assistance of the Spirit, or else we could not so fully surrender ourselves to God, and so sweetly acquiesce in Him as our portion.

III. We may conclude that we have the Spirit assisting us in prayer, from the ends we have in view. If we pray only to satisfy our conscience, and lull that asleep; if it is to make atonement for some sins we have been guilty of, to establish a righteousness of our own in which to appear before God; or if we retire only to please those we're related to, or to bring about some selfish ends — then we may at once conclude that we do not have the Spirit with us. But if we come to the throne of grace with a view to the glory of God, and the everlasting advantage of our own and of other's souls; if this is our chief end, if this is the mark we aim at in prayer — if, therefore, our greatest concern is that we may be delivered from the power of sin, that our corruptions maybe subdued, our polluted natures sanctified, our tempers, thoughts, and affections made more spiritual and holy, and our whole soul brought into a growing conformity to God; if we come for wisdom to guide and direct us, for strength to keep us in an hour of temptation, for righteousness to clothe us, and for greater measures of grace to enable us to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God — if, finally, spiritual blessings are what we have our eyes chiefly fixed upon, and these are the springs and motives from which we consequently act — then we may comfortably conclude that we have the Spirit of God with us in prayer.

Let us now bring the case more home to ourselves by a particular application.

1. *Let us all be concerned to examine ourselves as to this important matter.* Let me inquire, my soul, how is it with me when I come to God by prayer? Do I have a sense of my numerous wants? Do I see my nakedness and poverty? Do I appear vile in my own eyes? Am I enabled to mourn over sin, to humble myself before God, and admire the riches of his grace in taking notice of a creature so unworthy? Do I find a submission of my soul to God in prayer, a willingness to be disposed of by him at his pleasure? Do I have a sense of the excellence and importance of spiritual blessings, and am I enabled to plead with God for them, as a person in good earnest? Do I come in the name of Jesus, looking to him alone for acceptance, and building all my hopes of salvation upon him? Do I at any time find a sweet acquiescence in God, esteeming myself happy if I have but any communion with him, and can but cry *Abba, Father*? — yes, inconceivably happier than if I had all the world? Do I have any reason to conclude that I have His glory in view? Is my errand to the throne of grace to lament over my sins, to beg for renewing and sanctifying grace, so that I may be more like God, and be prepared to honour him more in every circumstance of life? These

are questions of great importance, and should be attended to by us all with the greatest faithfulness and impartiality.

2. *We may improve this subject by way of consolation.* If upon examination, you have reason to believe that you have found the Spirit with you, thus directing and assisting your petitions, then you may conclude from this, that you are a child of God. For the Spirit, as a Spirit of prayer, is a special blessing of the new covenant, and He is not given to those who are strangers to the divine life. You may further conclude that your prayers will be answered in God's own time, and in his own way, and therefore you may wait with expectations of it; and that God will take you under his peculiar care, and fulfil all his promises in the bestowment of every needed blessing. You may further conclude for your comfort, that if the Spirit is with you as a Spirit of prayer, then he will also be with you as a Spirit of sanctification; as a Spirit of illumination to enlighten you more and more in the great mysteries of grace; as a guide to direct your ways, till he brings you to his heavenly kingdom; and when he sees fit, as a Spirit of adoption, as the great Comforter to support and cheer your soul under every difficulty.

3. *From this, learn the difference between the intercession of Christ, and that of the Spirit.* The one prays *for* us; the other prays *in* us, or He helps us to pray. Christ pleads in heaven; the Spirit helps his people here on earth. He opens their eyes, warms their hearts, quickens their desires, and enables them to turn them into petitions. Christ's intercession and the Spirit's too, are of great importance; and blessed be God that his people enjoy them both. While Christ is interceding for them above, the Spirit is helping them to plead with God for themselves here. Oh, glory be to God who has made such provision for us, and given us such encouragement to pray and wait for his salvation!

4. *Hence we have reason to be humbled, that we have paid so little regard to the Spirit in prayer.* How many have been concerned to pray with fluency and elegance of expression, rather than to find the Spirit with them, kindling a fire of divine love in their souls, and enabling them to pour out their hearts before the Lord! Let us each be humbled that we have so neglected the Spirit in this important character. Take care that we do not grieve him, and so provoke him to withdraw from us. And finally, may none of us dare to live without prayer, and yet always look upon those prayers as useless and unprofitable, which are put up only to satisfy conscience, or out of mere custom. Let our concern be that we are not only favoured with the *gift*, but we experience the grace and spirit of prayer. To this may we all say, *Amen*.

CASE 15. How may we keep from spiritual pride after special enlargements in duty?

I am directed to take this case under consideration, in consequence of the following short, but pithy, and experimental epistle:

“Sir — I am one who professed to have received Christ Jesus the Lord: that I could say, I walked according to so great and glorious a privilege! But, alas! I find a sad carnality and coldness in duty, and see that my very best performances are utterly insufficient to recommend me to a holy God; indeed, that there is enough in each of them to merit everlasting punishment. Yet when I have some happy enlargement in duty, especially that of prayer, this corrupt heart of mine is ready to say, ‘Well done, this is something like prayer; now God will hear my petitions, and accept my person.’ Thus is my proud heart puffed up! This rust of pride soon eats out all the spirituality of my frame. I would be glad, sir, to have the following query answered. *How may a person keep from spiritual pride after an unusual enlargement in duty?*”

I think, upon laying this letter before you, I hear many of the hearts of God's dear children echoing these complaints, and longing to have such an important query resolved. It is a common, but a very sad complaint of the believer, that he finds a great deal of coldness and indifference in spiritual duties. He feels his soul clinging to the dust, his affections stupefied, his heart hardened, his conscience benumbed, and all the powers of his soul sadly inactive. So that, there seems to be no grace in exercise, and the duties performed appear to be no better than dead works. In the above epistle, we find a very humble and suitable acknowledgment that the best of our performances are utterly insufficient to recommend us to God, and that there is sin enough in them to deserve eternal punishment. One would think that a person who really sees and feels these things in himself, couldn't help but be humbled before God at all times, and upon every occasion, being sensible of the imperfections of his best duties, and the sin that clings to them. For certainly there is much unbelief mixed with our faith, much diffidence with our hope, much coldness with our love, and much corruption with our desires. Yet we find in the above epistle, that all this acknowledgment, sense, and experience, will not root up, nor keep down, this weed of pride in our hearts. It will and does remain and appears on various occasions, and at no season more commonly than after spiritual enlargement in duty. The manner of its working is here set forth very exactly and feelingly. For, if God at any time gives us the tokens of his love, draws forth our desires in prayer, enables us to wrestle and plead with him, and to lay hold of his promises, then we find that pride is such a weed that it will grow upon the very best of our duties, and the most comfortable of our enjoyments.

Upon this the heart cries out, as Leah did, "Surely my husband will love me because I am fruitful; I will be amiable in the sight of my Lord, because of the excellence of these duties, and the spirituality of my affections." And what follows upon all this? Why, the consequence is very sad and afflictive: the motions of pride spoil the duty, make it unacceptable and abominable to God, and prevent all the happy effects which we hoped would result from it. For in this way we hug our comforts to death. Pride, like a canker, preys upon the very vitals of the new creature, perverts the affections of the soul, and promotes a carnal security. And thus, that which should have been for our welfare, becomes a snare to our souls. I will venture to affirm that whoever seriously attends to his own heart, will find much of this in himself, which may well fill him with shame, and make him humble for the pride of his heart; knowing that thereby he has provoked God, and polluted his own soul.

Upon this, comfort is withdrawn, God is displeased, he hides his face, and the believer is troubled. But after all the disadvantages we feel from the workings of spiritual pride, we find this cursed principle will rise and work. We don't know how to root it out, or keep it under; and we would be glad to know what methods to take to be able to walk with true humility before God. I confess it is very difficult to give any effectual directions in such a case as this, because pride is so interwoven in our very natures, and it works in such a secret and undermining way. However, I would mention a few particulars, which, by the blessing of God, may be happily successful for removing this grievous complaint.

1. *Endeavour to detect and pursue the workings of pride in its various appearances.* Pride, in the believer's heart, is like a midnight thief, which doesn't care to be seen and observed. And nothing tends to suppress it more than looking at it. For immediately upon being discerned, it hides its head for shame, as it were. Our friend in his letter seems to have been enabled, in some measure, to follow this rule. Otherwise he could never have drawn out this complaint from his own experience so feelingly and exactly. But it is not sufficient merely to observe it in this particular

appearance of it. We ought to pursue it in its *other* forms. For it is very likely that the reason why this cursed principle rises and prevails at present, is because it has gotten some strength in other respects, which perhaps have not yet been discovered.

Let me therefore ask you, my dear friend, whether you, who are so puffed up upon spiritual enlargements, don't you feel as discouraged and disheartened under spiritual *contradictions*? Perhaps you're used to thinking that these discouragements have been the effect of true conviction and humiliation. You think that when you don't have much enlargement in duty, you have *reason* to be discouraged, and to be afraid of embracing the free hope of the Gospel. Let me therefore entreat you to look a little closer into this matter. For I am very suspicious that pride gains and maintains its power in this way, only because it is more insensible and undiscerned in these other circumstances. You think it's reasonable to be sunk in yourself, and to imagine that you must not dare to lay hold of free grace while you are under spiritual complaints. Now what is this, if not a certain kind of secret pride? It is saying in your heart, that if you had more holiness, and less sin, then you could be more encouraged. This is the same as saying that our encouragement to hope before God is grounded on the smallness of our sins, or purity of our hearts — as if the greatness of our sins and corruptions took away our right to the free promise of the Gospel.

Now, such a frame of mind as this, if rightly explained, will be found to be nothing less than forcing a condition upon a free promise. You should indeed be humbled and ashamed under corrupt and unbelieving experiences. But if hereby your heart is deterred from laying hold of the free promise, then you may take it for granted that there is pride at the bottom of it. Perhaps it is in this unsuspected way, that the accursed principle maintains its strength in your soul. For it is no wonder if the same principle which makes you discouraged because of your sins and corruptions, should fill you with high thoughts of yourself when you find any special enlargement. And as we should endeavour to thus detect it, so we should likewise attempt to pursue it in its workings. Are we at first discouraged, as if grace was not entirely free? And do we then begin to see the evil of this unbelieving frame, and to fly absolutely to Christ? We should next see whether this same principle doesn't make us proud of our very faith and humility. When, by the exercise of faith, we have received fresh grace and comfort, now let us see whether the same principle makes us proud of the grace we received. Still further, if we set about humbling ourselves for the pride of our hearts, let us watch ourselves narrowly, lest we be made proud of our very humility. On the whole, we should thus pursue it from step to step as it rises; and by a divine blessing, this will have an admirable tendency to subdue its power, and supplant its workings.

2. *Observe how irrational, abominable, and detrimental, spiritual pride is.* You know that in temporal cases, it is not enough to see an enemy. We must see and know him *as* an enemy, in order to be more watchful against him, and steadier in opposing him. Thus it is with regard to this dangerous foe. Though it is so suited to our natures, that we are sometimes ready to mistake it for a friend, yet it will be found upon close examination, to be the most detestable and destructive enemy. For what can be more irrational than for a poor, necessitous, filthy, guilty creature to be elated in the presence of a holy and just God? What can be more provoking to God, than for our hearts to take the crown from His head and put it on our own? And what can be more detrimental to the life of religion in our souls than self-sufficiency? Pride strikes at the very root of all our comforts and graces; and humility is a necessary ingredient in all spiritual experience. For if our faith is true, it is a *humble* faith; if our hope be genuine, it is a *humble* hope; if our love is sincere, it is a *humble* love. The same must be said concerning all the other graces of the new creature. Pride contradicts the first principles of the oracles of God. For when our mind suggests that God

will accept our person, and receive us into favour because of our enlargement in duty, our hearts then speak directly contrary to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel. And to set forth still more of the exceeding sinfulness of this sin, let us consider how peculiarly ungrateful it must be for us to dishonour God by those very favours and comforts with which he freely indulges us. Let such thoughts as these frequently recur to our mind, so that we may maintain a perpetual hatred of this abomination. And *this* may be a happy means of weakening its influence in us.

3. *Fight against it by the word of God and prayer.* You know in temporal cases it is not enough to see and hate an enemy, but we are likewise to oppose him, and militate against him. Therefore, if you would know how to fight against this spiritual adversary, I would direct you to take the sword of the Spirit into your hands, and strike at this sin with it. In order to familiarize the manner in which you are to do this, let me put it in the following light. Does your heart say, this is something like praying? Then produce some word in answer to this suggestion, such as, “We don’t know what to pray for as we should.” (Rom 8.26) Does your mind say, surely God will accept my person because of my good deeds? Reply to this suggestion in the language of Scripture, “Not by works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph 2.9) Does the pride of your heart say, Surely I am amiable in God’s sight because of what I am and have done? Give an answer in words such as these, “What do you have that you haven’t received?” (1Cor 4.7) This is the way to play the artillery of revelation against the workings of corruption. And while you are attempting to thus resist the devil and your own corruptions, look up to God by prayer; imploring that He would recall to your mind by his Spirit, those portions of his word which may be a full answer to the language of your pride — and that he would likewise impress those sentiments upon your mind and heart, and give them such a force and energy that they will effectually humble your soul, and shame your pride.

4. *Endeavour to turn this experience into another channel.* You know that when a river swells and begins to overflow its banks, the way to prevent it is to open the sluices, and let the water run out. By this means it is kept from running over those places where it would be detrimental rather than serviceable. Men have this wisdom in natural things; oh, that Christians had such skill in spiritual things! But perhaps you will say, how will I turn this sad experience into another channel? I answer, are you enlarged in your soul, comfortable in your frame, lively and spiritual in your duties? Then instead of taking occasion from this to be lifted up, make it rather an occasion for thankfulness and encouragement. Endeavour, therefore, to reason in this manner: *Am I thus favoured with special and delightful experiences? Then let me remember, this is not of my own production. What a call this is upon me to be thankful to God for his interposing grace!*

This surely will be found a proper method to remove the present complaint; because true thankfulness and spiritual pride are direct opposites to each other. For, the more thankful we can be to God for what he works in us, and bestows upon us, the less we will be subject to spiritual pride. Again, let these experiences be employed for further encouragement. For, if pride takes advantage of a spiritual frame to puff us up, then it will certainly sink and discourage our hearts when that happy frame is withdrawn. But if we are enabled to take encouragement from the comforts and quickenings we feel, to hope that the same free grace and almighty power will appear in our favour in future times, this will make the present experience preparatory for that season when we may be called upon to live by faith, without sight or sense. Let us say in our souls, If the Lord thus comforts and enlarges me by his free and powerful grace at present, then what a reason I have to hope that if ever I fall into spiritual distress, or into a carnal frame again, the Lord will appear and work deliverance for me in the same free, gracious and powerful manner that he has

now done! By this means, those spiritual frames which have been the food of our pride, will become the food of our faith and love.

5. *Lastly, take advantage from the workings of pride, to excite and stir up spiritual graces.* Just as we see by the complaints of this letter, that our corrupt nature knows how to bring evil out of good, so we may be sure that the work of grace can bring great good out of this melancholy evil. For just as there is nothing too good in this life that it cannot be misemployed by pride and self, so too there is nothing too bad in our Christian experience, that it cannot be employed for spiritual advantage. There is such a thing as improving upon a barren ordinance, and upon a carnal, proud, and unbelieving frame. The proper way of doing this is as follows. Do you find yourself swelled and elated with pride? Then take occasion from this to know more of the corruptions of your own heart, to see more of the sinfulness of sin, and to be more apprised of your own insufficiency for everything that is spiritually good. This sad experience is certainly a fresh evidence and proof of these soul-humbling truths. And if you are hereby more feelingly convinced that without Christ you can do *nothing*; if you are hereby more fully apprised of the deceitfulness and baseness of your own heart; if you are hereby made to see more clearly your own impurity — then these sights and convictions may be employed as a happy means of humbling and quickening your soul, to lay you low at the footstool of free grace, and to cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ. To do this, is to fight Satan with his own weapons, to overcome corruption by its own appearances, and at once to defeat all the ends of the devil and corruption in the affair. It is very plain that the design of Satan, and the tendency of these corruptions, is to eat out the life and power of godliness. But if by these means you learn more of yourself, and see a greater need for quickening, strengthening, and purifying grace, then these complaints will be so far from eating out the vitals of religion, that in the hands of the Spirit, they will be a blessed means to promote true humility and purity of heart. And after all this, what if you were incapable of keeping pride from working? Yet in this way you will find no real detriment arising from it, but rather the work of humiliation will be promoted and confirmed by the very sight and sense you have of the corrupt motions of self and pride.

Let me conclude the whole with two or three brief reflections.

1. How imperfect the graces and experiences of the children of God are in the present state! A believer, in his worst condition here, is very uncomfortable and distressed, or very carnal and worldly. So too, in his best estate here, he is in great danger of being lifted up with pride and self-conceit. The greatest enjoyments and the highest attainments cannot secure him from failing by this. So that, the strongest as well as the weakest believer, needs to *watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation*.

2. How desirable heaven must be! There we will be filled with joy unspeakable, and be possessed of perfect holiness, without the least hazard of losing our purity and delight. There the highest enjoyment will be joined with the deepest humility, and the most perfect holiness without the least tincture of pride. The perpetual enjoyment of God's love will make us completely happy; and the constant sight of God's glory will keep us entirely humble. It will be a blessed state indeed!

3. How blind sinners are with respect to their own hearts! We very seldom hear them complaining of pride, when indeed, they are *full* of it. They frequently have a high opinion of their own virtues, worth, and excellence, and think they are justified in them. Whereas, if they but saw themselves in the mirror of the law, and would compare themselves with the unspotted purity of God, they would blush and be confounded, and abhor themselves as unspeakably vile and abominable. We may take it for granted that all those who have not seen and lamented their own pride, are still strangers, both to God and themselves, both to the law and the Gospel. And if they are ever

brought to Christ, they will be made to see and be humbled for the pride and stoutness of their own hearts.

CASE 16. Is it necessary, in order to evidence a person's conversion, that he sees and acknowledges himself as the chief of sinners, even if he hasn't been guilty of outward abominations? Or, what is that sense of sin, which evidences conversion, and is therefore accompanied with salvation?

The following epistle shows the propriety of these questions:

“Having had the happiness of a religious education, and the privilege of sitting under the sound of the Gospel, I trust I have, by the restraining grace of God, been kept from many external vices which youth too often run into. I have, by attending on the means of grace, been led to see myself as a sinner, and in some degree to feel myself one; for I have daily cause to lament a hard heart and a corrupt nature. And my daily prayer to God is that he would search me, and show me the evil of my heart, and lead me in the way everlasting, and not suffer me to rest short of an interest in Christ. Now, as I have not been guilty of outward abominations, I cannot say with the apostle Paul, that I am the chief of sinners, and so I am afraid that I know nothing of renewing grace. And therefore I would be glad if you would take the above questions into consideration.”

This case seems to be founded upon what the apostle Paul says in 1Tim 1.15. After he had a view of the blasphemies he had been guilty of, and the injury he had done to the cause and followers of Christ, he styled himself as the chief of sinners. But he didn't intimate by this, that all who would be saved in the future should be persons of his character. No, he mentioned being a blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious, so that he might set forth the riches of divine grace in the salvation of a person so unworthy; and that it might be an encouragement to those who in future ages would be distressed on account of the greatness of their sins, when they see that the chief of sinners has already been pardoned and saved. The person who wrote this epistle has not been guilty of any notorious sins, and therefore he is afraid that he doesn't see enough of his sin; that he doesn't have such a sense of his own vileness as he should have; that his impressions are not deep enough; that he must have such a view of the wickedness of his heart, as to readily rank himself among the chief of sinners, even though his conversation and behaviour had been regular and sober — or else he can give no true evidence of his conversion.

In answering this case, I would throw my thoughts into the following method. May God make what may be said, effectual both for conviction and establishment.¹

I. There is a great difference in sins, as to their heinousness. Every sin has an infinite evil in it, as being the violation of the law of an infinite Being. The wages of all sin, therefore, is death. Yet there are many circumstances that render some sins more heinous than others. We read of scarlet sins, and those that have crimson stains in them, Isa 1.18. Sins against light and knowledge, under strong convictions and great advantages, are attended with peculiar aggravations. The sins which Paul mentions were great sins, namely, blasphemy, persecution, etc., because he had the Old Testament to engage with, and he had many opportunities to examine whether Jesus was the Christ or not. But he was obstinately fixed *against* the cause of the Redeemer, and he took no methods to soften his prejudices, but rather to increase them. Sins committed by the same person may be more or less heinous, according to the particular circumstances attending them.

¹ That is, for conviction of sin, and establishment in the faith. — WHG

II. God pardons and saves all sorts of sinners. Among the redeemed of the Lord are all ranks and degrees of sinners. Many who have had the privilege of a religious education, as this young person did, are singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Some were called in their early days; others were not brought in till old age had enfeebled their natural frame. There are those who were sinners of the first rank, ;who now triumphing in the mansions above, and arrayed with all the garments of salvation. There were all sorts among the Corinthian converts, 1Cor 6.9-11.¹ God doesn't confine salvation to a particular sort. He saves sinners to magnify his free, rich, and sovereign grace. And therefore, the heinousness of our sins is no objection.

III. All who are saved do not have the same deep sense of sin. Some see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, feel the greatest legal terrors, and beat upon their breasts with the utmost self-aborrence, crying, *Lord, be merciful to us sinners*. When Saul's eyes were opened, and sin revived; when he came to take a view of his blasphemies, his persecutions, etc., he was shocked. When he came to look within, and to see such a sink of sin, how he mourned, loathed himself, and esteemed himself to be the chief of sinners, notwithstanding all the righteousness that he boasted in before! This sense of sin seemed necessary in him — to keep him humble, to fill him with admiration for the grace of God in putting him into the ministry. And so it was a constant spur to all diligence in the service of that Jesus who had laid him under such peculiar obligations. But all do not have this sense of sin; nor are all brought to Christ the same way. Some are brought gently, without any legal terrors; they are drawn with the cords of love. Their hard hearts are melted down with a view of the riches of divine grace; and the Spirit doesn't reveal their sin to them all at once. Rather, it is a gradual work, and therefore a work of time. They have no outward abominations, as Saul had to loathe himself for; and they don't have the same deep sense of sin. God acts in this, in a way that is most for his own glory, and according to the different tempers of his people. Therefore he takes various methods, first to bring them in, and then to train them up for heaven.

IV. We must not judge a true, saving sense of sin, from the measures or degrees of it, but from the manner of its operation, and its fruits and effects. I would instance this in a few particulars:

1. We may be said to have that sense of sin that is accompanied with salvation, when we are brought to a sight of our guilty, naked, helpless, and wretched state and condition. Do you see yourselves as transgressors of the law, and therefore obnoxious to its curse? Do you find that you are naked, that you have no righteousness to justify you before God, that all your services are filthy and polluted? Do you see yourself depraved in all the faculties of your soul? Are you sensible of your weakness and incapacity, either to make atonement for sin, or to subdue its power and dominion? On the whole, do you see yourself lost and miserable, blind and wretched, and standing in need of a Mediator to bring you into the divine favour, and to do all *for* you, and *in* you? These topics of inquiry will reveal whether you have a right sense of sin or not. These things must be felt and experienced, or else all our confessions and acknowledgments of them will be a mere course of words, and not the genuine workings of a principle of grace within us. But though a person may be afraid that he doesn't see himself as vile enough, if he has been led to discern his real state by nature, and he is made sensible of his spiritual wants, then it is a comfortable sign that he has a suitable sense of sin.

¹ **1Co 6:9-11** Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

2. Where there is a true sense of sin, there is a hatred of it, and a self-abhorrence for it. There may be an awful fear of hell, but no alteration in a person's disposition and affections. The sinner still loves sin, and would be glad to keep his sensual enjoyments, if he could but escape everlasting burnings. On the other hand, the Christian loathes sin, and he appears vile in his own eyes because so much sin clings to his nature. He sees it as opposite to the holy law, and to the infinitely spotless nature of God, as having defaced the divine image in his soul, as carrying in it the greatest ingratitude, as doing the greatest injury — unfitting us for communion with God, interrupting us in duty, and robbing us of all our peace and comfort. Finally, he sees its incongruity and deformity, and therefore cannot help but hate it, and abhor himself on account of it. He cannot talk of the goodness of his heart, as some vainly do, but appears vile and contemptible in his own eyes. He sees nothing in himself to lay a foundation for boasting, so long as sin remains in every faculty, and clings to every duty. It reduces his spiritual pride, and fills him with humility, and makes him mourn before the Lord. He sinks into nothing when he considers the odiousness of sin, and wonders at divine grace in taking notice of a wretch so polluted. This hatred of sin and self-abhorrence is found in every renewed soul, even though he hasn't been guilty of any outward immorality. And this is a clear evidence of our having a saving sense of sin.

3. When we desire and are earnest to be delivered from sin, we may conclude that we have a true sense of it. You may not see so much of the sinfulness of sin as some do, but notwithstanding, it may be burdensome to you. You may be weary of such a companion, and cannot help but desire freedom from it. You reckon yourself a captive, a slave, and it is your great concern in looking up to God, to have your deliverance proclaimed. This shows that you have experienced the special quickening influences of the Spirit of God. This was one of the distinguishing parts of Paul's experience. Rom 7.24-25. "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ my Lord." All who can adopt this language, who are longing to be thoroughly purged and cleansed from sin, and are thankful for any hopes of deliverance through the great Mediator, make it apparent that sin is their real burden; and they have such a sense of sin, that it is an evidence of true conversion.

4. This is apparent when we are made willing to look to, and rest upon Christ for all righteousness and salvation. Those who have no true sense of sin, will never make an application to Christ for salvation. While Saul the Pharisee thought himself righteous, he was an enemy to Jesus Christ. But when sin revived, he despaired and died. He saw Jesus as his only refuge, and he was made willing to go to, and to rest upon Him for salvation. His language is now, "I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ... desiring to be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phi 3.8-9. Wherever there is a right sense of sin, the soul will be willing to receive Christ, Christ in every character, as the Gospel represents him. "Lord," says David (Psa 73.26), "*whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth I desire besides you.*" I would give up my all to you; I would cheerfully part with my own righteousness, leave my darling lusts, and give up my dearest Delilahs, and come to you naked and guilty, weak, helpless, and polluted, that I may be justified, sanctified, and saved by you." Wherever a sense of sin is attended with these happy effects, we may conclude that it was given to us by the Spirit of God, and it is evidence of a saving change.

There is one more observation which I would mention.

V. The more we grow in grace, the more we will see of the sinfulness and detestableness of sin. Our knowledge is like the morning light, which shineth more and more, till it comes to perfect

day. You may not see so much of sin and of yourself now, as you will when God comes to lead you into an acquaintance with your own heart. You may not have been chargeable with any outward immoralities; but as you grow in grace, you will see more of your own vileness, and see reason enough to style yourself as the unworthiest of creatures.

When you consider your nature, how depraved it is, that if God had left you to yourself, you would have run into the same excesses as others have done; when you view the sins you have been guilty of as a Christian, the convictions you have stifled, your murmurings and ingratitude, the rebellion of your heart, your numberless vain thoughts, your coldness and formality, your spiritual pride and ostentation, your carnality, your omissions of duty, your careless performance of duty, and your unmortified affections — as you consider these, you will be convinced more and more of your own vileness. And when you are before God, you will be ready to style yourself the chief of sinners, because your obligations, your engagements, your mercies have been so great and numerous. The more we are like God, the more humbling views we have of ourselves. Sin and holiness are two opposites. As sin increases, our aversion to holiness increases. So, on the other hand, as holiness increases, we see more of the malignity of sin, and we appear more and more odious in our own eyes, even so as to think we are more vile than others, though we haven't been guilty of any gross abominations. Let us now apply what has been said to ourselves. And that we may come to some conclusion concerning our own state:

1. *Let us carefully examine into our sense of sin.* You may not have so deep a sense of sin as some around you have. You may be afraid that you don't see enough of its odiousness, and of your own wretchedness. Are you convinced that you are guilty, helpless, miserable, blind, and naked in yourself? Do you hate and abhor yourself. on the account of sin? Do you desire to be delivered from it? Do you mourn over it before the Lord? Can you not depend upon your services for justification, as they appear all polluted, and therefore are an unfit garment to cover you? Are you made sensible of your need of Christ, and are you willing to receive him in all his characters? Under a sense of sin, have you been made thankful for a Saviour, been weaned from all self-dependence, and made to fly to Him for salvation? Then you have reason to hope that God has brought you out of darkness into his marvellous light, though your sense of sin may not be so deep and impressing as it appears in some others.

2. *From this we see the weakness of Christians in general,* making what ought to be encouraging into what is discouraging. You are afraid that don't you see enough of your own heart; you are daily praying, therefore, that God would let you see more of the plague that is in it. When he answers your prayers, you are immediately discouraged at the view, and cry out, *Will God ever look upon such a wretch as me? Can all this be consistent with grace?* You should rather be thankful for a deeper sense and clearer views of what you are by nature. If indeed you grow colder; if you omitted duties, etc., you might be alarmed. But if you find the same zeal for God, and a greater humility; if the sight you have of your heart is employed by you, and it makes you appear viler, and it fills you with greater self-abhorrence and thankfulness for a Saviour — then rejoice, and look at it as the work of the Spirit of God, and evidence of your growth in grace.

3. *Let us look more into our own heart.* Let us often consider the dreadful nature and demerit of sin. When we see that we are the same by nature as the vilest; when we view the wickedness of our hearts, we may be stirred up to admire the grace of God in sending his Son into the world to save such as us. We may be quickened to adore him for differencing us and others, and for giving us any hope of deliverance from sin. It would tend to keep us ever humble, to make us value the Redeemer more, and to rejoice in that fulness of merit and grace that is in Him. And indeed, we

should never look upon sin without looking upon Christ too, lest we be ready to sink into discouragement. While we view the one to humble us, let us view the other to encourage us, and then we will say with the apostle, Rom 7.25, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

4. *We may employ this subject by way of conviction.* You are all sinners by nature, lost sinners; even you who may think you have a righteousness that is blameless. You who haven’t run into open notorious sins, but have been sober and regular, you too are wretched and miserable, blind and naked. Oh, that I could fasten the conviction upon you! But this is your unhappiness: you are miserable, and you don’t see it; you won’t believe it. Let me tell you, and I tell you the truth, I do not lie, that you must see yourselves in this wretched condition, or you will never rightly apply to Christ for salvation. I must tell you, and I can say it from a real concern for your souls, that notwithstanding all your duties and all your good works, if you don’t have a sense of your guilty miserable condition; if you haven’t fled to Christ under that sense, as naked, perishing sinners; then you are not fit for the kingdom of God. It may appear a hard saying, but nothing is a greater truth. You are some of those whom our Lord spoke of, saying, “publicans and harlots will go into the kingdom of heaven before them.” Mat 21.31. You are those who are endeavouring to establish a righteousness of your own, “not submitting yourselves to the righteousness of God,” Rom 10.3. May the Lord open your eyes and give you a sense of sin, so that you may despair and die to yourselves, and that as helpless miserable creatures, you may look to Him who alone can deliver you from the wrath to come. May we all say, *Even so; Lord Jesus, let it be, Amen.*

CASE 17. When a person has received a temporal mercy which he prayed for, how may he know whether it is granted in answer to prayer, and comes to him as a covenant blessing?

It ought to be the concern of every person who has any regard for his own soul, to see that his temporal mercies come to him with a divine blessing. Such a pious concern as this, excited a friend to put this question to me. And seeing the importance of it, I have therefore ventured to take it under consideration, and I will do these three things.

- I. State the question itself,
- II. Give a solution to it.
- III. Make an application of it.

I. As for the question itself, I conceive it to stand in the following light. A person who hopes he has experienced the love of God in a covenant way,¹ earnestly desires to receive every mercy as coming from the hand of a covenant God, with love in His heart, with a smile in His countenance, and with the addition of His blessing. The gracious soul is assumed to have been in earnest with God for a particular, important favour of divine Providence. The consequence of this has been that God has been pleased to grant him the mercy he requested. He is therefore ready to hope that it comes in answer to prayer, and he desires that his heart may be affected with it, not only as a providential favour, but likewise as an instance and token of God’s especial love. But he desires to know how he will be assured that it comes as a token of divine acceptance. And he would be glad to be certain that he may venture to look at the present providential favour in this encouraging light. He knows it is the very mercy he has prayed for; he likewise knows it is a favour that calls

¹ That is, it *results* from the covenant relationship, cause and effect, and isn’t just random. There are two dangers here. The first is to believe that God won’t act if we don’t ask, and therefore we *cause* God to act (that we’re in control). The second is to believe that prayer doesn’t matter, because God will act or *not* act, regardless; so why pray? – WHG

for special gratitude; and his conscience tells him that his soul was enlarged in prayer for it. These things, then, he is well assured of. But at the same time, he sees that he cannot from positively conclude from this, that the favour is sent in answer to prayer; and if it is, he cannot be certain from this, that it comes with a divine blessing. For he is ready to suspect that he has been too eager in his supplications for a temporal blessing; that he has laid too great a stress upon it; and therefore he fears, though it is granted, that it may be given to him not in *love*, but in *anger*. He therefore greatly desires to know in what manner, and upon what plan he may judge in this affair — whether the favour comes in anger or in love; and whether he may humbly depend on a divine blessing, to make it turn out for his real and spiritual good. Doubtless nothing would be matter of greater joy and pleasure to a gracious soul, than to have reason to conclude that a divine blessing will attend the providential mercy received. On the other hand, nothing can be a greater damper to a serious mind, than to have a prevailing suspicion that what is granted will prove to be a snare and stumbling block, rather than a covenant blessing. This is the question.

But to amplify it a little, I would endeavour to make it familiar by an instance or two. You know that every Christian prays that God would give him day by day his necessary food. Now, this temporal favour is what God gives to those who do not pray for it, and have no sense of their dependence upon him for it. Nor can we be sure that our daily provision is sanctified to us, merely because we pray for it, and God gives it. Again, perhaps in some special cases we pray for a deliverance out of some great trouble, such as granting some important favour in providence. And since it doesn't immediately follow that these special mercies that are granted, will be attended with a divine blessing, the question still remains, how may we know whether they come in covenant love? I would therefore now proceed,

II. To give a solution to this serious and experimental question. And here, let it be observed that three or four things are previously necessary to assure us that what we receive comes to us in a covenant way.

1. *The person praying must be someone in covenant with God.* One who is destitute of saving blessings, may be so far led into the knowledge of the divine providence, as to be stirred up to pray for a temporal mercy; yes, and to be thankful for it when he has received it. And yet this cannot assure him that it will be really blessed to him. God may hear the cries, and answer the requests of an unregenerate person; and yet, after all, there is still a curse on his basket and store. For we know that, as to unrenewed persons, their very prosperity is cursed. Thus God heard Ahab when he humbled himself; and yet it doesn't appear that he was ever savingly renewed. Thus every one of the mariners on Jonah's ship prayed to his god, and the Lord answered their request; but we have no reason to think that their deliverance came as a covenant blessing to them. Don't let any therefore presume to infer that they are interested ¹ in God's special love, merely because He answers their prayers with respect to temporal favours. But if you are a person in covenant with God, and have an interest in the blessings of grace, you then have more reason to hope that what is granted comes with a *blessing*. "For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God," Rom 8.28. No temporal mercy can come as a covenant blessing to a person who is destitute of saving grace, unless it is made a means of bringing him to Christ. But it may be granted to someone who is already in Christ by vital union to him.

2. *The mercy prayed for must be such that it is lawful for us to ask for it at the hands of God.* Sometimes the desires of the children of men, indeed of the children of God too, are so wild and

¹ *Interested*: to have a portion or share in something; to be a beneficiary of it. – WHG

irregular, that they seek what would be hurtful rather than helpful to them. And if we were allowed to choose for ourselves in all temporal cases, we would many a time make a wretched choice. And then, indeed, if God were to answer such requests, he would do it not in love, but in anger. Thus we find the Israelites asked for their fleshly lusts, “and he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls,” Psa 106.15.

3. *The views of the mind in asking the blessing must likewise be lawful.* Perhaps we may desire a particular favour in order to gratify our pride, to indulge our lusts, or to be at a greater liberty to enjoy ourselves, without bringing any glory to God. Now, when a person prays for a temporal favour with such views, he has no reason to expect it will be granted to him. Or if it is granted, that it will be a blessing to him. For it is a mocking of God to ask for a temporal favour with such a view. It would be a mercy rather than a judgment, for God to deny such a request. Jas 4.3. “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts.” We should therefore look well to our aims and ends in praying for a providential mercy, if we hope to have it granted in love.

4. *The methods taken to obtain the mercy sought should likewise be lawful.* For however valuable the favour may be in itself, yet if it be obtained in an unlawful manner, we have no reason to expect the divine blessing upon it. It is true, God may and sometimes does bring good out of evil, as in the case of Jacob’s obtaining his father’s blessing by fraud. But this must not be a pattern for us; nor can we expect God to smile upon unlawful means. And even if they prove to be successful, it is a thousand to one; and what is obtained may become a snare, a trap, a stumbling block, and a recompense to us, Rom 11.9.

These four things, I say, must be previously supposed. Otherwise we can have no reason to think that the mercy received will be a real blessing to us. And I further apprehend that supposing we are right in these four particulars, they are not of themselves sufficient to ascertain the present important point. For some other thoughts must be added in order to give us ground to conclude that what we receive comes in a covenant way.

Do you then earnestly desire to know whether a special temporal mercy comes with a divine smile and blessing? I must beg you to make the following inquiries:

1. *Inquire whether you have prayed for it as a covenant blessing.* If our hearts are right with God, and our minds in a proper frame when engaged in the duty of prayer, we don’t ask for any mercy with a higher view than as a temporal favour. We seek such a mercy, that God may be glorified, that our souls may be endeared to him, and that we may be rendered more capable to honour him by what he gives us. We desire to receive it from Christ not only as King of Providence, but likewise as King of Grace. We are willing to forego the mercy if God sees it will not be for his glory and our good to grant it; and we dread the thought of receiving any favour merely as a temporal one. It is in the nature of true prayer in such a case, to look abundantly above and beyond the mercy sought, however desirable it may be to flesh and blood. True prayer teaches us to seek such a favour as a branch of the covenant — as a mercy that would subserve the glory of God’s name and our spiritual good. We desire that the Father may be glorified in it, not only as a God of Providence, but as a God of Grace. We desire that the Son may be glorified by it, as a fruit of his redeeming love and grace. We desire that the Holy Spirit may be glorified in it by making it effectual for quickening, humbling, and endearing its purposes. Now, if these are our real views in seeking a temporal mercy, then we have the highest reason to think that when it is granted, it comes from a covenant God, attended with the blessing of Christ, and the influences of his Spirit.

2. *Inquire whether you received it as a covenant blessing.* When it came into your hands, or when it was bestowed upon your persons or families, be solicitous to observe with what frame of spirit you received it. Was it merely as a temporal favour? Was it merely with thankfulness, because God had been so good to you, as to thereby increase your substance, your family, or reputation? If this was all, then you have reason to fear that it has not come in a covenant channel. But if, on the contrary, you have been made to see something of the connection between temporal mercies and spiritual blessings, and have received the present mercy as a token of God's love — and if in receiving it, it made such an impression on your soul as to endear your heart to a God of grace, and stirred up your desire to spend and employ it for God in Christ — then this is a happy token that God has granted it as a real blessing.

3. *Inquire whether you enjoy it as a covenant blessing.* Now that you have the mercy, doubtless you rejoice in it, and are thankful for it. But how do you enjoy it? Oh! there is a great deal of difference between the enjoyment that a believer has of a mercy when in a right frame of mind, and that enjoyment of it which others have. Unrenewed persons can taste a natural sweetness in a temporal mercy, and can enjoy it with a natural pleasure. But the believer in a right frame can take a spiritual pleasure, and taste a spiritual sweetness in the enjoyment of it. It is the real desire of a true believer, in the want of all things, to enjoy all in God — and in the fulness of all things, to enjoy God in all.

4. *Inquire whether you endeavour to employ the mercy as a covenant blessing.* You have now gotten what you prayed for; what do you desire to do with it now? Are you for making the best of it only in a natural way, and upon carnal principles? Or, are you for employing it in a way of gratitude to the God of grace who has freely given you his Son, and has *in him*, and *with him*, freely given you this and every other mercy that you partake of?

If you can conscientiously and seriously give an answer in the affirmative to the foregoing questions, upon a close examination, you may then with the utmost certainty conclude that what you have received comes to you in a covenant way; and it will be blessed to you and yours in accord with the most desirable and spiritual purposes.

III. I now come to the third general division. And that is to make some application of the whole, which will be done by the following remarks:

1. *How unhappy are all unbelievers, even in their best enjoyments!* They may indeed spend all their days in pleasure, honour, and wealth. They may have (as to this world) more than a heart could wish. But it is their great misery that in all these things, they don't know God; and therefore they can have no real enjoyment of him. Alas! what are all their pleasures worth while they enjoy them with a curse? These temporal mercies, unless free grace prevents it, will be found only to fatten them up for the day of slaughter (Jas 5.5). There is such an awful curse upon all the possessions and enjoyments of the unbeliever, that in the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is grief (Pro 14.13).

2. *See from this what the best method is to attain the sweetest enjoyment of what we have.* O, my brethren! If you desire to have a true relish of your mercies, esteem it a poor mean thing to have riches, honours, and pleasures without God. Let it be your first concern to seek an interest in the covenant of grace; and then see to it that all you receive comes from the hands of God with a design for your spiritual and everlasting good. And if you can arrive at this happy frame of spirit, it will lighten every cross, and add a double sweetness to every enjoyment. For temporal mercies on this account are abundantly sweeter to believers than to any others. The creature is vain and

insufficient of itself. Its pleasures, however delicate, are either defective or cloying; the honours that the creature can bestow, however elevated, are empty and despicable; and the supplies which the creature can afford, however opulent, are uncertain and unsatisfying. They will be found to be such by everyone who observes his own experience, or has the least notion of what is truly good and great. To those who are destitute of the grace of God, they are perpetually ensnaring and polluting, and will prove a preparation for hell rather than heaven. But if a person is made a partaker of Christ, and is enabled to maintain communion with God, then he will find the creature sanctified, blessed, and sweetened to him. He will have such a relish of it, that it will abundantly surpass all the pleasure that the carnal man can enjoy, or even conceive.

But I cannot represent this most spiritual and heavenly experience better than by transcribing a letter to a friend, dictated by the eminently pious Edward Polhill, Esq., of the last age, after he had lost his sight. It is a letter which shows a heart full of love for God, and lifted up above the creature in communion with him.

“WORTHY SIR — Yours I received, and return many thanks to you for your kindness and prayers. I am blind, but bless God, *content*. All that he does is wise and just. All that comes in his will is welcome. His choice is better than mine. Eyes might have blinded, but blindness will enlighten me. God has not cast me off, but called me aside into the invisible world. There Jesus Christ is the only Sun. Mercy is like a sea of infinite sweetness for faith to bathe in. The promises are like green pastures of comfort. God himself is the dew that makes a spring of graces in the heart. Heavenly truths are the firmament over our heads. The pure air is the Holy Spirit breathing in saints and ordinances. In this world the blind have a prospect, and may see the land afar off, which lies beyond the line of time, in another world. I may say it is good being here. I cannot see outward things; but the new creature in the heart is a better sight than all the world. I cannot read the letters in the Bible; but if I have the quickening Spirit, it is enough. The covenant may be felt in the heart. The promises may bud and blossom into grace, and notions may fire and be inflamed into holy love. The veil is upon my eyes; but my work is to tear off the veil of time from my heart, and to look into eternity; to put back all creatures, and to have all in God, eyes and all, and this is the greatest possession. If I have all things in themselves, I have them but in a finite sphere. But if I have them all in God, I have them eminently, and in a kind of infinity. In waiting, I wait upon the Lord till he inclines and gives me eagle’s wings of faith and love to soar up to him. Near enough to him, I cannot be. O that I were unearthed and unselfed, that my soul might be in perpetual ascensions to him, my love going forth in raptures after him! O for the circumcision of the heart! If the film were off my eyes, I would see the outward world; but if the flesh were off my heart, I would love the blessed God, which is infinitely better. Through grace I hope to come to that blessed region where God is all. In his light we shall see light, and in his love, we shall be forever inflamed to him. But I forget myself, and run out, but not beyond the pardon of my good friend.

“My kind salutes to yourself; and begging all your prayers, I take leave, and subscribe myself,
“Your obliged friend and servant,
“Edward Polhill.”

O that there were such a spirit breathing in each of us! Then we should know what it is to receive, enjoy, and improve every temporal mercy as a new covenant blessing.

CASE 18. How may a Christian know that he is growing in grace?

It is a question of some peculiar weight that I have before me. The resolution of it has a tendency to remove the Christian's fears, help him in examining his soul, and stir him up to a holy diligence and watchfulness in his spiritual course, that he may not be trifling and slothful, but press on towards the mark, and so make some progress on his way to Zion. Here I will,

- I. Make a few observations, that may be necessary to clear this important point. And,
- II. Mention a few instances in which it will appear that the Christian, notwithstanding all the opposition he meets with, really grows in grace.

I. I would make a few observations, that may be necessary to clear this important point.

1. *Growth in grace is generally imperceptible to the Christian himself.* For the most part, it is of a very gradual nature. It is like a plant which grows insensibly, or like a babe which becomes stronger and taller, till at length he has all the proportions of a man; and yet you don't see how this is done. In time, you find an alteration, but you cannot perceive the steps by which he approaches nearer and nearer to manhood. Thus it is with the Christian. He is first a babe, being weak in knowledge and grace; then he is a young man; and after that he is a father. ¹ These speak of great improvement; and yet in general, this is so gradual that the Christian is insensible of it. He is at first a plant; but afterwards he may be compared to a tree, and so he goes on oftentimes, till at length he becomes a tall cedar in Lebanon. And yet the steps by which he ascends to this height in stature are chiefly imperceptible.

2. *Sometimes growth in grace is quicker and more visible.* God does great work in a little time. Some Christians make great improvements, and soon come to a state of manhood. They ripen apace for a better world, and make great advances in the divine life. When God is like dew to their souls, they revive as the corn, grow as the vine, shoot forth their branches, and make a green and flourishing appearance. "When the Sun of righteousness arises upon them with healing under his wings, they go out, and grow fat like calves of the stall." Mal 4.2. Like the sun in its return from the winter solstice, nourishes frozen nature by its warmth and makes it look green and beautiful, so when the Sun of Righteousness, after a long time of withdrawal, comes to shine again upon the soul, he feels the warmth of his reviving beams, and finds a glorious and sudden alteration. He is then like calves fattened in the stall, which are fit for slaughter, and therefore make much quicker improvements than those that are in the open field. The Christian, like them, grows fat, and makes very visible advances in holiness. When God fills the pool of ordinances with his heavenly rain, we are sensible of it, feel the refreshment and go from strength to strength.

3. *On the whole, we may have made some progress in the Christian life, even if for the present we may appear to be going backward.* Some corruptions may for the present harass our souls and have led us aside. By some neglect or other, we may have grieved the Holy Spirit, and he may have left us for a time. And so we may appear to be in a declining and withering condition, though *on the whole* we may have made some progress in grace, and may have gotten some cubits added to our spiritual stature since we gave ourselves to Christ. A child may have some indisposition which may prevent his growth for a time. Yet he may have gotten much strength when compared

¹ The apostle John addresses Christians according to their rank and standing in religion. He writes to babes, those who are young Christians, and therefore weak in faith and understanding. He writes to young men, those who were stronger, more vigorous and lively, and therefore fit to encounter difficulties. And he writes to fathers, those of age and experience in Christianity. In all of these, he alludes to the different stages of the natural life, from one to the other of which there is a gradual ascent. 1Joh 2.12-18.

with what he was at first. David lay asleep for some time, and gave no evidences then of any growth in grace. Yet, doubtless he made advances in conformity to God, though now a corruption leads him into captivity. From all this, then, we learn that we must not compare ourselves with yesterday, if we would know whether we have any more steps on our way to heaven. It might be much better with us yesterday than today, as to the frame of our souls, and yet in general we may have gained some ground. If we would know our growth, we must look back to the time when we first gave ourselves to the Redeemer, if we can remember it, and compare ourselves now with ourselves then.

4. *We may grow in one respect, though we may not grow in all.* A tree in winter may appear to be dead, but it is indeed alive and gathering strength, even though it isn't beautified with blossoms or loaded with fruit. Thus the Christian has his winter seasons. Yet he is making some progress in adversity — when under afflictive dispensations, the buffetings of Satan, under spiritual darkness and discouragements. He may grow, though his faith may not be as strong, his affections as lively, and his soul as comfortable as he could wish. Some dispensations may be more suited to bring one grace into exercise than another. If any grace is strengthened, and we've gotten nearer to Christ in any measure, we are then growing Christians. Some form for themselves marks and evidences of growth in grace; and if they don't come up to that standard, they conclude that they are going backward. Whereas, we ought to be thankful if we grow in *one* respect, even if we don't see that we grow in *all*.

5. *We are not to judge our spiritual growth by the growth of others.* Some with whom we are acquainted, have perhaps made greater advances in grace. They have great knowledge, can reason solidly about the Gospel: their zeal is lively, their faith is strong, their hearts appear warm, and they seem to have much communion with God. Because we don't find the same gifts and measures of grace in ourselves, but perhaps a coldness, a sad indifference, etc., we are ready to conclude that we have no grace. We especially conclude that we are far from being growing Christians, not considering that there are different degrees in different persons. Indeed, we don't consider that these have their corruptions, their inward struggles, their dead seasons, as well as others. Because we are not all Pauls, must we therefore say that we are not Christians at all? Because we don't find the same degrees of love for ordinances as David did, must we say that we have none at all? These would be strange and very unfair conclusions.

II. These things being thus observed, I now come to show when the Christian may be said to grow in grace. Among other things, I would mention these following:

1. *Growth in grace reveals itself in an increase of spiritual light and knowledge.* To see more of sin is (as we observed in another case) a real sign that the work is carrying on. It was by the light of the Spirit alone, that we first saw the wickedness of our hearts, and a loathsomeness in sin. And it is by this light, that our views of it grow clearer and more distinct. When the commandment came, the boasting Pharisee saw himself as a sinner, Rom 7.9. To see more and more of ourselves, tends to bring us into a more evangelical frame, and so it makes us appear more like the followers of Christ. As we see more of ourselves, as the work is carrying on in us, so we see more of Jesus Christ — the greatness and amiableness of his person, the virtue of his sacrifice, the triumphs of his cross, and the importance of his intercession. On the whole, when we see more vileness in ourselves, and more beauty in Christ; more of our own emptiness, and more of his fulness; more of our own weakness, and more of his strength; more of the insufficiency of our own righteousness to justify us before God, and more of the glory of his — in a word, more of our wretchedness and nakedness, and more of his suitableness and excellence, then we may be said to grow in grace.

2. *When we are enabled to go out of ourselves more, and depend more upon Christ, we may be said to grow in grace.* The young Christian is ready to place too much dependence on his own frame. If his affections are not sweetly raised in duties, then he is ready to conclude that such duties are lost. When he finds a dullness, a contraction, a straitness in his frame, he fears that he has no experience of the grace of God. He is too ready to depend upon his own resolutions. When led aside by any corruption, he resolves against it, and goes too much in his own strength. Under spiritual darkness, or afflictive dispensations, he gives way to discouragement too much, and often refuses to be comforted. If, then, we are enabled to lay aside a stress on our frames, and look more to Christ, leaving our souls with him; if we are more sensible of our weakness and depend more on the strength of the great Redeemer; if when Satan buffets and God afflicts, we are enabled to leave ourselves with Christ, pleading *his* righteousness, and waiting for *his* salvation; if under a deeper sense of our emptiness we go to Christ's fulness, cling to and trust in him, resolving that if we perish, we perish at his feet, then it is a sign that we are growing in grace.

3. *We are making some advances when we find a true relish for duties, and grow more spiritual in them.* Young Christians generally have more fire than solidity. They are, says Dr. Goodwin, like new musical instruments — they have more varnish than old ones, but they don't give as sweet a sound. Their zeal and affection often carry them beyond their duty. They are ready to think they must pray so often, and spend so much time in duties, that they cannot otherwise be Christians. But as they grow in grace, they find a relish for duty; they see its great importance and attend to it in its proper place. They grow more settled and solid. They have juster conceptions of God. Their obedience flows more from love. Their services are more evangelical. They attend to duty more in its proper season, and give every duty its just weight. When indeed we find a growing coldness to duty, and indifference, carelessness, and negligence, then we have reason to fear a decline. But when we have a true relish for duties, and are more spiritual in them, it is a sign that we are making progress in holiness.

4. *We make advances in grace when we are more humble, submissive, and thankful.* A humble frame is that which the whole Gospel is calculated to bring us into, and which the Spirit promotes by all His works in us. The more we are sunk in our own apprehensions, the lower we lie, the more detestable we appear, and the more we show of the Christian. The growing Christian has more of a humble submission to the dispensations of providence. When afflictions first come upon us, we are like bulls unaccustomed to the yoke; our proud rebellious hearts are ready to rise against God. But as we make advances, we are brought to justify God, and to acquiesce in all his proceedings.

“Lord, this proud heart would gladly rebel. But, oh, have your own way with me! Why should a living man complain about the punishment of his sins? I would rather be dumb, not opening my mouth against any part of Your conduct, but cheerfully surrender myself and my all to Your disposal, saying, *Choose my inheritance for me.*” (Psa 47.4)

As the Christian grows, he is brought into a more thankful and admiring frame. He admires the riches of grace, and this is more and more his language:

“Lord, why me? Why was my name enrolled in the book of life? Why did you call, renew, and sanctify me? Am I an heir of God? Will heaven be my inheritance? Oh, the grace, the infinite grace and compassion of God!” etc.

This is the very frame of the saints in heaven. Who are more humble than they are? Who are more thankful? They are ever adoring divine grace, placing the crown upon their Redeemer's head, and

giving God all the glory, Rev 5.9-13. Therefore, the more we are brought into this frame, the greater progress we are making in the Christian life.

5. *We grow in grace, when we find our corruptions weaker, and the power of sin more and more subdued in us.* There was a time, Christian, when your poor, silly, foolish heart was ready to fall in with every temptation; when your corruptions were strong, and often led you into captivity. But have you gotten by divine grace a greater freedom from them? Have you been enabled to mourn over them, pray against them, and bring them to the cross of Christ, and get them mortified and slain? Don't pride, passion, envy, discontent, and carnality reign as much as usual? Are you then more on your guard, and do you find your soul more at liberty than before? *This* is a sign of growth in grace.

6. *Finally, when we find less of an earthly, and more of a heavenly disposition, we may be said to grow in grace.* When our esteem for this world is sinking, our attachment to it weaker, when our affections are often withdrawn from it, and we find greater desires to converse with God, and to look above; when heaven grows more pleasing and familiar, and somewhat like the inhabitants above, we are filled with a warmer zeal for God, and desire to honour him by a more active and lively obedience; when we find a growing concern to be dead to present things, and to have a greater love for Jesus, a stronger faith in him, and an increasing conformity to him, then we may comfortably conclude that we grow in grace.

I would conclude this subject with a reflection or two.

1. How awful is the case of those who are absolute strangers to the grace of God! To be conformed to God is the greatest happiness of a creature. What can render us more amiable than to have the divine image in us? What can more contribute to our real felicity? It is heaven to be like Christ, 1Joh 3.2. It is absolutely necessary to our communion with him here on earth, and to our full enjoyment of him above. You, then, who are strangers to the new creature, have no degree of fitness for a better world. What could heaven be to you, but a tiresome place? Could you exult in God as your highest happiness? Could you join the church triumphant in cheerful, unwearied, and everlasting ascriptions of praise to God and to the Lamb? Only sit down and seriously consider this, and you must soon be convinced that your hopes of happiness are absolutely vain, for you are under the power of sin; you have no relish for spiritual services; and consequently, you have no real fitness for heaven. Let me beseech you to consider your present dangerous and awful condition. And *oh*, seek to be a Christian indeed, so that you may not please yourself with expectations of salvation, and at last meet with disappointment. This has been the case with many. They thought themselves rich, and increased with goods, when indeed they were poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. They rejected every admonition, turned away every exhortation, and would not believe the awful truth that they were children of wrath and dead in trespasses and sins. But they cried peace, peace, till sudden and everlasting destruction came upon them, and it was too late to seek grace and look for mercy. Deplorable as it is, this will be your condition, graceless soul, if death were to come upon you while you are persuading yourself that all is well. Let me beseech you, therefore, to consider the things that belong to your peace, before they are forever hidden from your eyes — to be summoned before the tribunal of God, there to be weighed and pronounced too light; to hear the awful word, *Depart!* to see the bottomless pit opening, and no way of escape, no deliverer near — but instead to see the *now* compassionate Jesus, *then* refusing to stretch forth his arm to help you, to hear him crying out,

“You infatuated creature, you are ruined forever. Once I called, but you refused; once I stretched out my hand, but you didn't regard it; now I will laugh at your calamity, and mock now that your

fear comes upon you; you may now call, but I will not answer; you may seek me earnestly, but you shall not find me.” (Pro 1.24-28)

Oh think, *think*, I entreat you, of this melancholy and distressing scene. Let the consideration of it engage you to look into your heart, and with the utmost diligence, seek an experience of the grace of God to fit you for the enjoyments above. Seek an interest in the righteousness of Christ, to give you a title to them. Give God no rest, but earnestly beg that He would send his Spirit to make everything new in your heart, proclaim liberty to your captive soul, lead you to the feet of the almighty Redeemer, and prepare you to enjoy Him.

2. We see what should be our great concern as Christians. Not to grasp for honours, riches, and the emoluments of earth and time; not to gratify our appetites in the pleasures of sense — but to pursue the glory of God, and the prosperity of our souls. Is this, Christian, what you daily have in view? While you are attending to the affairs of your family, are you neglecting your soul? Do you ever inquire whether that soul is starving or flourishing? Is it your greatest care to grow in grace? Are you therefore watchful against every sin, much in prayer, frequent in meditation and self-examination? And are you looking to Christ daily, for all suitable supplies to enable you to make advances? Is it a matter of humiliation that you find so much of the body of sin within you, such coldness toward duties, such degrees of ignorance, so much carnality, spiritual pride, etc.? Do you mourn before the Lord, that there is so little of a divine temper, so little of your Redeemer’s image in you? Do you gasp after holiness, pray earnestly for the Spirit of sanctification to cleanse your heart, and add some cubits to your spiritual stature? To live a natural life only, is not to live: it is only to breathe. You slothful Christians, *awake*, and consider your character, your happiness, your usefulness. All of these call upon you to seek progress in grace. Oh, may this be your motto, “For me, to live is Christ!” Seek more of Christ *with* you, and *in* you. Don’t be content to always be babes, but thirst after an increase of strength, of knowledge, of faith, of love, of every grace, that it may be evident to all that you are not only a Christian indeed, but that your soul is in a healthy and prosperous condition, and that it is your greatest delight to be *growing* in holiness and usefulness.

3. If we have any reason to hope that we are growing in grace, we should ascribe all the glory to God. He is the author and finisher of our faith, Heb 12.2. The same grace that said to us, *Live*, continues this life. The same power that first brought us to God, must still be exerted, or else we will soon return to folly. It is not enough for grace to be implanted; the Spirit must help us to bring it into exercise. Has any corruption been subdued, any victory been gained, any progress been made in your race, any cubit been added to your stature? It is God who has done it. The smoking flax would be quenched, and the bruised reed entirely broken, if God was not to stand by you, and help you. your salvation is all of grace. Grace chose you from eternity, grace called you in time, grace sanctifies you, and carries you on from strength to strength; and at last, the same free grace will finish the work, and bring you into the immediate presence of God. It is no wonder, then, that the saints will forever sing *grace, grace*. May we learn the song here, and walk under a deep sense of unmerited grace, till we come to that world where we will put the crown upon our Redeemer’s head, and ascribe unwearied and everlasting praises to him who sits on the throne, and the Lamb.

4. How glorious heaven must be, where that work which God begins and carries on here, will be perfect! The end of ordinances is, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Eph 4.11, etc. We are at best but babes here, when compared with what we shall be. We are now underage, and have our inheritance in

prospect, not in *possession*. Here we are fatigued with numberless conflicts and struggles with sin and Satan. Now and then we get a victory, but again we are overcome. We make but slow progress in our way. It is difficult to get near to God, and to grow into his likeness.

“But see, my soul, heaven is before you: *heaven*, where all your corruptions will be perfectly destroyed and you will have no more enemies to contend with, no more victories to gain, no more struggles with your own heart; but the conquest will be fully yours, and the top stone will be laid in your salvation. See, heaven is just at hand; where the new creature will be perfect, and appear in its beautiful and just proportions; where your understanding will be freed from all the remains of darkness, your will is in sweet and everlasting subjection to God, and that heart glows and burns with the purest flame of divine love. Happy hour! Desirable period! When I will put off the body of sin, and start into perfection in a moment; when I will no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face; when I will no longer be a babe in Christ, but a perfect man.”

Awake, you saints, lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near. Get up on mount Pisgah, and view the heavenly land where your weary souls will be at everlasting rest, and all your longings will be eternally satisfied with the most perfect and exalted enjoyments.

CASE 19. How may a deserted believer discover the particular sin or sins by which he has grieved the Spirit of God?

This is doubtless a most searching and experimental question, in which there is a need for the greatest faithfulness to be used, both by the one who resolves it, and by the one who attempts to make use of it for himself. In many cases, it seems very difficult to point out to a soul under declensions, what the particular reason is for the Spirit's withdrawal. However, I will attempt to bring this matter as close to home as I possibly can, recommending myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

We must indeed acknowledge that the Lord may for wise and holy ends, withdraw from his people those comforts and quickenings with which they have been favoured. And He may do that without immediate respect to any particular sin or sins committed by them. Sometimes this withdrawal is for the prevention of sin, or for the revelation of sin, rather than as a punishment for it. But generally, divine withdrawals are in consequence of some iniquity by which the Holy Spirit has been grieved. And it is the duty and business of every gracious soul, when he finds himself deprived of these tokens of divine love which he has usually enjoyed, to ask this serious question: “Why does the Lord thus contend with me?” On all such occasions, he has reason to suspect *himself* as being the proper cause of his complaints. Thus the holy Psalmist seems to maintain a godly jealousy over himself when he says, *Psa 139.23, 24*; “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

The question under consideration may be placed in this familiar and soul-searching light: a believer who has been used to walking in the light of God's countenance, and under the quickening influence of his Spirit, now finds that these comforts are withdrawn from his soul; he doesn't experience such a spirituality of frame as he used to do. He now feels himself in a declining condition; his faith weak, his comforts low, his graces not ready for exercise. And notwithstanding all his attempts by prayer and endeavour, he cannot arrive at that spirituality and comfort of soul which he once enjoyed. And, therefore he cries out with Job, “O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shone upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness!” *Job 29.2-3*. Or as the same holy person said at another time, “Behold,

I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand where he works, but I cannot behold him. He hides himself on the right hand, so that I cannot see him,” Job 23.8-9.

This becomes a matter of sad complaint, and the believer wants to know the reason why it is this way with him. Feeling that the Spirit is withdrawn, he sees the greatest reason to suspect that the Spirit has been grieved by him. When he comes to search, so far as he knows himself, he is perhaps conscious that he has been kept from gross immoralities and enormities. For this reason he cannot be certain what the particular sins are for which he is thus visited. If indeed, upon reflection, the believer finds that he has fallen into some grievous sin, either of heart or life, in such a case he cannot help but know the reason for the visitation. Thus, after committing that complicated sin of murder and adultery in the matter of Uriah, David could not help but see the reason for the present declensions of his frame, and the present decay of his comforts. Therefore he cries out, Psa 51.11-14, “Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit. Deliver me from blood-guilt, O God, you God of my salvation.”

Now then, if you are conscious of any enormity in your practice, or any wilful neglect of duty, don’t wonder if the quickening and comforting influences of the Divine Spirit are awfully suspended. We have a general rule laid down in 1Joh 1.6-7, which should be attended to with great concern in the present case. It consists of two parts. The first is mentioned in the sixth verse: “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness we lie and do not practice the truth.” The second part is contained in the seventh verse: “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” From this we may observe that all those comforts are delusive, which are consistent with the love and practice of sin; and that those who are inclined to walk closely with God, may expect delightful communion with him. But the present case stands in this light: perhaps you don’t feel that delight and pleasure in spiritual duties, nor that spirituality of frame, which you were prone to enjoy. From this you very justly suspect that the Spirit has been in some way or other grieved by you. But you cannot be certain in what manner it has been done, because your conscience doesn’t charge you with any gross immorality and defects. It is true that, upon inspection, you see an abundance of corruption in your heart; but you cannot point out the particular sin or corruption which is the ground of your present complaint. You would therefore be glad to know how to discover it, so that the sin may be brought to the cross of Christ, in order to be crucified.

In answer to this question, doubtless the first and grand direction is this, to set about the duty of self-examination. Disconsolate believer, ransack your own heart; look *through* it, look *into* it as deep as you can; and while you are thus upon the search, beg of God that he would examine and prove you, that he would try your reins ¹ and your heart. But it may be that you have thus been searching and inquiring, and you are still at a loss to fix your eye upon that particular sin for which you are visited. You will then ask, “What rule can now be given?” And you will be ready to say that if you cannot discover it by self-examination, then how is it possible that any other would be able to do it? Yet I will venture it, and endeavour to do the most faithful and searching part, and then leave the whole to your own conscience to judge. Let me therefore give you three or four directions by which you may be able to fix your eyes on the particular sins for which the Lord withdraws from you.

¹ *Reins*: our innermost parts, the core of our being.

1. I say, the sin which was the immediate cause of your present declensions, and which most prevails under them, is very likely to be the reason for the present awful visitation. Look back, therefore, and observe the time and manner in which you fell into this declining, uncomfortable way. Perhaps, just at the time when your darkness began, you had some impatience under the divine hand, or perhaps you were left to slight or abuse those quickenings and comforts which you were favoured with. The spouse in the Canticles seems to be sensible that this must be the sin by which the Spirit is grieved. Sol 2.7, “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and does of the field, that you not stir up nor awaken my love till he pleases.” You had been favoured for a time with the divine presence, and the light of his countenance. But you began to grow casual about these spiritual privileges, to be careless about them, or to grow remiss in your duty under the enjoyment of them — or perhaps at this time you gave way to the rising of some particular corruption. And immediately upon this, the Spirit withdrew, and left you in darkness and distress, or under coldness and indifference. If so, then you may be very certain that this was the particular crime which grieved the Spirit.

Further, take notice what is that sin which most prevails under your present declensions. You will be able to learn this by a little inspection. It is generally found that the sin which *causes* the desertion is that which *continues* it. As it has gained such an advantage as to drive the Spirit away, it now rages and triumphs, and grows stronger and stronger under these calamitous experiences. By this you may know that this is the sin which lies at the bottom of your present complaints.

2. The sin, whatever it is, which you now want to extenuate and excuse, you have great reason to think is that which caused and continues the divine withdrawal. It may be that under your present darkness, you look into your own heart and ways, and find a great many corruptions working, and sins prevailing in your soul. The more you look, the more you see the corruption of your own heart, the abominations that are working within you; and those things appear in such multitudes that you don’t know which to fix upon as the particular cause of your declensions. And after all your searches, it is not at all improbable that you may overlook the very thing you are seeking. For those sins and corruptions which you are most ready to fix upon, are those which you are sensible of, lament under, strive and pray against — and these, however they may have caused the divine desertion, yet they do not continue it. Those sins which your soul is for magnifying, and for which you perpetually accuse yourself, you have the least reason to suspect. This is because, so far as you thus see your sins, it is a happy token that the Spirit is present with you as a Spirit of humiliation. Therefore, look further and see whether you aren’t making some excuse for, or palliating some of those evils which are in your heart and life; whether you’re not for making them as little as possible, and endeavouring to throw off the guilt of them from yourself.

Now then, as soon as you can observe this disposition with respect to any iniquity, you may immediately charge the fault upon that particular sin. For instance, have you been guilty of neglecting or slightly performing private, family, or public duties? Have you been negligent in keeping the Sabbath, or careless in the public or private exercises of God’s worship? Or have you conformed to any of the vices and vanities of the world? Perhaps in these cases, your heart is saying,

“It is true, I have occasionally neglected private prayer; or I have in some little instances conformed to the ways of the world — but this is no great matter. I neglected private prayer because my heart was not in a frame for it, or because I didn’t have a clear opportunity for it; and I have given into the ways of the world because there was some sort of necessity for it.”

And thus your mind palliates your offences. You are inclined to excuse your negligence or indifference. This plainly shows that these sins have gained and retain an awful prevalence in you. And therefore you may take it for granted that these are the iniquities for which you now are visited.

3. Those sins in your heart and life, which you find the greatest unwillingness to oppose, are the sins which cause or continue the withdrawal. There are many corruptions working in you, and many temptations assailing you, to bring you into what is contrary to the law or Gospel. Some of these you can fight, strive, watch, and pray against. Others are so pleasing to your flesh, or so suited to your inclinations, that you cannot find it in your heart to vigorously resist them. You may then take it for granted, that these latter lie at the foundation of your spiritual complaints.

4. The sins which you are ashamed or unwilling to heartily confess before the Lord, are those by which the Spirit is grieved. Look attentively into your own heart, and perhaps you will find there is a sin committed or indulged by you, which you would keep secret in your own bosom. You cannot confess it with true freedom and sincerity. And as you are attempting to enumerate your transgressions before the Lord by way of confession, perhaps one (or two) starts up in your remembrance, which you find yourself unwilling to acknowledge to be as sinful as it really is, and as your conscience and judgment inform you it is. In this case, you know in your own conscience that you cannot frankly confess the sin before God because your heart is wedded to it, and you are unwilling to part with it. If it is thus, you no longer need be at a loss to know what hides the light of God's countenance from you. But if you could know it without reservation, and pray, plead, watch, and strive against that sin which you find thus clinging to your soul, you would probably be immediately delivered, and find the Spirit of life and comfort restored to you. We have a clear instance of this in Psalm 32.3-5, where we find the Psalmist had withheld himself from a frank confession. So long as he thus kept silence, his guilt and distress remained and increased. But as soon as he said in his heart, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," God forgave him the iniquity of his sin.

Thus I have endeavoured in the plainest and most faithful manner I could, to lead you to the knowledge of those sins which are the causes of your spiritual complaints. It is very evident from the nature of the thing, that these must be the sins that separate you and your God. For those iniquities that you truly hate, that you lament under, that you desire to confess before the Lord, and to carry to the cross of Christ to be crucified there, are *not* the sins that maintain the distance between God and you. But those iniquities that you have such an affection for — whether spiritual or external, whether in heart or life — that you cannot heartily condemn yourself for; that you cannot confess without reservation before the Lord; that you cannot find it in your heart to oppose with vigour — these must of necessity cause a continued distance between God and your soul. These are the iniquities which are peculiarly provoking to God. These are the sins that harden the heart, that benumb the conscience and tarnish the soul. And remember, you can never expect a return of the divine quickenings and comforts until you can lay your hand upon these sins, heartily pray against them, and fly to the Lord Jesus Christ to have them pardoned and subdued.

Permit me to conclude this soul-searching subject by a few necessary and important advisements on the whole.

1. Beware of extenuating or excusing any sin. He that hides his sins shall not prosper (Pro 28.13). Yet this is what we are prone to. When we are tempted to neglect any duty, our corrupt heart will appear ready to find many excuses. It will suggest to us either that the duty is too hard for us to undertake, or we don't have an opportunity for it, or there won't be any great advantage reaped

by it. Thus we are often betrayed into a criminal omission of what the Lord calls for from us. It is no wonder, then, if the Spirit is grieved, and we soon feel the sad effects of indulging our spiritual sloth. It is no wonder if our communion with God is interrupted, corruption gains an advantage, and shyness between God and our soul is produced.

Again, when we are prevailed upon to neglect an incumbent duty, our corrupt heart will now proceed to alleviate the fault, and make many excuses for it in order to hinder us from freely acknowledging it, and repenting for it. And so we grow more and more hardened and careless, by which the grieved Spirit is still more grieved, and the separation between God and our souls is still continued and widened.

The same may be said concerning a temptation to the commission of sin. Our carnal heart will represent the iniquity as very small, or very pleasant, in order to induce us to comply with the temptation. And when we are actually “drawn away by our own lusts and enticed, then lust, having conceived, brings forth sin; and sin being finished, brings forth death” (Jas 1.14-15). This is the dreadful tendency of excusing and extenuating sin!

It is this sad disposition in *unrenewed* persons, that keeps them under the dominion of their own lusts. It is this that prevents them from seeing the danger of their state. It is this, likewise, that makes them continually careless, without an interest in Christ’s grace and righteousness. It deludes their souls with many vain and dangerous hopes. The same inclination when it appears, and in any measure prevails in a *gracious* person, is peculiarly provoking to God, and effectually robs the person of all his comforts and spirituality, makes him grow more and more carnal, and so produces and promotes divine withdrawals.

Therefore, let us all beware of extenuating any iniquity. Let us rather endeavour to aggravate it to ourselves, and before God.¹ It is true that to aggravate our own sins is very disagreeable to flesh and blood; it often occasions a diminution in our pleasure. Yet it is a necessary work; necessary to our true humiliation, and necessary to keep us in the love and under the smiles of our gracious God. None have a stronger view of the sinfulness of sin, than those who walk closely and comfortably with God.

2. Be watchful against the devices of Satan, and the deceitfulness of your own heart. We cannot have a stronger call to this necessary duty than what may be deduced from the foregoing discourse. For here we see that the devil and our own hearts will use all possible means to conceal from us the particular sins that are the most detrimental and dangerous to our souls. Are we afflicted in our persons, or distressed in our minds, and under the evident marks of divine displeasure? Satan and our corrupt natures join to so perplex us, that we won’t know why the Lord contends with us. Our perplexed minds will now condemn us for every other sin, besides the one that lies at the bottom of our spiritual distresses. And our unbelief will attempt to drive us into desperation because of those corruptions we see, lament, and pray against — while the foundation of the controversy between God and our souls lies hidden under a criminal excuse. See here a most remarkable evidence that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. See here the necessity for a narrow inspection, and of divine illumination, in order to attain the knowledge of our own case, and of the ground of our complaints. *Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation*. By a thorough search, according to the foregoing rules, joined with prayer for divine

¹ That is, to increase its offensiveness in our own eyes, and increasingly see its offensiveness to God. – WHG

teaching, you may be led to see the sin that most easily besets you, and that has gained the greatest strength in your soul.

3. Having found out the particular sin or sins which cause or continue the distance between God and your soul, now endeavour to lay it to heart as most abominable and detrimental. The least sin excused and alleviated by us, thereby becomes a most grievous abomination. Observe, therefore, how it has worked, and does work, in your soul. Hasn't it polluted your soul, weakened your graces, taken away your spiritual strength and enjoyment? Doesn't this indulged or extenuated sin, whatever it may be, destroy the sincerity of your confessions, and the uprightness of your prayers? Can you frankly acknowledge, or heartily pray against that iniquity which your heart clings to, and which it would gladly countenance? Surely not. Again, consider how provoking it must be to a gracious God, to find you harbouring his enemy in your bosom; to find you wishing that it may be spared or winked at. Surely you cannot wonder if the Lord withdraws from you. He does it justly; you *oblige* him to it. And he never will, never honourably *can*, restore his comforts to you until you are brought to hate, confess, and bewail it before him. O beg, therefore, that the divine Spirit would convince you of sin, and show you more and more the sinfulness of that particular iniquity and indulgence that lies nearest your heart, so you may see how abominable it is, as well as feel how detrimental it is.

4. Bring the iniquity to the cross of Christ, to be crucified there. Sin will live everywhere but under the cross of Christ. You may see your sin, you may strive, watch, and pray against it, and it will still prevail to maintain the separation between God and you, until you are directed to exercise faith in the blood of Christ for the forgiveness and mortification of it. "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts." Gal 5.24.

But perhaps you will ask, "*What does it mean to bring sin to Christ's cross, and crucify it there?*" I answer, it contains the following things:

1. *To behold the sinfulness of sin in the death of Christ.* You may see much of the evil of it by looking into the holy law, and observing its polluting effect on our own heart. But such sights of sin, by themselves, will not subdue it. Look at the cross of Christ; behold him suffering, bleeding, dying, and under his Father's withdrawal for the sin imputed to him. There you may look and wonder, look and mourn, look and raise your indignation against sin in the strongest manner. This will be a most effectual means of making you truly ashamed of it, and to mourn for it with a godly and evangelical sorrow.

2. *To account every indulged sin in you as crucifying the Son of God afresh.* By giving way to iniquity, by harbouring it in your bosom, or casting a pleasing glance upon the abominable thing, you are guilty not only of breaking the law, but of undervaluing the blood of the covenant. What! Did Christ die for sin, and you will indulge it? Surely this would be doing what lies in your power to bring him down, and nail him to the cross afresh. Oh! If we could only have such conceptions of indulged sin, they would greatly tend to set our hearts at the utmost distance from it.

3. *To cast the guilt of our sin upon the atonement of Christ, by faith.* Do we now see ourselves truly guilty and filthy? Are we ashamed of ourselves, and enabled to abhor ourselves, because of our abominations? Now surely we can only experimentally conceive that nothing short of an infinite atonement can procure remission. Behold, therefore, the atonement that Christ has made; see how satisfactory it is to divine justice; see how sufficient it is for our pardon; and let us now endeavour to answer the challenges of a guilty conscience, by the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus we will receive a divine pardon to our consciences; thus we will receive peace and reconciliation with

God. And then we will find Him restoring comforts to us, restoring the joys of His salvation, and the quickenings of his free Spirit.

How unhappy is the believer while he lies under the guilt of unpardoned sin, and while the corruption and unbelief of his heart keep him back from a free confession of it! He has now lost all enjoyment of himself, all communion with God, and all special pleasure in, or profit by, his ordinances. He now sinks in deep mire where there is no standing; he has now come into deep waters where the floods overflow him. But when he is enabled to see his sin, guilt, and impurity, and to disburden his conscience by an application to the blood of Christ, then his soul is eased, his heart is purified, his spiritual liberty is restored, and a gracious God returns to him in loving kindness and tender mercies.

CASE 20. How should we read the word of God, so that it may be for His glory, and the advantage of our souls?

This is a question of no small moment. It relates to a duty incumbent upon all who are favoured with the word of God. It is a duty too neglected by professing Christians, even though it is so peculiarly calculated to promote our spiritual advantage, and is often made effectual for that purpose. The person who sent in the question appears to be in some perplexity as to how to discharge his duty so as to get some spiritual profit. I will give you his own words.

“I am under some uneasiness concerning the word of God. I hope I love to hear it opened; to hear of that glorious Saviour exhibited in it, and that satisfaction he has made to justice. But as to reading it, what *coldness* I find in that duty! I sometimes appear to delight in the duty. But if I try to meditate on the word that I’ve read, how sadly my thoughts wander! So it is but little that I understand of it. I don’t know what method to take in reading — whether it would be most useful to begin at the beginning, and so go on regularly. Besides this, there is a great part of it that I don’t know the meaning of. I have often heard of the glorious promises there. But when I meet with them, I am afraid to take the comfort of them lest I deceive myself with false hopes. I have sometimes read the word before, and put up a few petitions that I might read and meditate on it with advantage. But, alas! I have so carelessly attended to it, that I have thought at times I had better omit these petitions. In this perplexity, therefore, I would be glad of your directions, and of your answer to the above question.”

In this case, you find the experience of many, and the question given is of great importance, and is worthy of our consideration, because it may be useful, by a divine blessing, both to our direction and quickening. There are numbers in this Gospel land who never look into the Bible. So too, many of those who read it, do it in such a manner as to receive little or no profit by it. Some read it as a task; others read it in a careless, customary manner, thinking they have done enough if they have but gone through a chapter or two, even if they hurried through it without consideration, or read it when half asleep. If you thus read the word of God, you cannot expect any great advantage from it. For when we trifle with God in our duties, we provoke him to withdraw his Spirit, and to withhold his blessing.

The directions I will give for the profitable reading the Scriptures, will be most particularly suitable to your private retirements. For I hope that you, who look upon prayer as one part of it, look upon reading as another important part of private duty. Permit me, therefore, to suggest to you the following directions:

1. Read the word with prayer. Prayer is one of the great means of bringing down the divine blessing upon all ordinances and duties, to our spiritual edification. It is a means of preparing our heart for other duties, and of enabling us to get good from them. It would be well for prayer to go before reading. However, if circumstances will not permit you to spend some time in this duty before you read the word, do not absolutely neglect it. Rather, send up a few petitions to God, that He would prepare your heart for the work that lies before you; open your eyes, that you may understand the Scriptures; and accompany reading with a divine blessing, so that it may answer some valuable purpose in your soul — either to enlighten, quicken, or comfort, or in some way or other promote your spiritual good. When you consider these things, you cannot help but see the propriety of prayer before reading. But especially *accompany* reading with prayer.

Don't think you have done all that is incumbent upon you, when you have read the Scripture either in the family or the closet. *Pray over it before God.* Have you been reading any promises of spiritual blessings? *Plead them with God.* Has the chapter represented the odiousness of sin, its dreadful consequences, the falls of God's people, and the salvation of the chief of sinners? Then beg that your eyes may be opened to see the malignity of sin, the wickedness of your heart, and that you may be kept from those evils which many have fallen into, and be enabled to admire the riches of free grace in the salvation of creatures so unworthy, and in your own in particular.

Have you been reading of the privileges of God's children here, and the glory they will have hereafter? Or have you been taking a view of the various duties in their respective relations and circumstances in life? Or of their various experiences, and of the dealings of God with them? Beg that your heart may be suitably affected with such representations, so that you may be encouraged in your Christian course, quickened to run your race, confirmed in your belief of the reality of religion, and be enabled to continue till you receive the end of your faith, even your complete and everlasting salvation. Has the chapter been representing the Mediator, his glorious person, his important offices, his amazing love, the triumphs of his cross, or his qualifications for the great work that he has undertaken, and therefore his all-sufficiency to save? Be earnest with God, so that you may be enabled to leave yourself with this Jesus, that you may be sprinkled with his blood, have a share in all the blessings he has purchased, and that his love may ever endear him to your soul, kindle the sacred fire in your breast, and engage you to walk before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of your life.

Thus let reading be accompanied with prayer. Remember that the Scripture is full of important mysteries which we cannot see the beauty of, unless the Spirit opens the eyes of our understanding. Our hearts are naturally full of prejudices against the glorious contents of Scripture, and therefore we want the Spirit to remove these, and give us a true relish for the great truths of revelation; and impress them powerfully upon our minds to our salvation. Those who neglect prayer, and depend on their own judgment and skill to guide them in matters of everlasting moment, have no reason to expect the Spirit's teachings. And they are therefore liable to fall into every error, even those that will prove eternally destructive to their highest interests. Pray, therefore, for divine direction, for divine quickenings, so that what you read may be the means of bringing you nearer to God, and of promoting your everlasting advantage. Finally, earnestly pray that while you are "beholding the glory of the Lord in the mirror of his word, you may be changed into his image, from glory to glory," and may find that those truths you are reading, are properly impressing, warming, and establishing your heart, that you may be growing in the image of your Redeemer, and be training up for a glorious and everlasting world above.

2. Observe some order in reading the word, and make use of those helps that may be necessary to your understanding it. This person is at a loss to determine whether he should begin with and go regularly through the Bible, or not. This seems to be the best method to observe at your stated times of reading; and it will not prevent your looking into other parts of Scripture when you have opportunity. This method will give you a view of the great events which the Scripture mentions, and of the various circumstances of the church from period to period, and of God's dealings with them. By this means, you have a regular view of things, as they appeared from the creation down to Christ and his apostles. You will hereby have a greater insight into Scripture history and chronology, which will be both entertaining and useful, and keep your ideas of things relating to persons and facts distinct and clear. This person further says there is a great part of Scripture that he does not understand. You should read the Scripture, therefore, with an exposition or paraphrase.¹ This will open the text to you, show you the connection, the design, the meaning, and so furnish you with matter for serious meditation. What end will it serve for you to read this sacred volume, and not understand it? *If it is a sealed book, it is likely to be useless.* On the whole, though you may understand some parts, yet there are others that will appear mysterious, and will remain so, to your great disadvantage in reading, unless you have some interpreter to help you to understand their meaning.²

3. You should be concerned to read the word of God with great seriousness and attention, and a real desire to have the contents of it impressed upon your mind, so that you may be better fitted for glorifying God in every character and station. If you run through a chapter or two in a hasty, cursory manner, you cannot expect much advantage. You should be concerned to attend with the utmost care and diligence, as well as with the greatest seriousness. A sense of the glorious Author, and of the subject matter of Scripture, should fill you with a peculiar awe, and command a reverence. *It is the word of God;* it comes with a "thus says the Lord;" it has his image stamped upon it, and it is his message to you concerning things of everlasting moment. It is not designed to amuse us with trifling and empty speculations, or divert us with romantic stories. It contains things of a far nobler and more sublime nature, even things that concern our everlasting peace. It reveals the transactions of eternity concerning the salvation of man. It represents the fall, with all its melancholy consequences; our state by nature, how wretched and deplorable it is! It sets forth the riches of divine grace in appointing a Saviour, and in the method taken to bring about our redemption and salvation. It shows us the encouragements we have to apply to the Redeemer for all saving blessings, represents the nature, variety and excellence of them, the happiness of the saints in heaven, the triumphs and solemnity of the great day, the sentence that will be passed upon the wicked, and the awful execution of it in hell. It is full of promises on the one hand, and threatenings on the other, and it therefore calls for the greatest seriousness and attention in those who read it. It is designed to be a means of our sanctification, and so to fit us for the heavenly world; and therefore we should seriously attend to it. And, lastly, it is that word by which we must be judged. This is the grand book that will be opened, and according to this, the sentence will be passed. All the opportunities we had to read and hear it, but not employed, will appear against us, if we are found to be strangers to Jesus, and aggravate our condemnation.

¹ It is an unspeakable privilege that we have such a variety of these, both upon the Old and New Testament. Permit me to recommend Dr. Guise's excellent paraphrase of the New Testament when you are reading that part of Scripture, on account of its clearness, fulness, and yet conciseness, as well as from the experience I have had myself of its peculiar usefulness.

² That is, a commentary (e.g., John Calvin, John Gill, Matthew Henry, etc.). – WHG

How seriously, reverently, and attentively then we should read this sacred word! In sum, when we read the Scripture, it should be with views and desires of feeling its power and tasting its sweetness; that our minds may be more enlightened by it, and our souls more established; that our corruptions may be more mortified, and our graces more quickened and strengthened; that our doubts may be more removed, and our souls be supported under all the difficulties of life; that the promises may be more and more our joy, heaven be more in our eye, and we be set to long more for the full and everlasting enjoyment of God above.

4. Reading the word of God should be accompanied with meditation and self-examination. Reading alone will be of little service. Food taken into the stomach will serve no valuable purpose unless it is digested. Meditation is digesting spiritual things, and turning them into nourishment for our souls. By this we extract honey from every truth, and so we get some additions to our knowledge and experience. It is a means of humbling, quickening and establishing our souls, and of kindling a fire in our affections. While the Psalmist was musing, *the fire burned*, Psa 39.3. How often in meditation upon what the Christian has been reading, has he found his affections raised, and his soul brought near to God in some measure! How often while musing, has he been filled with an indifference to this world, hatred of sin, self-abhorrence, love for the Lord Jesus Christ, admiration for His rich and infinite grace, warm desires for the enjoyments above, and satisfying views of an interest in them! By meditation the word takes deeper root in us, makes a more powerful impression on our mind, and furnishes us with matter for prayer. As often as you read, be concerned to meditate upon it. Also, examine yourself by it, to see what concern you have with it, what influence it has had upon you, and how you may employ it. Have you been reading about any of the marks and characters of the people of God, of the graces of the Spirit? Inquire whether you have found any of them in your own soul. Has the chapter represented some of the doctrines of Christianity? Examine what knowledge you have of them, how they suit your experience, and what use you may make of them for humiliation, encouragement, etc. Have you been reading about the love of God in the various parts of redemption and salvation by Christ Jesus? Here is a theme for your meditation; here is a call for self-examination. Inquire whether it has ever affected your heart, raised your admiration, and kindled a sacred flame in your soul. Finally, compare your heart with what you read. See whether it is your case that is represented, and endeavour by meditation upon it, and self-application, to gain some spiritual advantage from it.

To these directions I may add,

5. Read the word of God frequently. The more often you read the Scriptures, the more benefit you are likely to receive. Let the Bible be your companion. Be conversant with it. Consult it on all occasions, in every difficulty. When you want quickening, direction, comfort or establishment, look into the sacred word. Let it be your daily practice to read it, because by this means you will get a growing acquaintance with it, with its various mysteries, the duties it represents, the encouragements and directions it gives you in every case. And so, by a divine blessing, you will have your knowledge and experience increased, your graces confirmed and strengthened, and your way made easy and pleasant through this difficult wilderness.

I will now close with two reflections.

1. What reason do we have to be thankful for the Scriptures, and the free use of them? When we consider the divine authority of this book, view its important discoveries, its peculiar usefulness, and how many are deprived of it, we have reason to admire God's infinite grace that we enjoy it,

and we should ever esteem it as the choicest of our treasures. We have great reason to be thankful that God is delivering us from Popery from time to time, as by this means our sacred privileges are continued to us, and we have the free use of the Bible. We have it in our own houses, as well as in the house of God, and we can examine it on all occasions, and try every doctrine by this divine standard. These must not be ranked among the least of our mercies. They are of great importance, and they call for our highest and our united praises.

2. What matter of lamentation is it that this sacred book is so neglected, and how inexcusable such neglect must forever be? It is to be feared that there are many families in this land, who do not have so much as a Bible in their houses; nor do they desire it. There are others who have it, but let it lie neglected, as an unfashionable book. Romances, plays, history, and various sorts of human compositions are in constant use. But this most excellent volume, this book that is the foundation of all our knowledge of divine things, our holiness, and our comfort, is thrown aside; or when it is ever opened, it is with reluctance. What amazing ingratitude and stupidity this is! Oh, may we all be humbled for our own and others' negligence, and be concerned in our respective stations to esteem, use, and gainfully employ the Scriptures ourselves, and do all we can to excite others to do the same — that we may see peace and righteousness again flourish, ignorance and superstition banished, and a knowledge of the gospel spreading throughout the land. So, Lord, let it be. Amen, and Amen.

CASE 21. How may a Christian attain to performing the duty of serious meditation, in a right manner?

This question is grounded upon the following letter:

“Sir: — I am by profession a follower of the blessed Redeemer, and hope I can appeal to the Searcher of all hearts, that it is my desire to walk in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Holy, serious meditation is, I am persuaded, a duty which every Christian ought to exercise himself in. It is a duty in which I once took great pleasure and delight. Not a day was suffered to pass in the neglect of it for a considerable time. But alas! may I say to my shame, that an alluring world, a tempting devil, and a still viler traitor within, conspired against the welfare of my precious and immortal soul. I began to perform it in a slight and indifferent manner, and at last I was prevailed upon to neglect it. Now I feel the awful effects of this, in a dark understanding, a hard heart, and cold affections. I endeavour to set about the duty — but *oh!* the Spirit is withdrawn; I have lost my God; and where will I go? My thoughts immediately go after some trifling vanity; I endeavour to rally them, but they are soon gone again. I command them in the name of the Lord to attend to it, for I have a great work to do; but all is of no avail.

“I should be greatly obliged to you, Sir, if you would take my case under your notice, and give me some directions concerning the right performance of this so important a duty.”

I will aim at an answer to the various particulars contained in this serious case, by laying down the following propositions:

1. There is a great difference between speculative study and spiritual meditation. This observation is of the greatest importance to direct us in what we are to aim at when we are striving to perform this duty. Our friend, in his letter, seems to have a very clear notion of the nature of this duty, and the difference between it and mere study, from his own experience. But yet it is needful to say a few words to make this distinction clear. For though there is in appearance a near affinity between study and meditation, yet in reality they are as different from one another, as the sun shining in

the heavens, and a painted sign of the sun. It is to be feared that many persons are apt to imagine that meditation is nothing but thinking over, looking and inquiring into, the doctrines and duties of the word of God. But it is plain that a person may employ himself much in this way, and yet be a stranger to true meditation.

The difference lies here: Study is looking into divine things in order to *understand* them; but meditation is ruminating on them in order to apply them to our cases and consciences, and to raise our affections towards spiritual things. Study is, I may say, the thoughts of the *head*, while meditation consists in the thoughts of the *heart*. By *studying* concerning God, for instance, a person inquires into the evidences for His existence, and for a notional acquaintance with his perfections and glories. But by *meditation*, he contemplates those glories in order to affect his own heart with them, and to see his own concern in relation to them. The same difference may be observed between these two with regard to any of the doctrines or duties of Law or Gospel. If you would therefore attain to perform this duty in a proper manner, it is highly necessary that you know what it is when you set about it. And you should keep up this important distinction lest you cheat yourself with bare speculative study in place of holy meditation.

2. The chief part of the experience of religion is included and contained in a right performance of this great duty. It is in holy meditation that we feel all the experiences of the spiritual life, and exercise all the graces of the Spirit. What is the *exercise of faith*, but realizing thoughts upon divine and spiritual truths? What is *holy desire*, but a realizing view of the desirableness of God in covenant, so as to draw forth our longings for Him? What is the exercise of the *grace of hope*, but serious meditation upon the promises and blessings promised, with suitable affection? Where does the exercise of the *grace of love* consist, but in endearing thoughts and views of God in Christ? And what is the *grace of humility*, but having low and abasing thoughts of ourselves? So that, I may venture to affirm that true grace is no further exercised by us, than as our thoughts are employed by holy meditation — in viewing and realizing spiritual things in a spiritual, heart-affecting manner. And this duty of meditation is of such a nature, that it is included in all other spiritual duties, so far as they have anything of the exercise of grace in them.

For instance, in *prayer* we have no exercise of grace, but so far as our souls take notice of our own wants, and of Christ's grace and fulness. In *reading* we have no exercise of grace any further than as we understand, realize, and apply to ourselves what we read. The same may be said concerning singing the divine praises, hearing the divine word, confessing our sins, and the like. So far, then, as there is anything of the power of religion in our souls, thus far the thoughts of our hearts are engaged in and employed about the spiritual things we are conversant with. And thus, when any grace is exercised, there is some spiritual meditation, whatever the duty engaged in may be.

But, sometimes this duty of holy meditation is performed alone, as a separate duty — namely, when the soul is enabled to look with a spiritual eye, and in an affectionate realizing manner, upon the *things which are not seen, and are eternal*; when we designedly set ourselves to think about spiritual subjects, and have thoughts flowing in upon us; when we have the doctrines, promises, or precepts of the word brought to our minds, and we receive them to ourselves, and apply them to our own cases. But whether meditation is performed by itself, or in any other duty, remember that if it is rightly performed, it always includes in it the exercise of grace; and the exercise of grace always includes meditation. From what has been said concerning this duty, it immediately follows that none but the lively Christian can daily perform it in a right manner. And this seems to have been the happy case of the person who wrote this letter.

3. There is a necessity for the spiritual operations of the Spirit of God, in order for a right spiritual performance of this duty. Let us contemplate as well as we can upon what we read, hear, or know. Yet, unless we are favoured with the presence and influences of the divine Spirit, we will find ourselves incapable of true meditation. Without Him, all our contemplations will be dry study, and speculative thought — a laborious attempt without success. But if the divine Spirit takes from the things of Christ, and shows them to our souls, *then* we can see them, *then* we can realize them, *then* we can feel them and apply them to ourselves, and we can think upon them with spiritual affection. As a proof of all this, I may appeal to the experience of all God's people. And I may say, as Job does in another case, "Now, if it is not so, who will make me a liar, and make my speech worth nothing?" (Job 24.25)

4. The Holy Spirit is a gracious, just, and sovereign agent. We must acknowledge that he is sovereign; for like the wind, he blows where he wishes, Joh 3.8. But let us not forget that he is likewise a wise and just agent. He is, I say, a *just* agent — for when he is quenched or grieved, he resents the indignity, and justly withdraws. Therefore, if we grow negligent in any duty, or give way to any sin, we have reason to expect that He will withdraw from us. And when he is gone, I may say, there is an end, for the present, to all the right performance of holy meditation. Further, it is plain that the Spirit acts as a *wise* agent. He knows best when to favour us with his influences, or when to suspend them.

5. Though we don't have the influences of the Spirit at our command, there are many things that may be done by us, which may drive him away; and many means may be made use of to obtain his gracious return. As to the former of these, I need not tell you how to drive him away. This is what I hope you dread and detest as the sorest evil. But when he is withdrawn, the great question is, What means must be made use of for his return, that thereby our souls may be fitted for the spiritual exercise of holy meditation? This is what I apprehend our friend particularly desires to know. He wants direction for the right performance of the duty, now that he finds he has lost his capacity for it. But I hope he doesn't imagine that any directions can answer his end without the Spirit's return. So that the first and chief concern is not, *How I may set about this work so as to attain the delightful performance of it?* — but, *What method must I take to have the former influences and assistance of the Spirit restored to me?* For then, and not till then, will this duty be rightly performed.

Give me leave here to lay before you a few plain directions as follows:

1. Is the Spirit withdrawn? Endeavour to maintain a sensibility of his absence. For while there is left in our souls a distressing, humbling sense of his absence, it is a good sign that he is not totally withdrawn. But if we grow careless and indifferent about his presence and influence, and we now think to recover ourselves by virtue of the use of means in our power, we have missed the way, and can never attain what we want, until our souls are led out after his gracious influences.

2. Inquire into the particular cause or occasion of the Spirit's withdrawal. Once you have found out the sin or sins which occasioned it, then go and humbly confess them before God. Loathe yourself for them, and bring them to the cross of Christ to be pardoned and crucified.

3. Never omit spending some time in private. Daily converse with God, with his word, and with your own souls. Keep steady to private religion, and endeavour to make the best of it. By no means neglect the duty itself, under a pretence that you cannot perform it rightly without the Spirit. It is indeed very unpleasant, and very discouraging, when we find from day to day that the wheels of devotion drive on heavily. But however unpleasant it is, you should still keep to it in order to

maintain a sense of divine withdrawals, and a humble frame of spirit under it. But if you are prevailed upon to neglect these regular exercises, then you have no reason to expect that the life of religion might be maintained, or the comforts and pleasures of it restored to your soul.

4. Take advantage from what you feel in yourself to promote the work of meditation. Are you in a dark, declining, and deserted frame? It's true, you cannot at present meditate as you would upon the glories of God in Christ with sweetness and delight. All your endeavours to realize and impress these glorious subjects upon your mind will be found abortive while you remain in this declining frame. But remember, in this dark season you are called upon to another sort of meditation — namely, to meditate upon the sinfulness of sin, the deceitfulness of your own heart, the corruption of your nature, and the sad effects produced by the working of corruptions in you. If you can seriously contemplate upon these awful, humbling subjects, this may be a happy means of rendering Christ and his grace more precious and desirable to your soul. Though in your present frame you cannot find it in your heart to dwell upon glorious and delightful subjects, you may find matter enough in your present condition to fill your thoughts with subjects of a self-abasing and penitential nature. And when you are employed in this sort of meditation, turn it into confession and humble supplication.

5. And *lastly*, Don't think the duty of holy meditation must be confined to itself, but bring in other spiritual duties to its assistance. It isn't very often that we can perform this duty in a right manner, separated from other duties. It is indeed a happy thing if a person can regularly and daily form his mind to it, and find his frame fitted for it, whenever he designedly sets about it. But generally speaking, I believe this is a privilege that is not very common. For when we professedly apply our minds to it, and attempt to pursue a spiritual subject by contemplation, the vanity of the mind either prevents us from entering into any regular chain of thought, or it soon breaks in upon it. When we are thus disappointed, the more we strive against the stream, the more embarrassed and perplexed we will be. It would therefore be proper to turn this attempt at meditation into mental prayer; or else take the word of God or some spiritual author in hand, with a view to direct our thoughts and apply what is read, to our own case and circumstance. If our thoughts can be seriously employed in reciting any portion of Scripture from memory, or reading it, or lifting up our heart to God in spontaneous prayer, this is as real a meditation as if it were performed in a separate duty.

On the whole, if you are inclined to attend to such rules as these, you may hope that, before you are aware, your soul will make you *like the chariots of a willing people*, Sol 6.12. I will conclude with a few remarks on this experimental case, for the benefit of all.

1. How gradually sin makes its entry into our souls! Perhaps at first we only begin to perform a duty in a slight manner; then we proceed to an occasional neglect of it; and then to an almost total neglect. By this, the door is set open for sin and Satan to enter in. Our hearts grow harder and harder, our thoughts more vain, and our souls too weak to withstand any temptation, or engage in any duty.

2. How sad are the consequences of grieving the Spirit! It must be acknowledged that He is very often grieved by us; but blessed be his name, he doesn't always take advantage against us. He doesn't always resent the affronts we cast upon his gracious and comforting influences, by undervaluing or overvaluing them. If he did, the people of God would perpetually be in a deserted, uncomfortable condition. But once he is provoked to such a degree as to actually withdraw, what sad effects follow! Now the graces of the Spirit seem to lie dead; now nothing but sin and corruption seem to reign; now we are exposed to fall ready prey to our spiritual enemies — and

we may be obliged to pray and wait a long time before there is any comfortable return. Let us therefore be very cautious and watchful, lest we dishonour and offend Him. For when we begin to fall, we don't know how low we may fall, or how dismal our case may be, before He returns and we are revived.

3. How ungovernable our thoughts and affections are! It is evident and demonstrable, that we do *not* have them at our command. They are like an army of undisciplined and disaffected soldiers. The will is, as it were, the General of the Army. He commands them to act, but they don't stir; he sees them running away, and commands them to rally, but to no purpose. *To will is present with us, but to perform what is good, we do not find* (Rom 7.18). See how necessary it is that we should be under a superior influence to that of our own hearts.

4. How ignorant of the nature of true religion are those who think it an option to be pious, holy, and spiritual at their pleasure! Those who think so, betray their weakness, ignorance, and unbelief. For if the spiritual Christian — a person who has tasted of divine grace — finds his corruptions so untamable, his affections so irregular, and his thoughts so ungovernable, how can it be that unbelievers should have any strength to so much as think a truly good thought?

5. *Lastly*, What a plain rule we may collect from this subject, to judge the progress or declension of spiritual grace in our souls! We may easily judge how things go with us, only by observing how strong or how weak, how frequent or how seldom, the meditations of our hearts are upon spiritual subjects. The more advanced a Christian is in the spiritual life, the more his heart can dwell upon divine subjects with pleasure and self-application, and the more natural it is for him to really meditate in the midst of the duties both of life and religion. But if, from day to day, we find our thoughts vain, our meditations barren, our hearts dry and unsuited to devout contemplation, it is a sign that religion is at a low ebb with us. Therefore, frequently ask yourselves such questions as these: Are the very thoughts of your heart employed upon divine subjects? Can you truly meditate when you are reading, meditate when you are hearing, meditate when you are praying? And according to the answer that your conscience gives to these questions, you may determine the growth or declension of true religion in your soul. Happy are those whose thoughts and hearts are daily taken up with spiritual things. And how much happier still are those who are advanced to glory, where they are employed without intermission and without end, in nothing else but holy contemplation upon heavenly things in heavenly places!

CASE 22. When may a Christian be said to so pursue the affairs of this present life, that it prevents his advances in grace, dishonours God, and injures his soul?

As this question appears to be of so critical and important a nature, and it will lead me to touch on a darling sin, a sin too common among us, namely, *love of the world*, so as to be properly on my guard. To clear the way for a direct answer, I would first premise these two things:

1. All persons ought to be diligent in that calling in which God in his providence has placed them. Diligence in the shop is highly commendable. For lack of this, persons have often gone backward in the world. They have thereby lost all opportunities to be useful, and have brought themselves into circumstances that greatly reflect upon the amiable character they bear as Christians. Poverty and distress are the consequences of slothfulness.

“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding. And look, it was overgrown with thorns, and nettles had covered its surface. Its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well. I looked at it, and received instruction: a little sleep, a

little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.” Pro 24.30-34

It was a command which the apostle gave, under the direction of the Spirit, that *if any man would not work, neither should he eat*, 2The 3.10. Industry is not only consistent with, but highly becoming to the Christian. It is of particular service to keep persons from temptations, both temporal and spiritual. A slothful life is a dangerous life: Satan has greater opportunities to lay out his schemes with advantage. While our hands are employed, our head is engaged, and the enemy cannot so easily distress us. I hope none will take occasion from anything I may say in my solution of this question, to intimate that I discourage diligence; rather, I would *press* it. The children of God, though interested in His peculiar favour, and heirs of glory, they are not exempted from labour, even with regard to the present world. If they would have bread and other comforts of this life, they must get them *by the sweat of their brow*. Yet,

2. The enjoyments of this world, through the depravity of our hearts, are greatly ensnaring, and often prove greatly injurious to the Christian. They are blessings in themselves, and call for thankfulness. But through the corruption of our nature, they become temptations to us, often take our affections away from God, give us a coolness to spiritual duties, and at least endanger the eternal destruction of our souls. This is the reason why our Lord, in such strong terms, represents the great difficulty of a rich man’s salvation. Mat 19.24, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” This is the reason that the apostle tells Timothy to “charge those who are rich in this world, that they not be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches,” 1Tim 6.17. It is no wonder then, that Agur made such a wise choice, and begged that God would give him “neither poverty nor riches; but feed him with the food allotted to him,” Pro 30.8. I mention this to show how much persons should be on their guard in their pursuits of this world. The first observation shows the necessity of diligence. This tends to keep diligence from degenerating into an immoderate thirst after outward enjoyments.

I now come to the question itself: “When may a Christian be said to so pursue the affairs of the present life, that it prevents his advances in grace, dishonours God, and injures his soul? “It is a difficult matter to steer between two extremes. We are either ready to be too negligent on the one hand, or too anxious and eager on the other. The Christian may often increase in worldly wealth; but God sends leanness into his soul. When we act unsuitably to our character, we grieve the Holy Spirit, and in measure He departs from us, and leaves us to ourselves.

But the Christian may be said to so pursue the world, that it dishonours God, prevents his growth in grace, and injures his soul:

I. When it breaks in upon his opportunities to attend to spiritual duties. It is not enough that we spend one day in seven attending to the concerns of our souls. The Christian must not let the week slip away, even if his worldly engagements are ever so great, without conversing with God and his own heart. If he does, it is a sad sign of his being in languishing circumstances. Spiritual meditation, self-examination, prayer, religious conversation, and reading the Scriptures, are all duties of great importance. In the performance of these duties, the Christian life is maintained, corruptions are subdued, graces are strengthened, and he is enabled to make some progress on his way to Zion. I say not how often a person must pray, read, hear, etc., so that he may grow in grace. But when we find our worldly engagements breaking in upon our spiritual duties, and gradually curtailing our opportunities to attend to them, we should heed the alarm.

We encounter many enemies in our Christian warfare. We have but little strength. We need to be much on our guard, much in prayer and in the use of those means which are necessary to our spiritual prosperity. Therefore, when the world encroaches on our time so as to leave but little for these duties, we have reason to be afraid of a decline. Many have begun well; they have set out with attending to the duties of the family and the closet. But the world, encroaching upon them, has taken up their time. They have left off all family prayer, and they are, I fear, too little in the duties of retirement. And for an excuse, they plead they have no time. They content themselves in this by a persuasion that the work began some time ago; and therefore they are safe, even if they cannot attend so well to all the duties they once performed. Whether these persons are Christians or not, I dare not determine. But I apprehend that we may, without hesitation, conclude that they are not *growing* Christians; they bring no honour to religion. Those who neglect such opportunities as these for the world, thereby reflect upon the concerns of the soul, as if they were of a trifling nature, and far inferior to outward enjoyments. I need not say how much this grieves the Spirit, and brings a consumption upon the new man. But if, while you are pursuing the world, you reserve time for family and private religion, for looking into your heart, and attending to the means of spiritual improvement, you may be growing as to both worlds.

II. The Christian may be said to pursue the things of the world to the dishonour of God and the injury of his soul when he finds thereby a growing coldness and indifference to spiritual duties, and his thoughts are greatly led away from God. It is an unspeakable happiness when, amidst the engagements of this life, we find a readiness to duty and a delight in it; when we can rejoice that the Sabbath is just at hand, and find that the enjoyments of the world don't make us indifferent to the great duties of the Lord's day; when we find a holy warmth upon our spirits, a readiness for spiritual conversation, serious meditation, and a pleasure in private duties. It is happy when the Christian is enabled to keep the world at a proper distance, to see it as it is, *emptiness and vanity*, and cheerfully endeavours to abstract his thoughts from it — and as God gives him opportunity, to attend to those things that relate to his immortal part. It is happy when, like the good man that David describes, he often employs his thoughts in sweet and spiritual meditation (Psa 104.34); when he labours to have his soul above, while his hands are employed; or to be habitually in a spiritual frame, to often rise up to God in holy thoughts, desires, and affections. This is the person who makes advances in the divine life, even while he is busily engaged in his secular concerns, and is pursuing them with all becoming diligence.

But if we find the world chilling our heart, producing a barrenness in our frame, and a coldness to our duty; if we can let slip opportunities to attend to our soul, making an excuse to God and our consciences that we are busy (though it really flows from that indifference the world has given us to spiritual exercises); if we find a growing fondness for present things, and as that fondness increases, our relish for the spiritual parts of religion lessens; if we can pursue the world with a particular gusto, eagerness, and delight, but when we come to enter upon our duties, we find a sad deadness and reluctance to do them; if we find a growing indifference to spiritual conversation, but take pleasure in what is worldly and trifling — then we may conclude that we are so pursuing the world, that it dishonours God. While our outward circumstances may be flourishing, our souls are in a lean and starving condition. Always suspect danger when you find that your warmth in, and relish for, spiritual duties is on the decline. When your heart is willing to make frequent excuses for omitting them, conclude that you have been overacting your part, and you are too eagerly pursuing present enjoyments.

III. The Christian goes beyond his duty in the pursuit of this world when his inclination to employ the mercies God has given him, is in some measure taken away, and he grows into a worldly, covetous temper. The world is not given to us for ourselves only, but to improve, to lay ourselves out for the glory of God, and the good of others. Christ has left his poor with us as a legacy; we are to take care of them, to nourish and support them. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and supply the necessitous. We are to support the Gospel, and in a variety of instances use what we have to promote the interest of our Redeemer. If then, you are seeking after the world, and are diligent in your respective calling, so that not only you and your family may have a comfortable subsistence, but that you may have opportunities to do good to others by supplying the indigent, and showing regard for the Gospel. If you are concerned to set apart a portion of what God has given you for his cause, and to improve as his providence calls, and you find that this temper of mind increases with your wealth, then you have reason to conclude that your enjoyments come with a blessing. In great measure, you are walking suitably to your character, and you may be making improvements in the divine life.

But if, as the world increases, you lose your desire for usefulness; if you find that your concern for promoting the glory of God and the good of others is lessened; if what little you give, you give grudgingly; if you find an increasing fondness for the world, and a growing desire for riches; if you are willing to grasp at all you can, and cloak your covetousness under the names of *prudence* and *frugality*; if on the whole you become more selfish, and your views and desires are more contracted — then you have reason to conclude that you are pursuing the world with too much eagerness; that you have suffered some loss as to your soul; that you walk unsuitably to your character, and bring but little honour to God. To put a brand on covetousness, and to show its dangerous and destructive tendency, it is called *idolatry*, Col 3.5.¹ Therefore, the nearer we approach it, the further we go from God.

IV. The Christian dishonours God, and hurts his own soul, when his pursuing the world produces a proud and carnal frame, or too much anxiety and distrust. This has too often been the case. When Christians have succeeded as to this world, they have grown proud. Paul tells Timothy (as we observed before) to “charge rich men that they not be high-minded,” 1Tim 5.17. And Agur was afraid lest riches make him deny God, Pro 30.8. When Jeshurun grew fat, he kicked, Deu 32.15. Christians, through a flood of prosperity, may forget God too much; become carnal and trifling in their frames and conversation; get too carried away with thoughts of their enjoyments; aim at superiority over others, looking at them with an air of haughtiness, or treating them as if they weren’t made of the same materials — as if they weren’t children of the same family, interested in the same God, and equally precious to the same Redeemer. Carefully avoid such a frame as this. It provokes God to withdraw his Spirit in measure, the consequence of which is a sad decline in the power of religion. “He who trusts in his riches will fall,” Pro 11.28. Always be afraid that you are going backward, when your enjoyments lift you up and bring you into a careless spirit.

Again, if your pursuits of the world are accompanied with anxiety, suspect some danger. Some persons are so eager after the world, or put such a value on it, that they are ever fretful and uneasy if they meet with the least disappointment. They pursue present things with the utmost solicitude, are afraid lest their schemes not be properly executed, ever doubting success, and discontented if every circumstance doesn’t appear suitable to their inclinations, or if others prosper more than they do. Now, what does all this signify if not too great a dependence on the world, valuing it too

¹ Col 3:5 Therefore put to death ... covetousness, which is idolatry.

highly, as if all our happiness consisted in the enjoyment of it? And what a reflection is this upon God, upon His providence and ways? What a grieving of the Spirit is it? What a sinking of the concerns of the soul? How unsuitable to the Christian character is it, and to all those who have heaven in prospect?

Thus I have endeavoured to answer the question in a few particulars, and I will now close with some suitable reflections.

1. How awful is their state, who have this world as their portion? It is absolutely incapable of giving complete happiness. All its enjoyments are empty and unsatisfying, and are by no means suitable to the desires of the soul. How many have been miserable in the midst of all their affluence! A circumstance in providence robs them of all their peace, and like Haman, they cannot be happy while a Mordecai is sitting at the gate. All the world will leave them at death. The term of life is as long as they can possibly hold their enjoyments. Then, however unwilling, they must take their everlasting farewell, and oftentimes it is when they have the highest relish of them, and delight in them the most, that they must leave it all behind, and make an awful exchange of worlds. “Here is the man who didn’t make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness,” Psa 52.7. He isn’t happy in life; he is far from being so at death. He leaves all, and lies down in everlasting sorrow. All that he enjoyed is not able to secure him from the terrors of the second death, or give him the least degree of ease. But *in hell he lifts up his eyes, being in great torments*, Luk 16.23. Lord, deliver us from such a condition.

2. How much each should be concerned to examine himself with regard to his pursuits of this world. *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*, 1Joh 2.15. The covetous will not inherit the kingdom of God, 1Cor 6.10. This should put us to inquiring whether we fall under this character or not. We should inquire whether we dishonour God, and injure our souls, by too diligent a pursuit of inferior comforts. “Does the world take up all my time? Can I easily omit duties, the duties of the family, or of the closet? Do I find a growing coldness toward spiritual duties? What is my end in pursuing the world? Is it to gratify an unbounded ambition for honour, wealth, or pleasure; or is it to improve every mercy, and employ every talent, for the glory of God? With what frame do I pursue the world? What impression, what influence does it have on me?” God knows how it is with you; I must leave it to your conscience to answer.

3. What matter of lamentation it is, that there are so many who profess Christianity, who are of so worldly a temper! Doesn’t it call for a tear when we see so many who are of a covetous, proud, carnal, trifling spirit among those who call themselves Christians? Alas, *alas!* how much time in the world, and how little with God! What eagerness in worldly pursuits, but what coldness in spiritual pursuits! How cheerfully opportunities are embraced for the world, but how they are omitted for God! How the world lifts us up! What readiness there is to lay out anything upon ourselves, and how reluctant to use it for the good of others! What self-love there is among Christians! Isn’t it so? Can you stand the test, Christian? Isn’t your heart too divided? Aren’t you too greedy for earthly gain? Don’t you trust too much in your riches? Where is your love for God, your zeal for *His* glory? Oh be ashamed, you professors of religion, be ashamed for your earthliness, your coldness, your carnality, and your unprofitableness.

Let us all then be on our guard, and so pursue the world that we may *honour* God, and *grow in grace*. Consider, amidst your pursuits of present things, that they are all transitory and uncertain, Luk 12.16-21. Consider and walk in view of that day when you must give an account of your employment of time, with all your enjoyments. Consider the obligations Christ has laid you under,

and what a short time you have to do anything for him or his people. Consider how much more excellent spiritual enjoyments are, than temporal ones. May the Lord enable us all to keep a watch over our hearts, and to *use this world so as not to abuse it, knowing that the form of all things is passing away* (1Cor 7.29-31).

CASE 23. How may a professor who fears that his experiences are counterfeit and not genuine graces, come to such a satisfaction concerning his state, that it will encourage his continued receiving of the Lord's Supper?

This question, which so much regards all members of Gospel churches, is taken into consideration on account of the following letter:

“Reverend Sir — I am a young person who has had a religious education, and had hopes that it was not entirely in vain; though I desire to be ashamed that I have improved it no better. I should be very much obliged to you, if you would form a question, and answer it, as soon as possible, from the following broken account of myself.

I was under convictions, when I was very young; but they were too often stifled by me. But since that time I have returned, and believed that God had begun a good work on my soul. I then thought it my duty to give myself up to the Lord in a public manner, was received into a church of Christ, have often found pleasure in attending upon those ordinances, and in particular I have found comfort at the Lord's table. Though it has not always been the same with me when there, I have hoped that when the ordinance was not so comfortable, it was a humbling one. I am often in darkness about my state, and am ready to fear lest I have deceived myself. But I still desire to seek God, and would esteem an interest in Christ above all the perishing riches of this vain world, indeed, above ten thousand worlds. But, sir, I don't know what to think of myself after all. If there is a false faith, a false love, a false hope, a false humility and the like, perhaps mine may be no better. Is it my duty to go to the table of the Lord, if I have no real love for him, and no true faith in him? Isn't this an ordinance of love? And when we attend upon it, isn't this a time to put faith in Christ, in exercise? But if my faith and love are false, what must I do? Am I not deceiving myself and others, and mocking God? Surely none ought to go to this ordinance, without a change wrought in them; and if there is a false pleasure in such an ordinance, as well as a false faith, how can I know that mine isn't so? I fear I lean too much toward outward duties.

I would esteem it a favour if you would, sir, show me what is true faith, true love, etc., and what is the difference between them and false experiences, so that I may know in some measure how it is with me. If I belong to Christ, I desire to honour him both living and dying.”

This letter plainly expresses the doubtful state of many a serious Christian who has had the enjoyment of Gospel ordinances for a considerable time, and has been admitted into the peculiar privileges of church fellowship. I have no doubt that there is many a person whose heart reasons in just this manner:

“I hope I have received the grace of God in truth, and now make a public profession of it. But Oh! when I hear that even professors may deceive themselves with false instead of true hopes, with a false instead of true love, I am afraid for myself, lest all my experiences have been of this kind. And since there is so much perplexity in my case, so much deceitfulness in my heart, and so much confusion in my mind concerning myself, how will I come to know whether it is my duty to go on receiving the Lord's Supper as usual? I am afraid that all is not right between God and my soul. And if it should appear, after all, that my faith is a *false* faith, my hope a *false* hope,

my humility a *false* humility, and the like, then it is plain that I have no right to partake of the Lord's Supper. Though indeed I have a visible right to the ordinance because of my profession and church-membership, I am afraid that I have no real spiritual right to it. Wouldn't it be better if I suspended attendance upon the Lord at his table, lest I go on deceiving myself and others, until I can gain a clearer satisfaction concerning my state? And if I should thus withhold for a time, how will I arrive at this desired satisfaction, or how will I attain to a well-grounded persuasion that my experiences are true and genuine graces, not spurious and counterfeit?"

In this way of reasoning, many a conscientious professor and serious Christian often perplexes himself about his present duty — while the mere nominal Christian, the hypocritical professor, generally has no doubts about this, but goes on in the outward participation of Gospel privileges, thus deceiving others, and hardening his own heart more and more. May the Lord enable me to speak to this important point with faithfulness and clearness; and may the blessed Spirit drive it home upon each of our hearts for our humiliation and consolation.

Therefore, in order to answer this question, I must desire all who make a visible profession, to look closely into these four things:

1. Your conduct and practice.
2. The nature and ground of your doubts and jealousies.
3. The frame and temper of your mind with respect to the Lord's Supper. And,
4. The tendency of those experiences that you feel in yourself.

1. Look attentively into your conduct and practice. For we must take that as a general rule in all cases, which the apostle lays down in 1Joh 1.6, 7:

"If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin."

Be careful, therefore, to put those two suppositions faithfully to yourselves. If you walk in darkness — that is, if you go on knowingly and willingly in the path of sin, or in the omission of known incumbent duty — then you may take it for granted that all your pretences are vain, that your profession is hypocrisy, and though you are church members, and so have a visible right to all the ordinances of the church, you are yet strangers to Christ, his truth, and his Spirit. Your allowed practice of any known sin, whether secret or open, makes your profession a lie; or as the apostle strongly expresses it, *you lie and do not practice the truth*. But if, on the contrary, it is your real desire to walk blameless in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord; if you desire to be found in the way of your duty, to watch, strive, and pray against sin; if you sincerely desire to honour and serve the Lord from a principle of love for Him, and from a sense of His love for you — then you have real spiritual fellowship with one another, and with the church of God. And you will happily find that the blood of Jesus Christ, represented in the sacrament, cleanses you more and more from all sin.

I hope this is the case with the young person who wrote this letter. For there are many things in it that seem to prove the sincerity of his profession, such as these: he desires to seek God; he esteems an interest in Christ above all the perishing riches of this vain world, indeed, above ten thousand worlds; he is afraid that he leans too much on his own outward duties, and has a desire to honour Christ both living and dying. Surely this is not the language of an unregenerate heart. Thus then, let all professors inquire into their conduct and practice.

2. Inquire into the nature and ground of these doubts and jealousies. You say you are often in darkness about your state, and are ready to fear that you've been deceiving yourself all along. And understanding that there are such things as false experiences, false faith, false hope, false humility, false delight and the like, your suspicions are strengthened, and your heart discouraged. I say, ask yourselves what the reason is for these doubts and suspicions? I know that Satan and an unbelieving heart will unite to cast a damp on the mind, and inject a surmise with special strength and weight. But perhaps only a surmise is injected, which doesn't offer any particular reason for its support. Now, if these injections and surmises offer nothing on which to ground themselves, they are not to be attended to, but resisted and rejected. You are in this case to take up the *shield of faith in order to quench these fiery darts of the wicked one*. Whenever such jealousies seize your mind, ask the question seriously which the Psalmist put to himself, Psa 42.5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul; and why are you disquieted within me?" Don't respond to the suggestion unless it gives a sufficient reason for its support.

But if your mind offers any reason for these doubts and fears, look at them attentively. Perhaps you will say, "Oh, I see much reason to doubt, for I feel much corruption in my heart, much deadness and carnal security, much vanity and selfishness, and every abomination in me — while I experience but little of love for God, or faith in his Son." Are such things as these the true reasons for your fears? Then you have great ground to hope that all is well with you. For this is an intimation that the Lord has enlightened you into a knowledge of yourself. He has given you a view of the plague of your own heart; and he doesn't suffer you to be content under the prevalence of any corruption. This sort of doubt is so far from rendering your experience more suspicious, it rather proves that all you feel, like faith, hope, and love, is true and genuine. For this jealousy proceeds upon a spiritual sight and conviction of your own unworthiness, guilt, and corruption.

Again, look into the tendency of these suspicions. Which way do they work? Don't they tend to make you more humble and watchful? And while you walk in the dark, don't you therefore walk more slowly and cautiously? Do they not make you more desirous after true grace and greater enlargement in duty? Do they not make you long more for holiness? If they work this way, you have great reason to conclude, from the very nature of your suspicions, that your heart is right with God, and principled with his saving grace.

3. Inquire into the frame and temper of your spirit with regard to the Lord's Supper. Why do you desire a continued enjoyment of this privilege? What is it that makes you want to have free access to this ordinance? Is it to subserve some temporal interest? Is it to make a justifying righteousness of this privilege? Or is it that you may be better esteemed among Christians or professors? If it is, then you have sad reason to fear that you have no real right to the ordinance.

Instead, do you desire the continued enjoyment of this privilege, in order to testify of your love for Christ, to have your sins subdued, to have your graces strengthened, your affections for Christ inflamed, and to have some sweet enjoyment of him along with the saints of God? In a word, are your views and desires conformable to the design of Christ in appointing this spiritual ordinance? If they are, then however dark your frame may be, however dubious you may be as to your state, or however much you complain under the power of corruption, you may come and be welcome to the Lord's table, since your designs and desires in coming are to behold what Christ exhibits there, and to receive what Christ has to bestow. This ordinance was particularly designed to comfort and to establish those who are worried by the temptations of Satan, and oppressed by their tyrannizing corruptions.

Therefore, as you have a visible right by being a church member, and you are not under church censure, you ought to consider that you have a real right to it because the Lord draws forth your desires, and he directs your views to what is the very design of this sacred institution. Come then, and welcome! Continue your attendance; for you are welcomed to the table by Christ himself, as well as by his church.

4. *Lastly*, inquire into the tendency of those experiences you feel in yourself. In looking over the particulars of the letter which occasioned this question, I find there are five fundamental graces of the Spirit mentioned. Concerning all of these, our friend desires to know how he will be satisfied that they are true and genuine — *namely*, faith, hope, love, humility, and spiritual pleasure. It is true, there is a counterfeit to each of these in the hearts and experience of temporary believers and mere notionalists. But if you would know whether yours are true or false, look into the tendency and working of them in your heart. It would require much time and several discourses to enter deeply into the consideration of each of these graces, and to set forth the evidences and marks of their being either spurious or genuine. But I will endeavour to run through them in as brief a manner as I can, suggesting a few thoughts that may give some satisfaction concerning the truth of each of them.

1. *Look into your faith*. You sometimes feel motions in your heart, that have the appearance of faith in and reliance upon the Lord Jesus. But just as there is a false faith, you are afraid that *yours* may be such. Consider then, and ask yourselves questions such as these: whether your faith is only notional, or whether it is joined with a serious concern for yourself about an interest in Christ and his salvation? Again, inquire whether you go to Christ for sanctification as well as for justification. Inquire, likewise, whether the reason for your application to Christ is an inward conviction of your own guilt, corruption, and helplessness, or whether it is only a flighty affection, without any serious insight into yourself? Now, you may be sure that if your soul acts towards Christ from a serious concern for *holiness*, as well as for *happiness*, proceeding from an inward knowledge of yourself, and founded on the free encouragement of the Gospel, then you may be sure your faith is true and genuine.

2. *As to your hope*. You have at times some pleasing hope in your soul concerning an interest in Christ, and the possession of his salvation. You not only fly to Christ, but you have received some hope into your soul, that he will save you with an everlasting salvation. Take notice then, what the foundation and tendency of this hope are.

Observe what the *foundation* of this hope is. If it is grounded on an imagination of the excellence of your duties, and the goodness of your heart, then it is a hope that will make you ashamed, because it betrays your ignorance of your own imperfections and corruptions. But if it is founded on the freeness of divine grace, the riches of divine love, and the faithfulness of the divine promises, then it will stand the test, because it proceeds from the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit, Rom 5.5.

Again, look into the *tendency* of your hope. If it tends to make you careless under the power of sin, or more careless about walking with God because you have a prospect of being happy forever, this is all wrong. Such a hope is certainly spurious and presumptuous. But if, on the contrary, it is your heart's desire to glorify God, to fly from sin, and to increase in holiness, the more your hopes grow, this is a token that your hope is genuine. For whoever has Gospel hope in him, "purifies himself, even as Christ is pure." 1Joh 3.2.

3. *As to your love.* You feel some outgoings of affection for Christ, for his ordinances and his people, but you fear lest all this may be counterfeit. And so it is, *if* your love is consistent with the love and liking of sin. But if your affection for Christ teaches you to cling to the Lord, to delight in his ordinances, and to love his people on account of their being such; if it makes you more willing and desirous to serve and honour the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is surely a genuine love.

4. *As to your pleasure and delight in spiritual things.* You sometimes feel a delight in divine ordinances, a secret pleasure in attending to the means of grace because they are sweet and comfortable to your soul. But you fear lest this likewise be false. Indeed, we must acknowledge that even a hypocrite may take pleasure in enjoying the means of grace, as we are told in Isa 58.2. There it is said, concerning the hypocritical Israelites, that they sought God daily, delighted to know his ways, and even delighted in approaching God. But what was the reason and ground for their delight? It was because they hoped by such services to make atonement for their sins, and to bring themselves into the divine favour by their own duties, as it appears in verse 3, “Why have we fasted, they say, and you don’t see? Why have we afflicted our souls, and you take no notice?” They had such a high opinion of their duties, that they thought it strange that God didn’t smile on and reward them for their religious services.

But now ask yourself this question: What is the reason for your delight in divine ordinances? Is it from a hope of being justified by it, or of laying God under some obligation to you? Do you take pleasure in them merely because they are suited to your own sentiments, or because they convey pleasure to your ears? Then indeed, it may be counterfeit. But if your pleasure in approaching God is because you desire and hope to find Him in his ordinances, because you would receive supplies from him, and enjoy communion with him, and would be brought nearer to him, and be made more like him — then you may be sure that your pleasure and delight are genuine.

5. *Lastly, as to your humility.* You find something within you that looks like a proper humiliation before God and his people; but your fear is that this likewise might be spurious and counterfeit. To be satisfied as to this matter, seriously inquire into the nature of your humility, whether it is feigned or forced — whether it arises from a real sight and conviction of your own meanness, guilt, and pollution before God. There is a kind of voluntary humility which some are very fond of, striving to represent themselves before their fellow Christians as very contemptible and polluted, as very ignorant and weak. They profess themselves to be such before men, when they know in their own consciences that they wouldn’t choose companions who had that opinion of them. But they do it with the purpose that their friends will think they are very modest and self-abased. It is evident at first thought, that this humility has a most hateful pride at the bottom of it. And those who are given to it, and fond of it, have great reason to suspect themselves, as they would certainly be suspected by their friends if they could see through the disguise.

But true humility is an unfeigned, unforced thing. The person who has it is really low in his own eyes; he sees and laments before God, his own guilt, weakness, and impurity; he confesses himself in the sight of God, as the chief of sinners. And the more he sees of the grace of God in Christ, the more he admires it, and is affected by it — and yes, *humbled* by it. None are more humble in reality than those who can view and receive the grace of the Gospel as entirely free. For the truly humble person, the more that he sees of the divine glory, and the more he beholds of the riches of grace, the more he lays himself low at the divine footstool. He says with Job, 42.5, 6, “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” This is that broken spirit and contrite heart which God will not despise. But God,

and man too, would despise a feigned, voluntary, affected humility. Therefore, inquire whether your being abased is thus sincere, or feigned.

Once more, look into the depth of your humility. Perhaps you are low in your own eyes merely because of some particular defects of capacity or knowledge; or chiefly because of some enormities or irregularities in your practice. If this is all, then it is not sufficiently deep. But if what makes you self-abased is a view of your own spiritual emptiness and poverty, a view of the corruptions of your nature, and the sins of your thoughts and affections; if you see yourself in such a light as to be heartily willing to receive all salvation as an entirely free gift, and to be truly thankful for every degree of hope with which you are favoured, as utterly undeserved and unprocured by you — then you are among the number of those whom Christ first pronounced blessed, saying, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Mat 5.3.

Thus inquire into the genuineness of your experiences, and look up to the blessed Spirit to enable you to pass a right judgment upon them. *The whole of it is this:* if that faith, hope, love, delight, and humility which you experience in yourself, tends to wean you more and more from sin and the world, to win you over to embrace and admire the free grace of the Gospel, and to make you depend on and delight in Christ, both for justification and sanctification — then your graces are true and genuine, not spurious and counterfeit.

But, after all that can be said on this searching subject, I know that in many cases no clear satisfaction can be given or received by way of self-examination. There is a necessity for the witness of God's Spirit to join with ours, to assure us that we are the children of God (Rom 8.16). There is so much darkness in our minds, deceitfulness in our hearts, and perplexity in our thoughts, that the clearest cases will sometimes be clouded, and the brightest evidences obscured.

You may ask then, What must a poor soul do in such circumstances? When he cannot gain the satisfaction he wants because of the Spirit's withdrawal, must he abstain from the peculiar privileges of church fellowship? Must he desist from a regular receiving of the Lord's Supper until these matters are cleared up to his satisfaction?

I will give my answer to this in the application of it, which will be (1) for encouragement, (2) for reproof, and (3) for warning.

1. *For encouragement.* Let me here say a free word to such poor doubting souls. Let me ask you, are you conscious of indulging and embracing any secret or open sin? Do you harbour any sinister or worldly views in desiring to eat of the children's bread? Do you want to make a justifying righteousness of this special ordinance? I hope you can answer in the negative to these queries, by saying that so far as you know your own heart, you *would* not, you *dare* not. If so, then you do not impose on the church, nor do you pervert the design of the ordinance by receiving it.

Do you still say, "Oh, but I fear, and have great reason to fear, that I have been a self-deceiver; for I cannot come to any clear evidence of the truth of my graces and experiences!" Do you therefore think it is your duty to desist, on this account, from attending the Lord's table? Think again, what would the consequence be if every doubting soul were to reason in this manner? If none but those who were free from doubts were to attend, I fear that very few would be found at the sacramental feast. Our churches are thin enough already. Many gracious persons keep themselves from the fellowship of a church on the same account. And how few, *very* few, would honour Christ by such a profession of his name, if all were to act upon this plan? What will you say as to the pastor himself? Do you think he is always free from such doubts, fears, and perplexities of soul? If you

do, you are very much mistaken. And what if he were to absent himself every time his heart is dubious and perplexed? This would run church ordinances into confusion indeed. It is therefore abundantly evident that a serious church member should not absent himself from the Lord's table because of his doubts and fears. No, no — doubting distressed souls should rather *come*, that their doubts may be scattered, their faith strengthened, and their comforts restored there. Come and *welcome*, so that you come with views and desires to meet with Christ, to see him, to receive from him, and to testify of your regard for him as the chief desire and only hope of your soul. You need not fear receiving any damage by coming unworthily, if you come with such views as these. But you may rather hope to find Christ and his love there, shed abroad in your hearts.

2. I now have a word of reproof for many serious Christians. I cannot help but find fault with several, for always complaining. You *harbour* your doubts and fears; you *encourage* them; your souls *refuse* to be comforted. You are always making scruples, raising objections, and you seem to be resolved *not* to be satisfied with the plainest evidences. Such a temper as this is surely dishonourable to Christianity. It is grieving the good Spirit; and it is ungrateful to God who has given you some tokens of his love. Because he hasn't given you all the grace and comfort that he has given others, you therefore continually suspect his love; but I must leave this charge to everyone's own conscience. While I heartily pity those who are truly in darkness and distress of soul, I must say that some are much to be blamed, who are fond of recommending themselves to their fellow Christians by making themselves appear as very dark and discouraged. Those who are inclined this way, insensibly sink themselves lower and lower, and provoke the Spirit of God more and more to withdraw his enlightening and comforting influence. Once more,

3. *A word for warning and conviction.* Remember, there are three sorts of church members: those who have their evidences clear and exercise their graces; those who are under darkness and doubts; and those who mind none of these things, so long as they can keep up a visible profession, and maintain their credit among Christians. These last ones are very easy and satisfied. They have no scruples or doubts, and think it is enough if they can keep themselves from falling under the censure of the church or their fellow professors. Let me tell you that such members as these, it is to be feared, are tares among the wheat. These have great reason to suspect that all is not right with them. And though I would do and say all I could to encourage the serious, dubious soul, I must proclaim that such carnal gospellers are in a most dangerous condition. They receive this sacrament only to keep their reputation alive. By continuing in this way, they stifle the convictions of their own consciences, harden their hearts more and more, and are in danger of falling from all their profession and privileges, into sin and hell. If these lines come into the hands of any such persons, oh, that they may be made to strike home to their consciences, and remind them that the case of the serious, fearful, and dubious soul who comes with trembling and concern to the table of the Lord, is abundantly preferable to their case, who boldly claim a privilege with no higher view than to support the reputation that they bear in the eyes of others. May the Lord convince and deter them, while He comforts and encourages the feeble-minded by his word and Spirit.

CASE 24. Can a person desire the blood of Christ to be applied to his soul, and yet be a hypocrite?

This question gives me an opportunity to clear a point which appears full of difficulties in the view of some, and treated by others as an enthusiastic fancy; but it is a point of the greatest importance to souls. The application or sprinkling of the blood of Christ is absolutely necessary to our everlasting salvation, however unintelligible the phrase may appear to unenlightened minds. It is the peculiar glory of revelation to make known this important mystery, to let us see how salvation

comes to us, and to encourage us in our application for it, in a way which is most for the glory of God and our own happiness. Yet, notwithstanding the clear revelation of this most interesting truth, many have only confused conceptions of it, and cannot get their ideas clear and free from perplexity. Therefore, to set this point in as distinct a light as I can, I would do these three things:

- I. Consider what is meant by the blood of Christ.
- II. How this blood is applied to, or sprinkled upon us. And,
- III. For what purpose it is applied.

I hope a consideration of these things will free the subject from all difficulties, and furnish our friend with a sufficient answer to his question. May God bless what may be delivered, to enlighten our minds more and more in these great and distinguishing truths of Christianity, and bring us to a hearty acceptance of, and dependence upon, the great sacrifice for sin, for all the ends it was designed to fulfill.

I. What is meant by the blood of Christ. We have frequent mention made of the blood of Christ in the New Testament. By a synecdoche, it is put for all his sufferings in life and death, all of which are of greatest importance to us. His agony in the garden must be considered, as well as his other sufferings. Much stress seems to be laid upon his death, and much is imputed to it because, without this, he could not have been a Saviour. This was the last act of his obedience. Now the wrath of God, in a peculiar manner, lay heavy upon him. Men and devils now united their force against him, and vigorously beset him; and now *he disarmed principalities and powers and triumphed over them openly*. For these reasons, we have particular mention made of the death of Christ. Thus the apostle says, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, Gal 6.14. But he doesn't mention this to exclude the sufferings of his life, nor even to exclude the obedience which Christ paid to the preceptive part of the law — the apostle being sensible of the great importance of all these to his salvation. But it is that he might particularly mention the cross of Christ for the above considerations. Blood signifies, further, that Christ suffered in his whole human nature. The blood of the sacrifices of old was to be sprinkled on the altar, and to make atonement for sin, Lev 17.11. Now, the life of the beast lay in the blood, and therefore the Jews were forbidden to eat blood, ver. 10. The blood sprinkled was *typical*; it showed what was absolutely necessary in the great sacrifice that was to be offered; namely, that not only should the blood of the Lamb of God actually be shed, and his body be wounded, but his soul too should be pierced and bruised. We find this was indeed the case. *He made his soul an offering for sin*, Isa 53.10. *His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death*, Mat 26.38. It was the agony of his soul chiefly, that revealed its intenseness by his bloody sweat in the garden. Oh, the anguish he must feel when drinking the bitter cup! No wonder innocent nature struggled at the view. God did not spare his Son. He spared neither body nor soul, but bruised them both, so that the sacrifice might be complete. Thus, by *the blood of Christ*, we must understand all the sufferings of his human nature in both life and death, or all that was necessary to be a proper propitiation for sin. But as the active and passive obedience of Christ are not to be separated, because both are necessary to our justification before God, so I would not speak of one to oppose or exclude the other. But I have my eye on both, as being of the utmost importance. Let us now consider,

II. How this blood is applied to us, or sprinkled upon us. It is not enough for us that the blood of Christ was shed; unless it is *applied* to us, we will never receive any saving benefit from it. It is therefore called *the blood of sprinkling*, because it is sprinkled on us, Heb 12.24. The saints above are said to have washed their robes and *made them white in the blood of the Lamb*, Rev 7.14. Here then is something else to be considered, besides the offering of the sacrifice. There must be an

application of it, or else its great ends and purposes can never be fulfilled. Now, there are two acts in this application of the blood of Christ: an act of God, and an act of ours. Both are absolutely necessary to enjoying the blessings purchased by the blood of Christ. Particularly,

1. *God sprinkles this blood upon us.* This is by an act of imputation, a foundation which was laid in the substitution of Christ in our place and stead. The Lord, therefore, is said to *lay on him the iniquities of us all*, Isa 53.6. And the apostle says that *he himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree*, 1Pet 2.24. And again, 2Cor 5.21, *He has made him to be sin for us*. He suffered and died as a sinner, though he was not actually so. He bore the punishment which the sins of his people deserved. And this opens a way for God's dealing with us according to the infinite virtue and merit of the Redeemer's sacrifice, or for imputing his righteousness to us. On the whole, when Christ was obeying the law, and suffering its penalty, God considered Christ as the representative of his people. And therefore, in his own time, in perfect consistency with his justice, and by an act of his grace, he imputes this righteousness to us, or makes it ours, so as to effectually fulfill all the ends and purposes for which it was appointed. Impressing the heart and conscience with a view of this atoning blood, for their relief under all disquietude, is likewise an act of God; and it is of great importance to fill the soul with joy and peace in believing.

2. There is an act of ours, too, that is necessary to the real saving application of the blood of Christ to our souls. This act, is *to believe*. Faith must be wrought in us, and exercised by us, or else we can have no interest in the death of Christ, nor receive any saving advantage from it. Faith is the hand which the soul stretches out and lays hold of Christ and his righteousness. It is that by which the sinner transfers his sins to Christ. He lays his hand upon the head of the great high-priest, and makes confession of his sins, views the intent and virtue of the Redeemer's blood, pleads it with the Father, and makes it all his dependence.

Thus, both these acts are necessary, absolutely necessary to our interest in Christ, and all the important blessings he has purchased. By the one, God sprinkles this blood upon us; by the other the sinner receives it. The one is of imputation, the other is of believing. The one is an act of God's grace towards us; the other is a grace implanted in us, and exercised by us, under the influences of the Spirit of God. And here we may observe that God and the sinner have the same ends in view, the one in sprinkling, the other in receiving this blood. There must be a union in this important point, or else there can be no communion with God, no enjoyment of him. And therefore you will find in the sinner, when properly applying to the blood of Christ, a frame of mind corresponding with the purposes of God in the appointment and sprinkling of this blood.

This brings me to inquire into,

III. *The purposes of God in the shedding and application of the blood of Christ.* And we will find that the sinner has these very purposes in view in looking to His blood, and so we will have a sufficient answer to this question. Here I won't confine myself to the sufferings of Christ, but will take into consideration the whole of that righteousness which God imputes, and which the sinner receives, as this will by no means be inconsistent with the question sent to me.

Now the design in this blood being shed for us, and sprinkled on us, is threefold: namely, to justify us before God; to give peace to our conscience and boldness at the throne of grace; and to promote our sanctification. To fulfill these important purposes, God imputes the righteousness of the great Mediator to us. And these are the ends that the sinner has in view in looking to it, receiving it, and depending upon it.

1. *The blood or righteousness of Christ is designed to justify us before God.* If we consider it as intending the sufferings and death of Christ, these were absolutely necessary to make atonement for sin by satisfying infinite justice, and opening a way for God to pardon the guilty creature consistent with the glory of every divine perfection. This was the end of Christ's sacrifice. It was a true expiatory sacrifice,¹ and therefore it was typified by the sacrifices of old. In this and in no other sense can he with the least propriety be said to be the *Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world*. This would by no means have been a suitable character for him, if he had only lived and died as an example, and to confirm the doctrines he preached. "He was wounded for our sins, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, that by his stripes we might be healed." Isa 53.5. "He was made a curse for us, that he might deliver us from the curse of the law" we are naturally under. Gal 3.13. When his blood is sprinkled upon us, our iniquities are forgiven; we may look upon the sword of divine justice as sheathed, and God as reconciled to us. If we consider the phrase *blood of Christ* as including his obedience to the preceptive part of the law, then we have a complete righteousness to introduce us actually into the favour of God, make us appear amiable in his sight, and give us an unquestionable title to eternal life, as well as a full atonement to procure our pardon and deliver us from everlasting punishment.

This is the righteousness which is the only justifying righteousness of a poor sinner. This is the righteousness which the apostle Paul desired above all things, to be found clothed with, Phi 3.9. This is the righteousness which is by faith; the righteousness with which infinite justice is well pleased; the righteousness which the believer carries with him out of time into eternity, and he appears in before the bar of God.

In sum, the design of God in imputing this righteousness, and the design of the soul in applying for it by faith, is his justification. And in the sinner, in receiving this righteousness, there is a frame of mind suitable to the end God has in view in the imputation of it. Thus, it is designed for his justifying righteousness. The soul comes humbly to fulfill that purpose, under a suitable sense of the insufficiency of all his own religious duties and services, renouncing all that he has done, acknowledging he is but an unprofitable servant, and pleading to be clothed with this wedding garment, looking to that alone for justification before God. But,

2. *Another end of the blood of Christ is to give peace to the conscience, and boldness and confidence before God.* The apostle exhorts us, when we draw near to God, to do it in "the full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience," Heb 10.22. It is the application of the blood of Christ by faith, that alone can deliver us from a terrifying and condemning conscience, silence all its clamours, and fill it with solid peace and tranquility. Therefore, when a soul is awakened and distressed with sin, he can find no rest till he is enabled to view and apply the blood of Christ. When he considers the infinite evil there is in sin, and the many transgressions he is chargeable with; when he views the condemning sentence of the law, and the justice and holiness of God, he is filled with distressing fears, till he fixes his eyes upon the sacrifice of Christ. He is afraid to come into the presence of God. He is ready to think it is presumption to hope for God's favour, that he is cast off, and must expect to be doomed to everlasting darkness, which is the portion he has justly deserved. His conscience is like the restless sea, ever uneasy. It wounds, it terrifies him; he hears no sound but that of everlasting burnings; he doesn't know where to fly for peace. He resorts to duty, thinking it will give him relief; but there are so many imperfections appearing in it, that it will yield him no satisfaction. But when he is led

¹ *Expiatory*: atoning for sin by expiation (compensation) or propitiation (appeasement). – WHG

to view the blood of Christ, the eternal appointment of that great sacrifice, its perfect acceptableness to the Father, and its infinitely atoning virtue; when the Spirit makes a reality of, and impresses upon his conscience, the atoning sufferings of Christ, shedding abroad the dying love of the Redeemer in his heart; when he is enabled by faith to apply it to his guilty soul — *then* he finds it a cordial ¹ indeed. It opens a door of hope in all his distress, and fills him with joy and peace in believing. Thus Christ gives rest to labouring and heavy-laden souls. I can imagine the poor distressed creature emerging out of his difficulties, and lifting up his head with comfort, saying to his conscience,

“Oh, conscience, how you have wounded me with your killing language, your repeated and painful stings! I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t fly from you. I dared not approach the throne of God with any lively hope. But now I have found a messenger, one among a thousand, one who is able to answer all your accusations, to remove all your heavy and awful charges, and to speak peace to my weary soul. *See the blood of Christ!* Hear, it speaks better things than the blood of Abel. Am I guilty? Through this I will have pardon. Am I unworthy? There is an infinite fulness of merit in this. Have I violated the law of God? Christ was made a curse for me. And with his sacrifice in the arms of my faith, I can view a holy God, come into his presence with the boldness and confidence of a child, and expect all the blessings of salvation.”

Thus the blood of Christ speaks peace to conscience.

3. *The blood of Christ is the great means of our sanctification.* It not only purchased grace for us, but it is the great means of increasing it in us. Christ came to purify his people, and a believing view of his sacrifice greatly tends to bring about this important purpose. When the believer is enabled to apply the blood of Christ to his soul — to view its infinite virtue, the riches of grace manifested in it, and the blessings he enjoys through the application of it — Oh! he finds in it the most powerful dissuasives from sin and the strongest motives for holiness. He finds it sweetly melting his hard heart, filling him with a hatred of sin and deep self-abhorrence, stirring him up to holy diligence and watchfulness in the service of God, animating him with boldness and courage, reconciling him to every difficulty, filling him with patience and cheerfulness in every trial, endearing the Lord Jesus to him, kindling the fire of divine love, and bringing him into a greater conformity to the image of Christ. There is nothing that gives a greater stab to sin, nothing that crucifies our lusts and corruptions more, than a view of a crucified Saviour. When we *look upon the One who was pierced, we mourn*, Zec 12.10. When the apostle viewed the cross of Christ, he found himself *crucified to this world, and this world to him*, Gal 6.14. On the whole, there is nothing that destroys sin more in the soul, than to look to Christ on the cross. Therefore, those who converse most with Christ by faith, are always the most flourishing Christians.

These, then, are the ends God had in view in establishing this way of salvation, in shedding the blood of Christ, and sprinkling it upon the soul. Now, if these are the ends you have in view, in desiring to have this blood applied to your soul, then it is a comfortable evidence of your being a Christian indeed. For instance: being sensible of your guilt, and the insufficiency of your own righteousness to justify you before God, if you are then willing to receive him as your Lord, your righteousness, resting upon the infinite merit of his blood alone; if you look to this to ease your wounded conscience, give you boldness and confidence in your approaches to God, and support you under every accusation of sin and Satan; if you desire this blood to be applied to your soul, to

¹ *Cordial*: anything that revives or comforts.

cleanse it more and more from the pollution of sin, and to purify your heart so that you may be growing in holiness — you may then conclude that you *have passed from death unto life*, and are far from being a hypocrite. But if you approve only of the *justification* of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ, and you don't see a beauty in real *holiness*; if you would have the blood of Christ sprinkled upon you to deliver you from everlasting punishment, but not to cleanse your polluted heart; if you would be saved from hell, yet live in sin — then you have no reason to look upon yourself as a real Christian. And therefore, all your expectations of pardon and salvation from Christ will meet with an awful disappointment. *Christ must not be divided*. If we are not willing to receive him in *all* his characters, it is in vain to call ourselves Christians. He is made by God to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to all his people.

Thus you are furnished with an answer to the above important question. I will now close it all with a word or two about application.

1. From this we see how lovely the Lord Jesus Christ should appear to us all. Did he come and obey the law? Did he come and submit to the death of the cross? Did he bear the wrath of God, and give his life a ransom — and all this for us, to make atonement for our souls, and secure for us all the blessings of salvation? How amazing is that love! How hard is the heart that feels no affection for this Jesus! How ungrateful is the creature who can despise the Redeemer! His love should recommend him to all. It will recommend him to all the saints. They love him here, and they often long for a better world where they will love him with a supreme and undivided affection.

2. If any would know whether their hopes of eternal life are rightly founded, we see what inquiries they must make. Not only whether they believe the Gospel, with all its important truths; but whether they see their need of the blood of Christ — consequently, whether they see themselves as guilty, naked, polluted, and miserable; whether they are willing to fly to the Lord Jesus Christ, and are enabled to depend on him for all salvation; whether they want to be sprinkled with his blood, not only for their justification, but their sanctification too. These are inquiries of the most important nature, and should be attended to by all who would know the state of their souls.

3. From this we see where relief must be found for a distressed soul. The righteousness, the death, the suretyship of Christ, are what lay a foundation of comfort for awakened sinners. Here is room for the chief of sinners to hope for pardon, for the greatest backsliders to accept mercy. Here is a sovereign balm which will heal every wounded spirit. When you are discouraged on account of your sins, their heinousness, their number, your unworthiness, and you are ready to conclude that there is no hope for you — then look upon the blood of Christ; consider for what ends it was shed; view its infinite virtue; hear what the glorious Mediator said just before he gave up the ghost, “It is finished;” and view the happy thousands above, all the living evidences of the saving efficacy of Christ's death and sufferings. Are you a great sinner? The blood of Christ proclaims pardon. Do you have a hard heart? the blood of Christ, applied by faith, will quickly melt it. Are you full of terrors of soul? This blood is sufficient to remove all, allay the furious storm, and cause a perfect calm, a peaceful serenity. Are you sadly entangled with your corruptions? This same blood can set you free, and cleanse your polluted soul. It is an overflowing fountain, always full. Its virtue is not in the least exhausted.

Come then, you despairing sinners! come, you dejected creature! The blood of Christ can remove all your complaints. you may say with the apostle, “Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died, yes, and is also risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Rom 8.34)

CASE 25. How may a person know whether the obedience he performs flows from true faith?

Taking this serious and spiritual case under consideration was occasioned by receipt of the following judicious letter. It indeed puts a question that, at first appearance, seems very different from what is now before me. However, upon an attentive review of the letter and its principal design, it appears that the solution of the *above* case (re: hypocrisy) will answer the chief end of the letter. It runs thus:

“Rev. Sir — I would humbly propose the following question to be answered, which may possibly be of use to others in similar circumstances, as well as to myself.

“The question is this: Whether faith — containing in its nature the soul’s assent to the great Gospel promise of salvation, and consent that Jesus should be its Saviour in particular, according to the tenour of that promise — may not be seen as evidential of my union to Christ, and the safety of my spiritual state in Him? And whether a conscious perception of these actings of my understanding and choice, may not be considered as criterions of true faith, and employed as such, even if the joy of faith, vigour of hope, and ardour of affection, are absent for a time, and inward corruptions (at times) violently oppose forming such a conclusion?

“My reason for confining the query to the grace of faith, is from the difficulty that I find in ascertaining the truth of my love, repentance, opposition to sin, and even my obedience itself, unless all of these appear to flow in me from faith in Christ as their principle.

“Another reason is, in examining myself as to my state or frame, I find that if my conscience is mistaken or ignorant of the rule of God’s word, then all the conclusions resulting from comparing my heart and ways with it, must be wrong and uncertain in the same degree as my conscience is erroneous, and its testimony false. These things considered, makes me very anxious to know the truth of my case. I am afraid of self-deceit. I have long been of the opinion that *faith without works is dead*, or rather is no faith at all. I am equally certain that works, however splendid, without faith as their animating principle, are dead works also. For the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith — which I am persuaded are either all together, or else they do not exist at all in my heart.”

“I remain,

“Your obliged servant.”

In perusing this epistle, you will easily see that the question, as first laid down, is put in a speculative rather than experimental form. But the evident scope and design of it is to enter deep into Christian experience. For this reason, I have chosen to alter the form of the question, and to place it in a more compendious and experimental view. This best comports with the design of this exercise. And at the same time, I will fully answer the end proposed by the letter; namely, to know whether our repentance, love, and obedience are genuine and evangelical — or in other words, *whether our obedience flows from true faith*.

Let me then observe, as an introduction to the whole, that it is a great mercy that the truth and reality of faith in our hearts does not depend on the distinct knowledge of its nature and workings. Many persons doubtless have this divine principle wrought in them, and they feel its workings, though they don’t know how to describe its nature or give a proper account of its actings, even in their own minds. It is indeed of some importance to have a doctrinal knowledge of this fundamental grace, because those who have it are better able to judge their own experiences, and

they may, by their knowledge, arrive at a clearer and more solid satisfaction about their own state or frames. Yet it is abundantly more desirable and important to know it *experimentally* rather than doctrinally. It is frequently found that when a soul is drawn into exercising this amiable grace under the influences of the Spirit, there is such a mixture and variety of affections working, that it would be difficult to describe them, or to conceive the manner in which they work. Let us not, then, be so solicitous to know the nature of faith in a doctrinal or controversial way, as to trace its chief evidences and appearances in our own souls, and its effects on our actions and conduct.

It is the design of giving the following evidences, to assist you in this examination. We will be able to see the beautiful and experimental connection between faith and obedience by attending to these two interesting questions:

- I. What is that faith which produces true obedience? And,
- II. What is that obedience which flows from true faith?

I. What is that faith which produces true obedience?

There are various sorts of faith mentioned in Scripture, which have been exercised or experienced by the children of men. Some of them are of a spiritual or saving nature; but others are those kinds of faith which may be found in persons who are strangers to all true grace and holiness. It is therefore necessary that we carefully distinguish between that sort of faith which produces true obedience, and that which can *never* produce it. There was a miraculous faith by which persons were able to perform miracles. However valuable this faith was, it was exercised, notwithstanding, by some of those who knew nothing of the grace of God in truth.¹ There is likewise a historical or speculative faith, by which persons understand and believe the truths of the Gospel with their heads, in the *notion* of them. Many now have this sort of faith, who are dead in trespasses and sins. There is likewise a temporary faith, which is so much like a true saving faith, that it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish the one from the other. This temporary faith is that by which a person not only believes the truth in his notion of it, but he has some sort of relish for it, approval of it, even a feeling of it in his mind. But after all, the truth only floats upon his affections, and doesn't enter deep into the heart and conscience. Now neither of these forementioned sorts of faith is of such a nature as to produce true obedience. For nothing will produce true holiness short of such an inward spiritual belief and impression of Gospel truth, that it effectually prevails upon the soul to go to and receive the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation.

Our friend in the letter inquires whether an assent to, joined with an approval of the Gospel method of salvation, is sufficient to evidence the truth of our faith, and the safety of our state, even if we may not have that joy, hope, and comfort which some are favoured with? To this I readily answer that doubtless our faith may be true and saving, even if it is not attended with that satisfaction and assurance which fills the soul with peace and joy.

Faith may be true, and yet be very weak; it may be true, and yet be sadly suppressed or overborne as to its actings and exercises. Yes, it may be both true and strong, yet be without much spiritual joy and consolation. For a strong faith may be overloaded with and borne down by temptations. A soul may truly go to Christ, though with a trembling heart; and may truly receive Christ, though with a trembling hand; and may have a strong reliance upon Jesus Christ, though distressed and perplexed. But even if all this is allowed, I cannot apprehend that a mere assent to, and approval

¹ Judas Iscariot went out with the seventy, and performed miracles with the rest (Luk 10.1-20). Most of the seventy later left Jesus (Joh 6.66); only twelve remained, including Judas (Mar 6.7). – WHG

of Christ, and the method of salvation, is the whole that is included in that faith which produces true obedience. There must be some real application to Christ, and some real application of Christ to us, in order to satisfy this end.

Let us then see how the Scriptures describe the essential actings of saving faith, and endeavour to render this important subject familiar to our mind, by comparing *natural* and *spiritual* things.

Everyone who has read his Bible with any attention, will see that true faith is frequently set forth by coming to Christ and receiving him. Let us then take into consideration these two ideas, and see what we can learn from them for our instruction into the nature of true faith and its actings. In order to conceive of these things rightly, we must take this general rule with us: let us observe what is included in the act of a necessitous person when he goes to a rich generous person for help, and receives a supply at his hand. Only cast aside the mere external acts of coming and receiving, and see what thoughts and affections are working in his mind when performing these external acts.

In this comparison, the reason why we are to cast aside the external acts of the body, is because faith is only a spiritual act of the mind and heart. Therefore, retaining the spiritual part of these acts, we may draw a similitude between our natural and our spiritual coming and receiving, to great advantage.

Let us, then, suppose a poor necessitous person has heard of a generous and wealthy gentleman. However well he may know this generous person, however much he may know about him, and however much he may approve of his method of distributing his bounty, if after all this, he doesn't actually go to this gentleman and receive a supply from him, the needy person is still as poor as ever. So that, his mere knowledge and approval will not suffice without coming and receiving. On the other hand, let us suppose the necessitous person has but little knowledge of this generous gentleman, perhaps having heard only his name and character in general, and even to have some fears in his mind lest he not be accepted or supplied. Yet, if he has knowledge enough and hope enough to induce him to go, and he goes accordingly, he receives the bounty, and is supplied. So that, the smallness of his knowledge, and the greatness of his fears, are no effectual bar in the way of his receiving the benefit. From this it appears that there may be much knowledge of Christ, and some consent to the method of his grace, and yet no act of saving faith; while on the contrary, there may be but little knowledge and many fears, and yet a true act of faith is put forth. There must be *some* knowledge of Christ, otherwise the sinner doesn't know where to go for salvation; and there must be a real approval of Christ as a Saviour, or the sinner will never apply to him. But by a close attention to this simile, and applying it to spiritual purposes, we may see that in the act of saving faith, besides mere assent and consent, there are the following particulars:

1. *Whoever exercises faith in Christ, has a personal concern in his heart.* A necessitous person will never go for a supply unless he knows his own necessity, and is concerned about it. Thus, whenever a soul goes to Christ by faith, he has a real sight and sense of his own emptiness and necessity. He feels his own wants pressing upon him, sees himself unable to obtain a supply for himself by his own industry or merit, cannot be contented in his present starving or naked condition, and this awakens him to seek help for himself. An unconvinced, unconcerned soul does not, *cannot* exercise an act of faith upon Christ. Thus it is evident that a true concern about the salvation of our souls, and about an interest in Christ, is necessary in an act of saving faith.

2. *There is likewise a probable hope of acceptance and supply in that soul who actually goes to Christ for salvation.* If a necessitous person conceives no probability of succeeding in his

application, he will not go. Though a full assurance of his success is not absolutely necessary, some *hope* of it encourages a poor person in first setting out. In some cases, this hope may be, as it were, only a possibility; but he believes it is a *probability* that he doesn't have elsewhere. It is like the lepers at the gate of Samaria (2Kng 7.3-4). They knew that if they continued where they were, they would die. If they went into the city, they knew they would perish there because of the famine. But they conceived that if they went to the camp of the enemy, they might possibly be saved alive. This expresses the lowest degree of hope that might be a foundation for making a trial. I mention this, not that convinced perishing souls may content themselves with such a weak hope. No, no, for I may boldly assure such distressed souls, that from the promises of the Gospel, they have the firmest ground to hope for success in their application to Christ. The difference between a sinner's going to Christ, and those lepers going into the camp of the Syrians, is very great. For those lepers went to the camp of an enemy. But a sinner applying to Christ, goes to the one who is a friend of sinners, and has said, "Whoever comes to me, I will by no means cast out."

Only let me observe that this probable hope which a sinner has in the first actings of faith, is not founded on any good that he may fancy in himself, nor upon any duties that he performs. But it is founded entirely and alone upon the freeness of divine grace, and upon the report that the Scriptures have given of Christ as one who is ready to receive the most unworthy, to welcome the most guilty, and to supply the most needy. Thus, in coming to Christ, the sinner not only approves of Christ, but he has some degree of hope in him, by turning his eye towards, and fixing his thoughts upon, the hope held forth in the Gospel invitation.

3. *There is likewise an actual application to Christ made by the soul who believes in his name.* A necessitous person is not only concerned about, and desirous of a supply; he not only hopes to receive it; but in consequence of his need, he actually applies for it. Thus, in believing — in having his concern raised by a sight and feeling of his own need; having his desires raised by a view of the fulness and suitableness of Christ; and having his hope raised by a belief of the freeness of the Gospel — he immediately addresses himself to Christ, or to God in Christ, by earnest prayer and supplication. He goes to the throne of grace, offers up his desires to God, lays out his sinfulness and misery before God, and pleads the promises and invitations of the Gospel. He voluntarily casts aside all his vain hopes, and throws himself on the free mercy of God in Christ. Once more,

4. *There is likewise a spiritual application of Christ made to the soul in the act of believing.* A necessitous person not only comes for supply, but he likewise takes it to himself; he receives it for his own use. Otherwise, he is still no better off; he is still in the same necessity as before. Thus, in believing, the soul receives Christ and his *blessings*, Christ and his *promises* for itself, for its own use. The believer makes use of Christ's blood for his pardon, his righteousness for his justification, his promises for his support and comfort, and his fulness for his supply. Applying Christ to ourselves in this way, is a matter of greatest consequence. It is what is expressed as a fundamental act of saving faith, Joh 1.12: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in his name." And what does it mean to thus receive Christ? It is something that is better experienced than expressed. In this act, the soul takes Christ home to itself, for its own; it appropriates him for itself, in all his characters and offices as a free and complete Saviour. Though this may be done with a trembling hand and a fearful heart, there is still an application of Christ to ourselves, by which we are enabled to apprehend him for ourselves.

To express myself as plainly as I can on this deep and spiritual subject, I would lay it out in the following manner: the believer sees what he is, and what Christ is; and he makes an affecting comparison between what is in himself and what is in Christ. He sees that Christ's atonement

answers to his own guilt, Christ's righteousness to his own unworthiness, Christ's purifying Spirit to his pollution, Christ's strength to his weakness, Christ's riches to his poverty, and Christ's fulness to his own emptiness. Having seen and been affected by this exact suitableness and correspondence of what is in Christ to his own wants, he is in some measure persuaded of Christ's fineness and willingness to give himself to his soul. And therefore he ventures, *humbly* ventures, to take Christ home to himself. He applies Christ's atonement to his own guilt, and thereby he answers the challenges of a guilty conscience. He applies Christ's righteousness to his own unworthiness, and thereby he answers the objections that unbelief brings against him for it. He applies Christ's fulness and riches to his own emptiness and poverty, and thereby he relieves his mind under these humbling views of himself. He says,

“Even though I am so guilty and unworthy, let me not be discouraged, for *Christ* is worthy. Even though I am poor and empty, let me not despair, for *in Christ* all fulness dwells. And even though I am polluted all over, let me not therefore despond, for *the blood of Jesus Christ* cleanses me from all sin.”

And thus the believer pacifies his conscience, silences his fears, supports his hopes, satisfies and comforts himself in Christ, by a special application of Christ to himself. This appropriation is stronger or weaker, according to the degree of faith in exercise. Sometimes it can triumph over every fear, danger and distress, by saying, “Who is he that condemns? It is *Christ* who died.” Thus the soul and Christ are brought together into a spiritual and experimental union. And from this it comes to pass that the believer purifies himself by washing in Christ's blood. He can perform duties in Christ's name and strength; he can resist the devil, overcome temptation, and surmount difficulties that lie in his way; out of weakness he is made strong, and can do all things through Christ who strengthens him.

This, *this* is the faith that works by love, that produces true obedience. And unless Christ is in some degree applied to the soul in this way, there is no strength for obedience, no true delight in it, nor any Gospel motive for it wrought in the heart. But if a soul, knowing and approving the method of salvation by the atonement, righteousness, and purchase of Christ, is really concerned about an interest in him; has some encouragement from the freeness of the promises; and thereupon applies to Christ for strength and salvation, and can now receive Christ to himself — he then begins to live upon Christ and to work for him, from a principle of faith in Him, and love for Him. Thus evangelical repentance is excited; thus evangelical love is drawn forth; and thus evangelical obedience is performed.

Here I have given you as distinct and regular an account as I am able, of the several particulars contained in that faith which produces true obedience. But after all, I dare not say that these various motions and actings of soul are always to be distinctly discerned in experience. For they are often so weak and imperfect in themselves, or so intermingled and confused with one another, that we cannot trace them distinctly. However, in the midst of all these confusions, the believing soul has such a regard for Christ, for his grace and Gospel, that what is seen, felt, and received, becomes the spring and motive for holy obedience in heart, lip, and life. The truth of our faith is best known by its influence and tendency, rather than by its distinct and particular actings, which are often so confused. If Christ is so received and applied, that our views of him, regard for him, and reliance upon him, lead us to him and his grace for motives to raise our abhorrence of sin, for the strength to subdue it, and for excitements to holiness of heart and life, then we may be sure that our faith is true and genuine.

Before I pass to the other question proposed, give me leave to observe that this representation of faith as coming to and receiving Christ, is far from casting any discouragement in the way of the weak believer. Some may be ready to say, “Oh, if all this is contained in true faith, and if there is such an application of Christ to the soul in it, *then I am destitute of it*; for I could never venture this way to appropriate Christ to myself.” But let me ask you, What is it that makes you afraid to take Christ home to your soul? Wouldn’t you be glad to do it, and isn’t it your greatest discouragement, that you fear you may not do it? Let me tell you that this view of faith has in it the best and strongest encouragement for you. For hereby you are told that if you can heartily approve of Christ, and you have a real concern about an interest in his grace and righteousness, then you may and ought to go to him, plead with him, cast your soul upon him, and apply all that he has done, suffered, and purchased, to your own soul for your satisfaction, supply, and consolation. I desire by all means to encourage such a hope and comfort as this. And I would aim to make it appear to all the souls who are truly concerned, that they have a liberty, a free and unrestrained liberty, to trust in Christ for themselves, and to apply Christ to themselves. Surely you don’t desire to be saved without Christ, or to be satisfied without an interest in him. I would not encourage such a desire or promote such a satisfaction. What I want is to lead you to an application of Christ to yourself, so that you may be satisfied, comforted, and supported *in* him and *by* him. And if you can, even in a low degree, trust in and rely upon Christ for yourself, then you may then be said to know and believe, in some measure, the love that God has for you in Jesus Christ. In this way you will find strength both to work for Christ, and to fight against sin and Satan. Which brings me to the other part of this discourse.

II. What is that obedience which flows from true faith? The letter on which this question is founded justly observes that, “as faith without works is dead, so works without faith, as their animating principle, are dead also.” They are only splendid appearances, and little better than shining sins. Though I would by no means disparage good works, it is highly necessary that our works be of the right Gospel stamp. Otherwise they are unacceptable to God, and often delude our soul. But, indeed, when we come to weigh our works in the balance of the sanctuary, and bring them to the test of the Gospel, I am ready to suspect that not only all the works of unbelievers, but that many of the works even of believers themselves are dead works. For there are a great number of duties performed in a legal, carnal, self-sufficient manner by the children of God. Happy is the one who can bring forth much spiritual fruit to the glory of God, by works of faith and labours of love. And we ought to be thankful if in any instances we can prove that what we do is truly in the name and strength of the Lord Jesus.

It is therefore necessary to remark that when we ask this question, “What is that obedience which flows from true faith,” it is not done so much with a design to determine a person’s state, as to show the nature of his duty, and to give him a rule to judge when his works are done in a right manner. We must not conclude that we are destitute of divine grace unless every act we perform is found to flow from true faith. For then the greatest believer in this world may well doubt and despond. All of us, even the best of us, will find reason to look back with shame on many of our duties, and be obliged to confess they have been dead works, having little or nothing of the divine life quickening them. Indeed, we would often detect that we are kept back from some sins, and stirred up to some duties, by the meanest, most carnal and worldly motives — by *restraining* rather than by *renewing* grace. It is therefore much to be desired that believers know how to distinguish not only good works from bad ones, but even the good works they performed in an evangelical manner, from those which are performed in a legal or carnal way.

That we may know which we ought to be peculiarly thankful for, and which to lament over, let me lay down the following marks by which to judge those duties that flow from faith.

1. If our obedience flows from true faith, we are not moved to it by self-will, but by a regard for the authority and command of Christ. Many services we perform, merely because they suit our inclination, fall in with our temper or convenience, or because they are of our own contrivance or invention. In this way, persons may perform innumerable services, excellent in themselves, and agreeable to the divine word, and yet be little better than will-worship. This is because what spurs us on to them, and animates us in them, and carries us through them, is their being done at a time and in a manner that suits our own tempers. But true faith teaches us to regard and reverence the authority of Christ. Then whatever we perform, it is because Christ commands us; and whatever we avoid, it is because Christ forbids us. The obedience of faith teaches us to eye Christ as our Lord and Master, and we desire to follow him in his directions. We would not do anything except by his commission and order, however it may suit our inclination; and we would not omit anything he calls for, however it may cross our own wills. Whatever we do, it is not so much to please ourselves as to please Him, who has an authority over our consciences, and a love for our souls.

2. If our obedience flows from true faith, we are not moved to it from anything visible, but from realizing a view of invisible things. "We walk by faith, not by sight." Most of mankind are moved to do one thing and avoid another, because of what they see or feel. All their motives are drawn from things within the verge of nature, and within the view of sense. But true faith teaches a person to look at and live by the things which are not seen, which are eternal. And it is a good sign that our obedience is of the right kind, if we are excited to it, and animated and supported in it, not merely by the applause or fear of man, but by a belief about those things which the Gospel reveals concerning Christ's glory, grace, love, and salvation; all of which are things unseen.

3. If our obedience flows from true faith, we are moved to it not from self-righteousness, but from a love for Christ. When we avoid sin, or perform duty in a right manner, we don't think to work out a justifying righteousness by it, either in whole or in part. Nor do we aim by this to make the least atonement for our sins. For these things (*namely*, for pardon and justification) we look to Christ's blood and righteousness alone. But we work from love for Christ, knowing or hoping that he has loved us and given himself for us. "The love of Christ constrains us;" and then "we don't live to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, and rose again." Self-righteous performances are not the obedience of faith. They are directly contrary to it, just as they oppose the fundamental principles of the Gospel. Once more,

4. If our obedience flows from true faith, we don't enter upon our duties in our own strength, but in the strength of Christ. We know, we see, we feel our own utter insufficiency to think a good thought, or to perform a good work in a right manner. We are conscious that there will be no life or spirit in our performances without the assistance or influence of Christ's grace. And therefore we engage in a duty looking up for, and relying upon, the strength and Spirit of Christ. Whereas self-sufficient performances betray our ignorance of the nature of true holiness and spiritual duty; and that they are neither acceptable to God, nor truly beneficial to ourselves.

Several more thoughts might be added, but let these suffice. Only give me leave to recommend to you the serious perusal of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where you will be furnished with a variety of instances, all of which show the nature of the obedience of faith. And they will teach you to judge whether what you perform flows from true faith or not.

I will conclude the whole with three brief reflections.

1. How impossible it is to be truly holy and spiritually obedient without faith in Christ and union to him! Many think that their obedience is the *way to*, and the *condition of* an interest in him. But alas, all the obedience we perform *before* faith, is self-will, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency. There isn't the least degree of acceptable obedience or true holiness previous to a union with Christ by faith. All those who talk of true piety and virtue without reliance upon Christ and love for him, don't know what they say nor what they affirm. If any therefore desire to become holy and evangelically obedient, let it be their first concern to fly to, and believe in, the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness and strength. We can never bring forth fruit to God, until we are dead to the law, and married to Christ, Rom 7.4. And we must become dead to the law, that we might live to God, Gal 2.19.

2. How imperfect and defective is the obedience of even true believers! It is happy indeed when a Christian is so circumspect and conscientious in his services that he is blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; when he is diligent and abundant in the work of the Lord. But if he seriously inquired which of his duties flowed from true faith, and where to cast aside all those performances that were attempted in his own strength, with a view to his own honour, and which he was moved to do merely by his own will, or by things visible and sensible, there would then be but very few remaining to place among the number of truly good works. The believer may say, "It is true, I have done such a duty, attended such a service, or resisted such a temptation. But where has been my love for Christ, my dependence upon him, my view to his glory in such a performance?" If you, believers, have your thoughts clear, and your eyes open to behold your own hearts and ways, you will find that your works haven't been perfect. They haven't been filled up with true faith, love, and affection before God, as they ought to be. This is matter for deep and constant humiliation.

3. How necessary it is to put good works in their proper place! If they are misplaced then they are, in a sense, destroyed! All their excellence and value is lost. They must flow from faith in Christ, or they are good for little.

Place them *after* faith, as the fruit and evidence of it, and they are beautiful — they honour God and are acceptable to him. But once they are made the ground of our hope of pardon and justification, they become offensive to God, because they dishonour Christ and overturn the scheme of the Gospel. Let us then, *all of us*, be concerned to be obedient and to perform all the works of righteousness that lie within our power. Only, see to it that they are performed from a sense of Christ's love, with a view to his glory, from a regard for his authority, and with a dependence on his grace and Spirit.

CASE 26. On Self-Examination.

"Sir — I have attended your Wednesday evening lectures, and have heard you frequently exhorting the people to attend to the duty of self-examination. I acknowledge that it is a very important duty, and I don't doubt that it is often very useful. But I find it very difficult to go through it with any advantage to my soul. My heart is so averse to everything that is serious, especially to a duty so close and interesting as this, that I don't know how to go about it. I would be glad, therefore, to have it set in a proper light: how I must perform it; what are the best seasons for it; how I must view it; and what use I must make of it. In thus obliging me, you may be useful to others."

Self-examination is a *duty*, as it appears evident from Scripture. "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Don't you know that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless

you are reprobates.” 2Cor 13.5. You will easily see at first view, it is a duty of peculiar importance, as it tends to lay open the heart, and bring us to the knowledge of our state towards God. It is necessary, and esteemed to be an act of prudence for the merchant to look into his accounts, to see what condition his *worldly* concerns are in, so that he may not deceive himself or injure others. Certainly it is much more necessary for us all to examine into the state of our souls, as these are concerns of infinite moment, for we are all hastening to an eternal world. A mistake here, when death has discharged its solemn office, can never be rectified.

The subject I am called to consider is weighty indeed. It concerns you all. And therefore, let me entreat your serious attention while I endeavour to answer the following questions:

- I. What must we examine?
- II. In what manner must we do it?
- III. What are the best seasons for it? And,
- IV. In what light should we view it, and what use should we endeavour to make of it?

May the answer to these questions strike our minds, and engage us diligently and frequently to attend to this duty, so that it may be for the advantage of our souls.

I. *What must we examine?* It will be easy to determine what must be the matter of our inquiry, namely, the state of our souls, or things relating to our experience as Christians — in which the glory of God, and the peace and welfare of our souls are concerned. Particularly, when we set apart some time for this duty, we should chiefly be concerned to inquire into one or both of these things:

1. Whether we are real Christians or not? And,
2. Whether we are growing or declining Christians?

1. We should inquire whether we are real Christians or not. This is a point of the greatest importance. If we are Christians indeed, all things will go well with us, both in life and at death, in time and eternity. But if we have only the name, then however we may live in earthly pleasure, it will be awful dying. “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; but he who does not believe the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him,” Joh 3.36. How many have been, and are still in the melancholy state of the foolish virgins? They have the form of godliness, but know nothing of the power of it. We read of the hope of the hypocrite which shall perish, Job 8.13. What will become of his hope and him, when God takes away his soul? Job 27.8. As this is the case then, surely we should all be concerned to make a strict and solemn inquiry as to what character we fall under, what state we are in. If you would know whether you have passed from death to life, then look back to the time when you think the change was made, and inquire into the circumstances attending it. What view did you have of yourself, of sin, and of Christ? Did you see your lost, miserable, and wretched condition, and were you made willing to renounce all that stood in competition with the Redeemer, and to receive him in all his Mediatorial characters?

Many cannot remember when the change was made. Therefore, inquire what evidences you can produce of the grace of God in you. Do you hate sin? Do you therefore desire, above all things, to be delivered from it? Is it your daily burden? And does heaven appear peculiarly amiable, because *there*, sin will be no more?

What is your faith? He who believes will be saved, Mar 16.16. Is Christ the object of your faith? Is it Christ as he is represented in the Gospel? Do you go to him for righteousness to justify you, for his Spirit to sanctify you, and his whole salvation to be bestowed upon you?

What is your humility? Do you appear vile in your own eyes? Are you filled with self-aborrence? Do you see nothing in yourself, and nothing in your services? And are you willing to receive salvation as the free gift of God, and to admire His rich distinguishing grace in the bestowal of it? Do you seek submission to the dispensations of his providence — not dictating to infinite wisdom, or censuring his conduct, but thinking honourably of all his ways, and desiring to say always, “Father, not my will, but your be done?”

What is your hope? Does it lull you into security, and encourage you to take your ease, for all is well? Or does it put you upon your duty, enliven you in it, reconcile you to afflictions, animate you with zeal, and put you upon seeking after purity of heart and life?

What is your love? Can you say, “Whom do I have in heaven but you, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you?” When Christ is present, do you rejoice? When he withdraws, is your soul grieved? When he is dishonoured, do you mourn? Do you long after clearer views and fuller enjoyments of Christ?

These and similar questions should be put to your soul when inquiring into your state.

2. Another subject of inquiry is whether we are growing or declining Christians. Inquire, Do you see more of the odiousness of sin? Do you grow more confirmed in this great truth: that you are nothing? Are your views clearer of your weakness and poverty, of the glory and suitableness of Christ, and of the excellence of the Gospel? How are your corruptions? Are they as prevalent as usual? Are your affections more mortified to the world? Does pride possess your breast as much as ever? Does passion still boil in you, and lead you aside as often as before? Are you as much entangled with lust, as easily conquered? Have you gotten no victories over sin, no steps forward in your journey, added no cubits to your spiritual stature? Are you in some measure more like your Lord? Do you have more of his divine temper? Are you therefore meeker and more lowly in heart; more patient and submissive to your Father’s pleasure; more active and diligent in promoting his glory; and more concerned to live usefully and profitably? In what condition is your faith? Does it grow stronger? Do you feel more of its purifying influences? Do you love Jesus and his people more than you did? Are you more afraid of offending your Redeemer, more desirous to honour him, more humble under a sense of the little that you do for him, and longing more for a better world where you will love and praise him forever? Finally, have you become more spiritual, more heavenly in your temper, your duties, your conversation; more circumspect in your walk; and more concerned to fill up every relation and character in such a manner that you may adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things?

Thus inquire into these two important points: whether you are Christians, and what progress you have made. Do you have reason to say, “Oh, that it was with me now as in months past,” and so to be humbled under a conviction of a decline? Or do you have reason to admire God’s distinguishing grace for any advances in holiness, and growth in experience?

II. *In what manner must we examine ourselves, or how must we perform this duty?* If we don’t attend to it in a proper manner, it will be of no real advantage. Therefore, to ensure the ends of it may be answered, let us,

1. Look up to the Spirit by prayer for his assistance. If you have set apart some time for this duty, begin with prayer. You will have but little satisfaction if the Spirit is not with you. You will be ready either to draw a shade over the work of God in your heart — and so you will come from the duty with discouragements — or else you may take for a real saving experience, that which is not; and so you will run into presumption. Therefore, be earnest with God to be with you; to impress you

with a deep sense of the great importance of the duty you are entering upon, so you may not trifle with God and your own soul; to enable you to examine your heart thoroughly, as in His presence. And if He has given you an experience of renewing grace, pray that he would shine upon His work, so that your evidence of the Christian life may clearly appear. Or if you've been deceiving yourself with false hopes, pray that He would convince you of it. Wrestle with God for his *presence*, if you would succeed in the duty.

2. Do not make your own marks, but observe and test yourself by those marks which God has given you in his word. Some make marks of the Christian life as their fancy leads them. They either deceive themselves by them, or else they draw uncomfortable conclusions concerning their state. The hypocrite thinks it is enough to attend ordinances, and go through a round of duties, and so he is resting on a sandy foundation. The Christian is ready to make a comfortable frame, lively affections, a warm heart, etc., the marks of grace; and therefore he is often ready to look at himself as a hypocrite. Look into Scripture, and see what God has made marks of the Christian; don't let fancy be your guide in a matter of such importance. Distinguish between marks of *grace*, and marks of *growth* in grace, and apply each to their proper subjects in your inquiries. For instance, if you would know whether you are a Christian, don't inquire into the measures or *degrees* of faith, love, etc., but into the *reality* of them. A weak faith renders the Christian as safe as a strong faith; and a spark of real love, is evidence of a saving change, even if it isn't ignited into a flame.

3. Be impartial in this duty of self-examination. The Christian and the hypocrite are both ready to be too partial — the last in his own favour, the other against himself. The hypocrite can see everything that is encouraging; he has no doubt that all is well. Whereas, the Christian can see nothing in himself that is good. As the woman of Canaan by faith turned every discouragement into an argument, so the Christian, on the other hand, too often turns every appearance of grace into an objection, through the power of unbelief. Give everything its due weight. Don't stop (as you are ready to do) upon viewing your imperfections. Don't say, "I need not go further, for here is evidence enough of my hypocrisy." Rather, go further and see what you can observe of the Christian in you, and weigh both impartially.

4. If you can find but one mark, you may draw a favourable conclusion. A real mark of grace is the actings of grace. And therefore, whenever you can see but *one* mark, you may comfortably conclude that God has begun a good work in your heart. If you have reason to conclude that you love the brethren, and love them for the image of Christ in them, then you need not hesitate about your state. For this love is the exercise, or outworking of that grace which God has implanted. Sometimes one mark appears visible, and sometimes another. If you have but one, be thankful, and give God all the glory.

I might add some other directions, but I pass on to the third question.

III. *What are the fittest seasons for self-examination?* It is a duty that should be frequently attended to. Every day we should be looking within, and taking a view of our heart.

- At the conclusion of the day, we should be concerned to ask our souls such questions as these — *How have I spent this day? What sins have I fallen into? What frame have I been in? What advantage have I gained on my way to Zion?*
- When we've been reading the word, it would be proper to examine ourselves by it, what we have seen in it, what we have experienced of it, and how we may improve it.
- After prayer, we may inquire into our frame, our views, and our experience in prayer.

In his providence, God is giving us these and many other opportunities to look into ourselves. But there are seasons more peculiarly set apart for self-examination, seasons when we should look back on many years, compare the frames and experiences of one year with those of another, to see how God has been dealing with us, so that we may come to some conclusion concerning our state. I will mention only three hints, as they will provide some direction as to the proper seasons.

1. When we have the most time to go through this duty. It shouldn't be hurried over, but attended to with the greatest deliberation because it relates to the state of our soul. We should therefore endeavour to set apart as much time as we can, so that our mind may be composed; that we may not trifle with God or our own soul, but may attend with that solidity and seriousness which the subject requires; and that we may take a thorough view of things. Don't let this lead you to a constant neglect of the duty, pleading as an excuse that you don't have the proper time for it. Rather, let it put you to striving to so order your affairs, that you may have these opportunities frequently returning.

2. When our thoughts are most likely to be disengaged from this world, and the most free from interruption. As week days don't afford us many opportunities for this duty, we should often fix upon the Lord's day. Now we are free from business. We hear the word, and engage in spiritual duties, all of which tend to bring us into a serious and composed frame. Once you've been in God's house, then retire into your closet in the afternoon, shut the door behind you. There, not only cull through the word you have heard, and look into your present frame, but set yourselves upon this solemn work. Look back and take an impartial view of things, and try to come at a knowledge of your state and experience. Any other day, when you likewise find yourself in a serious frame, set apart an hour for this important purpose.

3. When anything in providence more peculiarly calls us to this work. Here I would mention three seasons that seem to invite you to this duty.

First, when you go to wait upon Christ at his Supper. For this you have the direction of the Holy Ghost, 1Cor 2.28. This is a *public* surrender to God, and therefore you should inquire whether you are heartily willing to give yourself wholly to Christ. This ordinance is designed peculiarly for the people of God. It is necessary, therefore, that you inquire whether or not you are one, lest you take what God has designed for his own children.

Another season is affliction. This duty seems proper to attend to when God's hand is upon us. Many are ready to think afflictions are inconsistent with God's love. Therefore, inquire whether you are a Christian or not. It may be a means of supporting your soul while you see a rod in the Father's hand. Inquire into your sins. Perhaps you may hereby see the cause of your afflictions, and see matter for humiliation, as well as be made sensible of the ends God had in view in afflicting you, and so be directed in the way of your duty.

Lastly, another season proper for this duty is when eternity is approaching. Then, like good old Jacob, you should view the conduct of Divine Providence towards you, and see what appears in your whole life as evidence of the Christian. How happy it would be if upon diligent examination, you were enabled through grace to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: hereafter there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness!" How pleasant it will be to die! How your soul will long to hear the chariot wheels of your Redeemer coming! On the other hand, if you are *not* a Christian, to die in this state would be inconceivably awful. And so how happy to be made sensible of it, and to find your soul willing to fly to Jesus, even if it is at the last hour! Thus all of these appear to be fit seasons for this important duty.

Let us now consider the last question.

IV. *In what light must we view this duty, and what use “should we endeavour to make of it?”* Some look upon and represent self-examination as legalistic, and the comfort that arises from marks and evidences as not truly evangelical. But objections of this kind fall to the ground when we consider the following particulars:

1. Self-examination is not designed to make us proud, but to fill us with admiration. We are to make this use of it. If in this duty any marks and evidences of the Christian appear, we must not be lifted up, as if we were something; but be humble, giving God all the glory. This is the improvement which the Christian desires to make of this duty; this is the frame it leads him into. Does he have any reason to conclude that he is a child of God? Then see how his soul is melted with a view of the *grace* of God. “Oh, why should God look upon a creature so unworthy! Am I indeed a Christian? Should I not dispute it? Is there a change made in my heart? Oh, what grace, then, what grace is that which God has manifested to me! What grace to pluck me like a brand out of the fire! View it, my soul, and ever adore and admire it. “

2. Self-examination is not to lull us into security, but to quicken us. Do any marks of the Christian appear? Then we must not say, “Soul, take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. You are a child of God, and nothing can ever cast you out of his favour.” Those who draw such conclusions have never yet received the grace of God. A view of God’s love for us should, and it *will* quicken and enliven us in our duty. “Oh, what will I render to the Lord for such distinguishing grace? Love the Lord, my soul, and never loiter in the service of Him who has laid you under such peculiar obligations to love and honour him forever.” If no marks appear, then we have no reason to conclude we are Christians. This should rouse and alarm us, and stir us up to seek acquaintance with the divine life.

3. We must not depend on this duty for our justification, but use it as a means to promote our comfort and sanctification. If we can see any traces of the image of God in us, then we have reason to rejoice. It is for this purpose that the Spirit comes, and lets the soul see his interest in the Redeemer. It is that we may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And who cannot, who *does* not rejoice at such a discovery? As this view fills the soul with joy, so it gives him a hatred of sin, melts him into godly sorrow, subdues the power of sin more and more in him, and so promotes his sanctification. If we don’t have these ends in view in this duty; if we think we now have enough to justify us before God, and thus depend on our own righteousness for eternal life, then we give no evidence that we have experienced a saving work in our soul.

4. Therefore, after all, we should keep close to Christ, looking to him for all righteousness for justification, and all strength and grace for sanctification. If all is dark within, and we can see nothing to encourage us to conclude that we are the children of God, don’t be dejected, but look to Christ. Our salvation doesn’t depend on our seeing ourselves as Christians, but on being united to Christ. So don’t be discouraged. These marks aren’t the ground of your hope, but only the means of your comfort. If we find what we seek — namely, the marks of the Christian — while we are rejoicing that we are heirs of God, let us depend on Christ for righteousness to justify us, and for all grace and strength to enable us to persevere in faith and holiness, till we come to the full and everlasting enjoyment of him in heaven.

Thus we are to improve this duty. Now, let me ask you concerning this duty, aren’t there some of you who have never yet examined how the case stands with you? Doesn’t your conscience upbraid you with negligence? Don’t you blush at your folly? Do you please yourselves with the thought

that man doesn't see you in your closet, and your friends don't know if you are engaged in that duty? But alas! alas! what poor comfort this is when *God* knows, and sees your neglect. You yourselves are conscious of it. Your soul is starving; eternity is drawing near; and yet you don't know how it is with you. You are careful as to outward things, such as pursuing pleasure and wealth. But you have never yet sat down and asked, *Am I fit to die? How is it with my soul?* Oh, my friends, if you have any regard for your peace, your happiness in life and at death, then make the inquiry, *how it is with you?* It is a reasonable request that I make. It is with a desire for your salvation. Tomorrow you may be in eternity. There is much to be done before you are fit to die. And yet *see*, you haven't seriously asked a single question about it! It is time to awake! Do you think to sleep on in this way till death approaches? Were it not for your soul, *sleep on*.

But to see an immortal creature in danger of falling into everlasting fire, is enough to raise my compassion, and it calls loudly upon me to endeavour to rouse you. Awake, *awake*, soul! Get up and examine yourself. Some of you may be afraid to look within, afraid to see what is there. You are suspicious that things are bad; you would avoid the sight; you would fly from it; but *oh*, you *cannot*. If you were able to stifle your conscience and lull it asleep for the present, yet the time is coming when you can no longer withstand the force of conviction; when conscience will awake, and fill you with everlasting sorrows if you are found a stranger to Christ. Oh, inquire, then, what is the state of your soul?

As God has now brought us to the close of this lecture, so it may not be improper for each of us to examine our views, our frames in it, and improvements of it. Let us, my dear brethren, inquire what ends we have had in view in engaging in it. How have we attended to it? Is it with seriousness and affectionate concern for souls, with earnest prayer for assistance and success? Those of you who attended this lecture, did you examine what frame you attended it in? What were your views? Were they only to gratify a vain curiosity, or to meet with Jesus, to have your doubts resolved, and your soul brought nearer to God? What benefit have you received? Have you seen more of your own heart, more of the suitableness and glory of Christ, and been more and more established and grounded in the faith? Thus let us all of you examine the state and frame of your soul. Let this be our frequent employment. And let us rejoice more in the prospect of that world where all our cases of conscience will be fully answered; where every dark cloud will be forever scattered; where every fear will vanish, and our souls be possessed of complete and uninterrupted happiness in the everlasting enjoyment of God. Amen.

CASE 27. In what frame does the sinner come when he savingly closes with Christ?

This question is of great importance, and deserves particular consideration, as it peculiarly tends to direct the inquiring soul how to come to Jesus, to convict the hypocrite of being destitute of the grace of God, and to satisfy the humble Christian that he has been enabled to come rightly — that he therefore has an interest in the Redeemer, and will be a partaker of all the blessings of his purchase. I will not consider here how such an alteration is brought about in the sinner — that from an enemy to Christ, he is made an admirer and becomes a follower of a despised Jesus. This is owing to the free and all-conquering influences of the grace of God.

The inquiry is, How does the sinner come to Jesus when the Spirit has fastened saving convictions upon his mind? In what frame does he come? What are the workings of his mind at the time that he closes with the Redeemer, and makes a surrender of his soul into his hands? If we look back and consider how it was with us at the time of our espousals; if we take a view of the convinced and humbled sinner; and if we look into the word of God, where we have the sinner represented

in his state of enmity, under his convictions, in his closing with Jesus and in his progress through the Christian life — then we will find that the frame of his soul at the time he comes to Jesus is suitable to the convictions that the Spirit has driven home upon his mind. Thus,

I. The Spirit has convinced him of his guilty condition. According to these convictions, he comes to Christ in a humble and admiring frame. There must be a conviction of sin, or else there will never be a dependence upon and a looking to Christ for salvation. It is the sick person that applies to the physician, and not the healthy and vigorous, Mat 9.12. We are all ready to acknowledge we are sinners, but we never have a true humbling sense of sin till the Spirit comes and gives us a view of it. The Spirit gives the soul a view of what sin is: how directly it is levelled at all the perfections of God; what an abuse of divine goodness; what a contempt of his law; what ingratitude it carries in it; and how justly it exposes us to His everlasting indignation. This leads the sinner to admire the infinite patience and long-suffering of God in continuing so guilty a creature in life, and that this sinner was not long since sentenced to the infernal prison. The sinner under his convictions is all astonishment, all humility. The lion is turned into a lamb. The proud rebel, who a few moments before would suffer no control, is now lying prostrate at the feet of Jesus; and his only cry is mercy, *mercy*. See every proud thought that exalted itself against God removed, the haughtiness of the sinner brought low, and the poor convinced creature in deep distress and humiliation. He is striking his breast, admiring such infinite grace and compassion that he is not in hell.

The Spirit takes different methods with sinners in conviction of sin. Sometimes he opens the heart and gives us a view of that fountain of corruption that lies there. At another time, he brings some actual sin, sets it before the soul in all its aggravations and deserts. And at another time, He draws up a whole catalogue of sins with which a poor creature stands chargeable before God, and so He convinces him of his miserable and wretched condition.

There is a great difference likewise as to legal terrors — both as to their degrees, and as to their continuance. Some don't know what legal terrors mean. They see themselves as guilty, but their souls are not discouraged with the view. Their hearts are opened at once, they receive the Redeemer, and they rely on him, sweetly pleading His righteousness for pardon and salvation. Others are pricked at the heart, and like the Jews under Peter's preaching, they are full of awful astonishment at a view of their wretched condition. Or like the jailer, they come in deep agony of soul. And under all the terrors of an awakened conscience, they cry out, "Oh, what must we do to be saved?" Act 2.37, and 15.29-30. Some lie for a considerable time under awful and distressing views of sin. They are filled with the deepest compunction and contrition for it, before they are cheered with a view of pardoning mercy. Others just feel the smart, and are led to Jesus — as soon as they are wounded, they are healed.

But in all those cases where there is a saving work of the Spirit, there is such conviction of sin as to humble the soul. All see themselves lost and undone without a Saviour. All confess their guilt, fall down at the footstool of God's throne, and there acknowledge their sins with every aggravation. They charge themselves with the greatest ingratitude. In their own apprehensions, they appear deserving of everlasting burnings; they confess how much they have dishonoured God. They wonder at and admire infinite compassion — that they are prisoners of hope, and have any encouragement to expect an interest in pardoning mercy. All of this is strongly represented in the parables of the publican and the prodigal. What a deep sense the publican has of his unworthiness! How humble! He is afraid to draw near lest that be esteemed presumption. He therefore stands afar off. He dares not lift his eyes towards heaven, the place of God's habitation,

sensible that he had not the least reason to expect admittance there. Therefore with his eyes fixed on the earth, and with the deepest sense of guilt, he beats upon his breast to reduce his wretchedness. Though unworthy to be received, and fit only to be thrown into hell, yet he ventures to speak to God. But his whole plea is for mercy, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” Luke 18.13. This humble frame is beautifully and strongly represented in the parable of the prodigal son, in Luke 15.17, etc. He wasted his substance in riotous living, and was guilty of the greatest ingratitude to a kind and indulgent father. When he therefore comes to be sensible of it, how his soul is humbled! See how he approaches the father whom he had abused! He falls down at his feet, makes a free and full confession of his sins, and begs only to be admitted as a servant. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” I have forfeited the amiable title of a son. I can no longer expect to be treated as a child. I have forfeited every endearment of a father. I therefore don’t ask for it. Only let me be admitted as a servant. That is all I crave at present; I dare look no further. Thus the frame in which the sinner comes to Jesus, is humble.

II. The Spirit convinces the sinner of the infinite purity and holiness of God, the odiousness of sin, and the imperfections attending all his religious duties. He comes to Jesus, therefore, filled with self-abhorrence, and renouncing all his poor services as being insufficient to justify him before God. The sinner is to be brought to an entire dependence upon, and a hearty acceptance of Jesus Christ in all his characters. So the Spirit uses those methods with the sinner that have a direct tendency to bring about this important end. For this purpose, therefore, He gives him some suitable conceptions of God. Perhaps before, he conceived of and represented God as many others have — a Being of infinite benevolence, goodness, and mercy. But now, though he adores God’s mercy, that shining perfection of his nature, he has a striking view of his infinite justice, purity, and majesty. Together with this, the Spirit gives the sinner a view of the odiousness of sin; of how contrary it is to the holiness of God and to his holy law; and what deformity it has introduced into his soul. The understanding, will, and affections have been sadly polluted by it. This fills the sinner with self-abhorrence. He finds he is “carnal and sold under sin” when compared with God and his law, Rom 7.14. He finds such an inconformity of his soul to the divine nature, that he appears vile and detestable. He sees so much of the malignity of sin, that his breast is filled with a hatred of it. He cannot forgive himself for so greedily pursuing that which has so much deception ¹ in it.

The Spirit does not, at first, make a full revelation to the soul of the malignity of sin. He does this gradually as He carries on his work. The evil of sin and the plague of the sinner’s heart are laid open more and more, to raise his abhorrence of himself. But at first, the Spirit gives the sinner such a view of the odiousness of sin, as to make him appear vile in his own eyes, and really despicable. Thus he styles himself as the very “chief of sinners; not worthy of the least of all God’s mercies.” He is filled with self-loathing, “with shame and confusion of face;” and thus he comes to the Redeemer. Though before, he was ready to lean upon a few religious duties that he had performed, now he sees such defects in them as to make them absolutely unworthy of the acceptance of an infinitely holy God, and therefore unfit for a guilty creature’s dependence. He therefore comes renouncing all his own righteousness, and with the church, he esteems it as but “filthy rags, and an unclean thing,” Isa 64.6.

He is now in a great measure emptied of self. Under his first convictions, he might indeed fly to duty, under an apprehension that this would remove his fears and ease his conscience. But now

¹ Originally, “obliquity.” – WHG

he comes to Jesus — he sees his *poverty*; he comes *naked*. He is far from a lukewarm Laodicean temper. He is not puffed up like the Pharisee, endeavouring to quiet the clamours of conscience with what he has done. But he comes renouncing all his religious privileges, all his shining gifts, and all the duties he has done, being convinced that all of them put together are incapable of appeasing an infinitely righteous Judge, and of entitling himself to an everlasting felicity.

3. The Spirit convinces the sinner of the suitableness and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. This is accompanied with warm desires for Him, a high esteem for Him, and a thankful acceptance of, and *obedience* to Him. The Spirit doesn't leave the poor sinner once he has convinced him of his nakedness and misery. As he is the Glorifier of Christ, so He takes of his things and shows them to the sinner, Joh 16.14. Does he have no righteousness to justify him before God? The Spirit presents him with a fulness of righteousness in the Redeemer — righteousness that is pure and perfect, that has been approved of and accepted by the Father, and that has infinite and everlasting virtue and efficacy in it. And therefore it is perfectly suitable to the case of a guilty sinner. Is he guilty? There is pardon purchased by the great Mediator, free and full pardon for every sin. Is he miserable and wretched? There are riches of salvation in Christ, indeed, durable riches and righteousness, Pro 8.18. Is he weak? There is strength in Jesus the mighty God. Is he unworthy? Christ is worthy, for whose sake all the blessings of grace and glory will be given to him. In brief, are his circumstances the circumstances of the greatest indigence? Is he made up of wants? Christ is all fulness to answer his condition.

Now, such a view as this cannot fail to raise in the sinner an esteem for such a Saviour, fill him with desires for Him, and make him thankfully accepting of him. "Is it so?" asks the sinner. "Is Jesus able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him? And will he look upon such a poor, vile, despicable creature as I am? *Oh blessed news!* Let me not wait a moment, oh my soul. Let me fly to this Saviour. Let me love him, trust my everlasting all with him, receive him, and trust in him as my righteousness and strength." When the sinner sees a door of hope thus opening, and that Jesus is the person who has done it for him; he is *alive*. He admires, adores, loves, desires, and comes and ventures his soul upon Christ, and trusts in him for all that salvation which he stands in need of. And thus the frame in which the soul comes savingly to Christ, is a depending and believing frame.

4. He is convinced of the necessity and beauty of holiness, of the love of Jesus Christ in giving himself for such guilty creatures. And this is accompanied with an entire, obediential and submissive frame. The soul is brought not only to the obedience of faith in Christ as the Lord his righteousness, but to take him in all his characters. Before his convictions, he was ready to say, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him? I cannot relish that many duties; I cannot think of enduring reproaches and persecutions for Christ." If he makes a profession, it is only an empty one; and that is perhaps the effect of custom and education, or occasioned through the authority and influence of his friends. But when the Spirit works upon his heart, and brings him to the feet of Jesus, he gives himself up, a willing subject to the Redeemer, agreeably to what the Father promises the Son. Psalm 110.3. *Your people shall be willing in the day of your power*. The love of Christ now constrains him. And because Jesus has done so much for him, he cannot refuse Him so small and reasonable a request as his heart. He yields himself, a cheerful sacrifice. He chooses Christ and his service before all the pleasures of sin. He willingly parts with his Delilahs, takes Christ as his Lord and King, takes him with His cross, and is willing to employ all the powers of his soul for his Redeemer's glory, and to be entirely at his disposal. He is willing to have his corruptions all subdued, his Redeemer's image implanted, and to be ruled and governed

constantly by His laws. Thus we see the frame in which a sinner closes with Jesus Christ, and the workings of his mind. Not that these things may be so distinctly and separately ranged in the soul at first. Yet he has a general sense of them, and in time he distinctly considers them in all their importance.

To further illustrate what has been said, let us represent a sinner under these serious and important impressions coming to Jesus. I imagine him struck with conviction, falling down before God and breaking out in some manner such as this:

“Lord, what a guilty creature am I! Why didn’t you long ago cut me off, and send me to the infernal regions to receive the just rewards of my sins? Against you, you only have I sinned, and done innumerable evils in your sight. I have absolutely forfeited the blessings I have come to you for. Yet, stretch out the hand of your mercy, and get for yourself a name and a praise in the salvation of one so unworthy as I. Oh the infinite patience and long suffering of God to a wretch so provoking! Lord, I am all sin. I am a lost, undone, perishing creature. I once thought all was well. I boasted of my duties. I apprehended myself as rich, but now I see I am miserable, and blind and naked. I have nothing to recommend me to your favour, but enough to make you view me with detestation and abhorrence. Lord, I have nothing to plead but free mercy; nothing to depend upon but that blessed sacrifice, which I would ever have in the most grateful remembrance.

“Oh Jesus, you are the only able Saviour. A sense of my need of you has filled that heart, which was all enmity to you, with desires for you. How suitable you appear in all your characters! I hope I now love you. I now feel my heart melting under the all-conquering influences of your love. I would now be thankful for your undertaking, adore your infinite grace that such a wretch has encouragement to come to you; and I would come, abhorring myself and repenting in dust and ashes. I would come renouncing all my poor despicable duties and services: I would be clothed with *your* righteousness and yours *only*. Lord, I would come giving up all my sins, my pleasures, all my worldly interest, and I would take you with your cross, your reproaches and difficulties, esteeming it greater riches to have an interest in you, than if I were possessed of all the world. Here I am, Lord, at your feet. I would make an unreserved surrender of myself to you, to your guidance, government, and disposal. Do with me whatever seems good in your sight, so I may but be an object of your favour *here*, and be happy in your everlasting presence *above*.”

This is a true evangelical frame of soul. This is the frame in which the sinner comes to Jesus for salvation. And whoever has been enabled to come in the manner that has been represented, has savingly closed with Jesus Christ. He is really and actually united to and interested in Him.

For the particular satisfaction of the soul, I would prove by the three following things, that whoever comes in this way, comes *savingly* to Jesus Christ.

1. This frame of soul in every way corresponds to the ends God has in view in the scheme of salvation. The great end God has in view in the whole of our salvation, is to glorify and exalt the infinite riches of His sovereign grace, and to keep the creature from boasting. Therefore, all the methods that he has taken, have that particular tendency. Thus the objects he has fastened upon are sinners, oftentimes some of the most contemptible sinners, so that they may not have the least apparent ground of boasting. Those who are brought to the marriage supper are not the rich, the honourable, etc.; but the lame, the crippled, and the blind, and those who are in the highways and hedges, the most despised part of mankind, Luk 14.23.

“You see your calling, brethren,” says the apostle, “that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised God has chosen, yes, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.” And why is all this? “That no flesh should glory in his presence,” 1Cor 1.26-29. He has likewise fixed upon the weakest means to bring about the conversion and salvation of his chosen people. And all of this is that the excellence of the power may be of *God* and not of man, so that *He* may be glorified. Thus the frame of soul in which the sinner comes to Jesus, corresponds to these views. He comes humbly; he is emptied of self; he admires divine patience and grace; he pleads free mercy, and he lies at the feet of Christ a humble suppliant, depending upon Him alone for acceptance. This frame, then — so exactly corresponding to the ends God has in view in the whole scheme of salvation — makes it apparent that it is a true gospel frame. It shows that we come rightly to Christ, and we will meet with acceptance in Him.

2. This frame corresponds with the representations we have of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. How is he represented, but as our righteousness and strength, our wisdom, our all in all? He is held forth as the object of our faith, as the only foundation of our hopes of eternal life. He is represented as the True Vine, being the only Fountain of all spiritual life to his people, and as having in himself an inexhaustible fulness of all grace for the supply of all our wants, Joh 15.1. He is called the Lord our Righteousness, Jer 23.6, to signify that he is *all* in our justification. He is our green fir tree; all our fruitfulness depends upon him, Hos 14.8. In sum, without him we can do *nothing*, Joh 15.5. Agreeable to these and similar representations of Christ, is that frame we have been considering. And therefore I conclude it is a right frame, and all those who so come to Christ, have an interest in him. If the sinner owns Jesus in all his characters; gives him the glory for all his characters; receives Him as his righteousness, his strength, his all — then he certainly comes rightly, and he has that faith which is saving.

3. This frame corresponds to the experience of the saints recorded in the word of God. It is the frame recommended by our Lord in the parable of the Pharisee and Publican. It is the frame in which the Prodigal is represented as coming to the Father, and which the Father owns and approves of, Luk 15.20-21, etc. It is the frame David appeared in when sensible of his backslidings, thus receiving a fresh assurance of pardon (2Sam 12; Psalm 51). Peter appeared in this very frame when he was restored after his fall, Luk 22.62. And Saul, the obstinate Jew, the rigid Pharisee, appeared to be under the same impressions, and manifested the same spirit at his conversion. He had a deep sense of sin, and he absolutely despaired of ever obtaining eternal life by his own righteousness, Rom 7.9. He desired to be found in Christ, clothed with his perfect and everlasting righteousness, Phi 3.9, and fully surrendered himself into the hands of Jesus, to do with him, and dispose of him, as he pleased. Act 9.6, “Trembling and astonished, he said, ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’” As if to say, “Here I am at your feet, your conquest; the triumph of your grace. I willingly yield myself as a sacrifice to you. Take me, Lord, and rule in me; direct, order me where and as you please. I am ready to follow you in all things.” On the whole, we may with the greatest satisfaction and readiness conclude that the frame that has been described, is a true evangelical frame, and that in general, it is the real frame in which every sinner savingly closes with Christ.

Let me now see how this case may be usefully employed. Here I would address myself,

1. To those who are asking the way to Zion, and crying out, *What shall we do to be saved?* Are you, oh soul, under the apprehensions of guilt? Are you lost and undone, without an interest in

the Saviour? Are you sensible that Jesus alone can deliver you? Are you saying, How will I come to him? I am altogether unworthy of his notice; I deserve his everlasting frowns: I have nothing to say to move him to look upon me — unless *this* will do it: that I am miserable, wretched, blind, and naked. And will he receive such a creature? Thus come, oh inquiring soul. This is the best frame you can come to your Redeemer in. Come this way, and you will find acceptance. Are you unworthy? Come and tell the Mediator. Let him know your wants; tell him of your desires; give all into his hands, and plead his own free gracious promise that “whoever comes to him, he will by no means cast out.” Joh 6.37. This is to come rightly; this is the temper, the *spirit* of the Gospel; and be assured you will meet with a hearty welcome. Jesus will take you into his bosom. He will open all his heart to you. He will give you His presence here, and make you eternally happy with him in the mansions above. Your unworthiness will be no obstruction; your crimson sins shall all be washed away. Jesus gives all his blessings freely. He gives them to the most unworthy.

2. I would address myself to the Christian who is afraid that he never came to the Redeemer rightly. You are calling this into question; let me ask you, How was it with your soul when you gave yourself to Jesus? Weren't you humble? Didn't you come confessing your sins, lamenting them — renouncing your righteousness, your Delilahs, and wholly giving yourself to Jesus? Did you have any reservations? Didn't you take the Redeemer in all his characters and say, *Lord, take my heart, take all I have. Not only save me from hell, but sanctify me. Do with me, and by me, and in me, what will be most for your glory.* Wasn't this the case? Let your conscience speak, for I appeal to that, and that must give its witness to what I have said. Yes, oh humble Christian, you came rightly to Christ. God has given you saving faith in the Redeemer. Go on with cheerfulness. You most assuredly have an interest in Jesus Christ, and heaven will infallibly be yours.

3. I would address myself to the hypocrite and empty professor on this question. It is plain that you have no more than a name to live by. Your hopes of eternal life are absolutely vain, and “you are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” (Act 8.23) You indeed profess to believe that Jesus is the Saviour. But have you ever savingly closed with him? Did you ever see your nakedness, misery, and poverty, the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and *thus* come to Him for salvation? Was your heart ever made willing to receive him in all his characters? And have you made a full and unreserved surrender of yourself to Jesus? Let conscience act but a faithful part, and it will be a witness against you. To what purpose is it then, for you to entertain hopes of eternal life? If you are a stranger to Christ, you are in the most awful state, being under the wrath of God. Oh, don't deceive yourself with expectations of an everlasting inheritance, while having no more than a mere form of godliness. Examine yourself, and you will find that you are a stranger to that frame which has been described. You know nothing *savingly* of Jesus Christ, and therefore you have no interest in him.

4. *Lastly*, how mistaken those persons are, who are ready to conclude they don't have a work of grace because they have never felt those legal terrors that others have. They never appeared under such degrees of humiliation as many have discovered. The Christian often complains of having an unhumbled soul. He is afraid that he hasn't seen enough of sin. He begs to have a deeper sense of it. He sees others full of contrition, their hearts deeply impressed with a view of it. But his own heart is frozen, dead, and stupid. He cannot mourn as some do; and therefore he fears he doesn't have that real humiliation which is a necessary evidence of the grace of God. You are greatly mistaken in this. Have you seen so much of sin as to fill you with a desire for Christ, and to make you willing, *heartily* willing, to receive Jesus Christ in all his characters, and cast your soul upon him? Then your convictions are saving; your humiliation is real; and your state is happy. Ever

remember for your direction and satisfaction, that the great question is not whether you have been under such and such legal terrors; whether you have discovered such and such degrees of humiliation. Rather, the question is whether you have seen sin in such a light as to make you humbly, willingly, and thankfully accepting of the Saviour, and to give yourself to Him. If so, then you have been enabled to come rightly to Jesus Christ, and you have savingly closed with him.

CASE 28. A person has had a religious education, and cannot remember any time or place, when and where, God first worked upon his soul. What judgment must he form about his state, and what methods must he take to be satisfied that he is a child of God?

This is a question that is suitable to the case of many of God's dear children, and it occasions innumerable fears and doubts. It sadly breaks in upon the peace of their souls, and leads them into that frame which dishonours God. When the Christian has heard a converted sinner present the time and circumstances of his conversion, how God awakened him to a sense of sin, humbled his proud heart, and brought him to the feet of the Redeemer — when he has heard a servant of Christ present the early revelations God was pleased to make to him of his wretched condition, and how in the bloom of life he was brought to give himself up to a divine Saviour — when the Christian hears these and others pointing out most circumstantially the manner of being brought to Christ — he goes away under great discouragements, and he opens his heart in the following manner.

“See, oh my soul, how it has been with others! Hear the account they have to give. Their conversion has been evident to themselves and others. And if I had really received the grace of God, shouldn't I remember some of the circumstances of that happy moment? It is true, I have been sober from my youth, and I am not chargeable with any gross immoralities. My conversion could not, therefore, be so visible as that of the open and profane sinner. Yet there is a great difference between mere morality and grace; and if a good work was begun in me, whenever it was, the change was great. And shouldn't I remember some of the happy circumstances? Don't I have reason to fear that all my religion is nothing more than the effect of education and example? Won't the instructions of a parent, won't the daily observance of the regular exercises of religion in a family, have a great influence to fill the mind with awe, to guard a person against outward immoralities, and to be a spur to discharge some of the duties of religion, even so much as to appear to be a real Christian? And may not this be my own case? What reason do I have to draw a different conclusion? What must I do in my present painful dilemma? What method must I take to get satisfaction in a point of such vast importance? In brief, what must I call myself? Am I a child of God, or am I only an almost-Christian, a Christian by force of education?”

I grant you, oh timorous soul, something of this is awfully true. A person may be carried to some considerable lengths in the profession of religion through the influence of an education, and especially by the daily example and instructions of an affectionate parent or guardian, while they are present. But when they are gone, and temptations begin to present themselves in all their force, the person may throw off all restraint, and no longer appear to be the Christian. Thus “Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada; but when he was dead, he fell into idolatry.” 2Chr 24.2, 17. This is too often the case. The children of godly persons sometimes turn into the greatest apostates, and from a strict profession they run the greatest lengths in infidelity. These things are often a source of stumbling for the humble Christian who cannot remember the time and circumstances of his conversion. He is ready to fear that he is no more than an outward professor, and will one day absolutely fall, and make it apparent that he

never received the grace of God in truth. Having thus presented your case, your doubts and difficulties, I would answer the question in the following manner.

I. Don't hastily conclude that you are a stranger to a work of grace. It is enough to make us fear that we are almost-Christians, to say we cannot remember the time when God first brought us to Christ, and what methods he took to do it. This will be apparent if we consider the three following things.

1. A remembrance of our conversion is no mark of grace. A real mark of grace is of the same nature as grace itself. Therefore, there cannot be a mark of grace, without grace itself being there. For instance, love for Jesus Christ is a mark of grace. It is a real, a genuine mark, because it is the very actings of grace itself; or it is that habit of grace implanted in the soul, brought into exercise. Therefore, wherever there is love for Christ, it is certain and undoubted evidence that a real saving work has begun in such a soul. But this cannot be said of our remembrance of the circumstances of our conversion. If this were a mark of grace, then those who could not remember their first awakenings and closing with Christ, must conclude they are still strangers to the grace of God. So that, remembrance of conversion is no real mark of it. For if it were so, how many thousands must be deemed only outward professors, who give all the real evidences of a saving acquaintance with Jesus Christ? Many are sitting at the right hand of Jesus, and sweetly singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, who while here, could never remember the time when God first implanted a principle of spiritual life in their souls. Indeed, may I not say there are many of the most eminent of God's saints who, like stars of the first magnitude, shone with a peculiar lustre; and yet they were at a loss in this particular point. Thus, if you are ready to look upon a remembrance of your conversion as necessary to determine that you are a Christian, then you are under a great mistake. And this will be a means to fill you with perpetual anxiety. And so, it will unfit you for that cheerful conversation and discharge of duties which is suitable to the Christian character. *You have no warrant from Scripture for such a conclusion.* But the unhappiness is that we make our own marks of grace, and then we examine ourselves by them. If we don't find them, we immediately conclude that we are no better than hypocrites, though at the same time, we have no foundation from the word of God for such a conclusion.

2. Many are sanctified from the womb, or so early that they cannot remember when the Spirit first began his work in them. Jeremiah seems to be such a person. Jer 1.5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you." Though the word *sanctify* may signify "set apart," and that God designed him for the work he afterwards employed him in, yet the other sense may not be excluded. We cannot, we *dare* not say that it is impossible for God to sanctify a babe. Though we cannot comprehend how it can be done, all things are possible with God. He can and does do it, or else our dying infants must be in melancholy circumstances. They come into the world destitute of grace, or considered as the children of the first Adam; they have lost their divine image. This must be restored, so that they may be fitted for the everlasting enjoyment of God. And if dying infants are sanctified, why may not the living ones? The one is equally possible with God, as the other. Samuel appears to be one of those who were sanctified so early, 1Sam 1.20. And almost every age has produced many instances of children in their most tender years discovering a love for God, and an esteem for sacred things. This has chiefly been among the children of God's people. He has put an honour upon his saints, and He has early fulfilled his promise to their seed. Thus you may then have been sanctified early; yes, sanctified so early that it is impossible for you to remember the work. And would you conclude you are a hypocrite, or only an almost-Christian, because you cannot point out the time of your

conversion? Perhaps as far as you can look back, you can remember that your mind was in great measure under the same impressions it is now. And this seems to be a happy intimation that God was pleased to sanctify you early, so that you are absolutely incapable of remembering the happy moment. Don't be discouraged then, because you cannot speak of your first convictions, nor tell how the Spirit brought you to Jesus. Nor can you say that a saving work has *never* been wrought in you. You would thereby be limiting an infinitely wise and gracious God, and so you would act unsuitably to the obligations He has laid you under, to himself.

3. Grace is often insensibly and imperceptibly infused into the hearts of those who have had a religious education. The change is so gradual, or so easy, that it is scarcely to be distinguished. Thus the Christian cannot point out the first movings of his heart. He cannot remember any extraordinary impressions. There is nothing of Mount Sinai attending the change; no thunders of the law; no alarms of conscience. The work is done in a moment. The heart is opened, as it were, with the turn of a key. A saving change is made, and yet the person doesn't perceive it, but it appears just the same. Some can as soon lose a sense of their existence, as they can forget that important season when God suddenly struck them with the most awful convictions, and filled them with all the terrors of Sinai. Their conversion was visible and remarkable; while others have been just as effectually brought to Jesus, but with the utmost silence. The Spirit came with a still but powerful voice, called them to the Redeemer, and changed the natural bent of their hearts; and yet they are not aware of it. It is no wonder that the swearer, the blasphemer, or profane person, remembers the particular steps that God took with him. But here someone appears the same as he ever was. He has been taught to pray from childhood, to read the Scriptures, and to attend divine ordinances. All along he has been habituated to good conversation, and so he doesn't know when he first began to relish these sacred things. Saul's conversion was remarkable, Acts 9. But when Samuel's was — whether he was sanctified in infancy, or the work was begun after the dawns of reason — it was difficult for him and for those who knew him to determine, because he had always been habituated to religious exercises.

It is probable, that those who cannot remember the time of their being brought to God, were wrought upon in their tender years when, through the unripeness of their judgments, they were incapable of distinguishing what was a real work of grace. The work then being actually begun, it gradually and insensibly revealed itself in their later life. They often became shining Christians, without being able to give an account of their being brought to the Redeemer.

Thus, oh soul, these considerations are sufficient to guard you against those rash conclusions you are sometimes ready to make, that you are not a Christian because you cannot remember the time and circumstances of your conversation. God may have sanctified you from the womb, or He so early and so gradually led you into a real experience of the divine life, that it is impossible for you to point it out. Don't be discouraged, therefore. Nor should you give way to unbelief, because you are dishonouring God by this, and you may provoke Him to withhold from you those sweet tokens of His presence which would fill your soul with divine consolation. So much for *negatively*.

II. Examine yourselves by those things that tend to give you satisfaction in this important matter, and that come within your reach. Thus:

1. Look into what you've experienced. I don't in the least doubt that you've had some experience of the things of God in those duties to which you have been inured. It will sufficiently appear upon examination. How has it been with you when approaching God in private prayer? (I take it for granted that you attend to that.) What has been your frame of soul, the workings of your mind when under the hearing of the word? How have you been in meditation, and in the various duties

in which you've been engaged from time to time? Have you gone one continuous round in a dull and lifeless manner, without having any real sense or experience of the workings of divine grace? Have your natural affections been moved, but not with a sense and real view of spiritual objects? Rather, haven't you found your soul differently impressed, and in different frames at times? When Jesus has been represented to you in his various important characters, haven't you sometimes found your soul melted in some measure with his love, your heart filled with desires for him, and with a high esteem of him? "When sin has been represented in all its odiousness — our natural depravity, our weakness and great unworthiness — haven't you at times been humbled, seen yourself as vile, and been filled with self-abhorrence? Haven't you found your heart filled with hatred of sin; haven't you mourned over it, and begged to be delivered from it? Haven't you found that heart, those spiritual evils, which all God's people complain of so much — namely, spiritual pride, workings of corruption, distractions in duty, coldness and formality, etc.? And haven't you complained of these, and lamented over them before God in private?

Once more, when in your closet — when none have been witness but God — haven't you there sometimes found meltings of soul when mourning over your sins? Haven't you, so far as you know yourself, given yourself to Jesus without reserve, in the most solemn manner, to be justified, sanctified, governed, and saved by him? Haven't you found a willingness to be his, viewed and received him as your all, found a subjection of your soul to him, and renounced all that stood in competition with him? And didn't you take him with his cross, with all his difficulties, and wholly surrender yourself to his conducting and disposal? Thus look into what you have experienced.

2. Examine the present state of your soul. How is it with you now? Have you lost all sense of the things of God, or do you still retain the same sentiments about them, and at times experience the same as you did before? Don't examine whether you find any remains of coldness; and don't be discouraged if you find that your heart is sometimes seized with a sudden numbness. This is the case with *all* Christians at times. But inquire into the following particulars:

What are your views of sin? Does it appear the same as it did before? Do you look upon sin in general, or upon any particular sin, in a favourable light? Do you secretly hug it in your bosom, and roll it under your tongue like a sweet morsel? Or does it appear full of deformity? Do you find your soul filled with a detestation of it, and do you desire to have all the faculties of your mind delivered from it?

What views do you have of yourself, my friend? Are you elated with pride, from an apprehension of some peculiar excellencies you are possessed of? Are you puffed up, Pharisee-like, because you haven't been guilty of public sins as others have? Do you think you're something, when you are really nothing? Or rather, do you appear vile and detestable to yourself, notwithstanding that you aren't chargeable with outward immoralities? Are you sensible of the sad depravity of your nature? Are you crying out about the badness, uncleanness, and wickedness of your heart? Do you loathe and abhor yourself when you view an infinitely holy God, and His righteous and holy law? Have you no righteousness to mention before God, but instead, it's all like filthy rags, and an unclean thing? Do you appear in every way unworthy of divine notice?

What views and thoughts do you have of Christ? Did he once appear amiable to you, but doesn't now? Or can you not view him, or think of him with any degree of pleasure? What do you think of him as *God*? Is that an amiable character, and do you see the necessity of it to render him a complete Saviour? How does he appear as *man*, hanging as a sacrifice on the cross, under all the evidences of divine wrath, and exposed to all the cruelties and reproaches of man? Is he a stumbling block to you as he was to the Jews, and do you esteem the doctrine of his cross as full

of absurdity? Or rather, do you view this mystery of godliness, “God manifested in the flesh,” as the peculiar glory of the Christian religion, and are you often struck with the love of the great Mediator? How does Christ appear in his various mediatorial characters? Is he lovely all over, a king as well as a priest? Do you find a willingness to be his subject, to follow him throughout life, to live in his presence above, and to sing his praise forever? Do you value the enjoyment of Christ above all sublunary things? Can you say (so far as you know your heart) “Lord, whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is none on earth ;that I desire besides you,” Psa 73.25. If you are my portion, I have enough. In brief, is Christ the foundation of your hopes of eternal life? Do you build your everlasting all upon him, and daily commit your soul to him, to be saved by him?

Again, what is your general conduct? Here remember the inquiry is not to be whether you *have been* or *are* guilty of any particular slips and falls, because man’s state is not to be determined by one or two particular acts, but by the general bent and tendency of his life. Is sin then, in general, the object of your pursuit? Or, are you seeking a growing conformity to Jesus? Are the Lord’s commandments grievous, or do you see a beauty in every part of God’s law, and are you concerned to walk in daily obedience to it? Is holiness your aim, your happiness? Are you watchful over your heart, and against whatever has a tendency to lead you away from God?

How are you in your closet? You doubtless find formality and indifference there. But aren’t you enabled to complain over all that is done there? Don’t you tell God about your corruptions, bewail your sins, and beg for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace? Don’t you find your soul sometimes ashamed before God under a sense of your ingratitude, and melting into godly sorrow? Don’t you sometimes seem to be quite disinterested in surrendering yourself to Jesus, and then don’t you find in your soul longings for him, and for that world where you will perfectly love and eternally praise him?

How is it with you in the house of God? I don’t doubt it is too often dull and lifeless; your heart wanders from God, and you appear to be quite insensible. Yet don’t you go in general to meet with God? Aren’t you humbled at your careless attention? Don’t you often call upon your wandering heart to return and pay attention? Don’t you desire to be spiritually affected by what you hear? Do you mourn when you don’t meet with Jesus, and isn’t your soul all life, all zeal and love, all humility and joy, when Jesus gives you his presence, or the Spirit breathes on your dry bones?

My dear friend, inquire this way into the present state and frame of your soul, if you would know what judgment to form about yourself. And to further help you,

3. Examine what your resolutions are. Is it your purpose and resolution, through divine grace, to hold to your way, and be faithful unto death? You are sensible of your weakness, but isn’t it your determination, in dependence on the mighty Redeemer, to continue praying and waiting, and using all the means God has appointed to carry on the work of grace in your heart? You must be apprehensive of many difficulties in the Christian race. But is the prospect discouraging? Aren’t you willing to submit to reproaches, and whatever you may be called to for Christ’s sake? You may be afraid of not enduring to the end, or of sinking long before you have the haven in prospect. But doesn’t this fear arise from a sense of your weakness, and of your enemy’s power and craftiness, and not from any present doubt about your willingness to follow Jesus till death? In brief, do you resolve through grace, to leave yourself in the hands of the Redeemer, together with all your concerns — following him in all duties through the various parts of life, desiring to honour his name, adorn his doctrine, grow into his image, and glorify him both living and dying?

These, then, are some of the necessary inquiries to be made if you would know what conclusion to draw concerning your state.

III. A third direction I would give you is this. If on examination you have reason to hope that your heart can give some satisfactory answer to the above questions, then draw a favourable conclusion concerning your state. Admire the grace of God in giving you a real experience of the Spirit's work, and go on your way rejoicing. I don't doubt that you are able through grace to answer the above inquiries. I think I can see you in your retired moments, looking over these various topics of examination, and hear you breaking out in some manner such as this:

"It's true, my soul, I cannot remember the time and circumstances of my conversion, but haven't I had no experience of the operations of the Spirit on my heart in duties and ordinances? See, have I not been at times melted, raised, quickened and humbled? And what is it that has moved me? Was it not a view of my sins, my ingratitude; a view of the love of Jesus, or some spiritual truth brought home to my heart? And have I not, if my heart does not deceive me, chosen Jesus for my Saviour, his Gospel for my rule, his people for my companions, and his salvation for my best portion? And how is it with me now? Have I grown weary of the ways of God? Do you repent, oh my soul, your choice of Jesus? Isn't he still amiable? What does it mean to have those secret longings after him, that concern I have to honour him, and that fear of offending him? Aren't these tokens of love? Oh, doesn't he appear precious in all his characters? I cannot do without him. I must have an interest in him.

"How is it, my soul, as to sin? Do you really love it? Why then do you secretly mourn over it? Why desire to be diverted from it? Why are you filled with self-abhorrence? Why do you appear so vile? Doesn't this speak of a hatred of sin, and of some real humility? In brief, tell me, oh my soul, what is the foundation of your hopes of eternal life? Isn't it Christ? Don't you desire to be made holy, and to take Christ as king as well as priest? What is your purpose and resolution? Isn't it through grace to cling to Christ in faith and humble obedience till death? Do you deceive me, oh my wicked heart, in these important affairs? Am I mistaken? Surely I am not. I hope I find it as I have represented."

I am persuaded this is how it is with you, oh humble soul. And surely this is an evidence of grace. What can I call you but a Christian? What can you conclude you are but a child of God? Was it ever known in any age of the world, that a good education taught a person really to hate sin and love Jesus Christ? Can anything short of the influences of the Spirit conquer the enmity of our hearts, and make us willing to submit to, and close in with the Redeemer? Was it ever known that a hypocrite could heartily join with the apostle, and adopt his language in the seventh chapter to the Romans? But isn't this your case? What can you then be but a Christian indeed? Hatred of and a desire for deliverance from all sin — even heart sins — and a love for our Lord Jesus Christ, will remain as long as the world continues, standing as incontestable evidences of an interest in Jesus, and an acquaintance with him. Can you not remember when God made the change? Don't let that discourage you; it is of no great importance. Rejoice that your eyes are opened, and maintain and keep up a prevailing hope of spiritual and eternal blessings.

Don't let others' experiences stagger you, oh humble soul. But rejoice in and adore the infinite grace of God to you. Often view with admiration the grace of God in giving you a religious education and impressing your mind with so early a sense of divine things. And often reason with yourself in some manner such as this:

“Why should I question my experience of the grace of God, oh my soul, just because I cannot point out the time when the change was made? Surely I won’t give up my hopes. What, even if I cannot call to mind the happy moment when God sent his Spirit into my heart, may I not be a real Christian despite all this? To deny it would be to limit the grace and power of God, to dictate to infinite wisdom, to run myself into difficulties, to lay a foundation for continual uneasiness, and to unfit myself for the cheerful discharge of those various duties which are incumbent upon me. Let me therefore rejoice in the Lord, and not let go of my confidence, which has great recompense of reward. I hope I love Jesus; I would love him more. And can I love him and not be a Christian? Return to your rest, oh my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.”

Thus go on your way rejoicing. I would give one more direction.

IV. If you cannot receive satisfaction from any of the above inquiries, but are still in the dark, then come and throw yourselves at the feet of Jesus. Leave your soul with him, and rest upon him for salvation. We may examine ourselves at some seasons without any advantage. Our souls being in the dark, we may not be able to see anything in us that looks like the work of God, or we may be afraid of drawing a wrong conclusion. Is this the case with you, soul? Have you examined yourself, and can you not receive that satisfaction which you would desire? Are you still dubious about your real character? Don’t be discouraged; but go to Jesus and throw yourself at his feet as a naked, guilty sinner. Commit your soul into his hands, and determine to rest there. Say —

“Lord, I dare not conclude that I am a child of God, but I would come to you. I see no other refuge but you. I am lost if you don’t take me under your wing. Oh, here I am a guilty, polluted, unworthy creature. Pardon me, sanctify me, cleanse me. I dare not say I have believed in you; but if I have been acting the hypocrite, Lord, I would yet venture to come. I am within that gracious promise which is your own, Joh 6.37, “Whoever comes to me I will by no means cast out.” Lord, I would lie at your feet. I would rest entirely upon you and leave myself with you, to be disposed of as seems most convenient to you.”

This is a noble resolution, a noble act of faith — when a soul is in doubt about his state and under distressing fears — to go and throw himself upon Jesus and say, *Lord, here I will lie at your feet; if I perish, I will perish there*. Oh timorous soul, go and do likewise. This honours Christ. It is a means of bringing peace to the soul, and fits it to discharge its duty. If this is your resolution, it is a sign that you have received the grace of God in truth. Take it as a token for good that you are a child of God. Go on, therefore, trusting and waiting. And in God’s own time, when he sees it most for his glory, he will arise and shine upon his work in your heart, and give you “the Spirit of adoption crying, Abba Father.”

Thus I have freely attempted to answer your case, oh humble soul, and direct you what to do under the various difficulties that surround you. I will now close with two or three reflections.

1. From this we learn how unsuitably we act when we make our own or others’ experiences a standard. Someone has been brought to Christ early, and he is uneasy because his conversion is not as visible as that of others. Another has been brought to Jesus at an advanced age; he is afraid that the work is not right, or that he will never meet with acceptance because he was not enabled to surrender himself to his Redeemer in his youth. Some have been under great terrors, awful awakenings at conversion; these expect others to have the same experience. Or else they question the reality of a work of grace, because their souls were not melted down with the love of Christ. Others have been drawn by love. The doctrines of Divine grace have, like dew, gently fallen upon their souls, and been made effectual to produce a saving change without any inward terror. These

are afraid the work is not right because they have been strangers to striking convictions of sin, etc. Thus each in his turn is uneasy, and would confine an infinitely gracious God to a particular method in beginning and carrying on his work in the soul. How unjustifiable this conduct is, as well as weak and ungrateful! Won't he take whatever method he pleases? And can't he do it as effectually by one as by another? However the work is done, rejoice that you are brought to Jesus, and don't set up your own experience as a standard for others, or another's as a standard for you.

2. In our examination of ourselves, we should not lay such stress on the time and circumstances of our conversion, but examine ourselves by the real marks and evidences of grace. It is happy, indeed, if we can remember the time of our espousals, and view the various steps of our conversion; but all cannot do it. The surest way is to examine ourselves by the marks of grace. And here we should confine ourselves to those that are true scripture marks, and not make marks of our own, which are really no marks, and thus be led into dangerous mistakes.

3. How awful it is if there are any of us who have not yet been savingly brought to Christ! Your case is awful, you formal hypocrite, whatever your hopes are of an eternal world. You are resting on an outward profession, and are destitute of all saving grace. Your case is awful, you children of God's people, who are enemies to Jesus Christ, and haven't yet felt an almighty power changing your hearts and bringing you into obedience to the Redeemer. Your privileges will rise up against you at the judgment and aggravate your misery, unless you close with Jesus. But doubly awful is *your* case, you who have almost spent your days, and yet can give no evidences of a work of grace in your heart! You are just coming to the end of your race, and yet you are strangers to Christ! A few days may put a period to your existence here, and yet you have no real concern for your soul!

Oh that the Spirit of God may effectually lead us all to Jesus Christ, so that we may believe on him to the everlasting salvation of our souls.

CASE 29. How may someone who has thrown aside his religion, but now delights in it, know whether this is only restraining grace, or saving grace?

A young person who has had a religious education, and gave his parents promising hope of a work of grace in his heart, after this threw aside all his religion, and gave himself over to many known sins. But he has recently been enabled to refrain from those sins, thinks he hates sin as sin, and attends constantly with delight to public worship, prayer, reading, meditation, etc. He desires to know whether this is restraining grace only, or saving grace; and he begs advice and instruction in a matter of so great importance.

Of all things, those that relate to our everlasting happiness are of the greatest moment. They lie with the greatest weight upon the mind, and fill the awakened humble soul either with a painful anxiety, or a divine satisfaction, according to the frame he is in, or the point of view in which they appear to him. No wonder we find a soul so solicitous after salvation, or so particularly concerned to know whether what he has experienced is the work of the Spirit. His everlasting all is at stake, and he cannot help but be anxious to know whether it is secure. He has a deep sense of the worth of his immortal soul, of the awfulness of a mistake as to its vast concerns. And he cannot therefore be satisfied till he has some reason to hope that he has an interest in Jesus, and a real acquaintance with the divine life.

This I apprehend to be your case, my dear young friend, who sent in the above question. You once gave your affectionate parents great hopes of your future appearance. Your tender mind seemed to be under some particular impressions concerning the excellence and importance of religion.

You attended, in some measure, to the instructions of your fond indulgent parents, who were rejoicing at the amiable prospect that appeared of your serious spirit, and perhaps admiring divine grace for this important addition to their happiness. If God had cut you off in those early days, how cheerfully your friends would have submitted to the stroke, and followed you to the grave without one single doubt of your everlasting felicity. But see the uncertainty of all earthly dependencies. While they are taking the satisfaction that arises from such a view of things, behold a sudden alteration appears in the temper and conduct of their beloved son. It damps their joys at once, and darkens every agreeable prospect. Something or other turns up to give a turn to his mind. He quits his character as a Christian, and commences that of an apostate. He stifles all his convictions. He lets loose every criminal inclination; his corruptions now begin in good earnest to rise in his heart, destroy all the effects of a good education, and the unhappy youth is hurried with the utmost impetuosity from one act of sin to another, without so much as thinking what the consequences will be. Wasn't this in some measure the case with you, my friend? I imagine you were eager to get rid of every religious impression, and drown all thoughts of a future world by the intoxicating pleasures of sin. Satan now takes every method he can to secure you in his possession. Fearing lest the chains are not strong enough by which you are held, he labours to add strength to them. He prompts you to desert all your first principles, teaches you to think slightly of every important duty in religion, stirs up your inclinations to sinful enjoyments, and persuades you that they alone can give you the truest happiness.

Thus you are bidding farewell to God and a religious life, and hastening on to the regions of everlasting destruction, when *behold!* The kind Mediator who I hope enrolled your name among his people's in the book of life, sees you, steps in to your relief, saves you from everlasting ruin, and says, *Father, this is a chosen vessel. Behold his name in the everlasting roll. See it in the sacred records of eternity. I have purchased him with my own blood. Therefore say to him, live!* The command, the ever glorious command is given. And see, the Spirit comes, sets the broad seal of heaven upon you, turns the armed strong man out of his possession, and brings you out of your dreadful captivity.

And what is now the consequence? You are struck with admiration. The new creature begins to move. You are no longer a chained captive, the triumph of Satan. The union is broken between sin and your heart, and it no longer appears as the charming object it once did. Now you are humbled, filled with self-abhorrence, with hatred of all your sins, and you begin to find a relish for those duties you were brought up to, but have sadly neglected. Now salvation is your grand concern; eternity appears full of importance; your soul a jewel of unspeakable value; and what would you not give for an interest in the Redeemer?

But now things look dark. There is nothing so desirable as being a Christian indeed; but you are afraid that this is not your happy case. You look back to the time when your parents entertained hopes of you, but you have sadly fallen since, and now you are afraid that the present alteration is only owing to restraining grace; that it is only some revival of early convictions; and that you will again fall into a course of sin and make it appear that you are an absolute stranger to the grace of God. I don't doubt that all the circumstances of your early hopes, and of your sad apostasy, crowd into your mind, and greatly discourage you from entertaining the happy thought that God has now begun a saving work in your soul. You are giving some comfortable evidences of such a work — in a hatred of sin, and a relish for, and delight in, the great duties of religion — but you are afraid to look at these as evidences in you; afraid lest your heart again deceive you. Oh, if you could but be satisfied that you are a newborn creature, what an ease it would be to your burdened mind!

How your soul would rejoice and exult, and admire the grace that made the change! But *alas*, this is a matter in dispute. Therefore you desire to know what judgment you must form of things in their present situation, and what methods you must pursue to get satisfaction.

My dear young friend, I apprehend that this is your case in general. And now, with the tenderness and affection of a brother, and the faithfulness of a minister, I would attempt to answer it. And here are three things which lie on your mind, and which make up the difficulties in your case.

- I. You are discouraged from a view of your early profession and your apostasy, lest your present change not be saving.
- II. You want to know whether a hatred of sin, or a delight in the duties of religion are the effects of *restraining* or of *renewing* grace. And,
- III. Upon determining these points, you want to know what your duty is.

I would attend to each of these.

I. Let us consider the discouragement that arises from a view of your early profession and your apostasy, lest your present change not be saving. Now, how does your mind work upon this view? Don't things appear to you in some such light as this, and aren't you led to reason in the following manner?

"See, oh my soul, I once made a flourishing profession of Christ. My parents began to hope I was really renewed. I was held in some peculiar esteem, and had the reputation of a Christian. But, alas! I soon apostatized, and became a mere withered branch. I ran into many known sins, stifled my conscience, deserted all my first principles, and made it fully appear that my heart had never been established with the grace of God. All my early religion, even that which gave my dear parents such encouraging hopes of me, was nothing more than the mere effect of education. I deceived my friends and myself then with a mere name, an empty show; and may I not be doing the same now? Isn't such an apostasy a plain intimation to me, that I must not believe the most flourishing appearances again? May not my present profession be but a sudden fit of zeal occasioned by the remonstrances of conscience, which will soon be suppressed, and so my goodness appear as the morning cloud and the early dew which soon pass away?

"Can I reasonably expect that after such a flagrant apostasy, after stifling so many clear convictions, flying in the face of so much goodness, and abusing so many important privileges, that God would send his Spirit into my heart, conquer my enmity, and bring me effectually to Jesus? Isn't it the greatest presumption in me to look upon any present appearance of religion as a real work of grace? For would God ever look favourably upon such a wicked apostate, such a vile, ungrateful wretch as me? If I hadn't been favoured with a religious education, or made so strict a profession, my sins would not have been attended with such aggravating circumstances. But I was a child of many prayers. Daily I saw a good example, received daily good instructions, found in some measure the influence of them, and seemingly entered into the service of the Redeemer. And now behold, I have since fallen. Do I have any encouragement to then hope that God will visit my soul in mercy, and give me His salvation?"

Perhaps some of your present thoughts are like these, my dear young friend. And so everything looks dark and discouraging around you, arising from a view of your former apostasy. Permit me to ask you a few questions and to offer you a few hints that may be a means of setting you right in this important affair. Do you apprehend that God *cannot*, or that he *will not* bring such an apostate to Himself? I am persuaded you cannot believe that He is not able to begin a real work of grace in your heart. For what is omnipotence not able to do? Has He never brought such a rebel

as you to the feet of Jesus? Has he never melted such a heart as yours? What was Ephraim [as a type]? He was favoured with a variety of privileges, but he abused them all, and went on frowardly in the way of his heart. God afflicted him; but he was like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, that kicked and flung, and couldn't tell how to endure the rod. Yet sovereign *Almighty* grace turns his heart, melts his soul into godly sorrow, and he falls down at the footstool of God, strikes upon his thigh, and sadly laments the sins of his youth, Jer 31.18-19. Thus God can bring *you*, my friend, to the Redeemer, however you have endeavoured to harden your heart against him.

Therefore, the religious appearance you once made, and the hopes you gave of a real work of grace, together with your sad apostasy, are no reason why your present convictions should not be saving, or why the work in your heart should not be real. Therefore, don't let this discourage your mind. But you will say, perhaps, you fear that God will not come and quicken you after such affronts offered to Him, after such ingratitude. You have such a sense of your vileness that you dare not think he will manifest himself to such a wretch. And therefore you fear that your present convictions will again wear off, and leave you as great a stranger to God as you were before. But remember, my friend, God does not think as we, nor does he act as we do, Isa 55.8-9. If he were not to save the vile and unworthy, then He must save none. For though all are not *public* sinners, yet even those who appear the most amiable to our eyes on account of a regular uniform obedience, appear more detestable in their own eyes. They are ready to style themselves as the chief of sinners, and adore infinite free grace in their salvation.

Consider for your encouragement that God can not only pardon, but he can "abundantly pardon," Isa 55.7. He made it abundantly evident in the conversion and salvation of Saul the Pharisee; who was a public enemy to Christ, an open blasphemer, a cruel persecutor of the churches. And yet he obtained mercy, "that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ might appear exceedingly abundant." 1Tim 1.13-14. Some Corinthians were ranked among the chief sinners, such as whoremongers, adulterers, idolaters, drunkards, thieves, the covetous, etc. 1Cor 6.9-11. And all of this was to reveal the riches of the grace of God, and to show the encouragement that all sorts of sinners have to hope for pardon. There is abundance of grace in God to pass by innumerable sins; and there is an infinitely glorious righteousness in Jesus Christ to entitle the chief of sinners to eternal life. God's end in the salvation of sinners, is to glorify his grace; and this grace, therefore, triumphs over the greatest unworthiness. Are you afraid that you are too great a sinner for God to save? Oh, put it to the test! Put all your sins in one scale, and all the riches of divine grace in the other, and see which will overbalance. If you were to be saved by works, you would have reason to fear ever reaching the everlasting mansions. But as you are to be saved entirely by grace, *remember*, grace will stop at nothing to glorify itself. The more unworthy you are, the more glory will redound to divine grace in the salvation of so guilty a creature.

Thus you have no reason to be discouraged, or to conclude that you haven't felt the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, because you once made a profession, but far away. Many have stifled conviction after conviction, acted contrary to conscience, and to every tie and engagement; and yet they have at length been made the triumph of sovereign distinguishing grace. You are not so much concerned about what you have *been*, but what you are *now*, to inquire into the present work of God upon you, and to examine whether you can give any evidences of its being saving grace or not. And this leads me,

II. To consider whether a hatred of sin *as sin*, and a delight in the duties of religion — such as hearing, reading, prayer, meditation, etc. — are the effects of restraining or of renewing grace. Through restraining grace — or through the restraints that God has put on the mind by the

influence of an education, or by the force of some convictions — a person may abstain from gross immoralities, and make some show in the externals of religion. Indeed, he may be brought in some measure to detest the one and be pleased with the other. Thus, when Elisha told Hazael of “the evil he would bring upon the children of Israel; that he would set their strongholds on fire, he would slay their young men with the sword, dash their children, and rip open their women with child,” Hazael said with a sort of resentment, “What! is your servant a dog, that he should do this gross thing?” 2Kng 8.12-13. That is, would you divest me of humanity, and make me appear as cruel and despicable as a brute beast, to imagine that I would be guilty of such detestable things?

When children have heard their parents representing the odiousness of such and such sins, they may be prevailed upon to look at them as abominable; and yet afterward, be guilty of them. So, through being habituated to a course of duty, an unrenewed person may, with apparent pleasure, attend to all his duties.¹ He may hear, read, and pray; and like the stony ground hearers, he may sometimes be filled with joy through the working of his natural affection. But all of this comes far short of your experience, my young friend. For,

1. You hate sin, *as sin*. Now what does this signify? It supposes that you have not only seen the dreadful nature and destructive tendency of sin, but you have seen its obliquity — that it carries in it the greatest inconformity to the Divine nature. Consequently, it deprives the soul of its greatest beauty, and sets it at the greatest distance from God, who is the fountain of all excellence. It carries in it the greatest ingratitude to God, whose goodness it highly abuses. It unfits you for the great duties of religion, and has introduced into your soul the most hateful deformity. Having these views of it, you find it *odious*. Your soul is filled with a detestation of it. You mourn over it. It appears burdensome to you. You cannot willingly indulge it as before. Rather, you pray against it, and are ashamed before God that you have been so guilty of that which is so dishonourable and so hateful to Him. And you desire above all things to be delivered from it.

Isn't this really your case, my friend? Are these the views you have of sin? Are these the workings of your mind upon it? Aren't you filled with self-abhorrence on account of sin's dwelling in you? Aren't you filled with shame at a view of your duties, because sin is clinging to them? Doesn't your heart appear loathsome because of sin? In sum, aren't you vile and despicable in your own eyes, because sin has so much defiled you? If so, then you hate sin *as sin*; you hate sin *really*, with all your heart. And what clearer evidence can you have of renewing grace than this?

Is it possible for the force of convictions, or of education, to give you a real hatred of sin? Terrors may make a person resolve to leave sin; and education may make a person believe that sin is odious. But he can never *hate* it, till he sees its odiousness by the light of the Spirit. When the Spirit takes possession of the heart, therefore, He leads the soul to a view of sin, so that he is covered with shame and confusion, and bursts into tears of genuine sorrow. *Fear* arises from a sense of guilt; *shame* from a view of the deformity of sin. There may be the fear, and yet no work of grace in the heart. But shame is the evidence of grace, and it necessarily supposes the implantation of grace in the soul. Thus, my young friend, I cannot help but conclude — because you thus view, are ashamed of, and hate sin — that you are a newborn soul. You have passed from death to life, and are a Christian indeed.

Didn't Joseph give full evidence of his real love for God, when under that strong temptation to adultery from Potiphar's wife, he said, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

¹ Originally, “attend the round” — touch all the bases; tick all the boxes; show all the signs. — WHG

(Gen 39.9) He didn't hate the sin because it might expose him to the contempt of man, but because it was levelled against God. Therefore he dare not, he *cannot* indulge it. Can I be so ungrateful to that God, whose goodness and mercy have so remarkably followed me? Can I act so inconsistently with my profession for, and my relation to him? *God forbid!* I cannot be guilty of such base ingratitude. How clear an evidence this was of his real love for God, and interest in Him! Thus when the apostle Paul complained of sin, mourned over it, and desired to be delivered from it, he gave undoubted evidence of having received the grace of God, Romans 7.

And thus, your hating sin, *as sin*, my dear friend, cannot be the effect of restraining grace, but of renewing and converting grace. But,

2. You take delight in attending to public worship, reading, meditation, prayer, etc. Wherever the grace of God is implanted, it teaches persons not only to hate sin, but to love holiness, and to pursue those means which have a peculiar tendency to make us holy. Persons indeed may regularly attend public worship, may read the Scriptures, may pray, etc., and yet be absolute strangers to the power of religion. But when there is *delight* in and *relish* for these duties, it is evidence of a saving change. And is this your case, my young friend? Do you have any delight in these duties, any relish for them? Have you found your heart at times melted in them, through a view of spiritual truth? Has God met you, and communed with you? Have public ordinances been at times effectual to quicken your slothful soul, to warm you with desires for spiritual things? Have you found the word, eaten it, and has it been the joy and rejoicing of your soul? In reading the word, have you found any quickenings, any truth driven home to humble, convince, or enliven you? Has any part of the word been opened to you, and afforded you new light in your head, and life in your heart? In prayer, have you at times found your soul possessed with some suitable sense of the perfections of God, been humbled under a sense of sin, and stirred with holy relents so as to plead with the penitent publican, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner?" Have you found your soul set at liberty, even brought to God's seat — your mouth filled with arguments, enabled to plead and wrestle with Him for spiritual blessings? Have you found the Spirit breathing upon your dry bones, melting your hard heart, and filling you with holy affection? In meditation, have you at times been raised with a view of spiritual objects — been humbled, comforted, and quickened — gotten your affections in some measure disentangled from present enjoyments, and been enabled to view all sublunary things with a suitable indifference?

All of this cannot help but give you a relish for these sacred duties, and fill you with uneasiness when you don't find it so with yourself. I don't doubt that you are dull enough at times. It isn't that you *always* find your affections raised, and your soul in this sweet, delightful frame. You are often in the dark, and left in great measure to a dull and lifeless frame. But this is a matter of deep concern. This doesn't take away your relish for these important duties. You still prize them, choose them, or engage in them voluntarily, and desire to meet God in them. What can this be, then, but the effect of the grace of God in you? There was a time when you couldn't bear to attend to these duties; or else you attended in the most careless manner, and didn't have the glory of God and your everlasting interest in view.

But now, what draws you to the house of God? What prevails upon you to pray, to read, to meditate? Isn't it an experience of the presence of God in these duties, a relish for them, a desire for meeting with God in them? This, then, speaks to you being a Christian indeed. Wasn't it an evidence of David's being an Israelite indeed, when he longed for the ordinances of God in his state of exile, and cried out, "When will I come and appear before God?" Psa 42.1-2. Isn't a good

man set forth by having his “delight in the law of the Lord, and meditating upon it day and night?” Psa 1.2. Wasn’t it brought in as evidence of Saul’s conversion, that he prayed? Act 9.11.

On the whole then, my friend, it appears that you have experienced an almighty power changing your heart. Restraining grace might produce a considerable reformation in you; habit and education might make you look at some sins with a sort of detestation; but what can make you *hate* sin as sin, except the special grace of God? This hatred of sin shows that the union is dissolved between sin and the heart, that the reign of sin is destroyed in the soul, the captive set at liberty, and the divine life begun. What can make a soul delight in spiritual duties except the special grace of God? You might read, hear, and pray, and not be a Christian. But to *delight* in these, to have a *relish* for them, is evidence that the finger of God has been at work in your soul, and has implanted a real principle of spiritual life. I now come to consider your last request, which is,

III. To intimate to you what your duty is, or to give you some instructions that are suitable to your case.

1. Believe the change, and admire the infinite riches of divine grace manifested in it. Do not encourage a doubting temper; that will bring no glory to God, nor peace to your own soul. But believe the work God that has done for and in you, and consider and adore the grace that said to you, *live*. I would suggest some such hints as these, for you to frequently attend to:

“See, oh my soul, what God has done for you. Oh, what would you have been doing now, if a gracious covenant-God had not stopped you? What would have been your portion? Oh, stand and view the grace, the abundance of grace that you have received, and be filled with admiration! When I look back upon my apostasy, and consider how eager I was to stifle every conviction; what ingratitude I was guilty of; where I was going to with hasty speed, and where I would soon have been if God had left me. Oh, I tremble, I *shudder*! Oh, the rich grace of God! What, to stop such a daring rebel! To hold out the golden sceptre to him! What, to pardon such a guilty, ungrateful creature, melt his hard heart, and bring him to a divine Saviour. Who can point out the grace! Oh, may I ever admire the free love, the infinite pity of God, and long for that world where my everlasting song will be, *grace, grace!*”

2. Rejoice that as God has begun a good work in you, so he will carry it on to perfection. Before, you had only an appearance of a work of God in you. You therefore soon fell in with the temptations that were offered. But now a real work has begun, and therefore you will be *kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation*. Remember what your securities are: the oath and promise of the Father, the mediation of the Son, and the presence of the Almighty Spirit. Oh, often view these things, as it will be of peculiar service to your soul in animating you with zeal and resolution, in quickening you to duty, and in encouraging you with the hopes of perseverance in the midst of the most threatening difficulties. When you stumble, get up and *press on* towards the mark, for the prize is secured. Fear not, for no weapon formed against you shall prosper. You are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

3. Do not be self-confident, but entertain a godly jealousy over your heart, and watch against the first appearance of backslidings. While you are rejoicing in what God has done for you, take care that your heart is not filled with pride, nor grows secure and careless. Though you are safe so as not to totally fall from grace, yet you may fall so as to dishonour God, and darken your evidences of an interest in Jesus, and wound your soul. Peter was too self-sufficient, and therefore he fell into an open abomination. I would advise you to attend to the exhortation of the Psalmist, “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” Psa 2.11. Do not be afraid, yet do not be secure,

nor full of self. Watch against whatever has a tendency to lead you aside. The more self-confident you are, the more you are in danger of falling. The more distrusting of self, and the more you honour God, the more you are secured from falling into sin. Oh, ever remember that though through grace, *sin cannot destroy you*; yet it may greatly weaken and wound you.

4. Walk worthy of that vocation with which you are called. I am certain you cannot, you *will not* conclude from what has been said, that you have liberty to sin — that your state is safe and you may therefore indulge yourself in every outward pleasure. Whoever draws such a conclusion from the doctrines of Divine grace, or from an apprehension of the grace of God to his soul, cannot be a Christian, or at least he doesn't act like one. My friend, if you have a suitable sense of what God has done for you, you will say, "O what will I render to the Lord for all his goodness? How will I honour God? Oh, don't be cold in His service, my soul! Let it be my great concern to make the glory of God my aim, and let this be my motto: 'For me to live is Christ.'"

Thus, be concerned to walk in a way that honours God. Let your conversation be suitable to the profession you make. Be concerned that your graces are in a flourishing condition, and your daily walk compliments the gospel of Christ, so that you may have growing evidences of a real change in your heart. Thus you may rejoice in the prospect of that glorious world where you will clearly see the footsteps of Divine Providence and grace towards you, in bringing you to Jesus; and you may triumph in God as your everlasting portion.

I will now close all this with one remark.

From this we learn that the greatest sinners have encouragement to come to Jesus, and to hope for salvation. Have you stifled one conviction after another? Have you made a profession, bound yourselves by solemn vows to be the Lord's, made numberless resolutions — broken them all, and turned again to folly? And yet, are you now sensible of sin? Then you have encouragement to come to the Redeemer, and hope for acceptance. Here is a young person who once made some appearance of religion. Afterwards he stifled every conviction, ran into many known sins, and took every means to harden his heart against God. Yet *see*, the grace of God has melted his heart; he now hates sin, and gives comfortable evidence of having experienced a saving change in his soul.

Let this encourage you children of believing parents, *you* who have wandered into the ways of sin. Let this encourage you to come to Jesus, and plead free grace and the blood of Christ. Whoever you are, don't let secret despair keep you at a distance from the Redeemer. Hear what the gospel proclamation is. Isa 55.1, "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters, and you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." Our Lord himself, in that general promise in Joh 6.37, encourages all who come to him with hopes of salvation. "And the one who comes to me, I will by no means cast out." Are you thirsty? Are you willing to come to Christ? Your willingness to come is evidence of his willingness to receive and save you. He is the one who made you willing to come to him; and for what purpose, if not that he may exalt the riches of his grace in your salvation. Let no one then despair of pardon, who desire to leave sin and come to Jesus.

CASE 30. What judgment must a person form about his state, or what must he do, if he is in total darkness and cannot see anything of a work of grace in his heart?

What difference is there between the hypocrite and the real believer? The one is always full of self-flattery, entertaining the kindest thoughts of his state; the other writes bitter things against himself, ever humble, and afraid lest in entertaining a hope of an interest in Jesus, he would be

esteemed presumption. He appears so unworthy in his own eyes, so vile and despicable, that he dares not draw a favourable conclusion concerning himself, but as he knows he has deserved the everlasting indignation of a just and holy God, so he is ready to fear that will be his awful portion, notwithstanding all the promises of Divine grace, and all the encouragements the Gospel exhibits to the greatest sinners. He can see no amiableness in himself, nothing to give him any hopes he is a child of God, but a thick cloud hangs over his soul, hides the Sun of righteousness from his view, and all is dark within. This is not always the case with the believer; but when it is, it is peculiarly melancholy. He has no joy or peace in believing; he is full of doubts and fears, is surrounded with darkness, and is under the most fearful apprehensions of sin and wrath.

This appears to be your case, my friend, according to the account you have sent in. Distressed as it is, perhaps many here can join with you, and say they feel they fear the same you do. In addressing one, therefore, I address you all; and may the Spirit accompany what may be said with his almighty power, that it may be made effectual to still your mind under all discouragements, and to lead you to a cheerful dependence upon Jesus Christ for all the blessings of salvation.

That I may answer this question in a manner that may be suitable in some respects, I would:

I. Take all the complaints presented in this person's case, and show their consistency with being a Christian; or show that total darkness and great fears about our spiritual state, are not a just foundation to conclude that we are not Christians indeed. If it can be made to appear from Scripture and experience, that these are the complaints of God's own people, then we have no reason to conclude that our state is bad — not unless we bear the real marks and characters of an unrenewed soul.

Let us then view the case in all its particulars. Here we find a complaint about violent and sore temptations. But it is plain that this is in no way inconsistent with an interest in Christ, because *Christ himself was tempted*. The devil tempted him in the wilderness to distrust, presumption, etc. Mat 4.3, etc. And when the awful hour of his sufferings approached, the prince of this world again attacked him, and made his last furious onset ¹ upon Christ, Joh 14.30. Thus our Lord likewise tells Peter that "Satan had desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat," Luk 22.31. The words seem to be expressive of sore temptations. The apostle Paul, so great a Christian, and distinguished with such high enjoyment, yet had a "messenger of Satan sent to buffet him," 2Cor 12.7. Thus temptations are consistent with grace. For always observe: it is not sin to have the most blasphemous things offered to our minds by Satan. We are not chargeable with temptations unless we encourage and fall in with them.

Again. Another circumstance our friend brings in as unfavourable, is the frowns of Providence. This has been a common case with God's people. They have met with various disappointments as to this world. They have lost their outward enjoyments, and been under afflictive dispensations. Thus it was with Job, with David, and with many others. Indeed, the apostle tells us that it is "through many tribulations that we must enter into the kingdom of heaven," Act 14.22. So that, whatever afflictions we may be exercised with in the present state, they do not lay a foundation to suspect or conclude that we are not real Christians.

Again. We find in this case a lack of assurance, and fears of being a cast-away. These are consistent only with grace, because we find them in God's people. Thus the Psalmist cries out under awful fears that God had left him, "Will the Lord cast off forever, and will he be favourable no more?"

¹ *Onset*: a military offensive against an enemy.

Has his mercy ceased forever? Has his promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Psa 77.7-9. His unbelieving heart seems to lead him to question the faithfulness, unchangeableness, and mercy of God. Thus the church in captivity is represented as drawing a sad conclusion that God has left her, Isa 49.14-15. God addresses the timorous and the doubting. Isaiah 41.10; "Fear not, for I am with you Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Here, plainly, there is a lack of assurance; and fears arise in the soul, that God is not our God. And yet God says, *I am your God*. From this we may conclude that this complaint is not inconsistent with an experience of Divine grace in the heart.

Again. The person who sent in the above case, complains of God's face being hidden from him; and he appears to be in great darkness of soul. But even *this* is a case that has been common to God's people. Thus Job inquires why God "hid his face from him," Job 13.24. David represents God as "hiding Himself in times of trouble," Psa 10.1. He speaks of God "hiding his face," and his soul therefore being "troubled," Psa 30.7. Indeed, the prophet Isaiah goes still further, and says that "walking in darkness and having no light" is consistent with our interest in a covenant God. Therefore he exhorts them to "trust in the name of the Lord, and rely upon their God." (Isa 50.10) If we examine the experiences of believers, we will find this is frequently the case. God has hidden his face; their souls are in great darkness; they can see no traces of the divine image in their souls; instead, a shade is drawn over all the work of God. If we were to conclude that we are but nominal Christians because this is the case with us, then how small the number of real Christians would be. And how unfavourably we must think of those who, notwithstanding this, gave the clearest evidences of their experience of the grace of God.

Again. Another complaint is having fears of death, and distressing views of hell. This was the very case with the Psalmist. As he expresses it, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow," Psa 116.3. How frequent it is to find the Christian alarmed at his views of death, and afraid of falling into the hands of an angry God! It requires strong faith to triumph over death, or even to calm the soul under views of it — especially when a Christian has a deep sense of his guilt and unworthiness. It cannot then be evidence of having no grace when we are under fears of death, and under any melancholy apprehensions of the bottomless pit. Your case, my friend, is not singular. For many, even eminent saints, have felt the same, who are now standing in the presence of God, as conquerors through Him who loved them.

Again. Our friend presents many discouraging Scriptures that were brought to his mind, such as these: "What will it profit you, if you gain the whole world and lose your soul?" Mat 16.26; and Heb 2.3, "How will we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" This is a very frequent case among the children of God. When Satan has any design to execute, or any temptation to offer, he knows how to apply Scripture itself. Thus, when he tempted our Lord to presumption, in order to give the temptation greater force, he quotes Scripture, saying, "For it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning you, and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone," Mat 4.6. So too, when he has a design to distress the Christian, he will perhaps offer a text of Scripture to his mind, to fill the soul with awful fears and, if possible, lead him to despair. This complaint, therefore, lays no foundation for us to conclude that we are strangers to the grace of God.

Lastly. Another dark circumstance is that our friend has no answers to prayer. This has been the complaint of others. They have prayed and waited, and God has not satisfied their desires. The woman of Canaan seemed to be put off at first. Our Lord didn't answer her a word. When his

disciples entreated for her, he appeared to cast contempt on her, though at last he gave her the blessing, Mat 15.22, etc. Here we must observe that God doesn't always answer the prayers of his people in the very particulars for which they seek him. Yet he may answer them, and does it by giving them blessings that are *equivalent* to those they asked. Thus Paul prayed three times that the difficulty he was under might be removed. God did not remove it; yet He heard and answered Paul's prayer by saying, "My grace is sufficient for you," 2Cor 12.8-9. Thus, when we say we have prayed earnestly with a view to God's glory, but haven't met with acceptance, we are mistaken. He hears our prayers, even though we don't perceive it. And our souls are better for it, though we may not be so sensible of it.

Thus we see that all the complaints presented in this case, are consistent with our experience of the grace of God. And therefore you have no reason to conclude that you're not a Christian indeed, merely because you find that it is with you as it was represented here. For these are not the marks of a hypocrite.

II. As these things are so often discouragements to humble Christians, I would just show, in a few words, the usefulness of this method which God is pleased to take with his people. The way to heaven is through the Valley of Baca.¹ It is a way of affliction and temptation; it is a dark and discouraging way. But whatever the Christian may think of the difficulties of it, they are all useful. God is hereby glorified. His power is glorified in keeping his people amidst such apparent dangers. His grace is exalted as it appears to be free, rich, and abundant in our salvation. His faithfulness is glorified in fulfilling all the promises of his covenant. And his wisdom is glorified in using those methods with his people that best correspond with his infinitely gracious purposes. These things are therefore far from being marks of the hypocrite, and they should never influence us to write bitter things against ourselves. Besides, God brings good to us out of them. By such methods, He is training us up for his everlasting kingdom. By temporal and spiritual difficulties, we are brought to see more and more our own weakness; we are guarded against self-dependence, and we are enabled to rely more and more upon Jesus Christ. By this method we are humbled more, brought to see more of the glory and excellence of, and to acquiesce more heartily in, the gospel scheme. Furthermore, these things tend to wean our affections more from present things; they make heaven more glorious, and set us to longing for the enjoyment of it. Rest is more welcome to the traveller who is weary, and the port is more welcome to the sailor who has been in dangerous storms and tempests.

Lastly, these things will afford us rich entertainment when we get to the heavenly world, and lay a foundation of everlasting admiration and praise. *Here* these various difficulties appear dark and discouraging to us, and sometimes they nearly overturn us. But *there* we will see the reason for it all. *There* we will view the need we had for afflictions and spiritual difficulties — how they humbled us, emptied us, and quickened us. *There* we will see how almighty power kept us, how seasonably infinite grace stepped in to relieve us, saved us from threatened and feared destruction, and made all things work together for our good. Oh! what entertainment there is in viewing the conduct of providence and grace.

So then, these considerations are sufficient to keep us from concluding that the above complaints are inconsistent with grace, and from ranking ourselves among the almost-Christians. Unless we

¹ **Psa 84:6** "As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools." In Hebrew, *Baca* means *weeping*. – WHG

have some other things which are sure marks of the hypocrite, what has been mentioned gives us no reason to conclude that we are so.

III. We should consider what appears favourable in our case, as well as what appears dark and discouraging. Though there are many difficulties in the case before us, there are also many things that appear encouraging. Particularly, the person has a sense of his own blindness, emptiness, and ignorance. I am blind, yes, very blind. “I would to God that this was the language of everyone in this assembly. Felt blindness is a great mercy. The Pharisees were filled with indignation at our Lord when he intimated they were blind. Joh 9.41, “Are we blind also?” They were so far from being blind in their own apprehensions, that they were ready to imagine no one had as much knowledge as they did. The natural man thinks he knows enough, till the Spirit gives eyes to his mind; then he sees his soul full of darkness. That person who sees, confesses, and bewails his ignorance, is in a fair way for heaven. Grace, as soon as it is implanted, makes the soul fall out of love with itself.

And is this your case? Do you see your blindness? Do you appear as nothing in your own eyes? Do you now view yourself as a poor, ignorant, empty creature? Did you always appear so? Weren’t you once blind indeed, and yet unconcerned about it? Can’t you say, Though once I was blind, now I see? But I think I hear you saying, “True, I see; but what is it that I see? I see my ignorance. I see enough to discourage me, *namely*, that I am a poor, blind, naked, empty, ignorant creature; that I am made up of wants.” Bless God for this view of yourself! It would have been an awful thing to be under an insensible blindness. If you ever get to heaven, you must first be emptied of self, and see and bewail your ignorance and darkness. What should be a matter of *thankfulness* for you, is instead stumbling and discouraging. Oh, my dear friend, go to God and bless him, *praise* him, admire his *grace*, that he has given you a view of yourself — that he has thrown down your pride, and made you appear as nothing in your own eyes.

Again. Another favourable circumstance in this case is that this person has a sight and sense of his own vileness and unworthiness. *I am all sin and pollution*. Do you really see yourself all sin and pollution? And are you pleased with the sight, or unconcerned about it, or unhumbled for it? If so, then indeed your case is discouraging, whoever you are. But if you are lamenting over this view; if this sight of sin fills you with self-abhorrence; if you appear vile and despicable on account of it — then it is a happy, *most* happy circumstance in your favour. Hear the apostle himself making use of the most expressive language to represent his sinfulness. Rom 7.14, “I am carnal and sold under sin.” Oh! my friends, the more we see of our sinfulness, vileness, emptiness, etc., the more we should rejoice, provided this sight humbles us, lays us low, and has a proper influence on us. The Spirit sees it is absolutely necessary to do all this, so that we may be brought into a Gospel frame — a frame suited to the scheme of salvation which God has contrived and revealed. If we didn’t see our vileness, unworthiness, nakedness, etc., then we would never close with Christ rightly. But now we are made to receive salvation as a free gift, to depend on the Redeemer alone, and to give God all the glory. Don’t be discouraged, my friend. If your view of sin reduces your pride, makes you mourn and lament before God, and gives you a sense of your unworthiness, then Oh! look back on it as a token for good, and bless God for it.

Again. In this person there is a desire for grace, and that God would have his own way with him so that he may be saved. There are many who are willing to be happy in a better world, but they don’t desire to receive salvation in God’s own way. Convictions often make persons cry out, *Lord, what must we do to be saved?* etc.; but they cannot submit to the method of salvation. This is no sign of a good work begun in them. But when we see not only our guilt, but our odiousness through

sin; when we see not only the excellence of happiness, but the excellence of holiness too; if so far as we know our heart, we not only desire to be saved from hell, but we are willing for God to have his own way, subdue sin in us, and bring us to an entire subjection to Jesus Christ — then this is a comfortable evidence that the Spirit of the Lord is at work in our heart.

And is this *your* case, my friends? Do you say — not in a sudden fit of rashness, but from real conviction, choice, and mature deliberation — *Lord, have your own way with me; make me holy?* Are you longing for conformity to Jesus Christ? These things certainly appear encouraging in your case, and they ought to be taken into consideration when examining state and condition. But,

Again. Here is a sense of the emptiness of the present world, and of preferring Christ above all things. The language of this person, I have no doubt, is the language of many of your souls — “The nearest and dearest enjoyments to me here, have their mixture: they will give no solid peace or pleasure. I want for nothing here below, so much as the great Redeemer.” And is this really the case? Are you mistaken? Is Jesus and his presence really lovely? Does the world lose all its glory, and appear insignificant and trifling when compared with Christ? Do you want to love Christ, and to honour him more? What you were ready to look upon before as gain, do you now esteem it loss for Christ? If this is your case, then there is encouragement to hope concerning you. If we really find it this way with us, then we have reason to rejoice, and to admire the infinite, rich, and sovereign grace of God toward us.

Lastly, Another circumstance favourable in this case is that this young person is enabled to pray, and yet he has a deep sense of the unworthiness of his prayers, and his insufficiency to pray. In one part of this account, our young friend complains that he *cannot* pray. And yet he says, *I have cried and begged, and pleaded hard of the Lord, that he would teach me to pray.* Now what is this if not prayer? It is pouring out the heart before God, expressing our desires in words, even if perhaps in a broken and imperfect manner. And what, Is this praying? asks the humble soul. I have gone to God, I have, in the distress of my mind, put up a few broken petitions to the Lord, but I have been ashamed of such praying, and I could not entertain a kind thought of such poor duties. This, my friends, is *praying*. It is that praying which is acceptable to God through Christ. So prayed Hezekiah when he was in distress, “Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered. I mourned like a dove. My eyes fail with looking upward. Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me,” Isa 38.14.¹ There are many hypocrites who pray. If you think you will be heard for your praying; if you pray only out of habit; or if you depend on your prayers — this is no evidence of being a Christian. But if you love praying; if you make it your daily concern; if you are humbled under it; if you cannot live without it, and yet you place no dependence on it, but reckon yourself only an unprofitable servant — then however imperfectly you pray, it is good evidence of a work of grace in your heart.

Thus I have endeavoured to consider what is favourable in this case. And considering all these circumstances together, they certainly amount to a comfortable evidence of your being a Christian indeed. And if you find it with your soul as I have endeavoured to represent, then you have reason to be thankful, and to conclude that you are an object of God’s distinguishing grace. However, don’t take things based on a slight view, but examine your heart again and again, so that you may not be deceived in a matter of such great importance. Be impartial in your inquiries. Not only view your complaints, but consider what appearances there are of a work of grace. And don’t be rash in your conclusions. But if you find it as I have mentioned, then give God the glory.

¹ *Undertake for me*: Hebrew ‘*arab*; pledge for me; be my surety and guarantor. — WHG

IV. Guard against a distrustful unbelieving frame, and a habit of complaining. When things look dark with us, we are immediately ready to despond, and to draw some sad conclusion. We should be concerned indeed to maintain a godly jealousy over our hearts. But it is by no means our duty to have a jealousy and distrust of God, just because he may hide his face from us, or afflict us. Some Christians almost always doubt; and what is the consequence? They dishonour God by it. They provoke him to withdraw his presence and Spirit. They unfit themselves for the cheerful discharge of their duties. And they rob themselves of peace and comfort. Distrust has no tendency in itself to promote your spiritual good. You who have been so timorous and unbelieving, who have put away from you the promises and the word of encouragement, have you found any real advantage in doing so? Have you been quickened more by it, loved Christ more, hated sin more, and gotten nearer to God? I appeal to you, hasn't it weakened your faith, disturbed your peace, and sometimes almost driven you from your duty by insinuating that it is to no purpose to continue praying, etc. If *this* is the case, then let me guard you, my friend, against an unbelieving frame. To always doubt because your circumstances are apparently discouraging, will bring no advantage to your soul.

Have you nothing that absolutely defines you as a hypocrite? Don't conclude that you are, from the various circumstances of darkness that you are in. There is no religion in doubting. Some persons have gotten into a habit of complaining. Whenever you converse with them, they have nothing to entertain you with but sad complaints. This arises either from a mistake of duty, or from pride — copying others' examples so as to be thought of as Christians of some excellence.

You will then say, *What, if I am in darkness and real distress of soul, wouldn't you have me speak of it?* Yes, my friend, carry your burdened soul, and unbosom it to your minister or your friend. Tell him all you feel, all you fear; don't be silent and keep Satan's counsel. A person oftentimes gets distressed because he won't open his heart to his friend. Therefore be free, and keep nothing to yourself. But take care at the same time, that you don't contract a habit of complaining, as if any part of Christianity consisted in that. When you are telling your *fears*, tell your *hopes* too, or what God has done for you. Take care and guard against a doubting frame. Don't think that real humility lies in doubting. "O, you of little faith, why do you doubt?" Why do you distrust? Will that ease you? Will that cure your wounded soul? Will that bring you nearer to God, recommend you more to his favour, or prepare you for a Saviour's mercy? Oh, no! That soul who is carried away with doubts and distrust, cannot go on in a nourishing and comfortable manner. But I think I hear you say, *What would you have me do then? I cannot see myself in the light in which you have represented me.* To which I answer,

V. Commit yourself into the hands of Jesus Christ, and leave yourself with him, wait upon him in all the means and ordinances that he has appointed, in expectation of receiving all that he has promised in your complete and everlasting salvation. There is no other sanctuary to which you can fly and find safety. Christ is ready to receive all distressed souls. He is "a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, like rivers of water in a dry place, and like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," Isa. 32.2. There is all fulness in Him. He can supply every want. He can remove every distress. He can deliver you from wrath, cleanse you from sin, recommend you to his Father, and cheer and comfort your soul. In sum, he is an able and willing Saviour, exactly suited to all your necessitous and distressing circumstances. Go to him, then. Throw yourself upon him, leaving yourself with him, believing that he is what he has represented himself to be. Wait upon him in his ordinances; follow him in the use of all means, and so expect that he will do all that *for* you, and *in* you, that is necessary to your complete salvation. So long as you find that your

hope in Christ doesn't lessen your esteem for ordinances and duties, or make you negligent and careless, *embrace* it; entertain it; and let nothing rob you of it, or drive you from it.

If you were indeed to find that your regard for the various duties Christ has appointed, is growing weaker, that your soul growing careless and secure, then you would have reason to be afraid, and to suspect that you are in a dangerous situation. But if your love for ordinances is the same; if you desire to follow Christ in all the duties of religion, of honouring him by a humble and holy conversation, then don't be afraid; only believe. Keep on waiting upon him in every ordinance. He will fulfil his promises, and keep what you have committed to him against the great day. "He never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek me in vain," Isa 45.9. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled," Mat 5.6. Fear not. Christ is to be found in his ordinances. There he feeds his flock, and there he will meet with your soul, and train you up for heaven, and at length bring you there. However, along the way here, he may exercise your faith with trials and difficulties. I would just mention two things by way of reflection:

1. With what propriety we may put up the apostle's petition, "Lord, increase our faith." If faith were more exercised, it would put our souls in a flourishing condition. It would quicken our zeal, increase our love, purify our hearts, scatter our fears, arm us against every difficulty, comfort our souls, and make us live and die like Christians, to the honour of our great Mediator.

Then Lord, increase our faith. Breathe upon us, O eternal Spirit. Strengthen this grace, bring it into exercise, so that these happy and important ends may be attained.

2. How melancholy is the state of those who have no concern at all about their souls! Let us shed a tear over them. Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.

THE SPIRITUAL COMPANION

OR

THE PROFESSING CHRISTIAN TRIED AT THE BAR OF GOD'S WORD;

Being answers to several important questions; together with a few
free thoughts on the character and happiness of the happy man.

To which is prefixed,

THE TOUCHSTONE OF SAVING FAITH.

BY SAMUEL PIKE.

This important subject is taken into consideration in consequence of the following letter to me:

“Rev. Sir — Through grace (if I am not mistaken), I have long had hope of being saved by Christ alone, and yet I have some uncertainties as to the nature of true faith; whether I am a real believer or not. And I am concerned to know if my hope isn't the hope of a Pharisee, too much built upon such acts of the mind as arise from a legal principle — such as a humbling sense of the pollution of my nature and the sinfulness of my heart, strivings against sin, endeavours for a religious frame of mind, and raised affections in worship — together with some knowledge and belief of Christ in his glorious person and offices (that he is an all-sufficient, ready, free, and the only Saviour). I strive against any trusting in duties and frames. But I still want to know whether I have been made partaker of the true saving faith that is of the operation of God, though mixed or accompanied with doubts and unbelief. Therefore, sir, I entreat you in your casuistical lectures¹ to describe that faith, by which the soul looks to, applies, and receives Christ alone for salvation — to describe what those thoughts or acts of the mind are towards Christ, or God in Christ, which flow from regenerating grace, or the new principle of spiritual life implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit.

“*Principles* are known by their *effects*. This principle of living faith is known by its acts — by the inward frame, thoughts, and affections of the heart. I have often heard of inward feelings of rest, joy, and peace, which I want and pray for. If a soul seeks Christ uncertainly with this thought, ‘*If I am saved, it must be by Christ alone,*’ and he therefore ventures to pray for pardon and salvation with some hope, is this sufficient evidence of true justifying faith? Or, may even an unrenewed sinner, under the influence of common grace, have these same thoughts and desires working in his mind, and yet be destitute of the appropriating possession and enjoyment of Christ, or union with him?

“I have written this much because I would gladly have my case taken rightly, and I hope you will comply with my request. Your kind instruction and help in this may be a means of my relief under this real concern of mind, and it will much oblige me (perhaps many).

“I am, reverend sir, with cordial respect, yours,
“A Sincere Seeker.”

“P. S. Perhaps you will make more than one question to answer my desire.”

¹ *Casuistry*: here it means the process of answering practical questions *via* interpretation of rules, or of cases that illustrate such rules; it is case-based reasoning. More largely, it is the art of living to God, according to the word of God. It is *experiencing God* by looking for, seeing, and responding to Him, in all things. — WHG

This letter is evidently a serious and deep inquiry into the very vitals of religion, into the very essence and foundation of experimental Christianity. And therefore it deserves the closest attention in considering it, and the utmost care in handling it. A mistake here may be most detrimental. And we ought to be very cautious, lest we fall into an error on either hand; lest the false hope of the hypocrite be encouraged, or the true hope of the gracious soul be discouraged. We must not administer peace, where there is no peace; nor yet grieve the hearts of those whom the Lord would not have made sad. To steer the direct course between presumption and despondency, is most desirable, and yet truly difficult. Let everyone, therefore, read what follows with close attention, comparing it with the word of God, and begging that the Lord, the Spirit, may enable them to apply it to their own cases and consciences in a right manner.

The writer of the above letter very justly remarks that it will be necessary to solve more than one question in order to answer the full design of it. And I think the two following will be sufficient.

Q. 1. How far may a person's heart and ways be rectified and, notwithstanding, he be destitute of saving faith?

Q. 2. How will we know whether our faith is saving, amidst all the weaknesses and doubts that may attend it?

Let us now attempt to bring ourselves to the touchstone of the sacred Scriptures, while we have laid before us the consideration of these two important queries. The first question is of a very searching nature, and the second of a very satisfying and consolatory nature.

To begin with the first:

Question 1. How far may a person's heart and ways be rectified, and yet he be destitute of saving faith?

It is evident from Scripture and experience, that persons may come very near to the kingdom of God, and yet never actually enter into it. Permit me, therefore, to proceed in this inquiry step by step.

1. A person may have a very good NATURAL TEMPER, and be endowed with many valuable qualifications, even though destitute of saving faith. What is generally called *good nature*, is a gift of Divine Providence, which is by no means peculiar to true believers. Those whose tempers are naturally rough, may be favoured with a principle of special grace; while persons of a sweet natural disposition may be total strangers to it. Although human nature is very degenerate and corrupt as a whole all, we sometimes find many very amiable things in those who have no religion at all. There may be so much decency, sobriety, humanity, compassion, generosity, fidelity, and the like, in the natural dispositions of persons, as make them truly valuable, very agreeable, and really useful in life. Indeed, it is very difficult to say how far a sweet temper, cultivated by an education, may extend its influence to the regulation of the conduct. But after all, nothing is more evident than that all this may be found where there is no saving faith. For even a heathen, who knows nothing of Christ or his Gospel, may be possessed of such amiable qualifications. And among those who are favoured with the light of revelation, some are apparently of a rugged natural disposition, and yet have the true fear of God before their eyes; while others, with all their lovely qualifications, have no appearance of true religion. God is pleased to bestow his special blessings on some of both sorts, with a purpose to make us distinguish between *good nature* and *saving grace*.

2. A person may be influenced by the principles of CIVILITY and MORALITY, and yet be destitute of saving faith. He may see the necessity and propriety of doing justice and loving mercy. And he may see it as his incumbent duty to do to others as he would have others do to him. And so he becomes strict in his morals, and upright in his conversation between man and man. He may abhor lying, cheating, and all kinds of deceit. He may have great regard for honesty and integrity, for paying his just debts, speaking the truth about his neighbour, and would on all occasions do him justice. In a word, he may have a conscientious regard for the duties of the second tablet, both with respect to himself, and his neighbour. And so he may be what is generally called a sober, virtuous, honest, temperate, useful person. All these things are doubtless very good in themselves. Where there is true religion, these things will be found. But let's not think they are sufficient evidences of saving grace. For all these moral principles may be entertained and followed by a person who has never known or heard of Christ. The young man in the Gospel was evidently such a person, while yet a stranger to both the doctrine and the experience of faith, Mat 19.18-20.

3. A person may be influenced by many serious RELIGIOUS principles, and yet be without a principle of *saving faith*. He may have a serious regard for his duty towards God, as well as towards his neighbour and himself. His conscience may be impressed by a sense of the divine authority; his heart may be engaged by a sense of the divine goodness in providence; and his concern may be awakened by a consideration of the affairs of his precious immortal soul. All these things, and many more of a similar nature, may be found where there is not the least grain of true faith. These will appear to be strange assertions to many; but I have no doubt they are made evident from the word of God, and from the nature of the thing. Let me descend into a few particulars:

(1.) A person maybe constant to, and take delight in, devotional exercises. He may give himself to read good books, hear sermons, fast and pray, and receive the sacrament, and yet after all, be a stranger to the saving grace of God. Wasn't this the case of the Israelites? Isa 57.2. Wasn't this the practice of the hypocritical and self-righteous Pharisees in Christ's time? And yet none can think that these were truly gracious persons. Let no one therefore conclude that they have the grace of God merely because they regularly attend to devotional services. Indeed,

(2.) A person may attend to these duties with real seriousness and concern for the welfare of his soul, and so far as he knows himself, be sincere in this, having no hypocritical or worldly views. To use the words of a late valuable author,

“Men in a natural state may have a strong conviction of the infinite power, wisdom, justice, and goodness of God, of the judgement to come, of the everlasting happiness of the godly, and of the torments of the wicked. These convictions may stir them up, not only to make a high profession, and to utter rare sayings concerning God and godliness, but also to labor with great earnestness to avoid all known sin — to subdue their lusts; to perform universal obedience to God in all known duties; to serve Him with their lives and estates to the utmost; and to extort out of their hearts some kind of love to God and godliness — so that, if possible, they may escape the terrible torments of hell, and procure everlasting happiness by their endeavors.”¹

These are hard sayings to many. But I have two reasons to offer for the proof of these things. One reason is because the apostle Paul, before his conversion, appears to answer this character

¹ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1692), Dir. V, consid./par. 9. – WHG

according to the account that he gives of himself. And the other is because all this seriousness, piety, and devotion, may be produced only by the general principles of the being and perfections of God, and the certainty of a future world — without any dependence upon, regard to, or right knowledge of, the Lord Jesus Christ. The person may be working upon purely self-righteous principles, thinking to make his way to heaven by his own strength and merit. It is indeed impossible to say how far merely moral principles may work on the mind, rouse the concern, affect the conscience, and stir up the endeavours of a person. There may be much seriousness and devotion in the mind, without anything of faith in Christ at the foundation.

(3.) A person may be engaged to pay some regard to the inward part of religion. He may see something of the evils of his heart and thoughts, and may mourn over them. He may strive to curb and subdue his passion, his pride, his revenge, his notional impurities and the like. He may strive to get his heart affected in and by religious duties. He may be very active and intent upon devout practices in order to subdue his sinful lusts. And all this (I pray you observe it) with a view to obtain the favour of God, and to make some atonement for his sins. By this he shows that he is still wedded to the law, and knows nothing of faith in Jesus Christ. He may pray frequently and fervently, hear attentively, read seriously — and in the midst of all these, he may be averse to the freeness of divine grace in Christ, and be building on a self-righteous bottom, as the devout Pharisees did.

(4.) He may have some desire for an interest in Christ and his purchase. He may have some notion of the necessity of coming to Him for salvation. And yet he does all these things to fit himself for Christ, and to appear acceptable before him. He strives, he mourns, he prays, thinking that he may not, and *ought not* come to Christ until he has in some measure prepared and purified himself. Here indeed is an appearance of true humility; but there is a cursed pride at the bottom of it all. He still goes about making his own righteousness stand, and he will not submit to the righteousness of God. He doesn't aim to receive Christ and salvation as a free gift, but strives to entitle himself and recommend himself to Christ, by the excellence of his own prayers and endeavours. Though he follows the law of righteousness, he *doesn't attain to the law of righteousness, because he doesn't seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law*, Rom 9:31-32.

Thus, you see how far a person may proceed in practical, devotional, and even experimental religion, without having the least degree of true faith in Christ.

4. A person may be well-acquainted with, and be zealous for the peculiar DOCTRINES of the Gospel, and yet be destitute of saving faith. This is something mentioned in the above letter: *namely*, a knowledge and belief about Christ in his glorious person and offices — that he is an all-sufficient, ready, free, and only Saviour. Doubtless, there may be extensive notional knowledge of Gospel doctrines without a principle of saving faith. For a person may understand the truth and yet never feel the power of it; he may be orthodox in principle, and heterodox in practice. This is a truth that needs no proof to support it, because it is awfully verified in too, too many instances. Indeed, a self-righteous principle may even lurk under the appearance of disbelieving and disclaiming it. Aren't there some who, instead of making their knowledge of the Gospel a means to lead them to Christ for grace and salvation, make their knowledge itself a part of their justifying righteousness? They pride themselves in it, boast of it, and think that because they are so intelligent and orthodox, Christ will therefore receive and save them. Thus their knowledge and zeal make them proud, instead of bringing them to the footstool of free grace. And where this is the case, there is great reason to suspect the lack of saving faith, even if orthodox sentiments are joined with regular

practice. For a person may understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and yet lack that faith which works by love, 1Cor 13.2.

5. A person may be affected by the doctrines of the Gospel, and by the love of Christ, and yet be destitute of saving faith. I am obliged to add this to all the foregoing, because the Scripture is so express about it, and because the superficial experiences of many confirm it. In Mat 13.20-21, we read about the stony-ground hearers, who attend to the word with pleasure, and receive it with joy, and yet have no root in themselves. Thus many today attend to the Gospel with much delight, seem greatly pleased with it, and affected by it, and are sometimes raised almost to ecstasies and raptures. They are melted by the word read or heard, and so they are highly delighted. Now, such as these (one would imagine) could not fail to be true believers. And we are ready to expect that they will prove to be eminent Christians. But alas! all this perhaps proves to be like the morning cloud, or early dew [which evaporate]. We soon find something in their temper and conduct that carries sad evidence with it that the work is not solid and saving.

Therefore, as we have such instances, it is dangerous to draw conclusions from present feelings and emotions. Under these occasional impressions, persons may seem to cheerfully venture their souls upon Christ, to really and strongly desire an interest in him; they may appear greatly delighted with the method of grace, and to have a flaming love for Christ, and a zeal for his cause. In a word, there is scarcely one experience you can mention as evidence of true faith, that cannot be mimicked by the affections on such occasions. But in reality, the Word doesn't enter into their heart itself; it only floats on their imagination. Instead of being written or engraved on the heart, the work appears to be superficial in the event of it. Some take occasion from such instances, to confirm their denial of that most establishing doctrine of the saint's perseverance. But we must answer with the apostle John, in his first epistle, 1Joh 2.19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." We must have more solid evidences for the truth of grace in the heart, than those which arise from the mere moving of the affections.

I must add one more particular.

6. A person may be fully persuaded in his own mind, that he has an interest in Christ, and yet be destitute of saving faith. There are some who make such a persuasion as this to be the very essence of saving faith. And so they conclude that every person who can persuade himself, or *be* persuaded to believe that Christ is his, is a true believer; and those who fall short of this persuasion, are void of faith. This is a very discouraging and dangerous opinion.

It is a very *discouraging tenet* with respect to truly serious souls. For if none have the principle of faith in them, but have arrived at this assurance, we must cast out of the list of true Christians, many thousands of souls who give the clearest proof in every other respect that they are born of God. It is the duty of Gospel ministers to hold out the freest encouragement to distressed, doubting souls, and so be helpers of their joy.

But further, this is a very *dangerous opinion*. For is to be feared that some have made an unholy use of it. Some persons of this notion think that because grace is absolutely free, all a sinner then has to do is persuade himself directly and immediately that Christ and all the blessings of grace are his. Thus they encourage a presumptuous hope, an ungrounded assurance. They would persuade persons to at once believe their interest in Christ; and then assure them that all is well.

The Touchstone of Saving Faith

If any such presumptuous persons read these lines, I would take the freedom here to describe their character, and read their doom. You say in your heart,

“Well, since Christ and grace are free, I will therefore firmly believe that Christ is mine, and heaven is mine, whatever my conscience and conduct, say to the contrary. I am persuaded that all is well; and because I am so persuaded, therefore all is actually well with me. I will make it my chief business to keep this persuasion alive in my mind. And when anything arises in my experience or conduct that would forbid that persuasion, I will believe through it all, and thus prove the truth and strength of my faith, by believing in opposition to all my sense, feeling, and conversation.”

When a person has risen to such a pitch of presumptuous hope and assurance, he grows looser in his conduct, has a greater disregard for sin and duty, and looks down with contempt on the poor doubting but cautious Christian — esteeming him a legalist for the tenderness of his conscience, and for the sacred regard he has for practical and experimental religion. I hope there aren't many who abuse the precious doctrines of free grace in such a vile manner. But whether many or few, they may see their picture and read their doom in Mic 3.11-12. “Her heads judge for bribe ... yet they will lean on the Lord and say, Is not the Lord among us? Surely no evil can come upon us.” Therefore, because of you Zion shall be ploughed like a field,” etc. Those who would thus lean on the Lord, will persuade themselves past all risk, that they are safe. While they regard iniquity in their hearts, and practise it in their lives, they are the most detestable of all who wear the Christian name; and they must expect to have their presumptuous hopes totally demolished. Meanwhile, the poor, dark, conscientious Christian whom they despise, shall be brought forth to the light of comfort and joy.

Let us now close up this branch of the subject, with a few words of improvement.

1. How dangerous is all *self-righteous* doctrine on the one hand, and all *antinomian* doctrine on the other! Both sorts of doctrine are indeed very agreeable to a proud, corrupt nature; it makes these things pleasant, but all the more pernicious. Some teachers discover no difference between a good nature and saving grace. Others make the essence of their religion little more than mere morality, not knowing the difference between heathenish morality and Gospel holiness. And how dangerous it must be for any soul to be led to depend on his own piety, virtue or devotion, instead of being directed to Christ, in whom alone salvation is to be found! But while morality and piety should not be so exalted as to put them in place of Christ for righteousness, neither should the free grace of God be so exalted as to neglect or darken the necessity for true holiness in heart and life. Ministers need to take special heed to how they preach, and others should be just as careful about how and what they hear, lest the pride of human nature be fed by self-righteous doctrine, or the corruption of human nature be indulged by antinomian doctrine. A true Gospel divine can keep to the middle between these two extremes in his preaching; and a true Christian will keep to the middle in his experience and conduct. Inclining to either side, to the right hand or to the left, in preaching or in practice, is very pernicious.

2. What a necessity there is for all who make pretensions to religion, to examine themselves thoroughly, lest there be a flaw, an *essential* flaw in their religion! You may possess many amiable qualifications; may have performed many duties; may have made high pretensions and a shining appearance in your own eyes, and in the eyes of others — without the least degree of true Christianity in your heart. Don't conclude on slight grounds, that you are true believers. Are you moral? So was Paul when he was a stranger to the work of grace. Are you devout? So were the Pharisees, and yet they were enemies to Christ. Are you orthodox? So are many who have never

felt the power of the truth. Are your affections sometimes moved by the ordinances? So it was with the stony-ground hearers. Are you persuaded that Christ is yours? So is many a presumptuous enthusiast. Therefore look closely into your heart and ways, and see whether, in the midst of your profession and all your pretensions, you have that faith in Christ which works by love. Pray earnestly that the Lord would examine and prove you, that He would try your reins and your heart.

3. How desirable and useful are many things that are yet short of true Christianity! We should not, we *would* not degrade or depreciate any of those particulars which have been laid aside as insufficient evidences of a saving faith. God forbid that we should despise civility, morality, devotional exercises, or scriptural knowledge. It is the duty of all Christians to aim at and seek these things. And those who have believed in God, are under special obligations to maintain good works; for these things are good and profitable to men.

4. What a mercy it is that any are endowed with saving faith, and may come to the knowledge of it for themselves! Some may be ready to say, *If these things are so, who then can be saved?* But let us not say this by way of discouragement, but rather answer ourselves that, *With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.* And if we have any desire for this faith and salvation, or any concern about it, then let us take with us that rule from Jas 4.6: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Do you further inquire, “How is it possible for me to know whether I have received this precious faith? I am afraid that I haven’t, because there are so many things that fall short of it, and so many difficulties that attend the inquiry.” I answer, let me entreat you to suspend your doubtful and gloomy thoughts on this topic till you have seen or heard the other part of this subject. I would not have any serious soul discouraged by what has been offered. If the Lord would make it a means of demolishing any false hopes, or awakening the consciences of any deluded souls, then it will be a great mercy to them. And the timorous soul who desires to lean and live upon Christ, I trust will receive some encouragement from the plain solution of the next question.

WE NOW PROCEED TO THE OTHER QUESTION PROPOSED.

Question 2. How may we know whether our faith is saving, amidst all the weaknesses and doubts that may attend it?

It will be very proper in this place, to peruse the letter afresh, which occasioned both questions; because this query as well as the former one, are founded on and have a continued respect to it.

There is scarcely a subject in divinity, in which valuable and sound divines are apparently more disagreed, and by which Christians are more often perplexed, than this one which relates to the nature and workings of true saving faith. Yet it is undeniably a subject of the greatest importance. For the implantation of this grace, and an experience of its workings and actings, are necessary to the very existence of vital Christianity. No subject is more plainly treated, more copiously handled, or more frequently referred to in the sacred Scriptures, than this one. There is scarcely a page in any of the devotional or doctrinal parts of the Bible, where faith isn’t mentioned, or some of its actings described under the words *trusting, hoping, waiting, receiving*, and the like. It is difficult to ascertain what the true reason is for this disagreement among judicious Christians. But I am greatly apt to imagine that the difference is chiefly in words. For the subject itself being of an experimental nature, and the appearances of saving faith being so very various, the language is scarcely adequate to the theme. Nothing is more difficult than to express, in proper words, the motions and workings of the mind.

The great question is this: *What is the nature of that act of the mind, by which a soul entrusts itself to Christ for all salvation?* Does it include in it an assurance or persuasion of a person's own interest in Christ, and the blessings of salvation? If it does, what degree of this persuasion or hope is necessary in saving faith? And if it doesn't, what does the applying act of faith consist in? For my part, I will endeavour to cast aside perplexing queries, and take the whole of what I have to say from the sacred Scriptures — mentioning and explaining the ideas that the Bible gives us of the nature and actings of saving faith; and hoping that this method will provide the clearest light, and afford the most satisfying evidence.

The subject is very copious and large, because the Scripture is so full and distinct upon it. But I will confine myself chiefly to those searching, interesting questions that are asked; and to those difficulties that are stated in the letter, on which both these cases of conscience are founded. The writer of the letter desires me to describe that faith by which the soul looks to, applies, and receives Christ alone for salvation; and to describe those thoughts or acts of the mind towards Christ, which flow from and are proper evidences of regenerating grace. He next proceeds to argue in a judicious way upon it, by observing that *principles* are known by their *effects*; and that this principle of living faith must therefore be known by its acts — by the inward frame, thoughts, and affections of the heart. And then he asks whether a soul venturing to apply to Christ for salvation, though uncertainly, is sufficient evidence of justifying faith?

I will endeavour to give a reply to all these questions, by explaining the language and ideas of Scripture on the subject. I apprehend that this is the best and safest, and likewise the clearest method. Bear with me then, while I expatiate freely upon it. And let me beg you to read with particular attention, as it is a matter that concerns the life of your souls.

We have an exact and ample description of this grace of faith in that well known passage from Heb 11.1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Without any learned or critical remarks on this text, we may easily observe that what faith fixes upon as its object, are things invisible or future, things hoped for, and things not seen. And thus it is distinguished from *sight*. Now it is here said, that faith is the substance of things hoped for; as it gives these things a substance or subsistence in the mind, by substantiating and making them real to the mind, and impressing them upon the heart. It is likewise the evidence of things not seen, as it applies the evidence of their reality to the mind, and makes them as evident and real to the soul as if they were visible things.

So that the whole is this: faith in itself is nothing else but the real impression and application of Gospel truths and Gospel promises. When a person truly believes, the Gospel is written in and upon the heart, engraved upon the spirit of the mind, so as to become the principle of a person's actions and affections. Carnal and worldly persons are acted upon and influenced by worldly and carnal principles; but believers, as such, are acted upon and influenced by Gospel principles. And those Gospel principles are chiefly such as these: that Christ is a most necessary, most suitable, most free, and an all-sufficient and the only Saviour. If a person has these truths not only imprinted on his imagination, but written on his heart, and applied to his own case and conscience, he is then possessed of saving faith.

But a person cannot clearly know that these truths are savingly impressed and applied, except by the motions and actings of his mind in consequence of it. For let a person have ever so clear a knowledge of the truth, ever so firm a belief of it, ever so great a value for it, or have his affections ever so much moved by it — yet if his soul is not excited to those *actings* which are suited to the truth that is believed, then he has no proof of his being possessed of this saving principle.

You may ask then, what are those actings of the heart which are suited to and produced by the saving impression of such Gospel truths? I will answer in Scripture language. If anyone truly believes — for himself, his own necessity, and the fulness and freeness of Christ as a Saviour — then he is induced by that to fly to him, trust in him, lean on him, lay hold of him, go to him, take shelter under him, and to make him his refuge, his portion, his hope, and his salvation. Here lies the centre of the whole evidence — not in the degree of a person's knowledge, nor in the degree of his persuasion concerning his own personal interest.

You may proceed to ask, What is this *coming to Christ, receiving him, leaning on him, taking shelter under him*, and the like? I answer that all these phrases, though varied in words, are the same in their sense when applied to the workings of the mind; and so they illustrate and confirm each other. So that, whichever of these I fix on, it is much the same; it would be too tedious to run through them all distinctly. All of them are figurative expressions, taking a natural and common idea and applying it to the spiritual motions and actings of the soul. And therefore they are all to be understood in a *spiritual* sense. I will choose one of these various phrases, and explain it with a particular view to *doubts* on the one hand, and *assurance* on the other.

What I will fix upon at present is the act of flying to a refuge, or taking shelter under a covert. Christ is the true city of refuge; and in believing, souls are represented as *fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us*, Heb 6.18. Christ is *a covert from the tempest*, Isa 32.2, and by faith believers take shelter under it. Let me now illustrate and diversify this similitude in a familiar way.

Let us suppose a person in the field sees a terrible storm coming, which he wants to be sheltered from. The sight of it makes his heart tremble with a peculiar awe and fear. Let us likewise suppose he is informed of or sees a safe refuge, shelter, or covert at hand. Now let this person be ever so well persuaded of the safety of this shelter, and his being welcome to it. If he doesn't actually take sanctuary under it, he is still exposed to the violence of the storm, whatever his motive or reason may be for not flying to it. Perhaps he is indifferent about it, not apprehending that the storm is very dangerous; or he may think to weather it himself without a shelter; or he may have a dislike for the shelter itself; or he may think that some other shelter may be sufficient for him. In any of these cases, he still neglects to fly to it. And so he must take the consequences, even though he may see the storm, and believe that the proposed refuge is free and safe. This is an exact representation of the case of the sinner who begins to be concerned about his soul. He has learned and believes, in a sense, that Christ Jesus is a free and sufficient shelter. But either through his indifference about Christ, or through a dislike of him, or through an opinion of his own sufficiency, he still keeps away from Christ as the true Saviour. And so he stands exposed to the storm of God's wrath, notwithstanding all his knowledge of, and opinions about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us next put the case in a different point of view; and suppose a person sees a storm coming, and is greatly terrified by the apprehensions and appearance of it. But he knows very little about the shelter that is near at hand. He has heard something of it — enough to make him wish he was under it, and to be persuaded he would be safer there than anywhere else. But he may question whether he will be admitted into it, or whether he has any right to fly to it; and many other such doubts and fears may possess him. Yet he is driven by mere necessity; he sees no other relief; and on the whole, he has a glimmering *hope* that he may possibly be admitted, while he is *certain* to be destroyed otherwise. Therefore, in this trembling way he actually takes himself to it, and so he is safe — whether in the act of flying to it, he apprehends this or not. For his actual safety is not hindered by the fears of his soul; nor would it be promoted by any notional assurance of it. But the whole of his security depends on the safety of the refuge itself, on his admittance into it, on

his resorting to it, and in taking sanctuary under it. This is an exact representation of the frame and condition of a poor soul who knows but little of Christ, fears much through the weakness of his faith, and yet he ventures through all objections, to cast himself upon the Lord Jesus for all his salvation. I will leave it to your own thoughts to apply the similitude more distinctly.

I will now proceed to collect from this, the real workings of the believer's heart in the act of believing in, or running to Christ for spiritual safety. Casting aside the natural simile and outward act of flying, we are now to attend to the works of the soul — both when faith is very strong and clear, and when it is very dark and feeble. If faith acts in a very vigorous, lively, and comfortable manner, then the language of the heart is to this purpose:

“I feel my misery is exceedingly great, I see my state is itself exceedingly dangerous and helpless; I know and see that there is no help in myself; I cannot atone for one sin, I cannot root out one corruption. I cannot perform one duty myself. Nor can I secure myself from that vengeance that is due to me, or prevent my being miserable forever. But, O my soul, do not therefore despond. I have heard of a glorious, all-sufficient Saviour; one who is able to save to the very uttermost, having made a perfect atonement, and wrought perfect righteousness for poor, miserable, guilty wretches such as I. The truth of God and the oath of God assure me that this salvation is altogether free; that the most unworthy, guilty, and polluted souls are welcome to Jesus, coming to him for pardon and purification; that I myself, notwithstanding all my sin and misery, am not excluded from this hope and salvation.

I will therefore, without hesitation or fear, repair directly to this Saviour, thankfully accept his whole salvation, being fully persuaded that *the one who comes to him, he will by no means cast out*. I believe his promise. I will go and plead his own word, and lay a bold, but humble claim to all the salvation I need. Nothing will hinder me from this confidence in him. But I will go and call him my Saviour and my God, my portion and my salvation — knowing that he will not disappoint my hope, deny my claim, or rebuke my confidence; even though I am in myself so utterly unworthy and polluted.”

The soul having reasoned itself into this glorious hope by faith in free grace, immediately repairs to Christ, pleads the promises, claims Christ and all his salvation, and finds rest in him. Oh, what satisfaction and consolation, what joy and triumph the soul now experiences! This is the joy and pleasure of faith, founded not upon any past evidences; but upon the entire fulness and freeness of Christ. Now this satisfaction in Christ produces a hearty love for him, delight in him, and a desire to honour and serve him forever. It makes the soul abandon all self-righteousness as worth nothing; and to hate every false and sinful way as dishonourable and abominable to that Jesus whom it loves with a superlative affection.

But if faith acts in a very weak, feeble, and uncomfortable manner, then the heart speaks to this purpose:

“O my soul, what a miserable condition you are in! Surely I am a lost creature; I am ruined; I have ruined *myself*; my sins cry aloud for vengeance, and my heart is above measure, beyond conception, polluted and abominable. I cannot help myself; all the creation cannot help me; my sins have gone over my head like a heavy burden that is too heavy for me to bear. And oh, what *shall* I, what *can* I do? Where will I fly to for shelter from the wrath due to me? How will I get this sinful heart of mine cleansed, and fit to appear before God? O I am lost, utterly undone in myself. But is there no help, no *hope*? I have heard indeed, that there is an all-sufficient and gracious Saviour provided. But I greatly fear whether he will pity and save me. I cannot believe

that I will ever be welcome to him. I cannot think that he can ever pardon such a vile sinner, or cleanse such a polluted heart as mine. I cannot apprehend that such infinite favours that I must either have or perish, will ever be granted to one so ill-deserving and hell-deserving as I am. Surely I can never be someone for whom he shed his precious blood; and therefore I can expect no welcome at his throne, no admittance into his love.

“But my necessities press hard upon me! If I stay in this condition, my damnation is certain. It is possible, however, that there may be some hope. If I go to him, and venture to lay myself at his feet, it cannot make my condition worse. I will therefore go and confess my sins, and see if there is any mercy for me. But what will I say? I tremble to think of appearing before him, whose name I have dishonoured, whose blood I have trifled with, whose mercies I have abused, and whose calls and invitations I have slighted. However, I will go, *and if I perish, I perish.*”

Upon this, the poor desponding soul ventures to the throne of grace, pours out its complaint, confesses its guilt, mentions something in a trembling manner of the free grace of Christ; and perhaps is in such a fright, under such tremor and dread, that it doesn't know where it is, or what it is doing — little thinking that it is now acting faith upon Christ. Well, having thus come, the soul receives just encouragement enough to go again and again. And from this time forward, it loves and prizes a throne of grace. It is watchful against everything that may grieve the Spirit, and offend the Saviour. It seeks to no other refuge, but looks this way alone, and receives such a view of Christ as to make Him lovely and desirable. Though darkness and doubts may still possess the mind, yet it will heartily cling to Christ, desiring to be found in him, and be made more and more like him.

A person who approaches Christ, and acts in this trembling way, obtains the same safety, even though he doesn't possess the same comfort and assurance as the former. For our safety doesn't depend on our assurance, as I said before, but on the welcome which Christ gives to the coming sinner. Though we don't believe with such assured faith, Christ abides faithful; he cannot deny himself. Oh what encouragement is here for the weak faith of such trembling souls, to show them what hope they may entertain, and what free promises they may plead!

There are various degrees between these two opposite cases which I just represented; and there is a vast variety of experience. For the same soul who at one time comes with trembling, may at another time receive further hope, then sink back again into the same discouragement as before. While a person who has at first fled to Christ with much assurance, may have his faith assaulted and staggered afterwards. In other persons, there is a great mixture of hope and fear, of joy and distress, by turns. But *in general* there is a gradual increase of hope and love; for *the path of the just is like the shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day*, Pro 4.18.

Let me once more observe that there is a great variety, not only as to the strength or weakness of faith, but likewise as to means and ordinances, in and by which faith works. For with some, these actings of faith are exercised in a way of serious *meditation*; while others cast themselves upon Christ by *prayer*; and not a few have these workings drawn forth in *reading or hearing* the sacred oracles. And those who observe the motions of their souls will find that, in either of these ways, the soul actually, seriously, and cordially entrusts itself to Christ, and casts itself upon him.

Thus I have endeavoured to describe in a plain and familiar way, chiefly under one figure — that of flying to a refuge — the special actings of saving faith. I might in the same manner run through and expatiate upon the other representations of it, such as coming, leaning, receiving, and the like. But this is unnecessary, because it would still be found the same thing, the same sort of act under all of them. For it is coming to a free fulness, leaning upon a free prop, receiving a free gift,

as well as running to a free shelter. And under them all, there is really an appropriating possession of Christ, and an application of Him to the soul, with greater or lesser degrees of hope and comfort, founded upon the free welcome that the Gospel gives to a coming sinner.

But after all that has been said, it must be confessed that sometimes the very act of faith is so weak or confused, that by reflecting on these transactions between Christ and his soul, a person cannot arrive at a clear persuasion whether he has believed or not. It might therefore be proper to say something more on this topic, to give all the light I can in this matter. Sometimes, indeed, faith acts in such a powerful and perspicuous manner, that it evidences *itself* — the Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God. And then a person can no more doubt his interest in Christ, or of the truth of his faith, than he can deny or overlook the clearest and strongest motions of his own soul. In this case, the soul can at once say, *My Lord and my God*; it can directly appropriate a saving promise, taste the sweetness of it, and apply the blessings to itself.

Besides this, it may appear that there is a deceit even in the soul's own assurance of faith. It may be only a flighty passion, a fond imagination, or a dangerous delusion. It is therefore highly necessary that this persuasion itself should be examined, and tested against sacred Scripture. While on the contrary, those who don't have any clear assurance at all, may be proved to be true believers from the divine word. There may be such fears mixed with our hope, such unbelief with our faith, or the act of faith may be so weak in itself, that it is impossible from these experiences themselves, to prove our interest. Yes, we may be so dark in our minds, or so very jealous of our own hearts, as to make us afraid to draw the happy conclusion in our favour. And what must we do in these cases? Surely we may and should resort to marks and signs, according to the apostle's direction in 2Cor 13.5: "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith." At the same time, he insinuates the most substantial evidence for it: *namely*, Christ is in us unless we are reprobates. And if we pay any regard to the present experiences of believers, we will often find that a soul has fled to Christ at first in the dark. He doesn't receive any clear consolation, till afterwards the fruits of faith in the heart and life have been revealed. And this revelation by the word and Spirit of God has been the first introduction of a comfortable and settled hope.

Therefore, I will now endeavour to put you and myself into a proper and clear way to know whether our faith is saving, amidst all the weakness and doubts that may attend it, by producing a few satisfactory marks and evidences. May the Lord enable all who peruse these lines, and who are in doubt, to put these proposed questions to themselves! There is a great variety of marks and signs of this grace laid down in the word of God, and judiciously opened and applied by divines — such as an aversion to sin, the Spirit of prayer, conquest over the world, and the like. These are all good and solid marks if rightly understood. But the only thing that can determine whether our hatred of sin, or contempt of the world, or love for God, etc., flows from faith and evidences it, is an inquiry into the principles and motives of these experiences. I will therefore aim to ask the questions as closely as I can, to search into the very springs of our conduct.

I must take it for granted that everyone who has true faith, sees that (1) he himself is vile; (2) the Gospel is precious; (3) sin is hateful; (4) holiness is desirable; (5) Christ is honourable; and (6) God's children are amiable. Whoever cannot set his seal to these things, is no true Christian. For if a person is proud of himself, slights the Gospel, mocks sin, isn't concerned about being conscientious in his duty, despises Christ, or dislikes the people of God as such, then he can have no apparent pretensions to this holy and spiritual grace. But this is still not enough for us to apprehend that we have the above marks, because there is a sort of humility, hatred of sin, love for Christ and holiness, that doesn't flow from faith. And there may be an appearance of all these

things from *legal* principles. Therefore, under each of these headings I must ask two questions: Whether it is so with you, and why is it so?

1. Are you vile and base in your own sight? I apprehend that this is mentioned as a characteristic of a true saint in Psalm 15.4. We read it thus: “In whose eyes a vile person is contemned.” I rather choose to render it, “Who is vile and despised in his own eyes.” Every true Christian is this way before God, because he sees so much of the meanness and corruption of his nature, and of the majesty and purity of God. But it is to be seen that some persons may answer this character, who have been under a merely *legal* work, not knowing anything *experimentally* of faith in Christ.

I must therefore ask further, *What is it that makes you appear low and contemptible in your own eyes?* You may see enough of yourself, your sin, and your misery, to discourage you and drive you to despair; and yet you have a legal pride at the bottom of all this seeming humility. And this may keep you from Christ by making you unwilling to go to him till you can purify yourselves to prepare yourselves for him. But if your humility is promoted by and founded upon a view of the freeness of grace in Jesus Christ, so you see that if you are saved, it must be by free, powerful, preventing grace. And the sight of grace as absolutely free, melts your soul, subdues your pride, and shames your unbelief. This is a good mark that you have seen Christ, and believed in him. But if you are humbled and ashamed, not only because you have broken the law, but likewise because you have been so unbelieving of the grace of the gospel — because you haven’t trusted in Christ more, haven’t loved him more, nor sought him with more eagerness and delight. I say, if such things as these make you low, vile, and abominable in your own sight, then it is a happy evidence that you’ve had something of the Gospel engraved on your heart.

2. Is the Gospel precious to you? This is another thing that is universally true of all believers. As newborn babes, they desire the sincere milk of the word so that they may grow thereby, 1Pet 2.2. But it is certain that some may be fond of the Gospel, zealous for its doctrines, and plead its cause, without ever having felt its saving power upon their hearts.

Ask yourselves another question therefore: *Why is it that the Gospel is precious to you?* What are its peculiar doctrines that you are most acquainted with, and why do you lay such a stress on them? For instance, the atonement of Christ, the imputation of his righteousness, and the divinity of his person. Can you not bear to part with these truths, because you see and feel that all your salvation, all your desire, and all your hope are contained in them? Can you say for yourself that if these doctrines are *uncertain*, then all your comfort and expectation is removed, and the very foundations of your faith are destroyed? If your value for these truths arises from an inward conviction that you must be lost without them, and from such a regard for the honour of Christ that you cannot bear to have him so degraded and dethroned — then this is a blessed sign that your regard for the Gospel *flows from*, and *evidences* a saving belief of it.

3. Is sin hateful to you? This is another particular, without which a person cannot be supposed to be a true believer. But for this to be a proper proof of true faith in the heart, it’s necessary that you further inquire, *Why do you hate it?* If you detest it merely because it endangers your reputation; or distresses your conscience; or hurts your constitution; or merely because it renders you liable to everlasting misery — the strongest detestation of any iniquity on *these* grounds, will not prove the truth of faith in your heart. But if you hate sin because Christ died for it; if you see the sinfulness of it as it appears on the cross of Christ; if you can look at a suffering Jesus, and mourn for *your* sins as what pierced the Saviour; if you cannot bear to indulge it in any of its appearances, because it would be the highest ingratitude to Christ who loved us so as to give himself for us —

then such grounds as these for hating sin, will evidence that a person has believed in Christ, and had some true taste of his love.

4. Is holiness desirable to you? Or, is it your desire and endeavour to walk blameless in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord? This is a necessary ingredient in true Christianity; for it is a scripture maxim, that *without holiness, no one will see the Lord*. Whoever has no real love for, nor desire for holiness, in vain pretends to have true faith.

But for this to be an evidence of true faith, you must further inquire, *Why do you love it?* Perhaps you would be glad to be regular and obedient in order to promote your temporal interest, or to advance your good name, or perhaps to recommend yourself to God by your own righteousness. Such byproducts, or selfish and self-righteous views being at the bottom of your obedience and endeavours, they will spoil all, and prove instead that you are destitute of true faith. But if your regard for, and aim at holiness, arises from a love for Christ, a desire to serve and glorify him; if it is a sense of his love, and a view of his loveliness, that quickens and constrains you to it — then this is a blessed evidence that your faith is saving, however dark or doubting your frame may be.

5. Is Christ Jesus honourable in your esteem? We are expressly told that he is precious to those who believe, 1Pet 2.7. Believers have a real value for him, love for him, and estimation of him. But in order to know whether this value for Christ is of the right kind, and is evidential of saving faith, it is necessary to ask, *On what accounts is Christ precious to you?* Is it merely because he is able and willing to save you from the wrath to come? Or, is it because he saves you from sin, as well as from wrath? Do you value Christ because he is an effectual Saviour, and an absolutely free Saviour, and a holy Saviour? Perhaps you'd like him to assist you to save yourself; but you don't like him to do it effectually by his own efficacious grace. Or maybe you would like to be interested in his redemption, but you would rather receive it on the condition that it's performed by you, than as a free gift. Or you might like him to save you from the *desert* of sin, while you would rather have him spare *sin* itself. A regard for Christ and his salvation in any of these ways, is no evidence of saving faith. But if you esteem, honour, and value Christ because he saves freely and effectually, and that is both from the guilt and power of sin, then this will prove that your faith is saving.

6. *Lastly*, Are the children of God amiable to you? This is another necessary characteristic of a true believer. "For we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren," 1Joh 3.14. But let us beware of a deceit here. You may love the children of God because some of them are perhaps, your particular friends, or your relations, or because they've been kind to you, or because their natural temper and valuable qualifications make their conversation agreeable to you. Such things as these may draw forth a strong affection towards them, while you yourself may be a stranger to the grace of God. Ask yourself, therefore, *Why do you love them?* If it is because they bear the image of Christ, because they are holy, serious, spiritual, heavenly, and zealous for Christ, and if you love them more, you'll see more of these things in them, whatever they may be in other respects, this is a proof that the same principle of faith and love is in *you*, that is in *them*.

By asking such questions as these, a person may, under the influence of the divine Spirit, arrive at this important knowledge of whether he has saving faith or not. Though perhaps you cannot recollect the particular actings of your mind towards Christ, nor observe the special workings of faith in your soul, yet if you can say that you are low in your own eyes, that the Gospel is precious to you, sin is hateful, holiness is desirable, Christ is honourable, and God's children are amiable, and you can find that the reasons and grounds of this temper of spirit are of an evangelical nature, then you may humbly and safely conclude that this divine principle is wrought in your souls.

Let me now conclude the whole with a suitable improvement by way of information, consolation, humiliation, and direction.

1. *For information.* From all this, learn that a person may safely make use of marks and signs to know whether he has truly believed or not. I make this plain remark on account of one paragraph in the epistle which occasioned this discourse. The writer expresses himself as concerned to know whether his hope is too much like the hope of a Pharisee; too much built upon those acts of the mind that arise from a legal principle — such as his humility, striving against sin, and endeavours for a religious frame of mind. That is, he asks whether a hope based upon such evidence is merely legal, and tends to make him trust in his duties and frames. To this I answer that to raise our hopes upon those experiences that *are*, or *may be* of a legal kind, is indeed very dangerous. But we must not carry this thought so far as to deny or depreciate the use of marks and signs for fear of trusting in them. It is indeed very difficult to take encouragement and hope from marks and evidences, without relying upon them or putting them in the place of Christ. But there are two things that will prevent us from doing this.

One is to look upon nothing as a true evidence of faith, that doesn't have an evangelical principle at the bottom of it. If we take our encouragement from our humbling sense of sin, from our strivings against it, and from our endeavours after holiness, without inquiring what it is that *makes* us humble, penitent, and diligent, then we are in danger of being deluded by false evidence, and of placing our confidence upon it, rather than upon Christ. But if we are concerned to look into the motives and principles of our humility, repentance, and diligence, and to see that a regard to Christ in all his offices is the ground of them, then our evidence is true; and we are not in such danger of falling into a legal frame because now, nothing but *Christ in us is our hope of glory*.

The other thing that is necessary to prevent us from trusting in frames, evidences, and duties, is to make use of the hope that we have obtained from them, to further encourage us to trust in Christ, and live upon him. Having obtained some good hope through grace, of an interest in Christ, by reflecting on our past experience, we are now to say in our hearts, "Has Christ revealed himself to me so freely, graciously, and powerfully? Let me then go to him with an enlarged confidence for all those supplies of grace, strength, and comfort that I lack, being encouraged in this by the experience I've had of his free grace and almighty power." If we therefore raise our hope from such *evangelical* marks, and improve it to further reliance upon Christ, then we are not guilty of trusting in frames or duties.

2. *For consolation.* Happy, thrice happy, is the one who is endowed with this special grace, the mother, if I may say, of all the rest. For the word of God solemnly declares that he who believes is justified, will be sanctified, and shall be eternally saved; that he has an interest in all spiritual blessings, in all the sure mercies of David. Whoever has this divine principle of saving faith is safe, whether he knows it or not; yes, the least degree of it is saving, whatever doubts or weaknesses may attend it. Let me assure you, believers, that you need not be discouraged because of your many darkneses, fears, enemies, or temptations; for you will come off more than conquerors, through him on whom your faith rests. You may be apt to perplex your minds, and sink your spirits, because your faith is so weak; or because you cannot distinctly recollect its actings in your experience; or you haven't had those deep, awful convictions of sin, or those lively joys and comforts that others can relate. But don't distress yourselves for lack of these feelings. If you can conscientiously answer the foregoing questions, your state is safe, though you fall short of many others in knowledge, comfort, and lively experiences. Therefore, comfort yourselves with these

The Touchstone of Saving Faith

words, remembering that Christ *will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory.* (Isa 42.3)

3. *For humiliation.* Can we prove the truth of our faith only by the motives and grounds of our humility, devotion, or diligence? How many of the experiences and duties of believers themselves are defective in this respect! How many byproducts, selfish views, and carnal motives lie at the foundation of most of our performances! Surely we have every reason to lament the weakness of our faith and its absence from many of the services we engage in. Let us humble ourselves before God, confessing that our repentance, resolutions, hopes, comforts, obedience, and all our duties, are no longer evangelical, having so little of faith under them and in them.

4. *For direction.* Though we may make use of marks and signs to test the truth of our faith, let us take care not to live upon these evidences, but to live by faith in Christ. You've had an extensive description of the direct acts of faith in this answer. And let me assure you that the best way to clear up your evidences, to strengthen your graces, and to promote the life of religion, is to be found frequently acting upon Christ in this way, flying to him, and taking sanctuary in him. Are you in darkness? Go to him for light. Are you in doubt through unbelief? Go to him for satisfaction and consolation. Are you weak and feeble? Go to him for strength.

Let every complaint drive you to him. Make use of every ordinance to direct you to him. Improve every comfort and hope to attract you to him, and to encourage your confidence in him. In this way, by frequent returning to Christ, you'll find not only your faith cleared and strengthened, but likewise true grace, true holiness, and true consolation advancing in your soul, till faith is swallowed up in sight, and hope in enjoyment.

Other Practical Questions

Question 3. When may a person conclude that he enjoys God in the performance of duty?

A *very* serious and weighty query indeed! I wish I was able to answer it from a happy and large experience of the enjoyment of God. By “*duty*” here, I suppose is meant not any common function of life, which may be performed without the help of special grace. But rather, any religious duty which God, in his word, has enjoined on his people, and in the performance of which he graciously condescends to meet with them according to his promise. Such are the duties of *prayer*, etc.

1. To enjoy God in duty is to enjoy his gracious assistance — that is, the enlightening, quickening, strengthening, and sanctifying influences and operations of his Spirit — without which it is impossible to perform any duty in a right, holy, and acceptable manner. One may conclude that he enjoys God in duty, when his mind is impressed with a deep sense of the reasonableness, use, and design of the duty; when he willingly and heartily engages in it in the name of the Mediator — with reverential thoughts and a holy awe of God; with a single view, and ardent desire to glorify God; with self-abasement, and inward loathing of himself before God; with humble and sincere reliance upon him, and with unutterable longings and pantings after him. It is when he wholly resigns his heart to God, to be constantly governed, eternally possessed, and perfectly sanctified by him. In short, it is when the graces of the Spirit are in real exercise. These things, I think, cannot be experienced by a soul who is destitute of the influence and assistance of the divine Spirit.

2. I humbly conceive that a person may be said to enjoy the presence of God and have fellowship with Him in duty, when he heartily approves of, and contemplates with pleasure the being, attributes, works, providences, word, and worship of God; when his thoughts are emptied of all creatures, but filled with a holy and delightful meditation upon the glorious perfections of God; when he esteems and confides in God as his God and everlasting portion — viewing the Father as his Father in Christ; looking upon the Son as his only and complete Saviour; and regarding the Holy Spirit as his sanctifier, comforter, and guide. And all this is done with a solid peace, heavenly calm, and unspeakable satisfaction. It is when he feels his heart glowing with gratitude, and flaming with love for God — Father, Son, and Spirit. He experiences such a perfect oneness, such a strong union, and such sweet and delightful fellowship between God and his immortal part, that it exceeds all fellowship and union between his soul and any creature whatsoever. *And he cannot possibly express this.* It’s as if God were nearer and dearer to him than his own self, interwoven with his very heart, and He has become the life and essence of his inmost soul. It is when he not only confides in and loves God, as his God, but he sees and *knows* that He is so, enjoying sweet manifestations and clear revelations of the love and mercy of God to his soul. It is when the gospel promises are so powerfully applied to him; when his heart is so filled with sacred joy and overpowered with heavenly light; when the Holy Spirit witnesses to his spirit of his election, vocation, etc., so clearly and free from doubts, that he cannot forbear breaking out to this effect:

“Oh, my God! my God *indeed!* Now I cannot question your love. Oh! I feel it! I *feel* it! Nor do I doubt my interest in you; indeed, I am yours, and forever so! I — who am the vilest wretch! the meanest worm! *astonishing!* You have created me in order to redeem and create me anew! Oh, my heavenly Father! Now I behold your smiling countenance! Now I am happy beyond expression! O, what joy I now feel! What glory I now behold! What a treasure I now possess! The world, the whole world, cannot give what I now enjoy! ‘Tis heaven; ‘tis *you*, my God, who thus fills, and more than fills my soul with bliss — with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Oh!

precious Redeemer, you have died for my sins! Yes! for *mine*. Oh! you divine Sanctifier, you have changed my vile and abominable heart! You have raised me from death to life! You have brought me from the suburbs of hell to the gate of heaven! Now I feel the everlasting arms of Jehovah underneath me; and I behold the attributes of the Most High, as so many bulwarks round about me! O! I am infinitely secure and eternally happy! O! lovely Jesus! How gladly in this moment I would bid *adieu* to all below the sun, and turn my eyes from every earthly object, to gaze eternally upon your transcendent beauties and divine perfections!

“But Oh! how distressing the thought of losing this precious taste of your love! And especially after all this kindness to me, to prove myself unthankful, unstable and unfaithful to You! Oh, that I might never sin even once from now on! Hasten the time, my God, when instead of sipping now and then by the wayside, I will eternally drink of the water of life, at the Fountainhead! And appear in your presence, to spend eternal ages in wonder, bliss, and praise!”

I don't think that every Christian enjoys an equal degree of the soul-refreshing presence of God, which holy men of old called *the light of His countenance*. Nor do I believe that anyone enjoys all that I have observed, whenever God is present with him in duty. A believer may enjoy a comfortable portion of the divine presence so as to experience sweet serenity, inward tranquility, and inexpressible calmness — yet it is without strong raptures and transporting ecstasies. I am likewise fully persuaded that a believer, in the performance of duty, may be under the convincing and (in that sense) *enlightening* influence of the blessed Spirit — so that the poor man hates and loathes himself to a very great degree — and yet may have but little comfort. Indeed, perhaps his very soul may be wounded with fear, lest he be utterly cast away at last. Now, though that doubting soul is certainly under the very necessary teachings of the Holy Spirit, and God is really present with him in duty, yet properly speaking, he doesn't *enjoy* God. It is one thing to be under the saving operations of the Holy Ghost, but another thing to enjoy or have fellowship with God. The enjoyment which our blessed Lord had at his baptism, and also on the mount where he prayed, differed much from what he had in the garden. And I don't doubt that Paul's enjoyment, Act 9.11, differed considerably from his enjoyment, Act 22.17.¹ I will add no more than to say it may be your happy lot and mine to enjoy much of God now, and have the glorious vision and fruition hereafter.

Question 4. How may a person know, in the exercise of prayer, whether he is under the influence of the blessed Spirit, or under the movings of his own natural spirit or imagination?

It is undoubtedly the most excellent of all knowledge, for a man to be able to discern himself at all times, especially in his approaches to a sovereign God. Before His infinite majesty, all the posterity of apostate Adam is less than nothing, and altogether vanity. This is a knowledge infinitely more refined in its nature, than what distinguished ancient Greece by the title *the eye of the world*. It's a knowledge not to be attained by drinking the pure streams of Castalio's fountain, retiring to the solitude of Parnassus, or climbing the heights of Helicon.² It is not to be attained by attending at the feet of Gamaliel, either ancient or modern human literature being unconnected with it.

¹ **Act 9:11** So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. **Act 22:17-18** "Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'

² Castalio's fountain was the sacred source of Delphi. Parnassus, a mountain in Greece, was thought sacred to Apollo and home to the Muses. The springs of Mount Helicon were considered a source of poetic inspiration. — WHG

Though in itself, prayer is no enemy to knowledge, but a friend to it. This knowledge is attainable nowhere else but in the school of Christ, under the enlightening influence of his Spirit. By human instructions, only human knowledge is attainable; for the streams can never rise higher than the fountain. But the knowledge of *discerning spirits* is divine in nature, and therefore it must be the fruit of divine instructions.

According to the query, and 1Joh 4.6, the spirits by which every person is actuated, are the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error, one or the other. One or the other presides over all the thoughts of the heart, the words of the mouth, and every action of the life of all the posterity of Adam. For I know of no middle point between truth and error, nothing indifferent in religion. As prayer is the matter under consideration, it behooves us to inquire when, in that exercise, a man may be said to be under the one (truth), and when he is under the other (error)?

In answer to this, I have often observed that in all or most of the exercises of religion, there are three paths — *namely*, two extremes, and a middle path. These three paths engross all the professors of religion. The two extremes are under the direction of the spirit of error. One, which is the middle path of judgment, is reserved to the direction of the Spirit of truth. We will find this is never more so, than in the manner of prayer.

I. Some people are excessively afraid of formality in prayer; and there are others who despise it from a principle of enthusiasm. Both equally neglect it from a principle of mere negligence. These two kinds of people, under the influence of their own corrupt imaginations, or under a spirit of darkness and error (call it what you will), are led to extremes. Some desire to avoid the errors which generally attend the spontaneity¹ of the former. They err as much as the others — they dare not trust the dictates of their own hearts, nor the instructions of Him by whom Christians are taught to pray. They must have not only their matter and method *premeditated*, but their very sentences must be constructed by someone else, whose skilfulness they implicitly rely upon. And they must have their rules set before them in black and white. Both of these are extremes, and they both claim for their patron, *the spirit of error*, which deals all in extremes.

But between these two, if I'm not mistaken, is found *the path of judgment*, in which the blessed Spirit leads his people. I don't mean that if the Spirit of God doesn't teach his people to rely upon the compositions of others, that he directs them to pre-compose for *themselves* —though this, alas, is the modern custom. I mean that he leads them to pre-consider the *sense* they have of the greatness, goodness, and wisdom of Jehovah; that when they come to address his throne, their verbal adorations of him in these and all his other attributes, may not overrun their mental adoration of Him. I mean that He teaches his people to pre-consider their interest in and relation to God, so that their external invocation of him may not express more confidence than their hearts are really possessed of.

For nothing bears a more hateful aspect than the words "our Father" in the mouths of those who deny that we can certainly know our adoption in this lifetime. I mean further, that the Holy Ghost leads his people to consider the sin that they have to mourn over and confess; the blessings that they, or the persons for whom they pray, immediately want; the evils which they are to deprecate; the blessings for which they are to express their thankfulness, etc. Such premeditation, if I am not grossly ignorant, is the duty of every Christian, and a considerable part of the Spirit's instruction.

¹ Originally, "precipitancy." – WHG

II. It is not always safe for a man to conclude that he is influenced by the Spirit of God, when he finds a fluency of words and freedom of utterance. For this frequently proceeds from natural causes, such as a happy position of the animal spirits — or from familiarity with the persons with whom we pray, especially if we're conscious that their gifts are inferior to our own. Yes, if we only imagine it so, it answers the same end. For my own part, I have frequently found that pride lurking in my heart is greatly concerned in my volubility.¹ But the first, namely the animal spirits, having such a strong connection with the mental faculties as well as the organs of speech, are very much, even *most of all* concerned in our volubility in prayer. There are many well-decorated orations made with great freedom of speech, adorned with a graceful utterance prayer-wise, when, alas, the Spirit of prayer is not there. This would be readily apparent if the orator honestly told us the real disposition of his heart while in prayer — whether he viewed God or himself most; whether he considered the greatness of Jehovah, or the tastes of the people with whom he prayed.

III. Nor is it safe for a man to conclude that he is under the influence of the spirit of error, when in prayer he seems to be at a great distance from the favour of God. For it frequently happens that a soul is never more under the influences of sanctifying grace, than when he seems to be at the greatest distance, in his own apprehension. But because I know that all are not of my mind in this, I must beg of those who think otherwise, to consider the case of Job, who when he was nearest his spiritual enlargement, underwent the severest rebukes — why not so with God's children in our days? For my own part, without hesitation, I look at a sense of distance as a great degree of nearness to God; a sense of deadness to be a goodly measure of life; a sense of barrenness in prayer to be a goodly sign of a soul fructified by grace. Very often the soul, in seeming great distance, is under the immediate influences of the Spirit of God (Isa 42.16 ²), especially if the person finds any of the following tokens of the Spirit's presence.

1. Let someone, man or woman, conclude that he is under the influences of the Holy Spirit in prayer, when in his approaches to the throne of grace, he is possessed of such a sense of the divine greatness of a prayer-hearing God — which sinks him low in self-abasement, and so covers him with a holy shame — that it's with some degree of confusion that he lifts up his guilty eyes to the throne of infinite holiness. In such a case, creatures will be just nothing at all to him. In such a frame, swelling words of vanity — which infest not only our modern pulpits but crowd into our Christian meetings appointed for social prayer — will be *strange* to a person's tongue. There should be no verbal adorations, except those which carry heart and soul in them.

2. When he is blessed with a sense of nearness to God, and even though under a sense of the awfulness of the divine Majesty, he is enabled to admire that affinity of grace and goodness in God, which irradiates all his greatness, and endears his sovereignty to us. Then, with a profound awe and holy reverence mixed with a becoming boldness and child-like confidence, he approaches the eternal throne, which he sees sprinkled over with the atoning blood of the immaculate Jesus. In such a praying frame, shame will depart from the person, knowing that his business is with God.

3. When he has such a sense of sin and deadness, that he can make little other confession of it but with sighs and groans. There is a great deal of the Spirit's influences in such a confession, even though the person himself might not be able to utter one sentence. Yet there are many souls who,

¹ *Volubility*: The quality of being facile (effortless) in speech and writing.

² **Isa 42:16** I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them.

for lack of understanding to discern the spirits by which they are influenced, never think they pray by the Spirit's assistance, except when with pleasure they can fill up their usual time in freedom and utterance; *but this is a distressing mistake*. There is a vast difference between the *Spirit* of prayer, and the *gift* of prayer. Let such precious souls observe that words make up but a very small part in prayer. There is more persuasive eloquence in a single sigh or groan, forced from a sense of indwelling corruption, than in ten thousand well-constructed sentences *without* that sense. Grammar and rhetoric are not essentials of prayer.

4. When there is such a sense of our wants, that all our petitions are thereby circumscribed, and all our petitions are regulated by the rules prescribed by our necessities. A person under the Spirit's influences dare not ask for blessings except what he really knows he wants, either for himself or others for whom he prays. All rashness, levity, affectation, superfluous words, vain repetitions, and sometimes our elocutions, are the fruit of our own spirit, which may justly be called a spirit of darkness and error. But not so with all biblical tautologies ¹ in prayer, for these frequently proceed from a fervency of spirit with which only the Holy Ghost can inspire us.

As I am afraid I have already been too wordy,² I dare add no more, but only sum up what I have written. I conclude that if we are under the Spirit's influences, all our adorations will be ruled by the sense we have of his divine Majesty — all our petitions by a sense of our wants — all our thanksgivings by a sense of the mercies we are partakers of — all our invocations of God will be ruled by the sense we either have or desire to have, of our interest in and relation to Him — and all our confessions by our sense of sin.

I apprehend another answer to the above question, is that the difference, as stated in the writer's plan, may be considered in the manner of the operation or influence — in the *tendency* and the *termination* of it. I take two things for granted, both which I think are indubitably evident:

1. That every believer, every heaven-born soul, by the divine work upon his heart, is made to abhor every evil way, every sin; and yet at the same time, he finds almost (at least) every sin working within himself. And,
2. That in everything, all believers are liable to be actuated either by the blessed Spirit (the influence of good angels); or by their own evil imagination and the suggestions of Satan. Consequently, Satan's methods with the wicked, and with the godly, are very different.

But it is only the believer who comes within the verge of our correspondent's plan. And so I confine my thoughts to this:

I. As to the manner of the operation, I humbly apprehend that there is an apparent difference to an observing mind. The Spirit of God does not at any time debase the nobler power of the soul, the *understanding*, by attempting an entrance at the servant's door of the affections.³ Rather, He honours himself and the soul of man, by entering at the beautiful gate, the everlasting door of the understanding. And so, in an alluring way, He commands the compliance of the will, and the affections will naturally follow. By contrast, the evil spirit comes like a thief, and is glad to get entrance at the servant's door of the affections, working on the imagination and fancy by the senses. And so, the will is, as it were, dragged into compliance; and the understanding is, as it

¹ *Tautology*: here it means a statement that is necessarily true, because it is drawn from God's word. — WHG

² Originally, "prolix": prolonged or long-winded; discussing something at great length. — WHG

³ At the time, guests entered by the front door; servants and tradesmen entered at the back or side door. — WHG

were, darkened and becomes a servant. Happy would it be if believers had a better understanding of themselves, and a greater and more constant guard over their affections.

The wise man directs to keep the heart with all diligence. As for our senses, they are not to be trusted or indulged at any time. David prayed that his eyes might be turned away from beholding vanity. Gazing on the creature gives the devil an opportunity to strike the fancy, and then our feet are soon gone. Again, the operations of the Spirit come with pureness and pleasure: the light in the understanding diffuses itself through all the faculties. But Satan's influence, and that of our own hearts, just as there is no light in it for the understanding, so there is no purity, peace, or pleasure in it for the believer; but only something painful and defiling. To transgress is a hard way, an unclean and troublesome way (Pro 13), the way in which transgressors choose to walk.

The operations of the Spirit, the influence of Satan, and the motions of our own hearts, are all at times very sudden, and something surprising. But the operations of the divine Spirit, however sudden or surprising, are always calm, pure, transforming, and humbling — referring all to the uninterrupted word. By contrast, the motions of our own hearts and Satan's suggestions, are always attended with something or other that is inconsistent with, and directly opposite to these. Oh, that those who have eyes to see, would but make *use* of them.

II. We may view the difference in the tendency of the one, and of the other.

1. The operation of the Spirit has an immediate and direct tendency to lead in the way of truth, and the way of truth is but one. It is the way of life, and that way is *above* (Pro 15.24 ¹) — above the reach of the natural man. It is the way everlasting, the way Jesus walked in; he is himself the Way (Joh 14.6). But there are innumerable pernicious ways which are directly contrary to truth. When not prevented by sovereign grace, Satan and our own corrupt and deceitful hearts are always moving us to walk in one or another of these ways. So that, we may know we are moved either by Satan or our own hearts, when it has a tendency to lead us in any other way than the way of truth (however much it is approved of by men, even good men). I am persuaded that most believers in this degenerate age, born-again souls, are actuated by the spirit of error in their general walk. For though they have the Spirit of truth, which always abides in them, and they are often moved by it, yet they both grieve and quench that Spirit. Alas, haven't we grown so very polite and rational (having so much outward liberty), that we are ready to conclude there is no need of, nor place for the divine influence, except in some uncommon affairs or extraordinary cases? But with me, it is evident that the Spirit of God — by and with the written word — is the covenant blessing which the people of God should be waiting for and living in expectation of, to guide them through this wilderness in respect to their natural, civil, and religious conduct. *It is not in man who walks, to direct his own steps* (Jer 10.23). *In all our ways we are bid to acknowledge God* (Pro 3.6). And till we are led to it, and to observe his secret operations, I don't expect to see the revival of the power of religion. But I leave this hint to the wise and considerate.

Another tendency of the divine Spirit's influence, is to promote the wisdom which is from above; for the Spirit is a spirit of wisdom. The apostle James, in chap. 3.17, gives us such a sympathetic and familiar account of it, that all discerning persons may see how and when they are under the influence of the divine Spirit, and when they are under the movings of their own hearts, or the suggestions of Satan.

¹ **Pro 15:24** The way of life *winds* upward for the wise, That he may turn away from hell below.

Again, another tendency of the Spirit of God, is to lead us into glorious liberty; but what comes from Satan and our own corrupt hearts, from our own imagination, tends to lead us into bondage. How the believing soul is many times entangled with one lust or another! And don't they arise from Satan, or from our own hearts? How the poor saint is pressed down with a sense of the guilt of sin! And consequently he is entangled with its power. And this, too, is after God spoke peace and pardon to him, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. This pretended part of religion, like other temptations, will be backed with Scripture. But let the believer consider that the Spirit of God is a Spirit of *liberty*, freeing from a sense of guilt; and in that view, He is in some measure giving us power to overcome sin. The devil doesn't love to see the believer walk in full assurance of faith, and therefore he uses all the methods he can to prevent it. The believer needs to have his eyes wide open to see the snare when the devil turns himself into an angel of light. To war with spiritual wickedness in high places, we need to have on the *whole armour* of God. The One who said to the believing soul, "Fear not, for I am your God," will never afterwards move him to fear; And may those who have felt the love of God in their hearts, turn back at the first motion they find to call it into question, as it is from the devil.

III. But the termination of the Spirit of truth, and that of the spirit of error, plainly reveals the difference. That which comes from God, cannot terminate in anything short of God. It is His glory that the believer is led to aim at when he is under divine influence. The man is led out of himself; he is no longer his own. God is love! And that faith which the operations of God lead the soul to live by, always works by love. According to the degree and force of the operation, so is the degree of love in which it terminates. Love is of God! And this will spread itself far and wide. See how the apostle John has embellished his epistles with the beauties of it in the description that he has given of it (if I may express myself this way). So that every believer (if not asleep) may at once discern what is of God, and what is not. Besides, I humbly apprehend that in every believer there is a certain criterion, a peculiar property in every saint, by which he can distinguish truth from error better than the most skillful logician, or the most exact critic. He that has the new name on the white stone *knows* it, and none but himself *can* know it (Rev 2.17). Moreover, can any man appeal to anything besides or above the sun, to determine whether he sees its light or not? So, to what will the believer appeal, if not to the Spirit of God, to determine it for him? It is "in your light we see light," says the Psalmist (36.9). And here I would only add Peter's ready compliance to let down the net (Luk 5.5), Jeremiah's in hiding the sash (13.4), and Abraham's in offering his son, can hardly comport and correspond with the maxims and conduct of the day. This, I apprehend, is to *reason* themselves into faith and obedience, contrary to the plain meaning of the Holy Ghost, 2Cor 4.13.¹ For this reason, I observe, poor trembling believers are kept low, and the boasting orthodox goes on with ease.

Questions 5 and 6. —

5. How far may a child of God fall, and yet have true grace in his soul?
6. What is the essential difference between a *natural* and a *spiritual* faith?

Question 5. How far may a child of God fall, and yet have true grace in his soul?

It is recorded by the Spirit of God (who best knew the mind of God, and by which the prophets and apostles spoke), "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they

¹ **2Cor 4:13** And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,

are red like crimson, they will be like wool.” Isa 1.18. Also in Joh 1.7, “And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin.” And again, “All manner of sin and blasphemy, shall be forgiven men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven men.” Mat 12.31. Now seeing that there is no sin, however great, even blasphemy itself, though it reaches to heaven — yes, the most desperate of sins, even murder not excepted — yes, the most crimson sins, *the blood of Christ is able to clean*. Yes, cleansed from sins like David’s, whose sin was of the most complicated nature that could possibly be. Yet the Lord did not suffer him to lie in that backsliding way, but sent his prophet to bring his sin to his remembrance. Peter is another striking picture of backsliding. Yet the Lord didn’t leave him in the hand of Satan his enemy, but brought him back with weeping and supplication. Nevertheless, though He will never take his loving-kindness from his children, yet he will visit their offences with the rod, and their sins with scourges. But to return to the question — it can, therefore, never be determined how far a child of God may fall, *does* fall, or *can* fall, till we can determine what “*the sin against the Holy Ghost*” is.

Now we may come a little at the nature of that sin, by the context of the chapter in which it is spoken of. But to say to any man or men, *You have committed the unpardonable sin*, is to go beyond the word of the Lord. And for any man to determine how far a man may sin before he commits that sin, would be to determine what the Lord himself puts out of the power of any finite creature. He alone knows how far his children may fall, before they fall into that sin which shall never be pardoned, which none of the children of God ever did, or ever shall fall into, because the oath and power of God is engaged to defend them from falling eternally. But there is one thing to be noted here; *namely*, that there is not one instance in all the book of God, in which any of the children of God fell or committed any sin, that upon being charged with it, ever cloaked it or strove to make it appear not to be a sin. But on the contrary, they acknowledged it, and extolled the love of Jesus who, through the eternal Spirit, gave himself a ransom for the guilty. And those who, through the sin they had contracted by coming through the loins of their father Adam, and their own personal guilt, had brought condemnation and destruction (even everlasting destruction) upon themselves. So that, from the whole of what has been said on the first question, it plainly appears that none but God can expressly determine how far one of his children may fall. As to the latter clause in the first question, it is also clear that all the children of God have the true grace of God in their souls, and shall never lose it. This is true whether they stand or fall, though their falls will be to their shame and the hurt of their own conscience here, as well as to the dishonour of the cause they espouse. These few hints, I hope, will satisfy the first question.

Question 6. What is the essential difference between a natural and a spiritual faith?

As to the second question, very little needs to be said to clear it, though the point itself is the main point in which every man living is nearly concerned: *namely*, whether his faith is *natural* or *spiritual*. I say, this is the main point and inquiry of every seeking soul who has in the lowest degree tasted that the Lord is gracious, but is still (through weakness and infirmity) unable to see his title to the kingdom of God by Christ Jesus. Well then, how are we to know the difference? Or rather, *what* is the real difference? It is undoubtedly in some of these hints that follow: —

I. A *natural* faith, though ever so high, doesn’t trust in Jesus Christ for righteousness. But on the contrary, a *spiritual* faith, or the faith of God’s elect, is on God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

II. The one who is only possessed of a *natural* faith, trusts in his doing what he can, and he trusts in Jesus for the rest, as he says. But the one who has a *spiritual* faith, wholly trusts to Jesus, and not to himself, in whole or in part.

III. But the main difference lies here: the heart is not changed, nor is the man yet justified, and therefore, “He who does not believe is condemned already,” etc., Joh 3.18; but in the same verse, “He who believes in him is not condemned.” Now, we know that he who believes is likewise justified — not on account of his faith as an act, but he is justified by the blood of Christ, brought home to the conscience by the Spirit of God, through faith, it being the hand (if I may put it this way) which lays hold of the atonement. But again,

IV. As there is no change of soul wrought by the Spirit of God in the *unspiritual*, so there is no love of God — nor indeed can there be, seeing that they were never convinced. And so they never knew of a deliverance, which is the spring of love. For as one apostle says, *we love him, because he first loved us*. But the *believer* loves God, and all his obedience proceeds from a principle of love which is sealed in his heart, and from which all his works proceed as from a fountain.

V. Fifth and lastly, though in outward appearance, a man with *natural* faith may actually appear as upright in the sight of men as the most spiritual believer (I don’t say it is always so), and lives as uprightly (with respect to conscientious living) — and here lies the main point — at his best, he only acts as Paul did before his conversion. For he cannot say, as Peter said from a felt sense of the love of God, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” (Joh 21.1) Now, the one who has a spiritual faith can truly say this. And the Lord can likewise say, yes, and still says, as he did of old, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.” (Joh 1.47)

The main difference is then clear, I hope, from these few hints — I mean the *Scripture* difference. But there is one further thing to observe: *namely*, that the believer, though he falls daily, his views are always fixed and centred in Jesus — that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, which the believer knows must cleanse him, or else he must perish. He has repentance given to him, which need not be repented of. But if the *natural* man’s conscience begins to trouble him, he doesn’t fly to the blood of Christ for relief, but to something he calls *repentance* or *amendment of life*. But all this time, he doesn’t know what repentance is. He doesn’t consider that repentance unto life is a *change of heart* wrought by the Spirit of God, and it is the gift of God.

Question 7. How may a person distinguish between the genuine consolations of the Gospel wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God, and those comforts that spring from our own imagination or a delusive spirit?

An important query indeed! It is a query that ought to be well-weighed in this age of carnal security on the one hand, and fatal delusion on the other. The question is not to be solved by any mortal, to the believer’s full satisfaction. The divine Teacher is the infallible casuist.¹ Nevertheless, as the Holy Spirit condescends to sometimes smile on our weak attempts to answer doubts that lie heavy on the hearts of his beloved ones, and as we are commanded to comfort his people (and particularly the feeble-minded) — to such as these, the following thoughts are humbly presented.

By *consolations* and *comforts* in the query, I understand these words to mean ease, quietness, and satisfaction regarding our present and eternal state, so as to produce joy and gladness.

¹ *Casuist*: someone who resolves cases of conscience or moral duty; in this case, the Spirit of Christ. — WHG

The query itself denotes that genuine consolations are wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God. I will first endeavour to point out this genuine work that is both begun and carried on by the God of all solid comfort. Let it be well-noted that this consolation is wrought only in mourners; and yet, not all mourners. For Christ came to comfort those who mourn in *Zion*. They have been enlightened to see that sin is sinful beyond all expression. Their heart is wounded with a sense of their own vileness. Their sorrow for sin is expressed in a godly manner. Being often so loaded with guilt, they are afraid lest it sink them to the nethermost hell. They refuse to be comforted, for who can bear a wounded spirit? There are different degrees of sorrow, and so there are different degrees of comfort. The Holy Spirit wounds before he heals, brings low before he lifts up, even to the dunghill before he sets upon the throne, sometimes even to the gates of hell before he leads to the borders of heaven. Now, when the blessed Spirit administers comfort to those he has made sorrowful, he will always direct them to Christ, as the very fountainhead, spring, and source of all true joy. He will display the riches of Christ, his ability and willingness to save even to the uttermost. He will never fail to glorify the Redeemer. Not only are the believer's first comfort and peace derived from Christ; but all after-consolations that are solid, will abound by Christ. It is joy and peace in believing. This peace sometimes flows in like a river; it surpasses all understanding, says the great apostle. It proceeds from Him who said, "My peace I give to you." (Joh 14.27)

This inexpressible tranquility is sometimes communicated by the powerful and evident application of a particular and remarkably suitable promise, that at once answers all doubts, and effectually scatters the clouds. Yet it is not impossible for this joy to be grounded upon the whole scope of the Gospel, taking the promises together collectively, as centering in Christ. At certain seasons, this peace and joy in the Holy Ghost may be in great assurance; but it may not always be so. Whether the degree of this consolation is high or low, its fruits and effects have the same tendency. Where it is happily enjoyed, it wonderfully evacuates and cleanses the heart of pride, self-conceit, levity, etc. Faith in exercise always accompanies this inward serenity, so that it has a peculiar tendency to mortify sin, for it is the very earnest and foretaste of heaven itself — and the more of heaven, the less of sin. As the comfort flows from Christ, the believer will certainly attribute the whole of his salvation to his great and exalted Redeemer. To behold the fulness of Christ by a weak faith, will seldom fail to yield some degree of consolation which will be like oil to the wheel of obedience. The person will run with joy the way of God's commandments, even if the whole world is against him: *the joy of the Lord is his strength*. Those who walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, will walk in the fear of the Lord. If we rejoice in the Lord always, our moderation, meekness and holiness will be known to all men.

I am fully persuaded that these and their kindred fruits are, without any uncertainty, found wherever the true Comforter works under that character. The *comfort* of the Holy Ghost cannot be where the *fruit* of the Spirit is not. Yet even in a true believer, I don't question that comforts may spring from his own imagination, or from a delusive spirit. Such comforts will not fail to produce corrupt fruit. Instead of melting, it will harden the heart, filling it with pride and vanity, not with humility and gravity. They will cause the wheel of obedience to run heavily, whether it respects private devotion or public worship. The general conduct will also be more lax and careless, for the "conversation" will not be more "in heaven." The person will be more prompted toward an offensive and sinful self-seeking, than to a savoury and holy self-denial. He will be carried away more by *sense* than by *faith*, and in many parts of his conduct, he will imitate an unbeliever rather than bear the image of his holy Redeemer. We should beware of imaginary and delusive consolations, as much as we should pray for those that are genuine. The former will certainly dishonour the Gospel, but the others adorn it.

How many are there who are altogether in a state of nature, and destitute of saving grace, and yet they have their imaginary and delusive comforts. Pagans, Mahommedans, Jews, the most ignorant of the Papists, and all gross idolaters, have their devotion and no doubt their imaginary comfort. The ignorant protestant, who knows little more of real Christianity than a Hottentot,¹ who probably imagines that God won't be so unmerciful as to cast him into everlasting torments; and so he has some delusive comfort. I have the same opinion of Deists and other self-righteous and self-confident gentlemen, who so swarm in our age, and so set light by the blood of the everlasting covenant. May the Lord open their eyes and *forgive them, for they know not what they do* — any more than their brethren who cried, "Away with him! away with him!" Likewise is the antinomian, who boasted so much of the blood and righteousness of Christ, but still wallows in sin, and brings forth no fruit fit for repentance; his delusions are exceedingly strong and dangerous.

It evidently appears by these hints, that we ought to carefully examine our comforts. Our Lord's maxim is very good in many cases: "By their fruits you will know them." The more we are acquainted with divine consolations, the easier and clearer we will discover those that are false, either in ourselves or others.

Question 8. Why should the King of Moab, by the advice of his privy council in a time of imminent danger and threatening distress, apply for relief to a prophet of the God of Israel, as Balaam certainly was, and not to Baal-Peor, the god of the Moabites?

Balaam's character is set out so favourably in the query, that a stranger to the Bible might easily imagine him to be a true prophet. For he is not only supposed, but *asserted* to be "a prophet of the God of Israel." But the Scripture informs us that he was a soothsayer, and he sought enchantments. In the following texts, we may see what sort of persons soothsayers and enchanters were: — Exo 7. 11, 22, Deu 8.10-11, 2Kng 17.17, Jer 27.9, Mic 5.12, Act 8.9, 11; 13.6, and 16.16, with other parallel places. It might be said that "he had free access to God on several occasions." I cannot find any hint of that in Scripture, but only in the case before us. True, we find here that the Lord spoke to him often. And yet even in this remarkable affair, we see that Balaam sought enchantments. But when he found, after repeated attempts, that there was no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel, but they were miraculously preserved by God, it is said, "He did not go, as at other times, to look for enchantments." This seems to suggest that at each of the former times, he used enchantments or devilish arts. And it is probable that every time he sought the Lord, he used those very sinful arts.

If it is asked, Why did the Lord condescend to reveal his will to such a person? The matter appears to me thus: Balaam was a man of great fame, much like Simon Magus, and had a very artful way of deceiving the people. So that, they thought that certainly whomever he blessed, was blessed; and whomever he cursed, was cursed. It is plain that his aim was to amass riches, and not to instruct the people in the will of God. The messengers sent from Balak took the rewards of divination in their hands, for Balaam loved and ran greedily after the wages of unrighteousness. In the whole account of the affair, it is evident that he desired to go and curse Israel. For he said, "The Lord refuses to give me leave to go with you." Because he was now earnestly solicited, and willing to go and curse the peculiar people of God, I am persuaded that there was an eminent

¹ *Hottentot*: an aboriginal inhabitant of Cape Colony, in Southern Africa. They knew nothing of Christ, but only of good and evil. — WHG

divine interposition, so that Balaam was under special restraints from the Almighty. He was obliged, against his inclination, to bless and not to curse Israel. It seems he entreated leave to curse them, for it is said, "The Lord would not hearken to Balaam, but turned the intended curse into a blessing." I don't think he was ever under divine inspiration except on this notable occasion; and that was by an evident and wonderful interposition of God, in favour of his people.

We have other instances of this kind. When Laban, Balaam's countryman, both being Syrians, pursued Jacob intending to hurt him, God came to him and said, "Take heed that you not speak to Jacob, either good or bad." Let it be observed here that Laban says, "The God of your father spoke to me," Gen 31.29. Here he disowns the God of Abraham, and doesn't look upon him as his God. Yet he dare not at this time go beyond the commandment of the Lord to do good or bad, any more than Balaam could. And Jacob knew the reason for it. He said, "Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction, and the labour of my hand, and rebuked you last night," Gen 31.42. Gen 20.3 and 1Sam 19.22, etc.,¹ are not foreign to our present purpose.

It is apparent that Balaam was not one of the holy men of God, if we consider that notwithstanding his inability to curse but only bless Israel, he did all in his power to hurt them. For by his counsel he taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before Israel. And the Midianites being instructed by him, vexed the Israelites with their wives, and at last beguiled them so as to prevail upon them to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. This corrupted the people, and brought the plague among the congregations of the Lord. If he had been a true prophet of the God of Israel, he would not have taken this course. But once vengeance is brought upon the Midianites for following the counsel of Balaam, it falls also upon the head of the prophet. In time, the donkey rebuked and forbade his iniquity and madness. Thus, as he lived a wicked life, so he died the death of the wicked, and not of the righteous.

It doesn't appear to me that Balak applied to Balaam because he believed he was a prophet of the God of Israel, but only because he took Balaam as a very famous practitioner, as a soothsayer and enchanter. If Balak regarded any deity on this point, I think it must be Baal-Peor. For as soon as Balaam came, he was taken to the high places of Baal, and after that to the top of Peor. It appears by his manner of sacrificing on seven altars on the high places of Baal, and on top of Peor, that Balaam was no great enemy to Baal-Peor. I am of the opinion that neither Naaman the Syrian, nor his master, had the least design to change their deity in coming to Elisha. But I suppose they took him to be something like a great soothsayer, as Daniel was called "master of the magicians" by a heathen king. So a grand present is brought to Elisha. But the true prophet was not very greedy for filthy lucre. It is true, when the cure was done, Naaman's heart was so affected that he entertained very favourable thoughts of the God of Israel. But still, he was resolved to bow in the house of Rimmon, 2Kng 5.18.

The conclusion of the whole is this: Balaam's character would hardly permit him to be ranked among the prophets of the God of Israel. And because Balak doesn't seem in the least inclined to consult another deity, I don't see how he can affront Baal-Peor. Indeed, he pays him divine honour and homage in building him so many altars on his high places, by the direction and assistance of Balaam. So then, it is easy to conclude that assistance and protection, aid and succour, is earnestly entreated of Baal-Peor at this time of distress. And when all failed, the soothsayer at last gives Balak a way to bring Jacob over to the idol of Moab. For Israel joined himself to Baal-Peor; nor

¹ God warning king Abimelech about Abraham's wife; Saul prophesying at Ramah. – WHG

were the people soon cleared of his sin. For a good while after, it is said, “Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed to this day, even though there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord?” As for the truths which Balaam spoke concerning Israel and other nations, I believe it was to show Balak and his prophet, how effectually God could turn the curse into a blessing, and confound them both. He seemed to tremble at his own prophecy when he said, “Alas! who shall live, when God does this?” (Num 24.23) Caiaphas was no great friend of our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet he prophesied great truths concerning Christ and his people.

Question 9. How far should the master of a family concern himself about the eternal salvation of his children, servants, etc.? Is it his duty to read a portion of the Scripture to them morning and evening, and pray with them as often? Should he catechise or ask them pertinent questions at proper times?

This is an important query, tending to excite and stir to a duty that is much neglected within the pale of the Christian church, and neglected by many whose profession runs very high. When vital religion, or the power of godliness is on the decline (as lamentably it is these days), those branches of practical godliness are almost the first that are neglected. One who is not very well acquainted with the professing part of mankind, but nevertheless has a just sense of the forcible principles of humanity, would be apt to think it is impossible for a parent (who is himself acquainted with the heinous nature of sin, the impartial justice of God, and the vanities of bewitching earth) to be careless about the eternal salvation of his children. Yet, with grief we see numbers of professing parents — though in every respect as careful as any for training up their children in the modish fashions of the times, and procuring fortunes for them against the time when they will dispose of them in marriage — who at the same time appear to be indolent enough in that great part of a parent’s duty, which is to inculcate moral principles on the minds of their children. This is a practice which ought to begin early, and be continued with prayer and perseverance. The neglect of it may perhaps be one visible reason why some Christians find such intolerable opposition from the conduct of their grown-up children. The laws of nature enforce an obligation on parents to care for the happiness of their children, even as they consult their own.

Solomon points man to the diminutive ant, to learn instruction from its conduct in point of industry and frugality. Following his example I think I may, without prejudice to truth, say, “O you inhuman parents, who feel little or no concern for the eternal welfare of your children, go to the beasts of the field, and learn from them a lesson of parental care.” Their highest sense of happiness is present sensation. And how careful they are that the happiness of their young be the same as their own, both in species and measure! See the maternal hen; she prefers the safety and happiness of her young to that of herself. Now, I don’t intend to act the naturalist with you. Yet from the observation before us, a sharp reproof is given to those who have tasted the sweetness of religion, and yet neglect that natural obligation to do all that lies in your power, under the Lord’s blessing, that by any means your instructions may be instrumental in rendering the happiness of your children the same in kind as your own. Now, as we are not mere naturalists, but profess to be Christians, we have a sure and certain rule by which to govern our conduct. “To the law and to the testimony!” (Isa 8.20) Therefore, let us go. For “as many as walk according to this rule, peace will be on them.” (Gal 6.16) And in this we find some things that are indispensably required of parents in behalf of their children.

I. To diligently lead them into the Christian system of morality. There are three means which God has instituted, and on which his blessings may be expected, in order to attain this.

1. Restraining them from immoral practices. 1Sam 3.12-14, “In that day I will perform against Eli, all the things which I have spoken concerning his house. When I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity which he knows; because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice forever.” And in chap. 4 we see the awful fulfilling of this denunciation of wrath. “The ark of God was taken; Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were slain.” Eli hears the dismal tidings, falls from his seat and breaks his neck. The wife of Phinehas falls into labour, and dies in child-bearing. Thus, swift destruction to an eminent family in Israel was procured by the sinful indulgence of a tender father, who in other respects was a very good man. This is a warning given for professing parents in latter times, so that they may be aware and avoid the judgments that good men fell under. As to the manner of restraint, it is threefold:

First, Cautioning them against every known sin, of which the forecited Scripture is sufficient proof.

Secondly, reproof of their errors, which is much recommended by the wise Solomon in a variety of his proverbial texts; especially, Pro 29.15, 17. “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame,” etc. Not such lifeless reproofs as that of Eli: “No, my sons, for it is not a good report that I hear of you.” A far sharper rebuke may come even from as tender a heart as old Eli’s.

Thirdly, The rod of correction, as in Pro 13.24: “He who spares his rod, hates his son; but he who loves him, chastens him promptly.” Chap. 19.18: “Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not let your soul spare for his crying.” Also chap. 23.13-14, and 29.17, etc.

2. The second institution on which the divine blessing may be expected is *instruction*. Psa 78.1-9, “I will utter dark sayings of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, by tell to the generation to come, the praises of the Lord,” etc. It is doubtless the incumbent duty of parents, as far as possible, to set before their children what in itself is morally good, or morally evil; and to prohibit the one by threatening, and enjoin the other by precept. Gen 18.18-19: “Abraham shall surely become a mighty nation,” etc. “For I know him, that he will command the children of his household after him; and they will keep the way of the Lord, doing justice and judgment.” And Deu 6.6-7, “And these words which I command you this day shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children.” Nothing, I think, appears more rationally to be the parent’s duty. Therefore, I proceed to mention the next.

3. A holy example. Neither threatening reproof nor precept is likely to be of much service, if this is lacking: 1Tim 3.4, “One who rules his own house well, having his children in subjection, with all gravity” (or holiness). And Eph 6.4, “And, you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Parents may provoke their children to wrath, or ungodliness by bad example, as well as otherwise. But I don’t need to insist on this, for none will deny this branch of duty.

II. The second duty of a parent is to enforce on the minds of their young ones, the literal knowledge of the principles of religion, as you may see from Pro 22.6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” I presume anyone will allow that scriptural and orthodox principles of religion are not the least part of *the way* that is spoken of, but rather the principal thing intended. But to further strengthen the proposition, let me point

you to Deu 11.18-19: “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way; when you lie down, and when you rise up.” That was, doubtless, a well governed family in which Timothy was educated, for he is said to “know the Scriptures from childhood,” 2Tim 3.15. It can hardly be imagined that the knowledge of the Scriptures spontaneously grew in the mind of the child Timothy, without the application of his good mother’s diligence in instructing him. Indeed, it is laid down as an express institution, in the above cited Deu 11.19 — that we teach our children the knowledge of the Scriptures, and of the principles of religion, immediately founded upon the word. And for my own part, I have had great reason to bless God that my parents knew it was their duty to observe what is divinely appointed. For the knowledge of the Scriptures, etc., which I attained in my infancy by their careful instructions, was the first and principal means of my convictions both of sin, and my of utter danger from it; and also of the grace of God, and of my interest in it. And since my first experimental acquaintance with the person, grace, and righteousness of the ever adorable Jesus, the Scripture and my knowledge of it have been like bulwarks to defend me against the abounding, grace-depreciating errors of the age in which it pleased God to cast my lot.

This knowledge of the principles of divine truth is best attained by children:

1. *Where the word is read daily in the family.* David delighted in the law, or word of God, and made it his daily study, which could not be done without reading of it; and if David himself had such veneration for the word, we are well assured he would recommend it to the love and study of his household; for it would argue a parent worse than a barbarian, who having found a goodly treasure himself, will not suffer the children of his loins to partake with him. The neglecting this part of a parent’s duty, is a forbidding little children to come to Jesus Christ; but because there is no absolute command, which in express terms enjoins the word to be read evening and morning, people of carnal minds are too apt to shuffle it off from being a duty. Surely these words, “You shall speak of them when you rise up, and when you lie down,” have emphasis enough laid upon them to enforce the practice. What can Paul mean, Eph 6.4, by training up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Surely he must intend an inuring of them to all the means of instruction, to godliness in principle and in practice. Reading of God’s word is a part of instituted worship, and God is to be worshipped in all the families of his people. Jer. xxxi. 1. And if reading the word is a part of religious worship, consequently it ought to be read daily; for God is to be worshipped daily. The Bereans are said to be more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily. Act 17.11.

2. *Where catechising of the young ones is maintained.* Whether at stated times or occasionally, there ought to be certain seasons, inviolably appointed for that great purpose. Without these, the usual reading of the word is not likely to have the same success. And blessed be the Lord, we have many excellent helps published for this purpose, with many occasional opportunities for parents to put such pertinent questions to their children or servants, as may prove very beneficial. This should be often recommended to parents, especially to mothers who have more of these opportunities than we can expect a father engaged in business to have. O! how happy it would be for our uprising generation, if less time were spent in decking and adorning the bodies of their children, and more pains were taken to impress on their minds a sense of the great things of moral and divine religion. I would not have anyone think that I suppose it is in the parent’s power to give their children the saving grace of God, without which all other things are insufficient to bring them

to glory. But I am sure that consistent principles taught to them can never be a hindrance to their receiving that grace; and when received, they will make it shine with greater lustre.

III. Praying with and for our children is indispensably necessary, in the family as well as in private. Jer 10.25: “Pour out your fury upon the heathen who do not know you, and upon the families who do not call upon your name.” Here is a dreadful curse on prayerless families. Oh that it were well understood and feared! I must acknowledge, it is with difficulty that I can persuade myself that any master of a family, who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, can on any account neglect that natural duty of family worship which, to me, appears to be the glory of a family. To be instrumental in bringing children into the world, and not to solicit the Almighty on their behalf, argues that we are worse than infidels. How will children or servants be taught to know that prayer is a part of that natural religion which all men owe to God, if parents and masters of families deny them the privilege of joining with them in it? I well know that human instruction can never teach them that prayer is the privilege of God’s saints. But surely we ought to distinguish between the peculiar privilege of saints, and that which is a moral and natural obligation upon all men. The latter may well be inculcated both by example and precept, without infringing on the liberties of the other. David says in Psa 55.17, “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.” I would recommend to the Christian reader the three sermons preached from this text by Mr. Matthew Henry. This resolution of David’s beats down that asylum which people so often fly to for shelter against condemnation for the neglect of family prayer — I mean the hurry of business. For any man who knows the world, knows very well that no man has more business on his hand, and less time to spare for either reading the word or prayer, than a prince who has the uncommon weight of national concerns upon him. But the truth is, and I’m not afraid to say it, that when the hurry of business causes neglect of family worship, it betrays a heart that is engrossed by the world, and has little if any love at all for God in it. See Dan 6.10, “Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he went into his house. And his windows in his chamber being open towards Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done since early days.” By what follows in the succeeding verse, it is evident it was verbal family prayer in which he exercised himself. See also Jos 24.15: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

From these texts of scripture, observe first, David cried aloud, which people seldom do in private prayer. Therefore it appears likely that family prayer was maintained thrice a day in his house. And Daniel’s prayer was such that people who stood outside the doors could hear supplications; and this was the cause of his being cast into the lion’s den. Secondly, Joshua resolves not for himself only, but for his whole household or family. Abraham-like, he commanded his house to follow his example. And I do not believe anybody will venture to say that Joshua did not worship God in his family. As masters of families are invested with power sufficient to command children and servants to attend the worship of God in the family, I don’t know how parents can justify their neglect of it. There is a remarkable instance of the acceptance of family prayer, in the case of Cornelius the centurion, Act 10. 30.¹ But I proceed,

IV. To observe the expediency of habituating children while still young, to all the branches of external religion. Nothing can with greater propriety be called *the way of the Lord* than this. This is what Paul means by *nurture*, and what should not be neglected. Hence we see that parents

¹ **Act 10:30** So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house (Gr. *oikos*, which can mean *abode*, or *household*), and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing. – WHG

ought to command their children and servants to attend public worship, where the word of God is powerfully preached, and where the ordinances are regularly administered. Parents ought to make it a matter of conscience, how either children or servants spend the day of the Lord; and lay such necessary restraints, or give such encouragements, as the case requires.

All that has been said in regard to children, holds true in the case of servants. And if any should doubt it, I appeal to that memorable precept given by our Lord, *Do unto others the same things you would wish others to do unto you*, Mat 7.12. Now, let masters lay this rule of equity to heart, and ask themselves, *Would you be willing to have your children live with masters who take no care of their souls?* I know you would not. Then why should you act in a such a manner, careless as to whether your servants honour God or not, provided they do their work? Doesn't it indicate that such masters are mercenary and base? Is it a sign that they love the Lord with all their heart, and delight in His service? Doesn't it evidence their disregard to divine precepts? Their love for the world? Their ignorance of the value of immortal souls? Likewise the inconsistency between their practice and profession? May not poor Christian parents insert into their prayers, "Good Lord, preserve our children from such masters"?

Question 10. Is it possible for a person to be regenerated, or born again, and yet for many years after, fear that he is not? And may a person in no way doubt his regeneration, and at the same time be an unconverted person?

Consider the mental circumstances of the regenerated person: that the remains of sin and unbelief yet abide with him, and that the best are greatly clouded with ignorance, as well as liable to the bewildering temptations of deceitful friends. Thus, we needn't think it is impossible for a regenerate person to be afraid that he never experienced that gracious work upon his mind. It is observable that in their last distress, some of Jehovah's most eminent saints have been left to call into question the truth of their interest in Christ, and consequently their regeneration. That eminent saint and minister of Christ, the Rev. Mr. Ralph Erskine, late of Dunfermline, of precious memory to the church. His sonnets and sermons will be dear to the saints while both exist on the earth. And notwithstanding some of those defects which attend the best human compositions, they fully demonstrate his skill in the Spirit's work, in regeneration and sanctification — and likewise, his doctrinal acquaintance with the person, grace, and righteousness of Christ. Add to this his eminent usefulness in the work of the ministration of the word. Yet, when he came to his deathbed, he was left in such deep desertion, that all his friends who attended to or visited him, could not persuade him from the melancholy reflection, "That after he had preached to others, he himself had become a castaway." And he continued in this sad and mournful condition till his friends thought he was past speaking. Then, when least expected, he lifted up his withered hands, and clapped them three times, shouting, "Victory! — Victory!— Victory!" I also find another northern worthy, Samuel Rutherford, expressing in his letters his fears that he was but half a Christian, or like another King Agrippa, an almost-Christian.

But I have never heard these men's Christianity called into question till eagle-eyed Sandeman arose.¹ I have no doubt he would find many faults with Paul, or Peter, if they were preachers contemporary with himself. I could name many instances of a like nature, but those two will suffice, being men who are esteemed by all the orthodox.

¹ Robert Sandeman led a heretical sect in England and America that rejected imputed righteousness. He taught that faith is a continuous activity, finally resulting in assurance of hope. This is a *faith* achieved by *works*. — WHG

My friend and neighbour, Camillus, is a good man, of exemplary piety, and good understanding in the mysteries of truth, and zealous for the honour of that God whose cause he professes. Yet I often find him downcast. The other day I went to visit him, and found him sitting alone in his parlour, very pensive. After a mutual salutation, without using any of the modern formalities that are so graceful in the esteem of some, I inquired into the cause of his dejection. He told me that he had been a professor of religion for the past twenty years, and often thought he had reason to believe he was called by grace according to the purpose of God. But now he found himself incapable of “believing that he ever had any grace at all. I immediately found myself sympathizing with my friend, and offered what advice I thought most proper, intermixed with some portions of sacred writ for the removal of his doubts. I expatiated upon the usefulness of adapting our present frame to some suitable portion of Scripture, such as, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” etc. And from there he drew such a rational conclusion as he was best enabled, till the Lord, the Spirit, might be pleased to make His witness more visible. To which he replied, “The past changes of both the frame of my mind, or the bent of my inclinations, and the general tenor of my life, have been so very manifest to me, that if I could always believe the veracity of the Scriptures, I would never doubt my interest in the promises contained in it. For I very well see the character of Christ’s sheep as described there, and I see my own spots are of the same colour as theirs. But, alas! Such is my *unbelief*, that I cannot receive the Scriptures as the word of God.”

I told him that I thought it was impossible for any reasonable person who believed that there is a God, to resist the evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures of both Testaments. And here I enumerated proofs of it, to which he replied, “What you say is true. But it is a hard matter, sometimes, to believe that there is any God at all.” I then told him that I didn’t think it possible for any man to take a view of the creation, and at the same time to say that there is no God. Our reason itself is a strong advocate for the existence of a Deity. Then he bid me to consider that there may be certain seasons in the Christian’s life in which his reason may be overpowered by temptation and sin. And for a proof of this, he pointed out Isa 59.19, where it is said, “When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.” This portion of Scripture, added to what I formerly experienced on some cloudy days, convinced me of the truth of my friend’s doctrine. For if the enemy comes in like a flood, then of necessity he will bear down all before him: our graces, and our evidences of those graces. A flood carries all before it — houses, trees, etc. And if he is permitted for a season to bear down, or suppress our graces, then why may his license not reach the understanding, and our reasoning faculties? If this is granted, as I think it cannot be denied, it accounts for why some Christians of extensive knowledge and sanctity find themselves ill set (at certain times) to keep clear of the whirlpool of atheism. And likewise, it accounts for a regenerate person being liable to those fears noted in the query.

One very fruitful nurse to these opposites of faith, is our over reliance on the Spirit’s work within us, while neglecting His word and testimony as contained in the Bible. Here a man may miss his way so far, that the very things which evidence *grace* in us, may be made a ground for such *fears*; and I believe they are frequently used in this way.

For instance, a revelation of the secret abominations of the heart, and our helplessness to deliver ourselves from such inbred vermin (for the most part), is the least from which our fears spring. Whereas, if our eye were fixed upon “thus saith the Lord” in His word, then even though we could never be joyful, purely because these abominations dwell in our heart, yet we both could and would *rejoice* that the Lord had revealed them to us. It is a certain proof that God has been here, when his light shines into our darkness, which cannot help but manifest our darkness to us. It is

his grace alone that can show us the depravity of our nature. However great the attainments of a hypocrite may be, he can never be capable of mourning over his natural propensity to sin, through the depravity of the whole man. And by the way, I apprehend that the regenerated person mourns more over this, than all his actual transgressions.

Now a word as to the latter part of the query, namely, *May a person in no way doubt his regeneration, and yet be an unconverted man?*

I would say, he may. There are three distinct classes of men who do not doubt their regeneration at all; and yet they are *all* unconverted. These are the NOTIONALISTS (represented below by *Sententius*), the LEGALISTS (represented by *Legalius*), and the profane RABBLE (represented by *Vitiamor*).

The NOTIONALIST is perhaps at as great a distance as anybody from salvation by the works of the law; and it may be that he is as zealous for Gospel truths as any in the neighbourhood. Having those good qualities, one would be apt to ask, *What does he yet lack?* The answer is, he lacks everything of value. He is like the man who has read about navigation, but was never at sea; he has the theory, but not the practical part. Yet whoever has gained the theory of sailing, reckons himself as well-skilled as the man who has sailed round the world. The notions, alas! all float in the brain, without descending into the heart.

For many years *Sententius* has sat under an orthodox ministry, so that he has now learned the theory of the gospel by rote. He can pray with great propriety of speech for half an hour, in the company of others; but not in private, unless he is apprised that somebody is watching him. He will contend vigorously for Gospel truths, provided it doesn't clash with his interests. He will talk with you for a whole day on certain subjects; but if you mention the work of the Holy Spirit on the mind, or inward holiness, you tie his tongue at once, and you may quickly discern an uneasiness attends him. You may talk against sin in general, for as long as you desire, and he will join you. But if you happen to hit the right nail on the head, and pierce his own beloved lust, then he and you will differ; otherwise, he is silent. This hour he can converse with you about divine subjects; the next hour he is fit company for anybody, whatever their discourse may be. If it is profane, he can bear it without affecting his heart; if it is in any way tolerable, he will join with them in it. He would not swear an oath on any account, but he can hear another swear without being overly disturbed. He won't get befuddled either; but he can sit with drunkards, and drink as much as they do on occasion. And yet this man has no more doubts about his regeneration than the strongest Christian in Britain. He takes it for granted that the knowledge of the doctrines is *regeneration*; and indeed, so it is, provided it is a sanctified knowledge. But *his* knowledge, alas! is barely speculative. The various doctrines dwell in a confused mass, like so many mingled phantoms in his brain. And phantom-like, they have no weight at all, either upon his heart or his conversation.

Legalius, his next-door neighbour, is quite opposite to him in regard to sentiments, so that they can never agree. *Sententius* mistakes his speculation for the fruits of regeneration; *Legalius* takes his goodness for the same thing, and despises the notions of *Sententius*, in the same way that he despises the works of *Legalius*. For you must know that *Legalius* constantly attends the word preached, and the sacrament, and he is very devout at both. Besides these, he maintains family-worship, and says many long prayers by himself. And to perfect the matter, he feeds the hungry, and sometimes clothes the naked. Add to these, his negative holiness — he never wrongs any man, was never drunk, never swore an oath in his life, and all the comfort he desires when he comes to die, is that he may have nothing to do but look back, and take a view of his well-spent life. Now,

all these good things being summed up together, who wouldn't be blamed for saying that *Legalius* is but an *almost*-Christian? It's true, he thinks of himself as a good Christian, and of a better rank than most. But I will in all events assert that he has no Christianity in him, and prove it from his motives and proposed ends. And everybody may know that it is the *end* which crowns the work.

The love of Christ constrains Christians to obedience; but it is *self*-love which constrains *Legalius* to his religious acts. If he were sure that he could always live in this world, the religious sort might be for him, for he wouldn't do it unless (with Jehu) he found his account in it.¹ Or, if he were assured that he could escape hell when he dies, he wouldn't care much whether he gets to heaven or not. A separation from the joys of heaven at death, being inseparably joined with the torments of hell, *Legalius* is obliged to stir himself in order to escape what he's afraid of. Thus, the fear of hell is what oils the wheels of his obedience. He has no eye to the glory of God, nor to the good of his fellow-creatures in any of his duties, moral or religious. He merely wants to save himself from the vengeance of eternal fire. He mistakenly believes that he couldn't live so holy as his fancy tells him he does, if he weren't regenerated.

Vitiamor lives in the same street with these two men, and is an utter enemy to both of them. He hates the notions of *Sententius*, equally with the deeds of *Legalius*. You may meet with *Vitiamor* in the exercise of every sin. And yet he doesn't so much as once question the goodness of his heart, or even of his regeneration.

Now let these three men know that their pretended faith is no more than a fancy. Their hope is rotten at heart, and it will perish in a day of testing, however confident they are now as to all being well with them. To conclude, I cannot but wonder that any person who denies the popish doctrine of Christian perfection, would be so inconsistent as to tell us that an uninterrupted assurance of an interest in the love of God, is essential to true faith.

The assurance of faith is either a grace of the Spirit, or it is not. If it is not a grace of the Spirit, it cannot be essential to Christianity. If it is a grace of the Spirit, and in an uninterrupted degree it is essential to Christianity, then by parity of reason, uninterrupted humility, self-denial, resignation, love, repentance, and heavenly-mindedness (for these are likewise graces of the Spirit) are essential to Christianity. And to then speak of *growing* in grace would be nonsense. For if one grace or virtue may be perfect, then what reason can be given for why the rest may not? Rather, while you and I are in the body, we will find our faith interrupted with unbelief; our hope with fear; our love with carnal enmity; and every other grace with its opposite.

Question 11. What advice can be given to a person grievously distressed with fears, doubts, and unbelief?

In perusing the subsequent letter, the query may be more fully understood.

“Sir — As you desired in your last letter to know the particulars of my unbelief, of which I complained in my preceding letter, you will find my compliance with your request in the following lines.

“My unbelief consists chiefly in these things: *namely*, I am in some doubt, now and then, concerning the being of God, his nature, attributes, and person; concerning Jesus Christ, his excellence and mediatorial capacity, or qualifications; concerning the Holy Ghost, regarding his

¹ Originally, “If he could be sure that he could always live in this world, they might be religious who would, for him, for he would not, unless with Jehu he found his account in it.” For *Jehu*, see 2Kng 10.15-17, 29. — WHG

immediate energy or operation on man; concerning the resurrection of the dead, the general judgment, and the certainty that all persons who ever have been, are, or shall be, will exist in either of two places or states. But my doubts about these articles are not so abiding as they are regarding the particulars mentioned below. Yet, even these grieve and distress my soul more than a little, and I fear they are the cause of the hardness of my heart. This is especially so when they attack me in prayer, meditation, etc. Though when assaulted in my addresses to God, I know they have caused me to pray more earnestly in some seasons. Then I would endeavour to conclude that they were darts from Satan, and not the disposition of my mind — yet still dreading that I may be an unbeliever.

“But the most settled and general part of my unbelief may appear by the following hints: *namely*, I cannot view Jesus Christ in that loveliness, excellence, and pre-eminence which I find him set forth in the word of truth. I cannot find sufficient ability in my soul to believe in him, wholly and unfeignedly. And how can I believe in him, without a right view of him? Sometimes I can set him forth to others in the words and light of Scripture, so that I believe many of the children of God have their very souls nourished and fed by what I say. And at certain times I myself am much delighted *in* and *with* the work. But when I retire into myself, and consider the barrenness of my soul, my strangeness to, and alienation from God, Jesus Christ, etc., I conclude that my good frame and my delight in preaching, proceed from the agreeable frame of the *people*, rather than from any good wrought *in me* — and that God will endue me with a measure of light in his word, and grant me some delight in the ministration of it, for the benefit of his *people*. And yet, not for any love or regard he has for my person; but my soul is rejected by Him. It’s like a person who is favourable and kind to a nurse while she is nursing his children, only for *their* sake; so that thereby she might be a better and more qualified nurse. But when her work is done, he turns her away, like someone who is not of his family, except for a time, and only for the purpose just mentioned. Then it will appear to all, that she was *never* of his family.

“Again, though I set forth Christ to others, yet I question whether Christ is in me and I in him. A person cannot experience true joy unless he believes! And because I cannot rejoice at the very thoughts of grace, death, the resurrection, and the life, I am afraid that I don’t truly and sincerely believe. Believers are exhorted to rejoice always; but I cannot rejoice when I ponder the most important concerns of my soul. Therefore I fear that I am not a believer. Alas! I am not able to look steadily upon Christ as my Saviour. At times, when I join with the saints in divine worship, I am pretty confident of an interest in Christ. But when I retire, I conclude that this proceeds only from a kind of heavenly gale upon them, or else upon myself, merely to capacitate me for more use and service among them. I conceive that my heart is not in the least renewed, but in the sense of Scripture, it is still a stone. I don’t question God’s everlasting love for his *people* as much as I do his love for *me*. What will it avail me to know that God is unchangeable, and that his unchangeableness is a stronghold for his people, under all their instabilities and vicissitudes, when at the same time, I cannot conclude that he has loved *me*? Aren’t there some whom he never loved? I fear that I am one of those. If he hasn’t loved me, then all the things in heaven and on earth, indeed his infinite power, cannot prevail with Him to love me, seeing that He is unchangeable in his nature.

“I don’t question the ability and capacity of Jesus Christ to save to the uttermost even the vilest and chief of sinners, so much as I question whether he will save *me*? It’s not because he *cannot* (regarding his capacity), but because he *will not*. It’s not because my sins, though great and numerous, are more than he can take away; but I fear lest he leave me to die in them. One sin is

enough to condemn, unless there is an interest in Christ. I don't so much call into question *perseverance* in grace, as I do the *beginning* of grace in me. If I were sure that the good work of grace had begun in my soul, then I think all my other doubts would flee away and vanish. But while I doubt the very beginning of the work, I cannot be confident in anything that may profit me. If I now endeavoured to resolve, believe, and conclude that I am a gracious person, and that it will be well with me in the end, notwithstanding all my fears, and thus strive to be comfortable, not giving way to doubts anymore — such confidence would but vanish at the last, to my endless horror. I endeavour to perform every private duty in religion constantly. But I fear my entire aim is to quiet an uneasy conscience. I diligently observe every public duty as a professor of the Christian religion, and as a minister of the Gospel. And yet I often fear the whole terminates in self and vain glory, so that I *have* my reward! I am acquainted with many far and near who, I believe are godly persons. And I am of the opinion that most of them, if not all, judge me to be truly a gracious man. Indeed, I am confident that they look at me as a person eminent in grace. But all of that does not amount to a proof of the power of godliness in me. Nor does it evidence the least degree of supernatural grace in my heart.

“I think that pious people who hear me preaching and praying, conclude that I am very comfortable in my soul, and that I enjoy much communion with God in the discharge of my duties. But their conjecture is no evidence that I enjoy the least grain of solid comfort. Though their favourable judgment should yield me some groundless joy for the present, if I'm not born again, it can yield me no sweet consolation at death and judgment. I am endued with some measure of light in all the doctrines of grace, which I believe are consistent according to the Scriptures. And I am enabled to express and set them forth according to the consistency of my ideas, against the oppositions made to them, both in private conference and in a more public manner. But that profits me nothing while I imagine that I am an utter stranger to every experience of saving grace in my own soul. Satan knew very well that all the doctrines of grace are remarkably harmonious; yet he is not in the least happier for that.

“I am generally persuaded that all those who believe in Christ shall be saved. But because I cannot believe, how can I be saved? The word says that perfect love casts out fear; I fear *greatly*. I cannot be confident; rather, I disbelieve. Therefore how can the love of God dwell in me? And if I don't love God, how is my state better than that of the most profligate? Though I understand something of the doctrine of grace, I understand likewise — by the same doctrine and by experience — that nothing can persuade me to believe in Christ, except the Spirit of God. And if I were to believe in Christ, I perceive that it is impossible for anyone to convince me that my faith is of the right kind, unless it is by the same Spirit. Therefore, Oh! that God would be pleased to make use of some means, some word, some instrument or instruments to resolve my doubts and dissipate my fears, for His own glory and my present and eternal comfort and advantage. Oh! *Where will such a messenger be found, an interpreter, who would be one among a thousand to me?* (Job 33.23)

“I am yours,” etc.

My advice is this: that such a person should instantly attempt his duty, to believe in Christ afresh, just as he did at first. When he cannot come to Christ as a *believer*, let him come as he is, in every way a helpless and miserable sinner. And let him do this instantly and repeatedly, as soon and as often as he is attacked with fear from his felt and future dreaded misery. There's nothing like a fresh act of faith to baffle Satan's temptation, and the suggestions of his own unbelieving heart, that he is still in a state of unbelief. If the grand enemy of souls can just get believers to reason the

point with him, whether they have believed or not — from past experiences in the time of veiled evidences, or from present experience at a time of suspended influence — he knows that he will lead them at once into an endless maze of sore perplexity. This is exceedingly to God's dishonour, and to the wounding of their souls. Let such a person then attend to the Saviour's voice, "Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other." Here such a person may see that the words divide themselves naturally into two branches; the first respects duty, which is *looking*; the second respects privilege, which is *salvation*. And the command is given to *sinners*, at the greatest apprehended distance from God by sin, at the very ends of the earth. Let such a person then — as a sin-wounded soul, an apprehended law-condemned sinner, a Satan-accused and conscience-condemned sinner too — instantly look up to that great Saviour who is exalted on high, to save to the uttermost every poor soul who looks to Him for the whole of his salvation.

For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of man was once lifted up on the cross. And now the Son of man, as the great ordinance of God for a sinner's salvation, is lifted up to his Father's throne. And in the glorious Gospel, he is to be looked to by a perishing sinner for his eternal life, just as the stung Israelite was to look to the brazen serpent for healing, by God's appointment. And having looked, let such a person instantly attempt his further duty *to believe* that he will be saved in the looking. In looking to Him, let him credit the word of truth — the royal grant of the Prince of grace, from the high throne of his everlasting salvation. For lo, he says to all and every one of them, "Be saved." The word has gone out of his mouth in faithfulness, in immutable, omnipotent grace, and he *will not*, he *cannot* reverse it. He is God, and cannot lie nor repent. Once he has spoken, it stands fast forever. His unchanging word of all-producing grace and glory, stands engaged for that soul's salvation eternally. And thus he himself, who is the faithful and true witness, tells us that the inseparable consequent of his being looked to as lifted up, is *salvation*; that "whoever believes in him," (*i.e.* looks to him to answer the type) "should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now let such a person consider whether this solemn declaration of the great Saviour isn't worthy to be credited by him, instantly and constantly, for God's glory and his own joy! Whoever or whatever, from within or without, says anything to the contrary, can he doubt this truth even for a moment, without grievous sin, without making out the God of truth to be a liar? He must, even in this, either set his seal that God is true, or make his truth the lie.

Again, let such a person observe that his looking to Christ for salvation, in obedience to the divine command, is faith's first and direct act — one to which the promise of life in the sacred word is annexed. And his persuasion of salvation comes after, as a reflex act of faith; it *is* and *ought* to be founded on the promise given to him as a believer in Jesus. The promise respects his eternal security; the act of faith, respects God's glory and his own more abundant joy. If he has now put forth the direct act, he is, and ever shall be — in God's account, and according to his written word — a true believer. And though he may not at present be conscious of the reflex act, or may be obstructed by Satan and unbelief in its exercise, this doesn't alter his state as a believer, but only robs God of that glory which the believer ought to give to his Saviour; and he robs himself of that joy which is his soul's desire, in a full persuasion of God's everlasting favour.

Having been so verbose in my answer to the query, I may say less to the letter. But, Dear Sir, take a few hints. You tell us that you "still dread you may be an unbeliever." As to this, if I understand you rightly, you take *believing in Christ*, through most of your letter, as *believing you have an interest in the Saviour*, giving you joy in his intimate favour. This is answered above, as being something that does *not* constitute your state as a believer. Rather, *believing* is the direct act of

faith in looking, coming, and flying to the Saviour, that puts a specific difference between you and all the unbelievers in the world. Indeed, Sir, in this closing part of your sentence, you preface it with your being tempted to doubt these several articles of faith. You would do well, when thus assaulted, to conclude that they are darts from Satan. But as to their “not being the disposition of your mind,” you must distinguish between your *new* mind and your *old* one. Darts from Satan are most certainly designed to wound your new mind, and to excite in your old, its native infidelity. For, even though a believer, unbelief dwells and works in you. Satan’s temptation, to disbelieve the *doctrines* of faith as well as our *acts* of faith, may more or less draw out the forces of your unbelief with respect to both. And what Satan suggests, is the disposition of your own mind, so far as it is unbelieving. But this remaining unbelief should not in any way make you doubt having the grace of faith in your heart. For if you didn’t have faith in those doctrines, your temptations to doubt them would cause you no affliction. It is your *new mind*, or your *soul*, so far as it is renewed by grace and blessed with the grace of faith, that is grieved and distressed with temptations to unbelief, and to its workings.

Again, sir, you say, “I cannot view Jesus Christ in that loveliness, excellence, and pre-eminence which I find him set forth in the word of truth. I cannot find sufficient ability in my soul to believe in him wholly, entirely, and unfeignedly. And how can I believe in him, without a right view of him?” Let me ask you, have there been *no* moments in which you have viewed Christ in that loveliness, excellence, and pre-eminence, in which he is set forth in the word of truth? If you’ve ever seen his glory when presented to your eye of faith by the Holy Ghost in the word of truth, how did you esteem him *then*? Didn’t he then appear in your view, to be transcendently excellent? A Saviour like no other? If he did, *this* was faith in your UNDERSTANDING, discerning, or seeing the Son. And how did this work upon your will? Didn’t your will bow to and choose the Saviour beheld as your Saviour, and to *be* your Saviour? If it did, *this* was faith in your WILL. And from this, didn’t your affections go out after him? Wasn’t he altogether lovely to you, or all your desires? If so, *this* was faith in your AFFECTIONS, or that faith which works by love to its all-surpassing and altogether lovely object! And have there been no moments in which the blood of Christ, in its cleansing, and pardon, and peace-procuring efficacy, has appeared sufficient to your conscience? In which his righteousness, as your desired justifying dress, has appeared all glorious? In which his fulness of sanctifying grace, unto an increasing and perfect fitness for eternal glory, appeared to you most precious and soul-satisfactory? If there has, *this* was faith in your CONSCIENCE. And so you have been blessed with a spiritual, a *supernatural* ability to believe in Christ wholly, in a whole Christ, with all the powers of your soul, so far as they are renewed. Whether you refer this faith to its direct, or its reflex act, it is true with respect to *both* — so far as they are put forth. You believe wholly in a whole Christ, with all the powers of your soul, so far as they are sanctified initially.

And yet, with regard to the unrenewed, unsanctified part which still remains in your every faculty, you may just as truly be said *not* to believe in Christ wholly, *i.e.* with all the powers of your soul as entire faculties. This is because darkness in your understanding, rebellion in your will, earthliness in your affection, and legality in your conscience, still remain. But your regenerate part being your leading principle of action, your acts of faith in that part are, in every power of your soul, on and in Christ. Hence you are denominated *a believer in him*. However unbelief in your unregenerate part may be permitted to work, this does not in the least injure your state.

You add, sir, “Sometimes I can set him forth to others in the words and light of Scripture; and at certain times I myself am much delighted with the work. But when I retire into myself, and consider the barrenness of my soul, my strangeness to, and alienation from God, Jesus Christ,

etc., I conclude that my good frame and delight in preaching, proceed from the agreeable frame of the people, rather than from any good wrought in me.” To this I reply that retiring into yourself, to consider your own barrenness, etc., is from the weakness of your faith in its reflex act, which ought to be strong *in* and *towards* the promise given to you in Christ upon your first direct act. “Abraham did not consider his own body being dead, nor the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He didn’t waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, believing that what He had promised, He was also able to perform.” And it is an excellence in Abraham’s children, *Abraham-like*, to be strong in faith, to consider the promise, and God’s power and faithfulness — not their own barrenness.

Your conclusion, sir, that your “delight in preaching Christ proceeded from the agreeable frame of the people in hearing,” I think is ill-founded. As you afterwards say, “At times, when I join with the saints in divine worship, I am pretty confident of an interest in Christ.” Now, sir, as I take it, your confidence of an interest in Christ while preaching him to others, is the ground of your supreme delight in the work. Though it is from the agreeable frame of the people in hearing, you may have a lower *additional* pleasure in being an instrument to exalt your beloved before others; and thereby to win them to faith in Jesus, and to build up those who have believed through grace on their most holy faith. And your faith in having an interest in Christ, which gives you a supreme delight in the work, is a pregnant proof that God has wrought in you faith’s good and saving work.

Once more, you say, “God will endue me with a measure of light in his word, and give me some delight in the ministration of it for the benefit of his people. And yet, not for any love or regard he has for my person. It is like a person who is favourable to a nurse while she is nursing his children. But when her work is done, he turns her away, like someone who is not of his family.” This, sir, is a temptation, and an affliction that is common to you and others of your ministering brethren. The grand enemy, though he cannot destroy the Lord’s servants *eternally*, he strives by this to destroy their joy in his service *temporally*. He well knows that what the Lord’s servants love supremely — which is Himself, and his special favour eternally. They cannot bear the thought that they must part with these without pain of extremity. No, dear sir, God has adopted you into his family as a believer. And from His love for your person, he calls you to be a servant to some of your dear brethren. And having put you among the children of His infinite favour, you will abide in his family forever, and possess with the rest, his great Self, as your vast and eternal inheritance! If you believe the Saviour’s *ability*, and doubt His *will* to save you eternally, come and test it. Come in all your discerned pollution and misery, and fall down before him, and say, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus, moved with compassion, will say, “I will, *be clean*.”

Question 12. Are the death and sufferings of Christ, or his passive obedience, all that is required for the salvation and justification of a sinner? Does his active righteousness have no part in the work, or must it be imputed? Is the imputation of Christ’s active righteousness an essential point of doctrine, or may a man be safe without it?

A most momentous and necessary query! For it tends to put the sinner on the most accurate inquiry after things of the greatest importance; *namely*, the matter and cause of his justification before God, and his acceptance by Him. These things are essential to our present and future happiness; for without them, none can be saved. The knowledge of this is prior and previous to a person’s knowing either his duty or his privilege: how to worship God, or pray acceptably, or what to believe, or what to rely on the Lord Jesus Christ for.

To suppose that the sufferings and death of Christ are all that is required for the salvation of a sinner, is to answer Paul in the affirmative, when he asked the Corinthians, “Is Christ divided?” 1Cor 1.13. Yes, to suppose this, would not only divide, but reject and cast away part of Christ as useless and of no value. This is a thought to be abhorred by every pious soul. The believer has a whole Christ for his salvation; *namely*, the life and death, body and soul of Christ — *all are his, and he is Christ’s*, 1Cor 3.22-23. Just as the law of God requires the perfection and perpetual obedience of the sinless, so it pronounces condemnation and death on the sinful. Justice will certainly inflict this sentence unless reconciliation is made, and plenary satisfaction is given. This satisfaction cannot be made except by the death of the High Priest. For without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin; and it is not possible for the blood of beasts to take away sins. Therefore, Christ has done it with his own blood — Gen 21.27; Gal 3.10; Num 35.32; Heb 9.22 and 10.4; Col 1.22; Rom 5.11.

Now, just as the *passive obedience* of Christ is absolutely necessary for washing and saving the soul from guilt, and from all the dreadful effects of sin, Rev 1.5, so his *active righteousness* is as necessary to constitute the sinner righteous before God, Zec 3.4. For as one delivers from hell, the other makes ready for, and recommends us to, heaven. In Mat 22.11, 13, Matthew presents to our view a man not having a wedding garment, with his final and miserable end: “bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness.” In Rev 19.7-8. John shows us the bride made ready, the Lamb’s wife, and he tells us that her wedding garment is “fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.” Let it be observed that this righteousness of the saints is either wrought by the saints themselves, or by some other person *for* them. It is certain that it is *not* wrought by them, because “all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags,” Isa 64.6. But Christ’s righteousness is clean and white, wrought for the saints, given to them, and put upon them, as Paul affirms in Rom 5.17: “Those who receive abundance of grace, and the gift of righteousness, will reign in life by the One, Jesus Christ.” “Just as David describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputed righteousness without works,” Rom 4.6.

Whatever God does is essential and right. And as he is declared to impute righteousness to the blessed, it must be essential and right; nor can a man be safe without it. Paul knew this right well, and therefore he “suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but dung, that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,” Phi 3.8-9. Namely, it is Christ’s righteousness imputed to us, which is wrought by God the Son, given by God the Father, revealed by God the Spirit, and received by faith as the soul’s justifying dress.

Perhaps some may object and ask, Is it natural, reasonable, and just, to suppose that one man is righteous because another is so? Or that one man is made righteous by the obedience of another?

I answer, between men in common this isn’t so, nor is it reasonable to think so. But between Christ and his church, it is most natural, reasonable, and just that it should be so, because of that federal union which subsists between them. He is the head, and they are the body, so that they are no longer two but one, *i.e. one body and one Christ, one spirit and one life* (Col 1.18; 1Cor 12.16-17; Col 3.3-4; Heb 2.11). Whatever is done and suffered by any one person, whether suffered to his head or any other member of his body, we naturally, reasonably, and very justly ascribe the suffering to his whole person. And the whole man or body bears the shame, or receives the reward, according to the merit or demerit of whatever thing is done, good or bad, 1Cor 12.25-27. Hence our sins against God fell on Christ, Rom 15.3; and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. “For as

by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, many will be made righteous," Rom 5.19.

Whatever is done by the head is justly imputed to the body. Christ, the Head, having fulfilled the whole righteousness of the law, it is therefore justly imputed to his body, the church; "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in or by us," Rom 8.4

Question 13. Is it possible for a person who is enabled to bewail his own vileness, to be assured of an interest in Christ with eternal joy; and yet not have an astonishing view of the glory, fulness, and suitableness of the Mediator, engaging and constraining him to love his Saviour and delight in His ways? And is it possible to have such an affecting view of Christ before regeneration?

In all our researches of this nature, we should sincerely aim at the glory of God, our own growth in grace, and the edification of others. When this is the case, we may and ought to pray earnestly that we may be directed in the right way; nor should we despair of a blessing. With regard to the query, I believe that God is often pleased to condescend so far as to indulge his people with a comfortable view of their interest in Christ, and consequently of their eternal glory and joy. I mean a view so clear and evident, that they may say, "My Lord and my God; I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; who shall separate," etc.¹ And yet, at the same time, the believer may have a very distressing view of his own vileness. I don't think there is a child of God on earth who doesn't have the rebellious warring law in his members, Rom 7.23. How necessary, and yet how humbling and self-abasing it is, to see the depravity of our nature! In some seasons, the blackness and beauty may appear at the same time. I am of the opinion that the beauty seldom or never appears, unless the blackness is also in view. This is a very instructive contrast to a follower of Jesus Christ. I suppose Job had a clear evidence of the favour of God, as well as the majesty of Jehovah, when he cried out, "I abhor myself!" (Job 42.6) When the apostle breaks out in that mournful manner, "O wretched man," etc., he could thank God for the victory through Jesus Christ (Rom 7.24-25). When he talks of the incorruptible glory above, he points at the corruptible here (1Cor 15.42). And when he mentions the glorious body of Christ in heaven, and the saints' likeness to them there, he doesn't forget the vile body here (Phi 3.21).

These observations appear to me very evident: *namely*, the clearer anyone sees his relation to and interest in Christ, the more he will see and bewail his own depravity.

A person may sometimes have a very oppressing sense of the prevalence of sin, and at the same time his interest in Christ is greatly clouded and called into question. Yet, at those very seasons, he may be under the saving and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

It is possible, and perhaps too common, for true believers to be in so stupid a frame, that they are little affected by a sense of sin, or by the beauty of Christ and true holiness. These are sad seasons, and much to be dreaded. For where they are of long continuance, the state of that poor barren soul is much to be lamented.

It is my certain and unshaken belief that a person can never be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so as to be assured of his interest in Christ, without — under the heart-purifying operation of the same Spirit — bitterly bewailing the remainder of indwelling sin. This heart-grief and sorrow is quite consistent with spiritual peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. I likewise believe that where this

¹ Sol 6.3; Rom 8.35.

sorrow and joy really exist, the person must of necessity have an astonishing view of the glory, fulness, and suitableness of the Mediator, of his willingness, power, and capacity to purify entirely and glorify eternally, a worm so vile in itself. This view of things will certainly engage the heart to love Jesus Christ in the most sincere and affectionate manner; and out of love, excite to yield Him cordial, grateful, and cheerful obedience, in both principle and practice. I am confident that it is impossible to experience these things in their transforming and affecting manner noted above, before regeneration. These consequences will then follow: —

- There may be assurance, or strong faith, where much corruption still remains unmortified. The Canaanites will dwell in the land. Yet this faith purifies the heart, breathes after more holiness, and takes up arms against the Canaanites.
- True faith, weak or strong, does not lead to a loose, unguarded, and licentious life.
- The faith which disposes someone to dissolute conduct is not genuine, but a most pernicious delusion.
- Those who say assurance leads to licentiousness, testify to how destitute they are of the real experience of the true grace of God.
- When a person loves Jesus Christ, and depends on Him for acceptance with God; when he hates sin, loves and follows holiness; he may conclude that he is born again.
- When a person doesn't experience these things, he may conclude that he is in a natural state, and in the broad way that leads to destruction.

Question 14. As I apprehend that the practice of family prayer is unfashionable in our days, is it because this age is so much wiser than the last? Or is it because we are less acquainted with the life, power, and comfort of that religion which is pure and undented before God?

A query on social religion in the family has already been well answered (question 9 above), where it is very justly observed that “when vital religion and the power of godliness are on the decline, this social religion in the family is almost the first thing neglected.” Reading a portion of Scripture to the household, and praying with them, is not only expedient and profitable, but an incumbent duty. This is evidently proved, I think, in that previous answer. That it is very much neglected, and by some professors, even *derided*, is a mournful truth that is so glaring and open, that it needs no proof. It may be easily demonstrated that it was much more in practice, a century past.¹ Now the query is whether the present race of professors have attained to a superior degree of wisdom above their fathers, or does this negligence proceed from some other cause? I won't pretend to justify everything in our holy, valiant, and heavenly-minded ancestors, but I dare say that they imitated that great and renowned man, Abraham, better than their successors do. For his eminence, he was styled the *friend of God*, and *father of the faithful*. He took care to erect an altar for God in his house, and he set his children and servants an honourable precedent. How well they were trained up in religion may be seen in the piety and faithfulness of his chief servant. God himself, the searcher of his heart, gives him this excellent and exemplary character: “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.” This is a glorious testimony, where the family was so numerous, and many of them were even bought with his money.

¹ That is, during the age of the Puritans, in the 17th century. — WHG

It would be well if our countrymen and others would lay this example more to heart, and endeavour to copy it. But alas! we have here, in this land of light and peace, many professing families that do not call upon God. Won't Cornelius, the Gentile officer in the Roman army, rise up in judgment against them? He was diligent in prayer, and feared God with all his house, a clear evidence of what pains he took with his family, and that his religion wasn't confined to his closet. Perhaps the prayerless masters of our families would be quickly offended if they were told that their conduct evidences they are but little acquainted with the life, power, and comfort of true religion, and that they neither fear God nor regard the souls of their families. If what is already observed in the answer mentioned above is not sufficient to convince them of their duty, then I pray that God may, in his mercy, show them the right path, and deliver them from fatal deceptions. I think it is needless to add any more in that way on this subject. However, I would beg leave to propose a few queries to three sorts of people.

I. To those who treat the point with disdain, and boldly plead that it isn't their duty to read the scripture, and to pray morning and evening with their family:

- Don't you greatly, if not entirely, neglect private prayer, self-examination, and heavenly contemplation? Then it is no wonder you neglect others.
- Do you bring up your children and servants in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Let conscience answer in the presence of God. If you do, then I ask, what method do you take with them? Consider well.
- Do you take care to make them acquainted with the word of God, with their misery by nature, and with the absolute necessity of an interest in Christ?
- Do they know very well that you pray often, and highly value the scripture? Or do they have room to conclude that you seldom, if ever pray?
- Do you oppose the practice, because you believe in your conscience that it is a sin before God to read the word and pray in your family? Or do you oppose it because you are too indolent to engage in it, and too busy about other concerns that better suit your taste?
- Do you think it is the work of Satan to promote family worship, but the work of the Holy Spirit to demolish it? Or is it the contrary?
- Can you, in the presence of God, say to those under your care, I am clear from your blood? If not, then what will be the result?

II. To those who believe it is their duty, but often (if not always) neglect it:

- Are you as negligent about the affairs of this world as you are about the very important concerns of the next? Think about it seriously.
- Do you think reading a chapter, and prayer, would greatly hinder and hurt your secular business? Do you ever find it so? Is time so precious that you cannot afford half an hour, morning and evening, for religious exercises?
- Don't strangers who come accidentally into your house, wonder that they don't find more religion under your roof? Is this adorning the gospel?
- Are you more skilful in excusing your negligence, than in reforming it? How will this turn out in the end?

III. To those who are willing to set up, and carry on this family religion, but are too bashful and afraid that they don't have sufficient qualifications for it.

- Do you earnestly pray in your closet, so that you may be enabled to discharge the duties incumbent on you as the governor and leader of a family?
- Did you *attempt* your duty? Do it again, and wait for a blessing.
- Think more about it; read more and converse more about religion with your family.
- Also, consult with solid, pious, and judicious friends who are capable of advising you.
- If it is a duty, then do it as well as you can; and you will improve.

Question 15. How may a person know that he is justified, pardoned, and accepted by God? And how many ways does God take, according to scripture, to evidence and give comfort of such justification, etc.?

[What follows is an answer to this question given by “W.D.” Immediately after, Pike will offer his own “Supplemental Answer,” to encourage those who haven’t experienced what W. D. describes here. – WHG]

I suppose the author of the query, by *justification, pardon, and acceptance by God*, would be thought to mean how these are manifested to the conscience. Just as I apprehend that all the elect of God were virtually justified from eternity, so I look at the discovery of an interest in it as a weighty and awful concern. And if this is the meaning of the gentleman who proposed the query, then it is much the same as asking, “What foundation does my soul stand on, respecting another world? On what basis are my hopes built for heaven? And, where will my soul be lodged when it leaves this earthly house, the prison of the body, and takes its flight into a world of spirits?” These thoughts have occasioned the attention of my mind, and often employ my thoughts to the utmost extent. Such will be the case with those whose search is truly ingenuous and spiritual, whose powers and faculties of soul are lively, and all directed by the unerring guidance and management of the Lord, the Spirit. For being led by this Teacher, every sensible sinner has recourse to the Spirit for such manifestation, etc.

For a person to know that he is justified, pardoned, and accepted by God, is a thing of great importance, though it is a privilege that perhaps is peculiar only to some of God’s people; or only a comparative few of them enjoy the comfortable sense of it. Among others, it is one of the greatest secrets of the Lord, revealed only to those who fear him, Psa 25.14. It’s a secret that can never be purchased by any creature whatsoever; a secret that no natural man (as such) can ever be acquainted with; a secret that is not only totally hidden from the men of this world, but sometimes hidden for a season from the favourites of the Lord — his own dear children, whom he esteems as His jewels, and who will be evidently so in the day when He makes them such, Mal 3.17. It’s a secret that will ever employ the saints in their Father’s house, while the glorious displays of the greatness of the grace will demand the attention and excite the wonder of the angelic tribes.

There are but few of the Lord’s family who are satisfactorily acquainted with it. This appears from their many great and bitter complaints, the frequent distresses they are in, the sinkings of soul that they labour under. With David, in another case, they are sometimes heard to say with uncommon regret, “O my God, my soul is cast down within me,” Psa 42.6. That had been my case. Through divine goodness, having been delivered from that burden, I can therefore speak of it by experience. I found that it is one thing to be justified, pardoned, and accepted (which are the words of the query), and another thing to know that this mercy belongs to *me*. Justification makes certain the safety of the people of God — that they can never perish, nor miscarry of everlasting happiness. Knowing that this mercy belongs to them, is the foundation of their present comfort under all their trials in the wilderness. It is what enables them, by the Spirit of the Lord, to always triumph in Christ. As for gaining the *knowledge* of this justification, pardon, and acceptance with

God, it is through believing in Jesus Christ for salvation, which a soul could not do if the mercy did not belong to him, and if it were not *given on behalf of Christ*, Phi 1.29. Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved, Mar 16.16. He that believes has the witness in himself, 1Joh 5.10. And as the apostle fully expresses it in Act 13.39, “by him (Christ) all who believe are justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” From this it is evident (and an inquiring soul may rest satisfied in the truth of this) that whoever believes in Christ, whether he is a Jew or Gentile, as his faith fastens upon and lays hold of Christ, he is justified; his sins are pardoned; he is accepted by God.

The first part of the life of young Christians is mostly made up of *sight*. They have sensible enjoyments from the Lord; and here their souls are filled with raptures. They can bless and praise the Lord, and exult in him; they can tell others what he has done for their souls. Here their mountain stands strong, and they can do much for Christ under such divine influence, and with Peter, they think and say, Lord, “I am ready to go with you, both into prison, and to death,” Luke 22.33. They find no duty hard or difficult; they can pray with much fervour and enlargement of soul; their mouths are filled with arguments at the throne of grace; the Spirit of the Lord is now a Spirit of freedom and liberty. They are not shut up as in later seasons, but are entertained with the pleasing beauties of a risen and exalted Redeemer. At these times they can trust the Lord, and are ready to think that this is all *faith*, and that they are strong in this grace — when at the same time, this is instead a sensation arising from the evident manifestation of the divine presence.

Now, when these are withdrawn from them, there is little or no exercise of faith to be found. Their joy, hope, and consolation seem (to them) to be lost for awhile. In fact, when this is the case, some of them are ready to think that their Christ, pardon of sins, and heaven are all gone. But faith believes, trusts in the Lord, lives upon Christ and the fulness of grace that there is in him. Faith walks with him in darkness; it lives upon what it will one day enjoy, and depends upon him when he hides his face — believing the word and promises of God, his faithfulness to perform them, the certainty of the covenant of grace, and the respects in which it is well-ordered. Here the statutes of the Lord (in the view of faith) become *the songs of the saints in the house of their pilgrimage*, Psa 119.54. I would not be understood to think lightly of the presence of Christ, nor write anything diminutively about it. I have enjoyed the happiness of it in my own soul, and prize it above all the world, and all things in it, even ten thousand worlds. I know nothing that can be compared with it, having found it my strength, hope, and joy, my meat and drink, the life of my soul, and the substance of vital godliness. But I speak of these things in this way to show the mistaken notions of young Christians at such seasons, and how apt we are to take for a life of faith, that which is rather the sweet emanations of divine love wrought in the soul by the Spirit of Christ, in a special and sensible enjoyment of his presence.

Properly speaking, this is *sight* more than *faith*, though the latter is a concomitant that will always attend it in our present state. Nor can sight exist where faith is wanted, except in imagination only. For faith must first be seated in the soul (as to its habit at least) before it can be known that there is sensible communion with the Lord. For it is after believing, that the soul has holy joy, comfort, peace, and consolation, and the visits of Christ in a saving way. To suppose the contrary would appear as ridiculous as it is blasphemous, unscriptural, and diametrically opposite to the experience of all the redeemed of the Lord. At times, they enjoy not only his sensible presence, but a persuasion of faith in him, each of which are pre-libations, or foretastes of the best things, and by which a soul may know, or may fairly conclude that he is justified, his sins are pardoned, he is accepted by God, etc.

It is true, and I grant that there may be that faith in the soul that is of a right kind, called “like precious faith,” 2Pet 1.1, and “the faith of the operation of God,” Col 2.12, and “faith which works by love,” Gal 5.6, and “faith that purifies the heart,” Act 15.9, etc. And at the same time, it may be difficult for the subject of it to determine whether he has it or not. The thing may appear dubious and doubtful to the soul, for lack of a close application to the word, the nature of God’s dealings with those he brings to glory, and the various methods he uses in effecting it. This is not to be wondered at, where corruptions work strongly, and frequently bubble up, and there is but a small measure of faith. Most of God’s people at their first awakenings find it so, even though the genuine effects of it as a living faith, are evident and satisfactory to other saints who have tasted and savingly handled these things themselves. They find them agreeably recorded in the sacred writings, and they can make out their title to heaven from them, as those who believe, are justified, have their sins pardoned, and are accepted by God.

But let me make the thing more evident, as to my own experience of it, and respecting the author of the query — if the Lord is pleased to bless it to him, or to any other of God’s people. By faith in Christ, I can be assured that I am justified, my sins are pardoned, and I am accepted by God. And I apprehend that this faith is of a right kind, because I have been enabled to stake my soul on Christ. I find that none who ever did this perished, or were lost and cast away. The case of the soul who is brought to do this, is like that of the four lepers mentioned 2Kngs 7.3-4.

There were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, “Why sit we here until we die? If we say, ‘We will enter the city,’ the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the host of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.”

So the soul that is spiritually enlightened from above, views himself as a leper *by sin*. He is a nauseous and filthy creature in his own eyes, in a deplorable state and condition, undone as to any help in himself, and for the present, he is more or less ready to conclude that he must be shut out of the camp of God forever — till he has faith given to him. Upon the declaration of the Gospel in its power, he looks to Christ by this faith; and he *runs where the righteous run, and finds safety*, Pro 18.10. He says, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean,” Mat 8.2. The Lord is pleased to say more clearly and particularly to some, as he did to his disciples, Joh 15.3, “Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you.” And what was this if not the word of faith, the word of sanctification, the word of hope, the word of peace, and the word of pardon, brought home to the soul by the Spirit of the Lord, who removes the burden of sin. This is true even though the soul may experience sad declensions and backslidings. And with David, under a sense of his sin, he may be heard to cry to the Lord to restore him to the joy of His salvation, and to uphold him with his free Spirit (Psa 51.12). Faith enables the soul to believe that God abides faithful, and that He cannot deny himself. And thus it enables him to depend upon this — that he is justified, his sins pardoned, and he is accepted by God, etc.

Conformity to Christ in measure with Gospel obedience, will ever be found where the new creature is found, and this is a solid foundation for heaven. The apostle Paul lays it down for granted as an undeniable maxim, that “to whom you yield yourselves as servants to obey, you are his servants, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness,” Rom 6.16. I would conclude from this, that yielding obedience to someone, proves that the person so yielding this obedience, is the other’s servant. And this obedience ever follows upon venturing our soul upon Christ. But to make it appear more plainly, I will give the reasons why I conclude that I have ventured *my* soul upon Christ.

I. I conclude that I have ventured my soul upon Christ, or placed it into his hands, as I have seen my need of him. A conviction of the need of Christ is absolutely necessary, and it is prior to a sinner's venturing upon Him. Without this, it is impossible to do. The prodigal, when he is convicted of this and of his own imbecility, cries out, "I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father," Luk 15.17-18. "Those who are healthy don't need a physician, but those who are sick," Mat 9.12. And the Spirit of Christ reveals this to the soul, not the law. That may show a man his misery and there leave him, without pointing out to him any remedy; but it cannot show him a Christ, nor lay before him the need that he has of an interest in Him. This is the proper work of Christ, revealed to the soul by His Spirit, which searches all things, even the deep things of God, 1Cor 2.10. He "convinces of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment," Joh 16.8.

Nor does a saving or spiritual conviction, wherever it is, leave the soul without hope under a view of his miserable state, wretched and undone, as a legal or natural conviction does. Great sorrow for sin is not always a proof that the heart is right with God. It may be found where there is no grace of a saving nature, no love for God, nor delight in him, nor spiritual life in the soul. Such was the sorrow of Cain, Judas, and others. Fear of punishment may fill the mind with horror and terror, and make a man formally serve God. But the reason is fear of the devil; and so his sorrow leaves him on the verge of hell, in the very suburbs of damnation. His conscience not being cleansed or purged by faith in the blood of Christ, it must necessarily be evil. And so it may haunt him from place to place, testifying that he is not only a sinner, but a great one too. And so, remaining a stranger to the sanctifying work of the Spirit of the Lord upon his soul, and having no believing views of Christ, this will sooner or later make him conclude that his case is desperate, notwithstanding his great degree of sorrow, and it will allow him no relief.

II. I conclude that I have ventured my soul upon Christ, because I have been enabled to confide in Him, even in seasons of darkness, both in providence and as to the frame of my mind. And I have trusted him with it and all its concerns, agreeably to what the Psalmist declares, "And those who know your name, will put their trust in you," Psa 9.10. Here I have found myself *immovable, like mount Zion*, Psa 125.1. Nothing could move me from my hold and confidence. Here I could not only challenge, but *face* death and hell, and all the powers of darkness. Here I saw my soul steadfast, and well-anchored amidst the storms and billows of a fluctuating state and tempestuous world. Here I could meet all opposition, and see every mountain of apparent and supposed difficulties, *become a plain*, Zec 4.6-7. Come trials, temptations, evil tidings, or death, my heart was fixed; *I wasn't afraid of them, trusting in the Lord*, Psa 112.7.

III. I conclude that I have ventured my soul upon Christ, having been enabled to take Him as a gift of grace, the gift of God, for my whole and complete salvation. Here I saw the emptiness and insufficiency of all things but Christ. And everything in this world was so many nothings and dross, when compared with Him. I heartily approved of him, and him only, as God's way of saving sinners through the fulness of his offering, and his satisfaction of divine justice. These things I have mentioned in place of many others. And from these I conclude that I have ventured my soul upon Christ, and that I am justified, my sins pardoned, and my person accepted by God.

But here are six things, among others, that I was greatly taken with in Christ.

1. With his supreme ability as a Saviour: that he was *able to save to the uttermost, all who come to God by him*, Heb 7.25; that no sin or iniquity whatsoever, could be any bar in his way; he *speaks in righteousness, mighty to save*, Isa 63.1; and is called the *Mighty God*, Isa 9.6. He is capable and in every way qualified and fitted for so great an undertaking — mighty, without any aid from men or angels — mighty to fulfil, make good, and perform, all that he has promised — mighty

beyond all our mighty and potent enemies, whether men, devils, or corruptions. And this is beautifully implied in every sensible sinner being brought to Him. In the language of the disciples, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" Mat 8.25.

2. I was greatly taken with the call of Christ, *not in an outward way, but in an inward and spiritual way*, Rom 2.28-29. (I sat long under the means of grace, and was externally called in this way. But I knew nothing of the power of grace, till the Lord was pleased to work it.) I found my heart growing warm towards the Lord. This was the day of His power, when he made me willing to relinquish all my former hopes and righteousness. I was enabled to hunger and thirst after the bread and water of life, and nothing but Christ, and him alone, could satisfy my soul. I found him to be my rest, and I seldom went to the throne of grace without enjoying His presence. My heart was drawn forth, and my soul *like the chariots of Aminadab*, Sol 6.12; and the more there were of my joys and comforts, the more my soul was humbled in me. I was enabled to praise the Lord, to bless the Lord, and to *lift up my hands in his name*, Psa 63.3-4.

This was a time of love manifested and revealed. And such was the indulgence of the Lord, that in some seasons it was but to ask and have. I drank deeply of that love that surpasses knowledge; and I must say, it was sometimes almost filled to the brim. And from this I began to conclude that I would never know darkness nor carnality anymore. For the Lord manifested his *everlasting love, by drawing me with loving-kindness*, Jer 31.3, as the effect of His early regard for me. There were no previous preparations nor qualifications in my soul prior to this, that I could ever find. Nor would I have ever desired Christ or loved him, had he not first set his desire upon me, and loved me, Sol 7.10, 1Joh 4.19. And His making it known by calling me, is an undeniable evidence of my relation to him. As the apostle expresses it: "Moreover, whom he predestined, he also called; and whom he called, he also justified, and whom he justified, he also glorified," Rom 8.30. So that it is plain from this portion of Scripture, that a person who is thus called by special grace, may work out that he is justified, his sins are pardoned, and that he is accepted by God.

3. I was greatly taken with Christ, in his taking possession of my heart. In consequence of this, and not before, was I enabled to *give it to him, and observe his ways*, Pro 23.26. The heart of man must first be touched, opened, and possessed by the Spirit of Christ, before he can make an entire and solemn surrender of it into the hands of the Lord. Whoever is enabled to do this, not only performs it by a supernatural power, but may assure himself of his sonship with Christ. Whoever impartially, and without mental reservation, gives his heart to Christ, must be an heir of Christ.

4. I was greatly taken with Christ in his being precious to my soul; and I find this to be among the discriminating characters of those who truly believe. The apostle Peter tells *those who believe, Christ is precious to them*, 1Pet 2.7. Here I apprehend that my hope for glory is made steadfast. And when Christ has been remarkably precious to my soul, I longed to be at home, and *wished for the wings of a dove, that I might fly away, and be at everlasting rest*, Psa 55. 6. Nothing would have been so welcome to me then as death. But alas! this has not always been my experience since I have known the grace of God in truth. In some seasons, I have shuddered and trembled at the thought of it. But since the Lord has weighed out to me fresh trials and afflictions, and given me His presence when I'm in the furnace, I have been more established in the covenant of grace. Afflictions have been sweet seasons to my soul, having enjoyed the Lord in them. They have been his candle to reveal my darkness, and to bring me into his light. Never has Christ been more precious to my soul than now, nor his word sweeter and more savoury. I have now found him to be my safe rest; indeed, "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," Isa 32.2. He has taken my burdens off my shoulders, and spoken peace to my soul in the blood of the everlasting covenant.

My heart has been so upon Christ, my treasure, that I could scarcely think about anything else. My meditation on him was sweet, and his company was the most entertaining to me; sleeping and waking, still with the Lord; a sweet, large, and composing portion to my soul. Oh! by what tongue can these joys of the saints be expressed?

5. I was greatly taken with Christ, being my King as well as Prophet or Priest. And I desire that he would always sway the sceptre in my soul, and allow no rival there. I delight in his laws, his government and rule, and not only in the pleasing prospect of his driving out and destroying all my inbred enemies at last, but in his power in subduing and keeping them under at present — not allowing them to reign or domineer. When corruptions sensibly rise from the old corrupt fountain, and begin to stir themselves, it is the grief and trouble of my soul, and I beg the Lord to keep them down, and keep me watchful.

6. I was greatly taken with contentment in Christ, and with all his dealings, having been enabled to choose him as my whole and entire salvation. A view of his interest in Christ tends to reconcile the mind of a child of God to all His dispensations; teaches the soul to think and say that all is well with him; that his heavenly Father is wise in heart, and that his wisdom as well as his power is concerned for him; and that He stands ever engaged to bring good out of every apprehended evil. Can it be supposed that a spirit of discontent can prevail with a believer when he is under the witnessing of God's Spirit, and there is no intervening cloud between God and his soul? When he is satisfied of having a covenant relation with Him? And the certainty of his person being secured in Christ from everlasting, he can read his name written in heaven; and by faith, he can see it written on the breastplate of Christ, and that he is "graven on the palms of his hands" (Isa 49.16). He is "set as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm." (Sol 8.6) And his best things are seated on high beyond the reach of every adversary. Ask the man who has known this, how it was with him under such enjoyments. He will tell you he was enabled to submit cheerfully to the will of God, and thought (for the time) no evil about His dealing with him in the affairs of this world, but that He has done all things well. "I was content," he says, "with Christ my portion, if I had been deprived of even bread and water — so long as I have the bread and water of life, this satisfies my soul. The fountain of Christ is open and I have enough, even if the springs of all creature comforts were to be dried up. Here I am content with adversity in afflictions, and I can welcome the cross, shame, and disgrace for Christ. And with a thankful heart, I can bless the Lord for these mercies; for I esteem them as such."

Thus have I related a little of my experience in this affair, as I thought about the query, which if the person who proposed it cannot exactly fall in with it, if he can make out his faith in Christ; his trusting in him alone for salvation; his venturing upon him; his finding him precious to his soul; his being called by efficacious grace; his having the genuine fruits and effects of it, or the things which accompany salvation; his being a sharer of the love of God as it is free, rich, discriminating mercy, and of His good pleasure, which he proposed in himself, Eph 1.9, called *his choice in Christ before the foundation of the world*, Eph 1.4; an *ordination to eternal life*, Act 13.48; an *appointment to salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1The 5.9; *the foundation of God and his seal*, 2Tim. 2.19; a *setting apart*, Psa 4.3; his *having mercy on whom he will have mercy*, Rom 9.18; *the favour that he bears toward his people*, Psa 106.4; *an engraving on the palms of his hands*, Isa 49.16 — If so, he may warrantably conclude that he is justified, his sins pardoned, and he is accepted in the Beloved. — W. D.

A Supplement to the foregoing Answer.

When I take my pen in my hand, it's not because I am inclined or disposed to censure Mr. W. D. No, I approve of his doctrinal sentiments. What he has delivered of his experience, I look upon as agreeable to Scripture. And I love to read the experience of solid, savoury, and pious persons. My soul has often been affected and benefitted by it. And I have read what he has written with a good deal of satisfaction. I am glad to see it, and I hope it will be of use to others. But I trust it will give no offence if I declare it to be my opinion, that the experience of no person on earth can be a common standard for another. The sacred Scripture alone is, and *ought* to be, the infallible touchstone. I apprehend that the experience of saints differs just as their faces differ. There are differences of administrations and diversities of operations. Yet, as the good work in all is begun and carried on by the Holy Spirit, it is unreasonable to suppose that the experience of every believer will, and *does* agree in the main part; just as there is great similarity in every man's countenance, notwithstanding all the differences. I am fully persuaded that many of the Lord's people, while they are young in years, and younger in graces, are warm in their affections, zealous in their profession, fervent and frequent in prayer, comfortable in their soul, and circumspect in their conduct. In short, their love for Jesus is strong; they love his name and person; they admire his early and unchangeable love, the freeness, sufficiency and riches of his grace; they delight in his ordinances and truths; they rejoice in his salvation; nor are they afraid or ashamed of his cross. So they may answer in most particulars to what Mr. W. D. has observed. But then I am just as fully persuaded that many of the flock of Christ, though beloved, chosen, redeemed, and called, have very different experiences at the beginning of their spiritual pilgrimage. Here I design to be so free as to give a short sketch of my own experience, hoping and praying that it may be of some use to the weak and hindmost of the travellers through the wilderness.

It is more than twenty years since I began to be seriously thoughtful about a future state; though from my very infancy, I had been kept from open vice and gross immorality. For this I will be very thankful while I have breath. Yet I had no relish, but rather an aversion to true religion and real piety. I was not without some convictions now and then; yet they were not abiding. Thus I spent the first twenty years of my time to very little purpose in the world, and I have more than once looked at it as so much precious time lost. I remember well, that the conversion and visible alteration in the life and conversation of some young people of my age and acquaintance, sensibly and closely affected my mind, so that I was brought to think what would become of me. I soon after began to pray, hear, read, think, and converse about religion with more relish, feeling and concern than in times past. And of course, I soon forsook my former unprofitable company and other vanities of youth. So there was a change wrought in me, almost imperceptible by steps or degrees. But notwithstanding all this, my comforts were not many; and my joy was not great. But my love for Jesus Christ was (in my apprehension) exceedingly weak; my affections for heaven were very languid; my heart very hard; and I was generally very straitened and dull in prayer. Indeed, I have often greatly questioned my state, from my barrenness in prayer.

And I did that for many years, thinking, "If I were a child of God, then surely I would have more freedom and liberty to speak to my Father." After awhile I did partake of the Lord's Supper, under a persuasion of duty; but still, I was little affected by it. My discouragements were numerous in every way. Yet I was by some means or other enabled to continue in the path of duty, though I greatly doubted whether anything of a real saving work was begun in my soul. When I would read or hear the experience of others, expressed in much the same manner as Mr. W. D. does his. And I found so little of it in myself, that my doubts would greatly increase. But still I went on feebly

praying, and faintly hoping. Many times I heard or read of others crying out and complaining in Job's words, "that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his lamp shone on my head; and when by his light I walked through darkness, just as I was in the days of my youth." But that was never my complaint to this day. My longings and desires were for better times, more life and light, stronger love, warmer zeal, clearer evidence, and sweeter comforts than I had ever yet been indulged with.

Thus I continued for almost twenty years, though not without some ebbs and flows. My deadness and formality in private prayer continued for about twelve years or more of that time. Few would believe it, I think, if I were to relate the particulars. Yet through it all, there was something of the savour of religion kept up in my soul, and I dared not forsake the little I had. I prayed then, in my weak way, for many things. But my unbelief in prayer was very prevalent, for I hardly expected to receive what I prayed for; rather, I often concluded (or at least feared) that I never would. How often did I doubt in prayer? Poor shattered prayer indeed! I had many causes for complaint, but little heart to do it. I found more ability, by far, to trust God with my temporal concerns (which were so weighty), than to lay hold of Jesus Christ and all his fulness, or to be satisfied about my eternal state. Whether God had undertaken for me, was the great question. Nevertheless, I was certainly like the four lepers at the gate of Samaria. I was resolved to depend on Christ, come whatever might follow. If I must perish, I chose to perish waiting upon and longing for Christ, rather than die in a course of wilful rebellion against him. *Though he should slay me* (Job 13.15), yet I would wait and hope to the end. Thus for many years I had but little comfort; yet neither was I despairingly distressed with terrifying fears. I was not easy and unconcerned, even if I was too lifeless in my soul.

I think it's needless to proceed to relate my own barrenness any further. No matter how few of the Lord's people tread the same paths, I must still make this observation: that in all this time, there was an increase rather than a decrease in life and religious favour, when I consider things in general. So I never long wished for my former experience; rather, I wanted to press forward, even though I was so weak and heartless. Surely the glory of *all* my salvation is to be rendered to God, and I greatly desire that it should be.

At this time I will not produce any argument to prove that I am justified, etc. I look at the way mentioned by Mr. W. D., as safe and good for those favoured with the same experience as that mentioned by him. But I believe there are others who, when they read the comfortable experience of good men, are so discouraged and cast down, that they are ready to conclude that they are not justified, that their sins are not pardoned, and that they are not accepted by God, because they don't feel in themselves what they hear others have felt and enjoyed. This greatly daunts them, and they fear to think seriously about death and an awful eternity. They don't know what they do. It is chiefly for the sake of those weak brethren of mine, that I write this. Therefore, I beg their leave to show my opinion on this important point.

You weak and fearful believer: — if you are so concerned about your future state and eternal happiness, and your mind is enlightened so far as to perceive the vileness of sin, and to bewail your own vileness because of it; if you see the suitableness of Christ, as a Redeemer, to deliver you from all the dreadful curses of a good and holy law, which you lie exposed to for sin; if you are brought to depend upon Christ with all your soul, for your whole salvation; if the little hope in Christ which you have humbles you, and encourages you to obedience; if your soul longs after perfect holiness; and if the thought of the probability of receiving salvation freely by grace through Jesus Christ gives you some ease and satisfaction, and animates you to pray for purity of heart

and life, etc. — then my dear friend, *if this is your case*, I am confident to say to you, “Son, or daughter, be of good cheer, your manifold sins are forgiven you.” (Mat 9.2)

But I think I hear the good man or woman, with a trembling heart, ready to answer, “Alas! My eternal salvation is so weighty a concern, that I don’t know how to take your word for it.” I can palpably feel that with you. However, *still go on*, as I did. I can tell you that, through great mercy, I have for some time been much better satisfied about the state of my soul, than in years past. For several years I believed certainly that the Lord might be pleased, at some time or other, to administer comfort to such unworthy dust as me. Even so, I believe and hope that I may yet be favoured with clearer views of things by far, than I have now, before I leave the wilderness. Lord, help me to be humble, and to go forward leaning upon Christ, and to take poor weak believers with me by the hand. Therefore, my friend, *look up*, and don’t be dejected. *There is yet hope in Israel concerning you* (Ezr 10.2).

But further, one part of the query above is this: *How many ways does God take, according to Scripture, to give evidence and comfort of justification*, etc. It has already been observed that there are diverse operations by the same Holy Spirit; and I believe that may be safely applied to the present case. But among writers, two more general ways are noticed: namely, by the *direct*, or else by the *reflex* act of faith.

The *direct act* is looking directly to Christ, as set forth in the Gospel, in the fulness and freeness of his grace — in his capacity, ability, compassion, and readiness to receive poor sinners, however much they are pressed down with their guilt, and a wounding, humbling sense of their vileness, helplessness, unworthiness, rebellion, etc. This, I believe, was the case with the thief on the cross, the jailer, and with a great number of those whose conversion is mentioned in the New Testament. And I am persuaded this is the case with many to this day. The Gospel comes in power, under the special influence of “the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” (1The 1.15) They are enabled to believe the Gospel report, and to lay hold of it as their own precious portion, and that is done with joy and thankfulness. This blessing has been afforded to many soon after their first enlightening, as were the Thessalonians and others. But the Lord is pleased to work in this powerful manner upon some who have been under real soul-concern for a considerable time. These persons do not consider and depend on former experience, as much as they depend on the Lord’s present dealings and free promises, the ability they find in themselves to believe in Christ as their own Saviour and precious Redeemer, the warmth of their affection toward him and his ways, and their love for his cross, so far as to despise any shame on his account — being comfortably and safely persuaded of their justification, that their sins are pardoned, and that they are accepted by God.

The *reflex act* of faith, is looking back and seriously considering the dealings of God with the soul in times past; namely, what convictions have been experienced, what impressions have been made on the heart, what light received in the understanding, what change in the will and affection, and what alteration in the mind. So, upon an impartial search, they find that old things have passed away in great measure, and all things wear a new complexion. Therefore they conclude that they are new creatures. They say with Manoah’s wife, “If the Lord didn’t intend my salvation, he wouldn’t have wrought these things upon my heart.” (Jdg 13.23) If Christ hadn’t loved me, and given himself for me, I would never have loved him as I do; if I didn’t have some real love for him, I would never be so uneasy that I don’t love him more, nor jealous lest other objects steal my affections; if I hadn’t been a child of God, my experience could not agree in so many particulars with that of Old and New Testament saints. They loathed themselves; bewailed their sinfulness; hated vain thoughts; sometimes refused to be comforted; could hardly speak or look up for their

iniquities so prevailed; they had such a quick sense of sin, that when they would do good, evil was present; the flesh lusted against the holy wishes, desires, and longings of the spirit; and where the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak, so they couldn't discover how to do what was good.

I find these particulars, and many more of the same nature, recorded in Scripture and expressed by eminent saints as their own experience. Thus, upon comparing notes, the believer will soon agree with former saints in his complaints. He can also join with them in prayer, saying, "Create in me a clean heart; renew a right spirit within me." "O that my ways were directed to keep your statutes!" "Open my eyes," etc.¹ By this close and impartial reasoning, and comparing themselves with Scripture, many come to enjoy a comfortable view of their justification, pardon of sin, and acceptance with God. I look at this as a safe and Scriptural way. The apostle puts believers on their diligence, so they might enjoy the comfort of their election in life, and leave the world in full joy. The first epistle of John is full of this kind of reasoning and concluding.²

Now, in the direct and reflex act of faith, it is the Holy Spirit alone who can enable us to believe rightly, for it is his proper work to comfort and seal. And I am persuaded that He condescends to seal in both these ways, and I believe he often joins them together.

Whoever is enabled to believe in the *direct* way, casting himself wholly and immediately upon Jesus Christ and his fulness, if he lives for any time after in the world, he should ensure that his character and conduct correspond to Scripture, lest in the end he be under a delusion, for Satan is crafty. Some have thought their faith of this kind was right, when alas! they resembled too much those mentioned in the epistle of Jude, 1.4, 8, 10-12, etc.

Again, whoever receives comfort from the *reflex* act of faith, should by no means neglect directly looking to Jesus for justification, pardon, and acceptance. Otherwise he will be grievously perplexed, and a legal spirit will steal in. The believer should be like those "living creatures full of eyes before and behind." (Rev 4.6)

Obj. Shouldn't a person always have some particular promise impressed on his soul with a particular energy, before he can receive any comfortable and safe evidence of his justification — such as, "I have blotted out your sins," or some promise of that kind? (Isa 44.22)

Ans. Many have had comfortable and satisfactory evidences that way. But perhaps others have rejected good evidences, because they were not brought to them in the same manner. If a person finds his heart enabled to depend upon Christ, and has a willingness to devote himself to His service, yielding himself to the Lord, then upon the whole scope and authority of the gospel, I think his foundation is quite safe, and that he should not fear to receive comfort. But we may be sure that Satan may, and often does, apply Scripture to deluded minds, in order to secure them more and more in their delusions. See his bold attempt on the Lord of life and glory, in Mat 4.6.³ I think little better of that passage in 2Kngs 9.36, and 10.10.⁴ We are not always to depend upon

¹ Psa 51.10; 119.5, 18.

² See 1John 2.3-10; 3.3, 10, 14, 17, 24; 4.12, 13, 19; 5.2, 3, 13.

³ **Mat 4:6** "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In *their* hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

⁴ **2Kngs 9:36** Therefore they came back and told him. And he said, "This is the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'On the plot of *ground* at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel.'

2Kngs 10:10 "Know now that nothing shall fall to the earth of the word of the LORD which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the LORD has done what He spoke by His servant Elijah."

particular Scriptures brought to our mind, unless they incline us to love Christ; for the Holy Spirit always leads us to Jesus. If the Scriptures that are brought to mind, and fastened on our mind, render our hearts tender toward the glory of God; if by their influence we are made more humble, holy, and resigned to the will of God, and disposed to deny our self-will, and to take up the cross and follow Christ — then we may trust that those Scriptures are applied by the good Spirit. Likewise, if we find in ourselves this disposition, based upon the general *scope* of Scripture, then it may serve the same end.

Now, on the whole, these observations seem to me to be true, namely:

- That some of the people of God have great comfort soon after regeneration, even though afterwards much darkness and gloominess may prevail. This observation should excite comfortable persons to be very watchful and humble.
- That others of the heirs of glory may be very weak at the beginning, and continue heartless and dejected for a long while — and yet be growing in grace. So that, in the process of time, they are filled with joy and peace in believing.
- That those who enjoy a comfortable measure of evidence should not despise the weak and feeble, and conclude that they are graceless because their fears and doubts are so many. *Those who stand, should take heed lest they be left by God, and fall.* (1Cor 10.12)
- That those who are much in the dark about their future estate, and often in great fear about it, should not be overly dejected and cast down — but let them lift up their heads, trust in Christ, pray to God, consider the nature of His promises, and hope for better times. “Others out of weakness were made strong,” and so, why not they? (Heb 11.34)
- That persons may be greatly straitened in prayer, and other religious exercises, and yet be new creatures.
- That if many believers have experienced much more than I ever did, I shouldn’t conclude from this, that I am an unbeliever. If I now experience what I did not formerly, why may I not hope that I may yet experience much more than I do now? The possibility should excite and animate me to prayer, hope, belief, and the diligent use of means.
- That some may well remember the time and means of their effectual calling; but the work upon others has been so gradual that they cannot point out either. But if a person is enabled to conclude that he is called by the grace of God, then he should give the glory to the Author of his salvation, and not perplex himself about times and seasons.
- That every believer should pray for and expect clear and comfortable evidence of his interest in Christ, and to have more spiritual joy.
- That the Holy Spirit has diverse ways to seal believers; but according to Scripture, all lead to Christ and a holy life. “Whoever names the name of Christ, should depart from iniquity.”

A Second Answer.

In this judicious and useful query, I don’t doubt that the pious inquirer intended to put the sin-burdened and disconsolate soul upon the most effectual and speedy method for receiving peace and consolation. And nothing is so conducive to the relief and comfort of an awakened conscience and nearly *despairing* sinner, as proof and evidence of his justification, pardon, and acceptance with God. But to come to the knowledge of these things, it is essential that we know what they are. To justify, pardon, and accept are God’s acts of justice and mercy towards ungodly sinners, through the obedience and merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, exclusive of their good works — *to declare at this time, his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of the one who*

believes in Jesus ((Rom 3.25-26). *But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness* (Rom 4.5). It is not that God justifies sinners as ungodly, nor for their ungodliness, but *from* their sin, as the redeemed of Christ, *who was made sin for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him* (2Coir 5.21). Christ being their surety, he had all their sins transferred to him; was chargeable with and answerable for them; was treated by the justice of God as if he had been the vilest sinner; was condemned to death; made a sacrifice; and in order to atone for sin, he died in the place and stead of his people; and by dying, he made satisfaction for their sin. He rose again as their Head and Representative, was legally discharged, acquitted, and justified, and they also, *in Him*.

Hence, it is evident that our sins were the matter and meritorious cause of Christ's condemnation; and his obedience, etc. was meritorious of our justification. *For by the obedience of one, many will be made righteous*, Rom 5.19. But no man can know his interest in these things, without faith by the operation of God, and by the Spirit's revealing Christ's righteousness as the matter of our justification, etc. Therefore we are said to be justified by faith. It is not that faith justifies, but it is the means or eye by which we see ourselves justified through Christ, and so we have peace with God. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen* (Heb 11.1). We live and walk by it, and can see things at a great distance from us. Abraham looked forward, and saw Christ's day at about two thousand years' distance. Thousands since have looked back to Christ's death and merit, who also are looking forward to his coming, kingdom, and glory — *when we shall see him as he is, be like him, and be forever with him* (1Joh 3.2). But according to the Scripture, God gives the evidence and comfort of these things in many ways.

1. That awakening, faith-creating, and soul-renewing power that the preached word has upon poor sinners, and by which they are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, is a scriptural and certain evidence of election, justification, pardon, acceptance, and eternal salvation. Let this be observed as a certain maxim: that whoever or whatever proves the sinner's election, at the same time proves his justification, and all the concomitant blessings of salvation, from the foundation to the topstone. 1Th 1.4-5, "Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Rom 8.30, "Moreover, whom he predestinated, he also called; and whom he called, he also justified; and whom he justified, he also glorified."

Then if we are called, we may with comfort conclude that we are saved. For calling, according to God's purpose, is the effect of a *previous* salvation in Christ, and in order for a *future* salvation with him. 2Tim 1.9, "Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

2. The nature and influence of faith is an evidence of our justification, which God gives *according to, and by* the Scripture. Gal 5.6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything; but faith which works by love." Now, if our faith influences us to love Christ because we believe he has first loved us, and we experience Christ as precious (for so he is to those who believe), then our faith is of the right kind, and according to Act 13.39, we are justified: "And by him, all who believe are justified from all things."

3. The witness within is an evidence which God gives of our sonship, pardon, and acceptance, testified to by the Scriptures, for our consolation and comfort. 1Joh 5.10, "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself." God's Spirit is the cause of faith, and proof of our adoption. Gal 4.6, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying,

Abba, Father!” If we can call God *Father*, then surely we are his children, and accepted according to that Scripture, Eph 1.5-7: “Having predestinated us to adoption as children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

4. Love for the brethren is an evidence, according to Scripture. 1Joh 3.14, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.” Not because we love those who are brethren, as men, as relations, or as friends; that may be done from selfish and carnal principles. But if we love them purely *as they are brethren*, because God loved and chose them, Christ loved and died for them, and because we see the image of Christ in them — then we love them for Christ’s sake, as Christ’s disciples. And then we have passed from death unto life — *namely*, from a state of sin, to a state of grace, in order for a state of glory, which God will give. For grace and glory are inseparably connected. Psalms 84.11: “The Lord God is a sun and shield; he will give grace and glory.”

5. Being willing to forsake all for Christ, to be saved by him alone, is an undoubted evidence, according to Scripture, of pardon and salvation through Him. Psalm 110.3, “Your people shall be willing in the day of your power” Rev 22.17, “And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” If we desire to part with sin, the world, and all its good things, and to be cast on Christ as perishing sinners, thirsting for no other salvation, then we have come to Christ. And so we must and *shall* be saved by Him. Joh 6.37, “Whoever comes to me, I will by no means cast out.” Isa 44.24, “The Lord of hosts has sworn,” etc. God has given his word and oath to confirm this truth.

Therefore, we may venture upon the security, and it is impossible for God to lie. Heb 6.18, “We have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.” Whatever our case, trials, and fears have been, or *are*, we are safe in Christ. And we may with as much comfort and certainty, conclude upon the enjoyment of heaven, as if already there.

A Third Answer.

The witness of the Spirit of Christ, is that by which a person may know that he is justified, that his sins are pardoned, and he is accepted by God, etc. This is part of that unction with which the people of God are anointed, as they are one with Christ who abides in them, and teaches them all things necessary to be known, none of which is a lie, 1Joh 2.27. Notwithstanding, I grant that there may be many shining advantages that have attended, and ever will attend, more or less, the subjects of such special enjoyment. Yet, it is impossible for the soul, however near the throne he may be, and whatever language he may have acquired and be master of, to declare and explain the half that is felt and experienced in the heart. Some things he can speak comparatively little of. And he may say of the witness of the Spirit, as the queen of Sheba said of Solomon’s wisdom, “It was a true report that I heard in my own land,” 1Kng 10.6. The Spirit of Christ dwells in all his people; and without it, it would be difficult to prove justification, etc. Indeed, without it, they *cannot* be Christ’s, Rom 8.9; without it, no adoption can be proved, Rom 8.14-16; without it, no sanctification can be manifested, 1Cor 1.30; and consequently, no right to eternal life, 1Joh 4.13.

The *indwelling* of the Spirit, and the *witness* of the Spirit, are two different things. Indwelling may occur where His witness isn’t manifest; and it may occur where it isn’t known to be present, but questioned, doubted, and feared. This isn’t so with the witness, which carries more or less its own evidence with it. “The wind blows where it wishes,” Joh 3.8. “He who has received His testimony, has set his seal to it, that God is true,” verse 33. Indwelling is the mercy of every child of grace, whether sensible of it or not; and it always abides and works as the Spirit of grace. But

this cannot always be said of the witness, by which I mean it isn't every child's mercy to have it. Though the salvation of God's people is connected to the indwelling of the Spirit, yet their salvation doesn't depend on their *knowledge* of it, though much of their present comfort does. And when the Spirit witnesses with their spirits as to the certainty of the work, it causes evangelical joy, boldness, strength, and large sips and foretastes of that everlasting consolation, flowing from a Christ-wrought experience. That experience having begun here, it will never leave them, even when safely wafted over the tempestuous billows of time, into those mansions that Christ, as the forerunner, has gone to prepare for them. And therefore, whoever has enjoyed this witness-bearing of the Spirit, may rest satisfied that he is justified, his sins are pardoned, and he is accepted by God, etc. And he may be sure of it on these three accounts:

I. Because the witness of the Spirit is a great witness, it is the moving, breathing, and stirring up of our spirits, and His declaration of our right of sonship — of our being children, *heirs* of God, and joint heirs with Christ, Rom 8.17. And it may be called great with respect to its Author, its power, and its effects. If its subjects are tempted, tried, persecuted, and mistakenly charged with being hypocrites, they can rejoice in this, and say with Job, "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high." Job 16.19. This witness may be where there is no particular portion of the word applied. It is sometimes applied in a more secretive way, though never contrary to it. It is always consistent with the Gospel of Christ, which is the evidence of its veracity because it is the pure word of God, revealed by Him, penned by his Spirit, and handed down to us by holy men of God. But the Spirit has pre-eminence here. As the apostle says, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater," 1Joh 5.9. And ver. 10, "He who believes has the witness in himself." The person who has been favoured with this knows it to be true. Just as the man who has tasted sugar can say it is sweet, so the one who has enjoyed this witness, knows it to be exceedingly great, for there is no witness equal to it.

II. Because the witness of the Spirit is a peaceable witness, it quiets and silences all the rough and surging waves that previously appeared in the soul. It doesn't come empty-handed, nor does it deal in a scanty way. These consolations of God are not small, Job 15.11. And why is this so? Because it is conveyed by Christ as a gift of the covenant. He makes it known. He brings it home. He reveals it, sprinkles it on the conscience, testifies of it, preaches it as a sure and certain blessing lodged in the arms of everlasting love — all without any view to creature acts and performances. However backslidden a child of God may be, brought into bondage, and tempted to think the contrary in an hour of desertion, yet he has received mercy in days past. He's been made thankful for it as its true and genuine consequence. However it may be with him at present, these mercies will be returned again. For, "He will speak peace to his people and to his saints, but let them not return again to folly." Psa 85.8.

III. Because the witness of the Spirit is a *perfect* witness. If nothing more than this could be produced, it is itself a sufficient and provocative argument, containing in its bowels a solid foundation on which a believer may rely, and work out that he is justified, etc. For as Moses declares in his song, "He is the Rock; his work is perfect," Deu 32.4.

And this is further confirmed by the experience of faith, in four ways:

1. *Faith receives the witness.* It takes it as the gift of God. It not only looks upon it, but like a special hand, it handles it in the way of its bestowment, and is enabled to use it for its service. It rejoices in it more than those who find great spoil; and it is entertained with the enabling power that is given with it. "For as many as received him, to them he gave power to become children of God," Joh 1.12.

2. *Faith eyes the witness.* It views it in its pleasing prospects in Jesus Christ — with its nature, properties, and excellencies, as supported and increased by him. It eyes the *witness* as a pledge of the heavenly inheritance, as the fruit of that love which is the foundation of every blessing we now enjoy, and are in expectation of. It eyes it,

- as *the rest* into which those who believe have now entered, Heb 4.3
- as one of the privileges of those who are not only sons, but sons in hope; *for it does not yet appear what we will be*, 1Joh 3.2
- as a part (though but a comparatively small part) of that light which is sown for the righteous, Psal 97.11
- as *a token of good from the Lord*, Psal 86.17, which the most eminent saints in every age have been concerned with Him for the throne of grace.
- as part of that goodness which was laid up in promise and covenant contract, for those who fear the Lord; and as to its nature and worth, it is called *great*, Psal 31.19.¹
- as the shining of the light of His countenance, and of His special presence, with whom there is *fulness of joy*, Psal 16.11
- as that help which encourages the saints to trust and confide in the Lord after they have lost something of the sweetness and savour of his refreshments upon their soul, Psal 63.7.
- as that which increases their thirst for God, in consequence of his pouring water upon them, and which floods according to His promise, Isa 44.3.²

In a word, faith eyes the witness as given freely, wholly, and entirely — the same as the blood of the everlasting covenant, Heb 13.20; the precious blood of atonement, Rom 5.9-11; without money and without price. Isa 55.1.

3. *Faith holds the Lord to the witness.* Its genuine language is just as I've found it in my own soul, "Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him," Job 13.15. It does this, or rather, it is empowered to do this, sometimes under sharp trials and conflicts, when the fig-tree doesn't blossom, and a poor believer cries out, "Woe is me, for I am like those who gather the summer fruits, like whose who gather the gleanings of the vintage grapes," Mic 7.1. But all this and much more, cannot hinder that strength which is given from Christ, by which the soul pleads as Jacob did, for what God has promised, "And you said, I will surely do you good," Gen 32.12; and verse 26, "I will not let you go unless you bless me;" and like the spouse, "I held him, and would not let him go." Sol 3.4.

4. *Faith rests upon the witness*, as the witness of Him who cannot lie. And in full assurance of that, it *draws near to God*, Heb 10.22. I've insisted on the witness of the Spirit of Christ at this time, because this is an undoubted testimony of the truth of justification. That cannot be said of many other things. And whatever soul is made partaker of that witness, he is not only happy now and highly favoured by the Lord, but will be so forever and ever. The weakest saints are as dear and precious to Jesus Christ as the strongest ones. But for lack of these gracious visits in that full and satisfactory way, they are often kept low and in the dark, suspicious of and questioning their interest in His love. No other substantial reason can be assigned for it, except that it is the pleasure of their heavenly Father. For this and some other reasons, I will mention a few things to show why

¹ **Psal 31:19** Oh, how great is Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You, *Which* You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men!

² **Isa 44:3** For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring;

many of God's dear children are so troubled about the lack of witnessing by the Spirit of Christ, with their spirits, that they are His children:

(1.) Some are troubled about it, because the witness of the Spirit is of their owning by Christ. They are sensible of this from the word of God. And for lack of enjoying this, life is often more unpleasant than what it would otherwise be: they cannot be so content or satisfied with the dealings of Providence, nor with the will of their heavenly Father. Indeed, they are afraid to speak of Him under that endearing character and relation. And sometimes, in place of that, they are tempted to think of themselves as vessels of wrath, who are only ripening and preparing to be shut up in the prison of hell. The darkness they find in their souls, they take to be the forebodings and presages of eternal darkness. When they are in company with those who live at the Fountainhead, and hear them relate their experiences, they are ready to tremble, and often obliged to be silent — secretly wishing, with Job, that they knew where they might find Him (*i.e.*, the Lord), Job 23.3. If they had the witnessing of his Spirit, this would be Christ's owning of them indeed; it would be his naming of them, Isa 43.1 — owning them as his jewels, Mal 3.17; — counting them as those born of him, and recording them, Psa 87.6. It will not be denied by those who know the love of Christ in their souls, and know what grace means in its operations — that the witnessing of the Spirit is part of the ownings of Christ and of his unsearchable riches. A child of God being persuaded of it from the word, and experiencing it in times past, but not enjoying it now, is rather doubtful of it, and suffers great confusion and perplexity in his soul. This may be the case at times for most of those who are saved with an everlasting salvation, in and by Christ. For remembering the past experience of the witness of the Spirit, will not always afford a child of God comfort and consolation, but only when the *Lord* reminds him.

(2.) Some are troubled about it, because the witness of the Spirit is the joy and gladness of Christ to the soul. For this is the native and genuine product of it. At least a few know that these seasons are the heart-enlivening and Christ-exalting seasons. And wherever this is savingly revealed, *namely*, by the witness specified before, it will be more or less attended with joy and gladness, in either one, or *each* of the four following things:

[1.] *In meditation.* For nothing like this prepares the soul for it, as meditation lays before the understanding, the beauty and excellence of the word, and a more than ordinary glory appears in the sacred pages, than is generally seen. The truth of this is evident in the experience of the Psalmist: "My meditation of Him will be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord." Psa 104.34. And as it arises from this, it is a certain proof that all that joy and gladness which is not put in the heart by the Lord, is deceptive and false, Psa 4.7.

[2.] *In prayer.* The witness of the Spirit produces joy and gladness also. And if ever God's children pray, it is *now*. Here they speak intimately with the Lord. They can call him *Father*, and the guide of their youth, Jer 3.4. Now they are free and open-hearted with him, and can unburden their very souls to him.

[3.] *In the house or church of Christ here below.* The witness of the Spirit produces joy and gladness, which makes the saints so delight in love, and long for it. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your honour dwells," Psa 26.8. Now "a day in His courts is better than a thousand elsewhere," Psa 84.10, and they would be glad to abide under this enjoyment. Their converse now is with things within the veil. And with Peter, they say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Mat 17.4.

The witness of the Spirit produces joy and gladness,

[4.] *In the belief of the complete and perfect enjoyment in the church above.* The thought of the dissolution of the body is so far from being terrible and shuddering (as is sometimes the case when the soul is in bondage), that it is rather delightful and entertaining — “to be with Christ, which is far better” (Phi 1.23); to be filled with joy and gladness in the perfection of it, and in that which will arise from immediate views and unclouded prospects of their great and exalted Redeemer. For there will be no more complaints about the lack of the witness, the hiding of Christ’s face, the hardness of their hearts, the damp that at times attends their spirits in this state of imperfection (their sun being eclipsed, and at times seeming to be quite set). For here the sun will never go down, nor will it ever be withdrawn. “For the Lord will be their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended,” Isa 60.20.

From these hints, gracious souls will be ready to set to their seals to it, that joy and gladness are produced from the witness of the Spirit, in the respects mentioned before, as it proceeds from Jesus Christ, called *the faithful witness*, Rev 1.5, and *the faithful and true witness*, Rev 3.14.

(3.) Some are troubled about it — that is, they don’t experience the witness of the Spirit, and they are distressed, because they know that this witness is the bread of life. Others partake of it, and they find it to be so. But as for those who are troubled, they think they must perish with hunger; they go on heavily, and they look sad for lack of it. They refuse to be comforted; and they manifest this by hanging their harps upon the willows, Psal 137.2. They are at a loss how to sing the Lord’s song in a strange land, verse 4. And it may be noted as no wonder, if a spark of envy sometimes arises in their minds towards their brethren who go on so comfortably, and walk in the light, while darkness is about their own tabernacle. But as for those who are under this witness — as it is the bread of life, they can plead these three things among others.

[1.] They plead the favour of Christ. And this is not the smallest part of their portion. In His favour, which is his *presence*, there is life, Psal 30.5. They find it to be so. This is the life of their spirits, Isa 38.16; the life of their faith; the life of their hope; the life of their patience; the life of their love; the life of their joy, the life of their expectations; the life of all the ordinances of Christ; the life of the word of Christ, *which dwells in them richly in all wisdom*, Col 3.16. It is the life of hearing the word of Christ; the life of reading the word of Christ; the life of meditating on the word of Christ; the life of hiding and laying up the word of Christ in their heart, Psal 119.11; the life of singing in the ways of Christ, Psal 138.5; the life of all the promises of Christ, 2Pet 1.4; the life of all afflictions and persecutions which were given to them in Christ, with calling grace, 2Tim 3.12; and 1.9. It is the life of living for Christ in the world, Phi 1.21; the life of living upon Christ — and in a word, *in the favour of Christ is the life of all the enjoyments of Christ*. Just as they plead the favour of Christ, so when it is his sovereign will to withdraw from them, nothing is more melancholy nor more affecting for them. Here they have sad and heart-disquieting hours, for when he hides his face, their souls are troubled, because *there is no beholding him*, even though they are his children, Job 34.29.

[2.] They plead the seal of Christ; and the impressions of this seal are not easily forgotten by them. This is a confirmation to them of their acceptance in the Beloved, which can never be reversed. Such is the beauty in which a promise appears to a child of God, in the hands of the Spirit.

[3.] They plead their portion of Christ, or rather Christ as their portion, and can live on him as such. “Whom do we have in heaven but you, and there is none on earth that we desire beside you,” Psal 73.25. This is the native air in which they breathe, and which the new creation addresses at the Throne of Grace. Pleading this under the witness of the Spirit, makes them

live like joint heirs of Christ — quite different persons and different lives than most of mankind and professors have. This weans them from this world, and makes them live above it. They behold it and all its creatures, when compared with Christ, as too mean, base, and sordid for them. They are enabled to soar above these, where they will quickly stand with “white robes and palms in their hands, crying, with a loud voice, *Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb.*” Rev 7.9-10.

Question 16. May a person with doubts of his regeneration or personal interest in Christ, approach the table of the Lord without being guilty of presumption?

The point is important, and concerns many of the dear children of God. Therefore it should be handled very seriously, judiciously discussed, and plainly resolved. I would be glad to see this done by an able hand, taught by God how to deal with babes in Christ. As the query has so long awaited an answer, and none has yet appeared, I humbly propose the following hints, lest the weak be tempted to conclude that they are despised or neglected.

The sum of the query is this: “May one partake of the Lord’s Supper before he is indulged with undoubted assurance of a personal interest in Christ?” It is easy to answer in the affirmative. If assurance of salvation were absolutely necessary to qualify for the Lord’s table, then worthy communicants would be much fewer than they are. And if that were the case, it would easily appear that our blessed Redeemer had appointed the sacred supper, not for the babes in his house, but for the strong men in his family. This would be very discouraging to the weak-minded. And I am persuaded it was far from the design of the tender-hearted Shepherd, who is so mindful of his lambs, and so compassionate, that he gathers them in his arms, and carries them in his bosom.

But here, I think, the next query will be, “What are the qualifications necessary to approach the Lord’s table?” The answer, strictly speaking, is that I don’t see that an unregenerate person has any right to that solemn ordinance. But it is possible that a person may be truly born again, and yet be perplexed with doubts and fears about his regeneration and personal interest in Christ. Now, the qualifications necessary in a worthy communicant, are things that are plain and evident. I reckon the following to be the chief among them:

To be so deeply convinced of sin, as to see its vile nature and fearful tendency; to see the just and eternal, as well as intolerable punishment that it exposes him to; to see his own utter inability to remove sin out of the way, or to cleanse himself from its defilements; and therefore, to see the absolute necessity of a Redeemer.

To have such a knowledge of Christ as to be fully persuaded, that he is the only Saviour who can deliver from sin and punishment, and to know that there is no salvation but in and through Jesus Christ the Son of God.

To find an inward desire, inclination, disposition, and resolution to depend upon Christ alone for justification before God, pardon of sin, all needful grace here and endless glory hereafter.

To love the Lord Jesus Christ so far as to yield cheerful obedience to his commandments, and ready submission to his will, as evidence of unfeigned loyalty to Him as the only and rightful sovereign.

To find an inward hatred of sin, even the sin of the mind as well as that of the conversation; *secret* sin, as well as *public* iniquity.

Spiritual Companion: Other Practical Questions

To have the heart so tender towards the glory of God, as to design, by divine assisting grace, to behave in the house of the Lord in a becoming manner; and in the whole of his life and conduct, to adorn his profession — testifying by his pious, humble, and circumspect deportment, that he has forsaken the service and slavery of sin and Satan; but desires to be forever a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ, being neither afraid nor ashamed of own his Master.

To take the word of truth as the only rule of his belief and practice; and to always look upon himself as a poor, helpless and unworthy creature, not able of himself to do any thing as he should, except as assisted by grace and accepted through Christ.

These things imply that the person's moral character is such as becomes the Gospel, whatever his station of life is. But furthermore, Our view in coming to the Lord's table should be —

To remember, with a thankful heart, the meritorious death of Christ, his great and matchless love in shedding his precious blood to take away sin, as nothing else could possibly remove it out of the way.

To testify before all, that we look upon ourselves as poor naked sinners, unworthy of any favour, and yet depend entirely and wishfully upon Jesus, as a crucified Saviour, for eternal salvation.

To devote ourselves afresh to the Lord every time we come in a solemn manner before heaven and earth, saints and sinners, *all who will see*, both friends and foes.

To evidence that we choose to be with the people of God here in the Church Militant, as well as hereafter in the Church Triumphant; to suffer reproach and affliction with them, and likewise to share in their privileges.

To wait for more faith, comfort, and joy; To have a clearer sight of our personal interest in Christ, and be sealed unto the day of redemption.

To have our love increased for God, the Father of all our mercies; for Jesus, our divine Redeemer, the Author and Captain of our salvation; and for the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier of our soul and body, and comforter of our hearts.

To have our affections for holiness universally warmed and excited, and to have the power and vigour of sin weakened and withered, to have the old man, the body of sin, effectually crucified.

Finally, to grow in every grace, and have repeated communication and fellowship with God — that our hearts and affections may be weaned more from the world, but more and more joined and cemented to those whom God has chosen out of the world, who are the excellent of the earth, in whom all our delight should be — that we may see clearer, by faith, the glory of God in his temple, and be indulged with some fresh prospect and foretaste of the glory above, where saints will be arrayed in white robes, drink the new wine, and forever remember the death of Christ and all the fruit of his love. This will render the songs of Zion inexpressibly vigorous, melodious, and harmonious, to the endless revolutions of eternity.

Now let a person examine himself regarding his experience of, and sincerity in, these things. *Then* let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. It isn't presumption for him so to do, but it is his duty and privilege. Indeed, it is his sin to neglect and disobey a precept so plain. It is his folly and imprudence to absent and deprive himself of a feast so rich, an entertainment so animating and refreshing. He may be confident that he discerns the Lord's body in an acceptable manner. Even if his doubts and fears may still be many, let him come to the supper which our blessed Lord has instituted, to the table which He has spread for the encouragement, support, and nourishment of

his people — the weak and timorous, as well as the strong and courageous. No man, of himself, is worthy of so great a privilege.

A sight and sense of our unworthiness is one considerable qualification; but I would close with a word of advice:

1. To those who partake of the Lord's Supper at stated times. My dear friends, prize your precious privileges: don't rest in, nor depend on ordinances. As they should not be lightly esteemed, so they should not be idolized. Look for bread for your souls at your Redeemer's table. Pray that you may grow in every grace, so that the world may be convinced that you have been with Jesus. Examine yourselves impartially: before you receive, think of where you are going; and after, think of where you have been. It is sad if Gospel ordinances are dry breasts. Take care that you don't prostitute and profane sacred institutions. Some eat and drink at the table of the Lord, and yet in their conversation, they lift up their heels against him. But in the end, these will go to their own place; the door will be shut against such professors.

2. To those who don't come to the Lord's table. Of these, there are some who despise all divine ordinances, and wallow in sin. The Lord pity them, and open their eyes! I don't expect them to read this, therefore I won't trouble them now with exhortations. But there are others who seem to stand about halfway between the Lord's flock and the profane herd. My friends, consider that our blessed Saviour, on that agonizing night in which his sweat was like great drops of blood, forever to be remembered by his people, said "Take, eat; ... all of you drink of that cup ... Do this in remembrance of me." — Will you still say, No? Why? Haven't you some darling sin that you cannot part with? Don't you think that Christ requires his disciples to be more holy than you choose to live? Then say to your idols, "What do I have to do with you anymore?" If fear and diffidence keep you back, pray for more strength. Ask advice from those you judge to be pious, faithful, and experienced. Don't indulge an indolent, lazy disposition. You complain of weaknesses, yet you won't come for food; you weaken the hearts of saints, but harden the hearts of sinners. You're doing yourselves an injury, and withdrawing your shoulder from the yoke of Christ!

Question 17. What means must a person use to attain greater liveliness in devotional exercises, who desires it, and mourns under a sense of his formality in them?

To be lukewarm in prayer and other devotional exercises, should be much lamented; though some of it is to be expected while any remainder of sin dwells in the believer. When that which is mortal is swallowed up by life, then farewell to formality and indifference, farewell to every depravity and disorder of soul and body. Then all complaints will cease forever. But what will be offered to our pious querist for his consideration under his present circumstances? I humbly conceive in this tender point, that the following few interrogatories should be duly weighed.

Do you indulge some lust which you don't know how to part with? It is possible to mourn under, and *because* of formality, and yet be fond of the very cause of that complaint. Do you follow so eagerly after the world, that your spirits and affections are quite spent upon it, and you are utterly unfit for devotion? We should attend to our proper calling and business in life, yet not so much as to neglect the worship of God, and lose our souls — the less should give way to the greater. Where the world is loved too much, "those persons fall into temptations and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts." (1Tim 6.9) Are you given to what the carnal man calls *pleasure*? Suppose, for instance, eating or drinking too freely; or keeping company with those who aren't friends to true religion — so that a light, vain, and worldly spirit quite prevails, while the vigour and relish of real

devotion are withered, weakened, and wasted, if not quite lost. Or suppose allowing so much liberty in any other kind of voluptuousness, that sin is more excited than mortified; the sinews of sensuality are strengthened, but the nerves of spirituality are proportionally enfeebled.

Do you watch and pray against pride, self-conceit, peevishness, sourness, revenge, and other unruly passions, and evil concupiscence? If these or any of their kindred but *cursed* lusts are nourished and cloaked, they will soon introduce spiritual sloth. Then the voice of Christ, of conscience, of ministers, of providence, etc. will be heard in a kind of dreaming way. Christ will withdraw, the Spirit will be grieved, and we may mourn after an absent God for many days. Then we're not to expect much liveliness in devotional exercises, for "he that covers or palliates his sins shall not prosper." (Pro 28.13) If iniquity is regarded and favoured, we are not to look for much life in prayer, nor any speedy answer to it. Because of our foolishness, we may be troubled, bowed down greatly, and go mourning all day long. Sin sticks very closely, and lust is very deceitful. Whoever would be comfortable in his soul, should be very open to conviction, saying sincerely and frequently, "Keep back your servant... (Psa 19.13) Search me, God, and try me... (Psa 139.23) Let the righteous strike me." (Psa 141.5)

Moreover, let the following hints be observed. He who meditates and delights in the word of God day and night, will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water — he will be green, vigorous, prosperous, and successful (Psa 1.2-3). We should meditate on and steadily endeavour to believe free promises such as these: "I will water it every moment; you will be like a watered garden; I will pour water on the one who is thirsty; he will spring up like willows by the water-courses; I will be like the dew to Israel; he will grow like the lily, and spread his root like Lebanon; he will revive like the corn, and grow like the vine" — with a vast number of like precious promises which the man who wants *life* in his devotion may easily discover. We should meditate much upon the fulness and suitableness of the grace that is treasured up in Christ, endeavouring to fix our eye of faith, though weak, upon his glory as Mediator, Head, Surety, and Intercessor. In so doing we will be more *like* him, and then more *lively*. We ought to consider his gracious invitations and encouragements to poor, dry, barren, and helpless souls — encouragements such as these:

"Let not the stranger [who has joined himself to the Lord] say, *The Lord has utterly separated me from his people; I am a dry tree.*" Isa 56.3 No indeed, but let him take hold of my covenant: "I am like a green fir tree; from Me comes your fruit;" Hos 14.8 "Come to the waters," eat what is good; Isa 55.1 feed and live upon "the sure mercies of David;" Isa 55.3 "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" Mat 11.28 "If any man thirsts, let him come to me, and drink. I will by no means cast him out." Joh 6.37

We should likewise observe *conditional* promises, which I look at as adapted and intended to encourage, excite, and quicken us to our duty. These are a few of them:

"Blessed is he who watches daily at my gates;" Rev 16.15 "Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength: they will mount up with wings like eagles;" Isa 40.31 "If any one does His will, he will know whether the doctrine is of God;" Joh 7.17 "He who keeps my commandments ... I will manifest myself to him; ... If anyone loves me, and keeps my word, I and my Father will come to him and make our abode with him;" Joh 14.21, 23 "If we follow on to know the Lord, then He will come to us as the rain, like the latter and former rain upon the earth." Hos 6.3

It might be of use to consider closely the great encouragement given to continue steadfast in prayer, as in Luk 18.1 and elsewhere. God's chosen may be left to cry to their Father for a space of time, day and night. He is in heaven, but he will at last hear, and grant their desire and request.

Let us remember how saints of old acted when they were low. The Psalmist expresses himself to this purpose: “Quicken me, O Lord; ^{Psa 143.12} Make haste; ^{Psa 70.1} Do not tarry long, ^{Psa 70.5} lest I sleep the sleep of death ^{Psa 13.3} lest I be swallowed up; ^{Psa 124.3} lest I perish.” ^{Psa 119.92} When they were weary with crying; when their throat was dried; though their eyes failed — yet they waited on the Lord (Psa 69.2-3). They persevered in seeking when they could not find; to call when they had no answer. By and by, and before they were aware, they “found their Beloved, they held him, and would not let Him go.” ^{Sol 3.4} There was *life* in devotion then.

We should pay due regard to all other appointed means. We should read with care, and attend the public solemnities of the house of God — hearing, praying, with the other ordinances appointed for reviving believers. It would be our wisdom and advantage to embrace and improve every opportunity we can to converse with those we judge to be skilful in experimental religion. In order to grow in grace, I think it is not only expedient, but very *necessary* to set apart some time to retire from the world, for prayer and communing with our own heart, besides our common time of devotion. Set aside an hour or half an hour every day, or every other day. If that cannot be, then twice a week; or at least once, as our circumstances allow. Col. Gardiner had his two hours every day, namely, from four to six in the morning. In this time, our very spirit should make a diligent search, sifting ourselves as in the presence of God, to inquire into the true state of our souls — whether we are impairing or improving in grace. And if impairing, What is the cause? What is the probable means of revival? What evidence is there for heaven? What corruption most easily besets us? What promises best suit our case? What are our encouragements? We may be employed in an abundant variety of questions regarding our temporal and eternal state, and that of others. I believe David had many sweet seasons of this kind in bed, and it’s probably the case with many still. But young people generally, and perhaps many others, find that their ideas are clearer, and that they themselves are livelier and better fit to engage in so solemn a work, when they’re *out* of bed. However, all should consider the best seasons according to their constitutions and various situations. Once more: it may have a tendency to quicken us in our duty, if we think of the loss we sustain when we’re cold and formal. We lose comfort, joy, satisfaction, nearness to God, and inexpressible delight. Let us think of the glory above — how active, how bright and incessant the flames of devotion burn there — poor languid souls that we are!

But when all is done, we should carefully remember that we are but like dry bones still, unless the Holy Spirit is pleased to breathe upon us. And if we should forget it, yet we will find it feelingly. Then we should beware lest we depend too much on our own performances. Though we ought to wait in the path of duty, yet we mar our work if we put that dependence on our duty, which should be upon Christ alone. If our souls are refreshed in the conscientious discharge of duty, the glory is the Lord’s, and not ours — it is enough for us to have the comfort of it. When we’re engaged in any part of divine worship, we should pray for the Spirit to assist us, or else we’ll be like a becalmed ship. After we use the means with sincerity and due caution, if we find that deadness and formality still prevail, let’s keep examining ourselves, praying, waiting, believing, and hoping. The vision will speak; if it tarries, we should wait for it, knowing it will neither lie nor deceive. ^{Hab 2.3} Those who trust in the Lord will be like mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. ^{Psa 125.1} Sometimes the Lord is pleased to break in on his people by wonderful grace, mercy, and good will, and revive them. At other times, He rouses them out of their lethargy by terrible things, by wounding and awful strokes which they little expected. Blessed be His name, for He does all well. May we be helped to acknowledge and forsake our sins, observe our duty, and not forsake our own mercies, and our very valuable privileges.

Question 18. When and in what may it be said that believers grieve and quench the Spirit?

We are to consider that *grieving* and *quenching* the Spirit of God, are figurative terms, and that they must not be understood in a strict, literal, and proper sense. But it appears evident that the Holy Spirit of God is indeed intended in Eph 4.30. He can never grieve and change his mind, or suffer any mutations of affections or passions as we do. When God is said to *grieve at heart*, to *repent*, and other similar expressions, it is a figure called *Anthropopathy*; that is, speaking in the manner or affections of men.¹ For instance, the Lord who sees all things, is represented as having *eyes*, because *we* see with our eyes; and as having *ears*, because *we* hear with our ears; as having a *mouth*, because *we* speak with our mouth. So too, God is represented as having hands, fingers, back-parts, face, countenance, nostrils, heart, bowels, soul, etc. Yet we must believe that God is a *spirit*,^{Joh 4.24} and has no body, parts, or passions. He is the Lord, and does not change. We grieve, because we've acted imprudently; or because of some event that we couldn't foresee or prevent; or for some oppression and disappointment that we didn't expect, nor were we able to remove it; or because of some consequence that we fear. None of these can happen to the Holy Spirit. So then, I humbly conceive that the phrase "grieving the Spirit," denotes that the conduct of believers towards God is such that it would grievously vex man; and that God's dealings in the course of His providence, will resemble the effect of grief, displeasure, anger, and resentment in man. Thus, the Lord is said to *hide himself*, to *hide his face*, to *depart*, to *chastise*, etc. as a father chastises, frowns upon, and departs from a child whose conduct has been very provoking and disobedient.

When the Spirit is supposed to be *quenched*, He is compared to fire. But it is a fire that can never be extinguished. And yet he may, and often does suspend his gracious, enlightening, enlivening, and comforting operations and influences on the minds of his people.

These hints being intended by way of explanation, I now proceed to consider the query.

It may be observed that the very same conduct in believers, both grieves and quenches the Spirit. I believe that whenever we give way to the devil, we then grieve and quench the Spirit. But to be a little more particular:

- When we love, set our affections upon, and pursue the things and concerns of this world immoderately; when we conform to the conduct of unbelievers, making their practice our rule more than the Scriptures; when we delight in their company and conversation, embracing the very spirit and temper of those who neither love nor fear God — we then grieve and quench the Spirit.
- When we are indifferent about faith in an exalted Redeemer, believing and attracting views of His riches and glorious grace that are mixed with our own personal interest in them; when we are careless about promoting the glory of God, about living upon and according to His promises, about growth in every grace, about communion and fellowship with, or endearing nearness to the Father and the Son, and about adorning the Gospel of Christ and His ways — we may then be said to grieve the Spirit.
- When we study more to gratify, nourish, cloak, and excuse the corruptions of our flesh and spirit, than to expose, mortify, destroy, and expel them; when close self-examination is neglected; when frequent exercises of faith and other graces of the Spirit are not minded; when private prayer is indolently attended to, and superficially performed; when family religion is

¹ *Anthropopathy*: ascribing human feelings or passions to God. — WHG

not cultivated; when the solemnities of the house of God are not delighted in, or at least are not attended with care, reverence, and godly fear — *in short*, when we don't exercise ourselves "to keep a conscience clear of offence towards God and men," ^{Act 24.16} — we may then be said to quench the Spirit.

- When we despise the Gospel as Israel despised the manna; when we murmur against Providence, entertain either a vain, light, and empty disposition, or a sullen, envious, angry, malicious, revengeful, or censorious temper; and when we won't receive instruction, reproof, convictions, and admonitions, whether from enemies, friends, Providence, Scripture, or conscience — I think we may then be said to grieve and vex the Spirit.

More particulars might be mentioned, such as self-confidence, self-will, distrust, unbelief, unthankfulness, etc. I would only add a few hints by which believers may conclude that they have grieved the Holy Spirit. When we find darkness, dullness, heaviness, coldness, formality, with all their dismal consequences prevailing; we will soon find ourselves backsliding and revolting from God, leaving our first love, and lie sadly exposed to temptations. We may then conclude that we have grieved the Spirit, and consequently, we must expect to be really grieved and sorely vexed ourselves. For the Holy Comforter has departed, and we are left to the sad buffetings of Satan, to grope in the dark like the blind at noonday; we are left to fears and tremblings, to hardness of heart and what not.

The Holy Ghost might well say, "Woe to them when I depart from them," Hos 9.12. And they may mourn and say, "Woe to us, for we have sinned; the joy of our heart has ceased; the crown has fallen from our head." Lam 5.15-16. May the Lord draw us, so that we may run, and follow hard after Him, keeping near and clinging to Him, with full purpose of heart.

Question 19. How may a person know and be satisfied that he aims principally at the glory of God in doing this, that, or the other thing?

God is glorified in various ways by the whole creation, even if not intentionally or designedly; and He will be glorified to all eternity! The Most High will have his own glory even in and upon the ungodly. And his own people glorify their God in diverse ways while here in this state of imperfection. But the query respects only our aim to glorify God in doing this or that. I suppose the term "doing" is confined to the actions performed by the members of our body. Yet I conceive that the judgment, will, and affections, may be deemed as much the actions of the soul, as anything else can be actions of the body, or any member of it. The soul must aim rightly, otherwise it is impossible for any lower bodily actions to be directed in a due manner. So then, in order to glorify our Father, who is in heaven, while we are here on earth, it is necessary for our understanding to be enlightened, our judgment informed, and our affections drawn to God through the loveliness and suitableness of the Mediator, under the drawing, endearing, and attracting influence of the blessed Spirit, 2Cor 4.6. This being premised, I would consider all our actions, both inward and outward.

By *inward* actions, I mean the motions and outgoings of the soul toward some ultimate or chief object. For instance, the principal aim of the covetous man is to enrich himself. With this view, he turns and winds many things in his own mind. He judges and deliberates whether such and such a project is the most likely way to increase his riches — that being his main *end*, whatever subordinate right or wrong *means* he may pursue. His labouring mind compasses sea and land. He often plans and tries what his hands never execute because, upon second and ever-inventing thoughts, he hopes he has formed a scheme that will answer his end better than all former ones.

The same may be said of the proud and ambitious in seeking honour and pre-eminence; the voluptuous man, the indolent, the unclean, etc. — their minds and affections work, act, and press toward their proper object. These are the actions of the soul, and they are esteemed so even when the body doesn't act, and often cannot keep pace with the soul. Israel erred in their heart; and in their hearts they turned back into Egypt. Sinful thoughts, strictly speaking, are *actual* sins, and must be forgiven, if sin is forgiven. But whoever principally seeks the glory of God, is by far the happiest man; he has the advantage over the rest of mankind. Being enabled to believe sublime and divine truths — such as free, sovereign, and distinguishing love, with all the extensive and glorious salvation which comes through Jesus Christ — he admires the goodness, grace, mercy, and wisdom of God, and his soul is drawn out in love for Him. When he is heart-wounded for sin by deep convictions — in confessing it with self-abasement, while he adores the holiness of God and stands amazed at his own sinfulness — he glorifies God greatly. When we are enabled to believe divine promises, whether they regard time or eternity — even if those promises are very unlikely to come about in our present view of things — we glorify God. Abraham, Mordecai, and Paul were eminent instances of this sort. When we believe the promises, despite every discouragement, when we bear patiently and resignedly all our sharp trials, trusting still that all will turn out well, because we judge Him faithful who promised — *this* is sanctifying and glorifying the Lord God in our hearts. When out of love for God, we shun sin in our minds, but delight in purity and true holiness — we glorify God in our spirit.

This is cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of spirit: in depending upon and believing in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation, we glorify God in the highest pitch that we are capable of here. In prayers, social or private, we glorify our God. When with our spirit we adore his perfections, admire afresh his grace, believe and plead his promises, give him ascriptions of praise, and devote ourselves to him through Jesus Christ, to be His forever and ever.

Perhaps this is worshipping God *in* the Spirit and *with* the Spirit. But I will have occasion to speak further of this inward working, in treating the outward. Therefore I hasten to that.

By *outward* actions, which I suppose are chiefly intended in the query, I understand any and every act where the body, or any member of it, is employed. I think our *words* are the actions of our tongue, as well as anything that may be deemed the actions of our hands or feet. Before the tongue is concerned in it, they are properly our thoughts, or the actions of our mind. Now the question returns, How may I know and be satisfied that I aim principally at the glory of God in what I do? I must descend here into a few particulars.

I will point out, for instance, my present writing. Do I seek my own glory by it, or any other base or by-end? I put these queries to my own soul, in the presence of Jehovah: Is it my aim that God may be further known in his grace and glory, that he may be more ardently loved, and more comfortably and cheerfully worshipped, obeyed, and praised by his people here? Is it my aim that my brethren, in the tribulation of this wilderness, may be further instructed, directed, edified, and comforted, so that under the divine blessing, they may be able to glorify God according to their measure of grace while they are here? When with humility, I can answer these in the affirmative, which a believer should do; and when I look for no perishing reward, nor any name known to the public, being conscious of my own infirmities; then I may satisfy myself that the glory of God is my principal aim. This is especially true when I find the motion of my soul is directed in love towards God by Jesus Christ, and my desire aims at the salvation and comfort of his people.

I am confident that the gentleman who proposed the query is capable of satisfying himself in some measure, according to the above hints. Yet, perhaps he and other pious persons may still object

and say, “Alas, we find self-seeking so ready to creep in at every crevice, that we fear it is mere presumption to think that the glory of God is our principal aim. Therefore, we lay aside our attempts.” It is a truth much to be lamented that sinful self clings very close to our best performances. Blessed be God for our great High-Priest, who bears the iniquity of our holy things. If we do nothing to promote the glory of God till we are clear of all sinful self-seeking, then perhaps very little will be done on this side heaven!

Let hearts that are well-furnished for service in the church of Christ — whether by writing, preaching, praying, or in any other way — bewail before God their indwelling sin. Yet, let them not on any account hide their talents in the earth, but rather stir up the gift of God bestowed on them for edification. How Bradford the martyr complained of his heart! ¹ Yet what a holy and honourable man he was!

In divine worship, ministers may be said to aim principally at the glory of God, when their intentional and direct designs are to set forth the glory and majesty of his perfections, his goodness, grace, and mercy through Jesus Christ; when they set forth how worthy he is to be loved, served, trusted, praised, and adored; when they endeavour to set forth man’s misery outside of Christ, in order to proclaim the glory, fulness, and compassion of Christ — all with a view that poor sinners should fall in love with him, and embrace salvation through him. Ministers aim rightly, when the whole bent of their lives is to promote the salvation of souls in God’s appointed way, and to depend on His blessing, and the gracious influence of his Spirit.

Hearers aim at the glory of God, when they attend to Him in the use of means appointed by him; when they do so with a longing desire to know him more, that they may serve him better; and when they conscientiously keep their place in the house of God — to pray, hear the word, and partake of his ordinances, in order to bear their testimony for God and his worship, against the openly profane, and the careless professor.

When we have these things in view, we glorify God in our closet, in our family worship, and in the solemn assembly, and in eating and drinking at his table.

In our common conduct and calling in life, we should aim principally at the glory of God. We do this when we pray to him for direction, when we take his word for our rule, when our conscience is tender for his glory, and when the general bent of our heart is to demean ourselves every day, so that others may, by our holy and inoffensive conversation, be induced to think and speak well of God and of his ways — or at least that we give no just occasion for others to blaspheme or speak evil of the holy name by which we are called, of the glorious doctrine we profess, or of the good ways we own. Thus the apostle served God with all humility of mind, and walked inoffensively, suffering much, with *this* view: that the ministry might not be blamed, behaving holily, justly, and unblameably. Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, are exhorted to do the same, that the doctrine of God our Saviour may be adorned in all things, and God glorified.

Eating and drinking should be with an eye to glorify God. God has appointed eating and drinking in common for all, for the continuance of our life and strength, so that we may be capable of service while our span of time here lasts. When we eat and drink with this view, giving God thanks for it, we do it to his glory. We may eat savoury food like Isaac, but we should consult our health and circumstances with inoffensive life, more than for our taste and palate. When we eat and drink to *excess*, whether in quantity or beyond what is fit in quality, we sin. It may be further observed that

¹ John Bradford (1510-1555). – WHG

the eating and drinking mentioned in 1Cor 10.31, seems to refer to things offered to idols, which is treated at large in the chapter. In everything we deal with, we should consider what end God principally appointed for it; and then, as far as we pursue that same end, I think we glorify Him.

When all is said and done, it must be confessed that in everything we put our hand to, we come short of the glory of God. This should keep us very humble at His foot, and dependent on a divine Redeemer; the more we see our need of Him, the more endeared He is to us. Jesus Christ glorified God without the least imperfection. Let us endeavour to glorify him according to our measure of grace, in our proper station, with all humility. And comfort yourselves with the believing views of that state in which we will glorify God forever, without the least hesitation or imperfection.

It is to be feared there are too many who pretend to glorify God, like those in Isaiah 66.5,¹ when their principal aim is, like Diotrophes, to have the glory and pre-eminence themselves (3Joh 1.9). In this very point, a corrupt heart has deceived many.

Question 20. How may we distinguish between what is moral, and what is typical, or merely ceremonial, in the books of Moses? Consequently, which of those precepts are still in force, and which have long since been abrogated?

For a long while, the people of Israel read the books of Moses with a veil on their heart, and still do. ^{2Cor 3.15} It is to be feared that many who call themselves Christians are in the same case. And not a few real believers read that part of the word of God with little understanding. Others neglect it, esteeming it, for the most part, as a collection of old rituals and antiquated ceremonies, of no signification now because it was obsolete and out of date long ago. I firmly believe that a considerable part of the books of Moses was abolished at the death of Christ. My design in proposing the query, was to be informed as to which part is abolished, and which is not — that we might read that part, as well as other parts of the word of God, with understanding and delight, to our spiritual advantage.

The Mosaic law is generally divided into three principal branches, namely, the *moral*, the *civil*, and the *ceremonial* law.

The *Moral Law* directed and enjoined our duty to God and man. It was given to our first parents in their state of innocency, and creation purity. After the fall of man, this law still continued in being, and in full authority, to the days of Moses. Then God was pleased to give a new, plain, and fair edition of it, written with his own finger, on two tablets of stone. This is commonly called, the Ten Commandments. It is concisely collected, yet plainly expressed by our Lord Jesus Christ, in these words:

“You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; this is the first and great commandment (this is the first tablet containing the first, second, third, and fourth commandments); and the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself (this is the second tablet, and it contains the last six commandments). On these two commandments hang all the law (this is the very sum and substance of the moral law) and the prophets.”

¹ **Isa 66:5** Hear the word of the LORD, You who tremble at His word: “Your brethren who hated you, Who cast you out for My name's sake, said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified, That we may see your joy.’ But they shall be ashamed.”

This is the subject matter of all that was commanded by all former prophets and preachers, in all their sermons, admonitions, and exhortations. Now, *this* law was never abrogated. Jesus Christ did not come to destroy, but to fulfil, magnify, and make it honourable. (Mat 5.17)

The *Civil Law* is also termed the judicial or judiciary law. Here we are to observe that in Moses' time, the Lord was pleased to take the people of Israel, and single them out as a peculiar people, above all people — a body politic, or kingdom. And so he condescended to be their king. Hence they were a *theocracy*, or a people governed by God. Now the Lord, as their king and lawgiver, gave them proper laws and statutes, peculiar to themselves, directing how to act, judge, and pass sentence in all civil debates about property, and to regulate the punishment of offenders in civil matters. This was founded on the moral law, and yet it was given in particular to Israel as a theocracy. The civil law is just and reasonable, and therefore it is an excellent foundation and directory for the civil law, or the law of the land, in every kingdom and government under heaven. Yet I don't think the judicial law in Israel, precisely as such, is now in force among us, or any other Gentiles. Rather, the kings and governors in every nation have full power and authority to enact laws and statutes according to the customs, manners, and circumstances of their own country. Nevertheless, the legislators in every realm and climate should have particular regard to the moral law, lest it be transgressed by their civil law. The Gospel dispensation should also be well weighed where the Gospel is professed. Everywhere, reason, justice, equity, and circumstances are to be observed in enacting and executing the laws of the land. The judge in Israel had a discretionary power lodged in himself. On the whole, we may look at the judiciary law given to Israel, as partly in force, and partly abrogated.

The *Ceremonial Law* regarded the sacrifices, uncleannesses, purifications, and all the types and shadows before the coming of Christ. It was therefore called, "The shadow of good things to come," Heb 10.1. This was given to our first parents after the fall. It was somewhat enlarged in Abraham's time, but there were so many things added on mount Sinai, that after that time it was called, "The law of Moses." Then the tribe of Levi was set apart, and their whole service was to manage, determine, and execute this law. It is also called, The Levitical Law. This was to continue to the death of Christ, and then both the law and the priesthood, with all the Levitical service, were to vanish entirely. See Heb 7.11-12. So the ceremonial law was long ago abrogated wholly. Yet it should still be read with care and veneration, for it points to excellent things that were then to come, even Jesus Christ, and the glorious salvation by him. The whole of it was Gospel, but given in obscure shadows and dark prefigurations.¹ Many of the types of this law are profitably explained in the first volume of the dialogue between Truth and Friendly; to which I refer the inquisitive reader.

Now my query is, *How may we distinguish between these laws, as they are so intermixed and interwoven in the books of Moses?* And consequently, *Which of them are we to look upon as binding upon us?* But let this always be remembered: the whole is to be read, as the sure and good word of God, given to his own people in former ages, and pointing out great things to us in these last times. I can think of no general and plain rule by which common Christians may discern this with ease and edification. Therefore I have taken a general survey of the whole and in some things, I have been very particular and minute. The result of the whole, I humbly and freely submit to the inspection, scrutiny, censure, and emendations of the candid and judicious. I have taken the books in order thus:

¹ Originally, "adumbrations." – WHG

GENESIS,

For the most part, Genesis is a sacred and divine history— the most ancient in the world, and yet authentic. It gives a true account of the principal genealogies of the most eminent and illustrious persons, with the most important and striking transactions, for upwards of two thousand years; that is, from the creation of the universe to the death of Joseph. This book is also interspersed with many precious promises, some regarding the present life, others concerning Jesus Christ, and the great, free, and blessed salvation that comes through him. It includes the sacrifices and offerings mentioned in Genesis before and after the flood, and likewise the circumcision belonging to the ceremonial law, which have ceased. They are, in my opinion, part of the *handwriting* which was nailed to the cross of Christ (Col 2.14).

EXODUS,

The beginning to the end of chapter 11 contains a piece of history so well attested, and so astonishing in every part of it, that the world at that time was struck with wonder and amazement. The power and glory of God shine in it still. Chapter 12 gives us a very exact account of the Passover, and the rites belonging to it. This is a considerable part of the typical law. Christ celebrated the last Passover, according to divine institution, on the night in which he was betrayed. Then the history is resumed, and continued to the end of chapter 19. Yet in these chapters, we have an account of several types and emblems of great things, such as separating the first-born to the Lord; the repeated charge concerning the Passover; the song of Moses; the manna; the water out of the rock, with some other particulars. Indeed, in the 18th chapter, verse 13, etc., we have the first appointment and regulation of judges of various degrees among the people. Their truly noble, great, and disinterested qualifications are set down in verse 21. These men were to execute the civil law. In chapter 20. we have the moral law delivered in a most solemn manner, with glory and awful majesty. As it was the *introduction*, so it seems to be the *foundation* of all that was afterward delivered from the fiery mountain. All of the shadows and substances, the types and anti-types, cast a lustre on the moral law. The substance of this law will continue forever, even in heaven. Verse 24, etc., belong to the ceremonial law.

Chapter 21 begins the collection of their political or *Civil Law*. For they were then a kingdom, or body politic, set apart from all other people. And their gracious, but dread Sovereign, was now issuing out wholesome laws peculiar to his newly erected empire. The statutes concerning Hebrew servants who were bought (verses 1 to 7) and daughters who were sold, verse 7, etc., I believe pertained only to that people, in that country, and under that dispensation. It is certain that the *slave trade* was then in being. The several laws beginning in verse 12, were merely of the civil kind, founded on reason and justice. Yet in the latter part, they were peculiar to that people. Nevertheless, in substance, they suit every nation, even at this time — even though there were some typical things in these, such as the city of refuge, verse 13, and the altar, verse 14. At that time, the judges were vested with a discretionary power, verse 22; and so they still are, provided that they don't transgress a positive law.¹

Chapter 22 is on the same subject. Some things in it pertained to Israel only, such as verses 20 and 25, etc. Verse 29, etc. belong to the ceremonial law.

Chapter 23 up to verse 9, belong to the civil law, and give excellent directions now to be observed everywhere. From there to verse 19, we have parts of the typical law. From verse 20 to the end, we

¹ A positive law is a written ordinance or statute. – WHG

have instructions, promises, and encouragements, suited only to Israel in their then present situation in the wilderness, and concerning their entrance into the land of Canaan. But still, they afford Gospel believers many useful instructions.

From the beginning of chapter 24 to the end of chapter 31, we have a number of types and prefigurations of great and good things to come. They all belong to the Levitical law, and therefore have vanished away. Yet we are to remember that it is the word of God, affording many excellent lessons for the man of God, for whom all scripture is chiefly given.

Chapters 32 and 33 entertain us with a humbling and striking history of the people's provoking revolt, the judgment on them, Moses' intercession, etc. — all of which were peculiar to Israel at that time. But they are still to be carefully read, and seriously considered by us under the Gospel, for they were written as a warning to others in later times, 1Cor 10.1ff.

Chapter 34 up to verse 17, gives instruction, promises, and cautions to that people, under their circumstances at the time. A believer now may look over that with profit and pleasure, finding that it yields doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction. From verses 17 to 26, we have some branches of the ceremonial law repeated. Concerning seething or boiling the kid in his mother's milk, there are diverse opinions. We have that prohibition three times in the books of Moses. What I think bids fairest for the truth is this: that it was a heathen and idolatrous custom. Some affirm that the idolatrous nations, at the ingathering of their fruit, took a kid and boiled it in the milk of the dam; and then, in a magical way, they went about and sprinkling all their fields, gardens, orchards, and trees, thinking by this means they would make them more fruitful the next year. The Lord would not have his people act in such an idolatrous, unnatural, cruel, or barbarous way. From verse 27 to the end, we have a very instructive history, and it had something of a type in it. See 2Cor 3.13ff.

Chapter 35, verse 2, belonged to Israel and to us. Verse 3 belonged to Israel alone, and perhaps it was to continue only while they were in the wilderness, as they had no fuel provided in their then moveable habitations. See Numbers 15.32ff. From verse 4 to the end of Exodus, we have the particulars about building the tabernacle, with all its furnishings. The whole is typical, directing us to spiritual and heavenly things. See Heb 9.1ff.

LEVITICUS,

For the most part, this book directs the priests and Levites how to execute their office. It contains the main body of the ceremonial or Levitical law. From the beginning to the end of chapter 7, instructions are given regarding the various kinds of sacrifices. A few remarks may be made here. The sin mentioned in chapter 4. may be considered of a moral nature. Though perhaps it might be a transgression of the *ceremonial* law, it was also a transgression of the *moral* law. Chapter 6 mentions sins against the political law. When that law was transgressed, then both tablets of the moral law were violated. The fat that is forbidden in chapter 7.23, was only that which they used in their sacrifices, verse 25, according to the positive command given in chapter 3.9-10, and in other places. Concerning blood, verses 26 to 27, I look at this law as both moral and typical, as the precept was given before Moses, and also the prohibition renewed by the apostles, when all met together under the direction of the Holy Ghost, Act 15.20, 28, 29.

Chapter 8 relates very minutely to how solemnly Aaron and his sons were clothed, anointed, consecrated, and installed into the priestly office.

Chapter 9 informs us how they began to execute their holy and important function. Both chapters concern the ceremonial law.

Chapter 10 transmits to us how soon the sons of Aaron transgressed the sacred law, given to them just before, with the immediate and awful judgment of God upon them. It stands to this day, like Lot's wife, as a caution to all, and especially to ministers. Verses 9-11 pertained, no doubt, to Aaron and his surviving sons, with all their successors, while that priesthood continued. It should now suggest to every minister of Jesus Christ how watchful and temperate he ought to be. The latter part of the chapter is *typical*.

Chapter 11 directs the people of Israel which beasts, birds, and fish they had liberty to eat, and which not. I look at the difference between the clean and unclean here, as being ceremonial. For it was said to Noah and his posterity, "Every living thing that moves shall be meat for you." And Peter's vision seems to suggest that this difference pertained to the Mosaic economy only. It denoted the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles, and it was a part of the partition wall between them. But it was abrogated when that wall was broken down by the death of Christ. Yet I think that the clean beasts, birds, and fish, by the law of Moses, are still the more proper and wholesome food, even though "every creature of God is good, if received with thanksgiving."

Chapters 12, 14, 15, 16, and 17 are altogether typical, and they ceased with the Levitical priesthood. Nevertheless, we have in them many humbling and instructive lessons, showing what vile and unclean persons we are, and how absolutely necessary it is that we should be washed and cleansed in the blood of Christ. Nothing else will take out the deep stain.

Many plead that the law in chapter 18 is *Ceremonial*, and therefore abolished. But to me it appears to be evidently of a *moral* nature, and it is to be as carefully observed now, by us Gentile believers, as it was then.¹ The introduction, and the conclusion of the chapter, strongly prove it. *None of you shall approach any who is near of kin*, ver. 6; that is, you shall have no intermarriages with anyone who is near of kin. Then the particular kindred forbidden are punctually pointed out. When all the particulars are mentioned, with some other abominations which are, without any contradiction, of a *moral* nature, it is said, "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things, for by all these the nations are defiled which I am casting out before you." verse 24. They are all termed "abominable customs," verse 30.

Chapter 19 is mixed: verses 3-4 are moral and still in force; verses 5-8 are ceremonial and abolished; verses 9-10 are civil, and perhaps partly typical, but not literally now in force — yet it teaches us to take care of the poor, and be ready to commune. Verses 11-18 are partly moral and partly political, and are now to be observed. Gendering with diverse kinds, in verse 19, I believe is still forbidden; it confounds creatures and the order of nature. But I suppose the mixed seed and garment was ceremonial; for the various kinds of grain are given for our food; likewise wool and linen are given for clothing. Verses 20-22 are of the ceremonial and civil kind, but it does not pertain to us now. Verses 23-25 are ceremonial; verse 26 I believe is moral; 27 and 28 are also moral, being a prohibition not to follow idolatrous nations, denoting immoderate grief for the dead. Verses 29-32 are moral and still in force; verses 33-34 have something peculiar to Israel, but they are instructive now. The succeeding verses are moral, and are to be observed.

¹ **Lev 18:3-4** According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them.

Chapter 20 up to verse 6, was peculiar to Israel. Then, for the most part to the end, it instructs what punishments to inflict on the transgressors of the foregoing laws. The laws mentioned as being transgressed, I believe are branches of the *moral* law, but the penalty was *political*. Whether the penalty is still to be inflicted may be a question. The crimes are now cognizable and punishable by the magistrate, but the legislators should consider the penalty according to the dispensations we are now under, having strict regard to the moral law, reason, and justice.

Chapters 21-23 all belong to the *ceremonial* law, and are abolished. And so chapter 24 up to verse 9. The affair of the blasphemer is a true and sacred history, and that affair gave occasion to enact the law in verses 15 and 16, which was strictly binding on Israel. How far the penalty is now to be inflicted, I will not determine; but every transgressor of this kind is certainly guilty before God, who is ever jealous of his own glory. Verses 17ff are the political or civil law. It should now be well considered, in enacting and executing laws, though probably not literally followed. Chapter 25. pertains to the Levitical law and priesthood, and has ceased.

Chapter 26 consists of precepts, prohibitions, promises, threatenings, etc. suited to the Mosaic dispensation. :Yet it is full of instruction for us at this time. Though the dispensation has changed, morality and divine worship are to be carefully observed with reverence and godly fear, or else temporal and eternal judgments are to be expected. The threatenings in this chapter have been accomplished on Israel long ago, and they are still under the rod. The promises in verses 44-45, have been fulfilled in part on their return from Babylon, and at other times. Yet I am confident there will be a further accomplishment of those and many other promises to the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹ Verse 46 imports that all the preceding laws were enacted in a peculiar manner between God and the Israelites, and they are to continue to the coming of Christ.

Chapter 27. pertained to the ceremonial law, and is abrogated.

NUMBERS.

Chapters 1-4 are antiquated, most of them suiting Israel only while in the wilderness. Chapter 5 is partly political, and partly ceremonial; the letter of it is now abrogated, but the doctrine is to be retained with care. The vow and law of the Nazarite, chapter 6, is not binding on Gospel believers. Verse 23ff was a set form for the priests to bless the people (see Deu 10.8 and 21.5). This form was peculiar to Israel. In chapter 7 we have the free offering of the twelve princes at the dedication of the tabernacle. Chapter 8 is ceremonial and abrogated. Chapter 9 up to verse 14 is abolished; the rest of the chapter is an instructive history. In chapter 10 we have some further rites pertaining only to Israel, up to verse 10. Then we have an account of the first march of the people after the tabernacle was erected, and all the regulations on Mount Sinai.

Chapters 11-14 contain a very important history, and were written for our example, 1 Cor 10.11-12. Chapter 15 is ceremonial, but verses 30 and 31 I think belong to the moral law; though in some things it was suited to that dispensation. So too concerning the Sabbath breaker; yet we should pay due regard to the Lord's day. Chapter 16 is a most awful warning piece. Chapter 17 is a kind of appendix to it. It is a true history, and a shadow of good things to come. Chapters 18 and 19 are abrogated. Chapter 20 is a short detail of great offenses for which we should be admonished, and so is chapter 21. Here we are to observe that the water out of the rock, and the brazen serpent, were eminent types of Christ.

¹ Such uncertainties and assumptions concerning the physical nation of Israel, gave rise to the dispensationalism of John Darby in the 19th century, which was refuted by A. W. Pink and others in the 20th century. – WHG

In chapters 22-24 we have the famous and interesting account of Balak and Balaam. Chapter 25 presents us with the sad fruits and consequences of Balaam's wicked and ungodly advice. Chapters 26 and 27 contain more scripture history, interspersed with some traces of their polity regarding their settlement in the land of Canaan. Chapters 28 and 29 belong to the ceremonial law, and are mostly a recapitulation of what was delivered before, with some explanation. Chapter 30 is an addition to Leviticus 27. The other chapters in Numbers are merely historical, yet very instructive; and several passages belong to their civil law, and were also typical, especially the *city of refuge*.

DEUTERONOMY,

This book is a view of the forty years' journey in the wilderness, from which solemn exhortations, admonitions, warnings, etc. are given to Israel. Some former laws are repeated — moral, judicial, and ceremonial — which are pretty easily discerned by what I have said already. Chapter 19 to the end of chapter 25, belong almost entirely to their judicial or civil law; and a great part of it is peculiar to the people of Israel under that dispensation. I see no necessity to add any more remarks on this book, because it so corresponds and tallies with what has been noted already.

Question 21. How may a person know whether a promise or threatening is brought to the soul by God, or by Satan?

I am fully persuaded that Satan, very often, applies promises and threatenings to saints and sinners; but it is done so very artfully that neither the one nor the other is always able to discern it. As Satan is a common adversary, we may be sure that he has an evil design in hand whenever he makes use of the sacred word. Seeing the case is so, when we find the word of God brought to our mind, and fastening on our hearts, we should ask, "Is this word brought by the Holy Ghost, or by the evil spirit?" Then the question becomes, "How may I know who brought it?" Let us try these particulars.

I. We should consider the end and tendency of the promise or threatening which affects our mind. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply a promise, the soul is more or less led to Jesus Christ, for all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. There is also some direction given to look to Jesus, and strength offered to trust in him. This implies approval of, and a degree of love for the Redeemer. And this love excites hatred toward sin, for faith purifies the heart, and works by love. Then holiness is promoted, the glory of God is in view, and all those precious fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Gal 5.22f, Col 3.12-13, and Jas 3.17, are more or less experienced and unfeignedly sought. When threatening is brought to the mind by the same Blessed Spirit, it generally (perhaps always) has a tendency to excite us to flee to Christ. For instance, *this* threatening is brought: "You will die in your sin," Joh 8.21 *i.e.* unless you flee to Jesus. Again, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the law, to do them;" Gal 3.10 — but still, *unless* they flee to Christ. To deter from sin, the Spirit hides the word in the believer's heart with this view: that he may not sin. You will perish, He says, unless you repent. If you regard and nourish iniquity in your heart, God will not regard your prayer. As to diligence in duty: "If anyone draws back," says the Spirit, "My soul has no pleasure in him." Heb 10.38 The man under the influence of the heavenly Teacher will say, "I would not draw back on any account; I will endeavour to push forward, though I am weak and feeble. If he slays me in the end, I will wait, trust, and hope, even unto death."

But when *Satan* brings a promise, he has other designs in hand. He has quite different ends to serve. He will not lead us to Christ faithfully, for if he transforms himself into an angel of light, it is to carry on the work of darkness. He may say, *Trust in Christ*, but it is in order to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. If Satan says, "the foundation of God stands sure," it is to harden the

person's heart, so that he may not depart from iniquity. He often applies promises to promote sin. We have a glaring instance of this in his combat with the Lord of life and glory, Mat 4.6.¹ When he acts this way on the green tree, what will he not do on the dry tree? When we are emboldened by a promise to commit sin, and then excited to cloak it, we may be sure that the serpent is at work. When he deals in promises, he is like a filthy sow, tempting and soliciting us to brutal uncleanness and sensuality. But when he deals in threatenings and menaces, he resembles a roaring lion, or a fiery dragon. He says, "It is in vain to flee to Christ, it is too late, you are too vile. Christ will have nothing to do with a wretch such as you" — or anything that will hinder us from Christ, he doesn't care what, if it attains the end. He says, "It is in vain to pray," as the wily serpent throws in a crowd of vain thoughts while the believer is praying. And when prayer is over, he will say, "That is a fine prayer;² give it up for shame. God will not hear sinners. Such prayers as these are an abomination to him." When the *Holy Spirit* reproves us for vanity in prayer, He says, "Be more watchful, more humble, more earnest," etc. He wounds the very heart, but it is to heal and strengthen the weak, sickly believer. But *the devil* is always a murderer. He says, "It is in vain to hear or read; the word is the savour of death unto death." If one goes to the Lord's table, he says, "You eat and drink your own damnation." Thus he terrifies poor souls, and many are so ignorant of his devices, that they believe him.

II. When the Spirit of God applies a promise or threatening, it is to promote something useful, to the glory of God, and for the good of his people: to support under affliction, and direct through difficulties, in a holy and humble way. To Joshua he says, *I will never leave you nor forsake you*. This was to sustain his heart in the hard service before him. It appears evidently that he had the glory of God near to his heart, for when God seemed to forget his good promise, the holy man's plea was, "What will you do for Your great name?" Jos 7.9. The same promise is brought to believers long after that, to discountenance covetousness and distrust; and to excite contentment and holy fortitude, Heb 13.5-6.

But *Satan* brings promises to promote trifles, and to excite self-conceit. He brought a promise to persuade Jesus Christ to cast himself down headlong. To what purpose was that? What end could it meet? Those who prayed for things to consume in their lust, very probably pleaded promises. While pope Alexander was treading on the neck of Frederick the emperor at Venice, Mr. Fox tells us that he repeated that promise, "You will tread upon the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon you will trample underfoot." Psa 91.13 There have been sad instances of shameful madness carried on under the pretence of promises. When Jehu was driving furiously, and wading through blood on his way to the throne, he would say again and again, "This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant the prophet;" yet all the while he was an idolater, under Satan's influence.

III. The Holy Spirit brings promises and threatenings to encourage the use of proper and appointed means to obtain free promises, and to escape just threatenings. Paul believed that he had a promise from God, and that it would be according to the promise. Yet they used precaution to shun rocks: the sailors who were more skilful than the soldiers and passengers in time of danger, must stay in the ship as the *instruments* by whom the promise was to be accomplished. The people must take food and be cheerful; they then use all possible means to thrust the ship in any way to shore. Hezekiah had a promise that he would recover, that he would go to the house of

¹ **Mat 4:6** "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In *their* hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

² "Fine" here means a thin veneer on a bed of sin, thus sowing doubt in the believer. – WHG

the Lord on the third day. And lest he doubt the promise, he had the token on the dial, which he chose himself. But for all this, a dressing must be applied to the boil, by the prophet's direction. Ezra had a general promise that the hand of God is upon all those who seek Him, for good. Here we have a description of the very persons to whom the promise pertains, so they give themselves to prayer and fasting. Ezr 8.21-22. Daniel read the promise in Jer 29.10; but along with this he saw there that the people should *pray*, verses 12-13. And so the prophet gives himself to prayer, and pleads fervently in his supplication. See Daniel 9, almost the whole the chapter.

When *Satan* produces threats or promises, he does it to supersede the use of means, and to persuade the persons to despise and lay aside their duty. It's as if Paul had said, "I believe it will be as God has promised, therefore let the sailors go wherever they want: we don't need to fear rocks, quicksand, shipwreck, or anything; we will go safely to land." It's as if Ezra and Daniel had said, "God will make good his promise, he regards his own veracity more than our prayers; therefore, we may rest easy." Or as if Hezekiah had reasoned thus: "God has promised; he has set the time, and also given a token; what does troubling myself with a dressing signify?" Many are deluded with promises; but they look upon duty in order to *obtain* promises, as a poor, low, mean, legal way — as if true faith must not produce obedience and works. Others are terrified with threatenings to frighten them from their duties, as observed above. The poor believer seldom thinks that Satan is so apt to show him the imperfections of all his performances. O friends, don't be discouraged in your duty; but still go on, no matter what may follow.

IV. The good Spirit brings to remembrance promises and threatenings, faithfully and honestly, in a way that is consistent with the whole scope of Scripture, true religion, real godliness, and right reason. But Satan is the father of lies, even when he quotes the true promises of a faithful God. He mutilates, twists, and tortures the scriptures, making one part clash with another. When Satan urges Christ with a promise of protection, he does it like a serpent, leaving out in the midst of the promise, that word which goes against his purpose, "To keep you in all your ways." But our divine Master has taught us that we are not to tempt God in depending on promises when we go out of the way, Mat 4.6-7. God is not the author of confusion, but Satan always is.

V. When the *Lord* brings a promise or threatening to the soul, the understanding is enlightened, and the judgment is at liberty to reason, weigh, and conclude impartially. Indeed, it is *charged* to do so in the light of an illuminated understanding, under the eye of conscience, under the direction of God's infallible word, in the presence of the Almighty, and looking forward to the decisive tribunal where judgment will soon be set to the line and the plummet.^{Isa 28.17} So many weighty considerations must undoubtedly strike the soul with awe. Yet where Satan does not disturb us, there is an inward serenity, coolness, calmness, satisfaction, and pleasure in all this. The soul loves to be under so many eyes, to be so well-guarded, and will say, Lord, search me; try me.^{Psa 139.23} Let all be according to Your word, Your will. When this is the case with the soul, the affections are drawn to right objects, and the will is submissive, so that there is harmony among the higher and nobler powers of the soul.

But when *Satan* brings the promise, the address is generally made to the affections, the fancy, and the senses, and often to very corrupt and headstrong passions. Then the understanding is blinded. A mist is raised before the mind, so that it is darkened. Conscience must sleep, the word must not appear at all, nor any part of it, except what serves to carry on the present purpose. So the judgment is in darkness and chained there, and reason is bribed and corrupted. But the will bears all before it, though even that is but a slave to the affection, the fancy, the corrupt appetites, etc.

Out of many instances, I will produce one (2Kng 22.21-22ff): Ahab was determined to go and fight for Ramah, in Gilead. Jehoshaphat would have him inquire from the Lord, whether it was right for him to go, and if the expedition would be successful. Ahab complies immediately; but he must consult his own prophets, that he might be sure to have his own way. They all agree to a man, and promise success to the king, but every one of them was under the influence of the lying spirit. When Micaiah was mentioned, Ahab was afraid he would overturn the whole scheme. But when the King of Judah would have his opinion, the messenger entreats Micaiah to speak good to the king. The lying spirit wanted to corrupt the Lord's prophet like the rest. But when that would not do, Ahab would have his own will, and gave no ear to truth. Now, in the whole affair, the devil's design was to fill the king of Israel with the imagination of victory, with a purpose to deceive him, that he might fall in Ramoth Gilead.

VI. In applying promises and threatenings, the Spirit of truth promotes the great and essential parts of religion, such as faith in Christ, a holy life, self-trial, mortification of sin, self-denial, etc. But Satan applies promises and threatenings to carry on with rigidity, and imprudent passion some small things of religion, like the people who tithed their mint, rue, and cummin, but neglected the weightier matters of the law (Mat 23.23).

Question 22. Does Satan know the thoughts and intents of the heart, or only the gestures and motions of the body, as he has had such long experience?

It is the prerogative of God alone to know the thoughts afar off; to discern the very intents of the heart; to look upon them intuitively, that is, with the utmost ease, and without the least difficulty or labour at all — all of them being open and naked before him. Therefore, Jehovah himself proposed this universal challenge: "Who can know the heart?" The answer by the mouth of truth is this: I the Lord know, or search the heart; I try the reins. So, by way of eminence, *God* is the searcher of the heart. Then we may safely conclude that Satan does *not* know the thoughts of man as God does. But still, as Satan is a spirit, he has a freer and more frequent intercourse with the human mind than many are aware of. I look at the mind as the spring, and thoughts as the streams issuing from it. Satan cannot exactly see or discern the spring head, nor perhaps all the streams. A good man may have many thoughts which Satan cannot be very privy to.

I think that in the exercise of faith, love, hope, etc., thoughts must be employed as the mind is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. I am of the opinion that the evil spirit has no great heart to be very near so as to pry into particulars, when the good Spirit shines and breathes upon the soul, and the Sun of righteousness warms and sanctifies the heart. But even then, the enemy is skulking about, and knows that the thoughts are on things above, and enters where he cannot go. He is around the door, and knows there is a feast within, but he cannot understand the whole conversation. I imagine that persons in a state of nature may have many deep thoughts concerning natural things, which Satan is not entirely acquainted with. For instance, the inventors and improvers of any art, such as mathematics, or any other science or mechanical art. I think every person has some thoughts which Satan is not wholly acquainted with.

Nevertheless, I think, that of all creatures, the fallen angels are the most skilful to know our thoughts. Not that I suppose the devils are wiser, more intelligent, or of more extensive knowledge than the angels in heaven. The innumerable company of angels above stand before God, minister to him, and behold his face always. So their knowledge is more heavenly and sublime; they learn the mind of God; they are sent on embassies here among men, to serve the heirs of salvation whenever it pleases God to send them. But heaven is their chief residence. Now the devil's main

exercise is to deceive man, inventing and improving all devices to destroy him. This is why Satan is so artful and busy to know our thoughts, which is not so much the concern of holy angels. There is one remarkable advantage that the enemy has to know our thoughts. He has an undoubted way and method to corrupt our mind, by injections and hellish suggestions. So far as I can conceive of at present, it is done this way: an idea is presented to the eyes of our body or mind, that is most likely to suit our temper and constitution. Then the corruption within us is excited by him, and irritated. And when he proceeds, which he often does, he may easily know those thoughts that are employed in his service, or set to work by him. He always works in the children of disobedience, and often takes them in his snare at his will; but not always with equal success. It is not as he wills in every respect, but only as God is pleased to give permission.

In paradise, the serpent began by presenting objects. Eve thought the forbidden fruit was exceedingly pleasant to the eyes. Achan was taken by the eye; the attractive garment, the two hundred shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold, stirred up the corruption of his heart. When Satan had leave, how soon he presented Job's oxen and asses to the minds of the Sabeans, and excited their covetousness and fury, so that they fell upon them like madmen, and put the servants to the sword! The Chaldeans invaded the camels in the same manner. I will add one instance more. We may conclude that Satan proposed to Judas in this way: "If you now go to the chief priests and scribes, they will give you money to betray your Master; now is your opportunity." Satan must have been some time about that awful affair. In Joh 13.2, it is said, "The devil having put it into the heart of Judas to betray him;" that is, he injected thoughts into Judas, or proposed temptations which stirred up his covetous disposition. Then in verse 27, we find that Satan entered him; that is, he had greater influence over him, and would let him rest no longer. So he went out, and betrayed his Lord. The case of Ananias and his wife, with many more, are still on record. But this is notable: how Satan tempts, rather than answering the query.¹ On the whole, I conclude that Satan knows the thoughts and intents of the heart above any creature, except the man himself. And as he is so subtle a spirit, his apprehensions so piercing, his scent so quick — as he has very near access to our spirits, and by our corruption, he is admitted to converse very close too often — perhaps, in general, we don't have many thoughts that he is ignorant of. He is more perfectly acquainted with the thoughts of sinners who are his royal subjects, than the thoughts of believers in Christ. For he is cast out of the heart of the people of God, and so he has lost much of his dominion over them, and his intimacy with them.

Question 23. Can a person who is daily harassed with unclean thoughts and desires, be a child of God? If so, what can, what should a poor unhappy person do, according to the direction of God's holy word, in order to vanquish and overcome them?

I would answer the former part of the query at once in the affirmative, were it not for the term "desires" in it, which may allow for different constructions. For the most part, the word denotes the full and earnest wish of the mind, to such a degree that nothing is lacking to fulfil the desire except liberty, opportunity, etc. Then the desire is enlarged as hell, and cannot be satisfied. This is a *mischievous* desire, an *inordinate* affection, an *evil* concupiscence. If the word is taken in this sense in the query, it is really mental adultery. It is transgressing the law, and defiling the man. I

¹ **Gen 3:1** Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

believe such a desire as this is intended in Mat 5.28.¹ I can hardly conceive that a child of God can be polluted in this manner daily. Therefore, I suppose the word “desires” in the query, intends only lustful irritations, stimulations, or inclinations. Taking this to be the ease, I would observe a few particulars.

There is in most persons a natural inclination to generation.² These desires are absolutely necessary for the continuance and increase of mankind. God has appointed that his purposes should be accomplished, and his glory promoted, in this manner. Nevertheless, these desires are not to be enlarged as hell, but to be restrained and limited by the holy law of God. Things that are useful and necessary in themselves, according to the law of creation and conservation, are greatly perverted by our sad depravity. If we have no appetites — that is, no desire and inclination to eat and drink — we cannot be useful in our place, nor live long. Yet the glutton, the drunkard, and the voluptuary,³ greatly abuse the good creatures of God, to the shame, ruin, and destruction of soul and body. So too, in the case under consideration, when our desires are unlimited, unseasonable, and to excess, they become sinful. Again, because Satan is an unclean spirit, his element is to promote all manner of uncleanness. Therefore, we need not doubt that he has a hand in carrying on, tempting, and provoking us to the *uncleanness* in the query. So it is possible that a child of God may be daily and grievously harassed with unclean thoughts for a time.

In attempting to answer the second part of the query, I will have occasion to expatiate a little on this topic. So then, I will proceed to observe, “What a poor unhappy person should do, according to the direction of God’s holy word, in order to vanquish and overcome unclean thoughts and desires which often harass him.” The will of God is the sanctification of his people, “that everyone may know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.” But many are at a loss to know how to do this. The subject is as seldom handled in this case, as in any other. Distressed ones are also at a loss as to how or where to apply for direction. Therefore, I will propose a few directions here, with the freedom of a friend.

1. Consider that the 7th commandment (against adultery) is holy, just, and good — the law of a holy God, written on the heart of a holy person. Observe that Mat 5.28 is a plain and infallible explanation of this commandment.

Beware of idleness. Be careful and industrious in some necessary calling and useful exercise. Also, *in your eating and drinking*, be prudently and conscientiously sparing. Observe what is necessary to support nature, so as to preserve your health and follow your calling comfortably. But learn to distinguish between that which is *necessary* food, and that which serves not only to inflame your lust, but to injure your body, and oppress your mind. The heart is overcharged with eating and drinking sooner and oftener than many choose to see. We are strictly charged by our kind teacher, to take heed lest it be so. *Sodom was proud.* It had “fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness.” (Eze 16.49) And so they committed abominations with a high hand. Therefore God made them an awful “example to those who after would live ungodly.” (2Pet 2.6) When Israel had bread to the full, they were like fed horses, and committed abominable lewdness. Joseph followed his business, knowing that was the way to keep his body under control. A careful and discreet watch over the eyes, ears, and tongue is absolutely necessary to some — and perhaps to *most*.

¹ **Mat 5:28** ... whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

² *Generation*: the act of producing offspring.

³ *Voluptuary*: A person addicted to luxury and to gratifying the pleasures of the senses.

We may easily conclude from the Scripture account, that Job was a person of strict chastity. Yet he found it necessary to make “a covenant with his eyes” (31.1). By the eye, David and many more were ensnared. Whoever would have the victory over unclean or impure thoughts, let him turn his eyes away from any object that he finds has the least tendency to excite impurity of heart, such as obscene pictures, cuts, or anything of that kind. These must be avoided. There are too many books, such as plays and romances, that seem purposely calculated to corrupt mankind. Some authors have an unhappy talent to dress vice and filthiness in the flowers of rhetoric and a charming style. A very pious and holy man thus expresses himself on this topic:

“I am really afraid to read Spenser’s *Fairy Queen*. He is superior in fancy, perhaps, to every poet. Yet he is so luscious in some of his representations, which I have casually dipped into, that it is impossible (for me at least) to view them without catching the contagion. His pictures of this sort are drawn with a good design. He makes his heroes victors of the soft allurements. But I believe that few minds are so case-hardened against sensual pleasures, as not to receive disadvantageous impressions. I am therefore determined not to look at it again — never to gather the honey of poetry from the briars of contamination. *Flee temptation* is the advice of an inspired apostle, and I will pay due regard to it.”

No, there shouldn’t be a fondness for reading anything on the subject. Even in religious books, though handled with modesty and tending to discourage vice, we should still carefully observe what effect that has on us. We are to watch no less carefully over the eye of the *mind*; for that may infect the thoughts, either by reflection or imagination. *Sin is multiplied by calling to remembrance*. Eyes of body or mind, that are “full of adultery, cannot cease from sin,” 2Pet 2.14. The ears likewise are to be stopped from the filthy conversation of the wicked; unclean thoughts may arise from the hearing of the ear. The tongue, by all means, should not be defiled with filthiness and foolish talking, or any corrupt communication; whoever doesn’t bridle his tongue in this case, only trifles when he complains of his thoughts. When conversing with a serious man, in a serious way, about the corroding wickedness and lamentable debauchery of the age, I mentioned what was reported about particular persons in our own neighbourhood (which was the occasion for our discourse). We detested the conduct and bewailed the misery of vile wretches. And yet for all this, I found some of the filth sticking to my mind for perhaps two or three days after. How cautious we ought to be!

II. Care should be taken to distinguish between our own sin, and Satan’s temptations. We may be sure that the enemy is full of wiles in this affair, both with the godly and the ungodly, in thoughts and actions. But the query regards only the thoughts of the *godly*. The sacred history informs us that pious husbands and wives are in danger of being tempted by Satan for their incontinence.¹ Satan knows very well the constitution, disposition, or inclination of the person, as noted in the foregoing queries. He observes and makes use of times, seasons and advantages. He knows what sin will most easily beset us; he has numerous ways to disturb our mind. Our eyes, ears, and tongues are often made instruments of much hurt in his service. By the glance of an eye, he may at once be able to pour in a crowd of injections which are neither quickly nor easily tossed away. It is possible that a person may be tempted, and yet not be defiled or contract any guilt; but every Christian cannot be a proper judge in this point. Our Lord Jesus Christ “was tempted in all points, as we are.” That is amazing indeed! And yet he was in not defiled in any point. He was like a glass of pure water: however much it is stirred, it is still clear.

¹ *Incontinence*: here it means lack of self-discipline with regard to sensuous pleasures. – WHG

True, no *mere* man is so free from sin. When we're tempted, we are apt to be defiled. Yet a good man may imagine that his sin is much more heinous than it really is. Satan has a subtle way of raising ideas in the mind, which may distress us grievously. And we may at that very instant loathe and detest the thoughts, yet we cannot be free from them. Now, the devil may grieve us sadly by persuading us that these are all *our sins*, when in truth they are *his fiery darts* which excite and inflame us continually. We would, with our very souls, be intent on quite different objects; yet we are still hit in the teeth with these. We can have no rest or peace, for these unwelcome guests, these *fiends*, will be haunting us. We may confidently believe this is from Satan. Yet the wicked one will tell us, *See what a nest of serpents your heart is! A child of God was never in such a case as yours*, etc. We should indeed be sorry to think and find that Satan has so much room in which to work on us; and yet we have no business mistaking his temptations for our own sins. But if we entertain his temptations, we sin immediately. He is like an enemy outside the city, tossing in fire as fast as he can. But we should be like prudent and valiant citizens, endeavouring to extinguish it with all our skill. We may still be at a great loss how to distinguish between Satan's temptations and our own hearts' corruption; but it's not very material. Let us endeavour to know when we are defiled. When we delight in thoughts revolving around what is not suitable, then we sin and contract guilt; and *that* gives our enemy the advantage.

III. It is good to despise these injections, and pay no regard to them. They are the seed which the enemy sows. But if they find no depth of earth, they will wither away. It is possible to grieve where we need not. But let us always beware lest we be lulled to sleep on Delilah's lap.

IV. We should hope, and even be confident, that we will yet obtain a greater victory than sometimes we imagine. Though the holiest man on earth is not quite free from *all* temptation, nor even from *some* corruption, yet in the case under consideration, one remarkable instance occurs to my mind: namely, a person who is so given to impurity, that he fancies himself invincibly impelled to it by his very constitution. He thinks nothing will cure him but shooting through the head. Indeed, he supposed that Omnipotence itself could not reform him without destroying his very body, and giving him another. This was before the great change wrought in him by the grace of God. His conversation was uncommonly remarkable, and he was so effectually cured of his impurity (which he thought incurable), that after many years he said that all desires and inclinations were as entirely removed as if he had been a suckling child. To be sure, this was a remarkable instance. The wonderful change in him was at about the age of thirty-one. His freedom from sinful thoughts and actions was not otherwise; for he was married about seven years after his conversion, and had many children. He was a most tender and affectionate husband, and a shining ornament to religion. His holiness and chastity were exemplary. He left the imperfect state of this life in 1745. This case, though not common, should encourage distressed ones to wait for deliverance. Then, when Satan acts the filthy sow, turning up stinking kennels, let us despise his low, mean, abominable course, and not dispute with him, but say, O Lucifer! You have fallen from the height of light and glory to *this* exercise? Get away from here, Satan; I will yet look up.

V. Abstain from that familiarity with the opposite sex, which may justly be deemed needless and too free — especially when it is found to give occasion to unholy thoughts. "Chambering and wantonness" is "making provision for the flesh."

VI. *With* all and *through* all other means, it is absolutely necessary that we look to faith and prayer. The mind ought to be employed about things above, looking to Jesus who suffered so much for vile wretches, by whose blood alone we must be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Faith in his blood is the only way to quench the fiery darts. We should be fervent in prayer, so that

the Holy Spirit may condescend to often and efficaciously bring to our remembrance the things of Jesus, so that we may be sanctified wholly in soul, body, and spirit. The query only regards thoughts and desires; and the persons concerned in it are conscientious to keep far from unclean actions. Those who delight in impure thoughts, and don't hate unchaste actions, don't have the 7th commandment written on their hearts. They haven't crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. Therefore they would do well to consider the works of the flesh (Gal 5.19-24).

The query may concern some who are unmarried. Let them seriously observe Paul's instructions in 1Cor 7.2, 7, 9, 39. It seems the apostle was not married himself. He had such supports from God's all-sufficient grace, that he wished others were like himself. Some in the conjugal relation may likewise be concerned in the query. I myself am in that honourable relation. I have known the conflicts of both states. Yet up to now I have been upheld, bless the Lord, my soul!

I will conclude with a short quotation out of a letter written by a celebrated author who, while here, made it his business to glorify God in his conversation, in his ministry, and with his pen. He entered into that state where holiness is in full perfection, and purity is untainted forever, in 1758. He writes to his friend thus:

"Recommend Jenk's *Victory of Chastity* to Mr. ____, and tell him that though the lusts of the flesh are inveterate enemies, yet three methods may be prescribed for a victory over them.

"1. A believing application of the Redeemer's death. The saints in glory, once men of like passions as ourselves, overcame through the blood of the Lamb. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin, might live to righteousness.

"2. A habitual reliance on the Spirit of God. If you, through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. Christ by his Spirit acts on our depraved, polluted hearts, like a refiner's fire, and a fuller's soap.

"3. An improvement of the divine promises. "God has given us great and precious promises, that by these we might be made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

In another place, the same author notes that St. Augustine justly observes that, "Of all the conflicts of the Christian, those concerning chastity are the sharpest, because the combat is strenuous and lasting, a complete victory being rarely obtained."

Question 24. How may a Christian know when he eats or drinks by faith, the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ sacramentally? Or, what does it mean to be a worthy communicant at the Lord's table?

We can seldom, probably never in our time, see a company sitting down at the Lord's table, that doesn't consist of two different sorts, namely, believers and unbelievers. By *unbelievers*, I understand everyone who is not regenerated, or born again; who is not quickened and enlightened savingly by the Spirit of God; who is not a new creature; and who doesn't have a spiritual taste, appetite, and relish for true religion; whose conversation is not becoming to the Gospel. Of these, many are *openly* profane. It's a pity that such should be suffered to come to the Lord's table. It looks like casting holy things to dogs, and pearls before swine.

Others are self-righteous persons and hypocrites. It's not so easy to know these. Therefore, they are false brethren who will come to the assembly of saints — even when they are separated from the world. These tares will be among the wheat, and the foolish virgins will intermix with the wise.

But when the great Shepherd comes, he will entirely and infallibly separate the sheep from the goats. Then and there it will be in vain to plead, *Lord, we have eaten at your table*, etc. Many who eat at his table, lift up their heels against him here; yet in the end, they will go to their own place. Unbelievers, then, of every rank and complexion, are in reality unworthy communicants. They can never eat and drink in the exercise of true faith, which they don't have.

Again, believers themselves may eat unworthily, as the Corinthians were supposed to have been, still weak and sickly because of their unworthy eating. And as they didn't judge themselves as they should have done, they were chastened by the Lord, so they would not be condemned by the world. The present query seems to suppose that a true Christian may sometimes be an unworthy communicant, not eating and drinking in faith. But that very same person may, at other times be a worthy receiver, as he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup in faith. I am of the opinion that the case may undoubtedly be so. The question then is, *How may a Christian know when he is a worthy communicant, and when he is not?*

There are many cases where it may be very difficult for a person to determine to his own satisfaction, as there is some true faith in every believer, however feeble; and there is also much unbelief at times. Consequently, in every believer there is some Scripture worthiness, and much unworthiness. A real Christian, eating and drinking in every way unworthily, must be in a sad and deplorable case indeed. I hope there are none of the children of God in our country who come up to the case of the Corinthians. However, it is perhaps possible for a Christian to be so far declined in spirituals, as to come to the Lord's table even though he lives in a known and heinous sin; even though carnal and earthly-minded; when the savour of religion is done away with by a sensuality and worldly conformity. And yet he comes to the sacred ordinance in a merely customary way, perhaps to cloak his iniquity so others may not suspect that he is so lifeless as he knows himself in some sense to be. He has grown gross, and almost impenetrable; he is not duly affected with his woeful case; he thinks but little about it beforehand, or while he sits senseless at the table, or after he goes away. If this should be the case, I think that surely such persons must eat and drink very unworthily. But it may be asked, *What may such a poor creature do in such a deplorable case as this?*

What! Let him examine himself, and see whether he rightly discerns the Lord's body or not. Let him consider where he has fallen from, repent, and do the first works. Let him "be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, but are ready to die; for his work is not perfect before God."

Quest. Is it best for a person in such a dead and benumbed state, to partake or not?

Ans. If he chooses and resolves to continue in that shameful and lamentable state, let him not come to the Lord's table, but refrain his defiled hands from the sacred elements. Yet I would hope that a child of God would not deliberately choose such a dead and uncomfortable frame. But if a person is grievously distressed on account of a state of soul that is so very disagreeable, and he is at a loss to know what to do, then which is best? To communicate or to refrain? I humbly conceive that it is the duty of that distressed and burdened soul to wait in the way, and come to remember afresh the love, sufferings, and death of a compassionate Saviour, who died and suffered so much in order to relieve and save poor souls. It may be that the Lord will have pity on him, and before he is aware, his soul will be set at liberty. He may not wait long before he cries out, *I found the one whom my soul loved and longed for!*

Quest. Is it the duty of a believer to refrain once or twice from the Lord's table on account of the commission of some particular sin, or fall by a temptation which is known only to himself — yet his soul oppressed with guilt?

Ans. I would determine nothing in such an affair. A person should act prudently. Satan may take advantage when one is swallowed up with excessive sorrow. If I am wounded at heart because of a sin I've committed, yet if it isn't not known to others, it is my opinion that I may, with great humility and self-abasement, come to the Lord's table. "You have done this wickedness, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart," 1Sam 12.20. Yet if I choose, by way of self-abhorrence and humiliation, to refrain once or twice from communion, perhaps it may not be amiss. "If her father had but spit in her face, shouldn't she be ashamed for seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and after that let her be received again," Num 12.14. If my fall or sin is known to some person or persons, and so it may possibly be made public, I think it then prudent to refrain and await the outcome, deploring my circumstances before God, and praying that His good ways may not be reproached on my account. For if my fall were to come to light, whatever the frame of my heart has been with regard to repentance, it will still be deemed an aggravation to my crime, that after committing it, I presumed to communicate. That will look to others as if I were hardened in sin, no matter how deeply and sensibly felt my compunction for sin had been.

Quest. What if a person has been guilty, and his fellow communicants know about it, and perceive in him evident signs of repentance, yet they are offended if he doesn't suspend his communion for some time, by way of reproof?

Ans. It appears to me to be his duty then, for the honour of the Gospel, and to avoid further offence, to refrain and comply with the desire of his friends, thereby testifying to his humility. Yet his brethren should not be too severe, but *consider themselves, lest they too be tempted*.

If these queries are reckoned a digression, I hope the candid reader will pardon it, and permit me now to return.

A person may be sure that he eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ *by faith*, when his soul within him is greatly humbled for sin before God; and at the same time, he looks upon Christ as crucified for his sin, and bruised for his iniquity. Behold Jesus exceedingly glorious, even in dyed apparel, though stained with his own blood. Yet as he is pierced with the believer's own personal transgressions, the humble receiver loves him with intense love for the glory of His person, his inconceivable love, in every way free, bestowed and fixed upon a wretch so vile, to deliver him from endless flames where he deserved to have had his everlasting abode. And as if deliverance from hell were a small thing, the love of Christ goes much further, and gives an indubitable right to, and fitness for, eternal glory, and all the enjoyment and employment of heaven. Where this is in reality the case, the highly favoured and very grateful communicant will delight to approach the Lord's table, to remember the unchangeable and inconceivable love and dying agonies of our divine Redeemer — to behold afresh the precious, precious blood, and to read again his title to the glorious inheritance. For him, the sacred solemnity will be a feast of rich things, and well refined wine. His Lord sits at the table addressing him in such heart-engaging, heart-melting language as this: "Eat, friend; drink; yes, drink abundantly, beloved. I assumed this body for your sake; it was broken for your sins; and this blood was shed to wash away all your filth. You will soon be with me where I am, beholding and delighting yourself in my glory."

For that soul, Christ will be his all in all; his mediation, incarnation, obedience, sufferings, death, resurrection, intercession, relation, etc. He will be bread indeed, and the best wine that goes down sweetly, which will cause his very soul to long for the new wine in the kingdom of heaven. This wine will strengthen and refresh him, so that it will be his food and drink to do the will of God, and yield obedience to a beloved Saviour whose very reproach is far preferable to all the gaudy grandeur of this world. He would be glad to always have “holiness to the Lord” engraved on all his conduct. This person will be sure to examine himself, and discern carefully the Lord’s body. He comes to the house of God, not that he may rest in any outward ordinance, even though of divine institution, but that while he is waiting in the appointed way, he may *by faith* have a clearer view of, and a more endearing communion with, the One whom his soul loves — with whom he hopes to be forever, and in whose presence is fulness and perfection of joy.

Probably there are many humble souls in Christian societies who find themselves coming very short of what is noted above. And so they are ready to cry out, “What shall we do?” I am fully persuaded that there are not a few worthy receivers whose experience doesn’t reach to the light, comfort, and enjoyment observed above. If so, then I would proceed and attempt to show when a poor, weak, doubting person may conclude that he is a worthy communicant. Notice has been taken already that a true Christian may be in a sad and wretched declining state: very dead, helpless, and earthly-minded. When a person is in this lamentable state, and sensible of it, and groans under it, he may be a worthy communicant, though dejectedly cast down and burdened with a sense of his unworthiness.

I would add a hint or two, to what has been observed. Let me ask such a soul what his design is in coming to the sacrament. If he answers, “I long for more spiritual life and light. I know Jesus alone can relieve me, and supply my manifold wants. I would still come like the poor woman, to beg and wait for a few crumbs from his rich table; I depend on him alone for grace here, and glory hereafter. Therefore I would be obedient.” This person should remember, for his encouragement and comfort, what the compassionate Redeemer said to that good woman, who reckoned herself with the dogs, that she might happily have some crumbs— “O woman, great is your faith.” So he should conclude that he eats and drinks in faith, but pray for *more* faith.

Some may be under fiery temptations, or are grievously distressed with doubts, fears, and unbelief; and therefore are afraid to come to the holy communion. If they desire to be relieved by Jesus Christ, the great friend of distressed publicans and sinners, and they are determined, according to their little strength, to be his disciples and await the result in His way, then they are welcome to the feast. Let no sinful plea and excuse hinder them; let them make no objections against themselves, but *come*. With all their fear, they may be very worthy receivers.

To clear up this point, I would beg the reader’s patience a little more. Persons may imagine they have no love for Christ because they have so many fears, doubts, etc. But they should consider that *perfect love casts out slavish fear*. Yet, where fear sadly torments and distresses, there may be (and often is) true and real love, though not perfect. If my love is not perfect, it would be weak for me to conclude that I have no love at all. That would be like arguing that because I am not as tall or strong as some other person, I am therefore not a man at all. This would be a very unjust, untrue, and unfair way of reasoning. Yet, many of the people of God are tempted to conclude in this weak way, to their own discouragement. Fear that my love isn’t true, and a desire to have it increase, is evidence of *some* love. Where unbelief prevails, and doubts are numerous, many fear there can be no faith. This also is *Satan’s* false reasoning. The strongest believer is often distressed with unbelief. But it is a certain truth, that there is often some true faith where much unbelief

remains. Others fear, because they have such a sense of their unworthiness, they should conclude they cannot be worthy communicants. They should consider that no man living is worthy, of himself. True worthiness consists in a conviction of sin, to be in pain for it, to long for deliverance from it, and to look to Christ alone for this deliverance, etc. Many *have* this worthiness; and yet they are afraid, because they don't enjoy evident communion with God; they're not feasted with divine love; they don't have their heart as free from sin as they could wish. These things and many more are very desirable. But we should wait for these things in the *use* of means, and not expect them while we *neglect* those means. If a weak person says, "I won't eat because I'm not strong," another would soon advise him to eat, so that he may *become* strong.

Obj. If after all this, any would object thus: "I have often come to the communion, under many discouragements, yet still hoping to meet with more comfort. But my fears rather *increase*, and I am almost tempted to give up. A word of advice would be acceptable."

Ans. You are tempted to desist from the use of appointed means, and to disobey the plain command of a dying friend, "Do this in remembrance of me." Are you likewise tempted to neglect the very necessary and profitable duty of searching and testing your ways, and return to the Lord? — to discover the accursed thing that nourishes your corruption, but deadens you in religion? — to neglect fervent prayer before God, with self-abasement? — to love the world, with its pernicious pleasures, more than Jesus Christ and endearing fellowship with him? — to be unconcerned about the glory of God, with many other things unbecoming a disciple of Christ? Pray for strength against these temptations; then expect that the temptations to forsake the Lord's table will cease.

But some conscientious, humble, and pious souls may also be concerned in the objection. To them I would say, continue on. *Wait until the Lord has mercy upon you*, Psa 123.2 — until you meet with comfort. Remember, endeavour to believe, and *look for the blessing promised to those who wait*, Pro 8.34. A daughter of Abraham was bound by Satan eighteen years; but she was loosed on the Sabbath day, Luk 13.16. Abraham himself waited for a son twenty-five years after the promise was made. But having waited, through faith and patience, even *hoping against hope*, he at last inherited the promise to his great joy. Heb 6.11-15; Rom 4.18-22. The poor man at the pool of Bethesda waited, labouring under his infirmity for thirty-eight years. Yet at last he obtained health and comfort, Joh 5.2-9.

Question 25. What is the true idea, or the most general and direct meaning of the term "grace" in Scripture?

The term is used in various languages, with very little alteration. But in common conversation, and among writers, it is taken and understood in diverse ways. The query regards only the *Scripture* use of it. We don't often find it in the Old Testament; yet in these few places, it is easy to discern that the word doesn't always have the same meaning. For instance, in Pro 1.9, 3.22, and 4.9, grace denotes beauty and ornamentation. So too in Jas 1.11. In Pro 22.11, it signifies acceptable and affecting words. Closely akin to this is Luk 4.22, Psa 45.2, Eph 4.29, Col 4.6. In Esther 2.7, it denotes favour, or good will and pleasure. This is how the word *favour* is used very often in Scripture. To *find favour*, and to *find grace*, are synonymous phrases.

In answering the query, we're not required to examine every use of the word in Scripture, but only the true idea; that is, its most general and direct intention. I think *the grace of God* means, in its strict and primary sense, "The infinite goodness, the eternal and unchangeable pleasure, or the good will of God, bountifully, transcendently, and most freely flowing forth to his rational creatures." In the first and strictest meaning of the word *grace*, I don't think it regards either

vileness or worth. All the glory and felicity of the angels in heaven, is of *pure grace* or *rich bounty*, freely bestowed and ever-flowing. All that was bestowed on man in his primitive purity and creation happiness, was entirely grace. God was under no manner of obligation then to place man in any nobler station than the meanest worm. At that time, man was the clay in the hand of the potter. But most commonly in Scripture, we understand grace to mean, “The good will of God toward his chosen people, regarding their safety here, and eternal glory hereafter.”

Having now come to the most direct intention of the term, I would note that it is a most charming and comprehensive word. It implies the free, eternal, and undeserved love of God, and the rich fruit and effect of it toward the elect — fixed, bestowed, and settled with inconceivable pleasure, satisfaction, and delight — so that all His great and gracious designs will be accomplished. See Mat 11.26, Eph 1.5. Concerning all the goodness of God toward his people, whether in intention or in execution, it may be safely said, “He rejoices over them with joy; he rests in his love; he joys over them with singing.” Zep 3.17. The first plan of their salvation was laid out with great delight, and of grace; or rather, the wonderful plan of their salvation was the eternal delight of Jehovah. The soul of the Father delighted in Christ redeeming His people. Even when the soul of the beloved Redeemer was put to grief, Justice was inexpressibly pleased. Notwithstanding the weight of the burden, and the greatness of the work, with the sorrow; shame, and contempt that attended it, yet our Lord delighted to do the will of God, to save His people. He despised all the shame *for the joy set before him*. His delights of old were with the sons of men, and He would love them to the end, and *save them to the uttermost*.

I must not forget to observe that all the good gifts of God, pertaining to the salvation of his people, are generally called *grace* in Scripture, and very justly so, because they are freely bestowed with joy and delight. Thus, Jesus Christ is the Father’s unspeakable gift; and *through* Christ, God is pleased to adopt His people, or make them his children — to justify them, to regenerate them by his Spirit, and to sanctify them; so at last He will glorify them. All this is done freely, and therefore it is of rich grace. All the goodness of God toward his chosen, from everlasting to all eternity, is grace, because it is done *gratis*, and with *pleasure*.

Among divines, faith, hope, love, repentance, patience, etc. are called *graces*. I don’t remember if they are called so in Scripture, except as they are the effect and fruit of the gracious operations and influence of the Spirit on the mind. They may be termed *graces*, but rather improperly or figuratively. Still, they may be reckoned *graces*, as they *grace* or *adorn* the mind and conduct.

While I was musing on this sweet word *grace*, a thought occurred to me, entirely new, which has in it something very entertaining. But here I must confess that the learned have some advantages above the plain Englishman. I beg leave to give a hint, but I will leave others to enlarge on the theme. The Greek word for “grace” is *charis*, derived from *chara*, which in English signifies joy, gladness, or joyfulness. The word *charis* in Scripture also signifies thanks, or gratitude; and very often, the word *eucharistia* is so taken. With regard to thanksgiving or gratitude, the Latin is remarkably emphatic, *actio gratias*, or *gratiarum*. In English it denotes joyful thanksgiving to God for grace received, or in other words, acting or returning the *graces* back to God, giving to God his own, with interest.¹ Here indeed, all the motions of the mind towards God, under different circumstances, which are named *faith*, *hope*, *love*, etc. may be called *graces*.

¹ Originally, “with interest” was “with usury.” – WHG

To me, there is something exceedingly pleasant and delightful in this subject. Here I would express myself as plainly as I can. Grace is God's goodness, and love, flowing freely, and with infinite delight to his people. Grace, as personally bestowed on the objects of divine love, one by one, as in their lost state under sin, is bringing home to them some of the great things prepared for them. The Holy Spirit first gives them spiritual life, and then the capacity to conceive of and relish these good things. Then they hunger after them and are solicitous, lest they come short of them. After that beginning, which is none other than *regeneration*, every support, supply, and encouragement then afforded to the believer, is *grace*, bestowed freely by the Spirit of grace. This is *sanctification*. Glory bestowed on the saints hereafter, will be grace in its full bloom and perfection. Moreover, the praises which saints here give to God for his unspeakable gifts, is grace in small rivulets returning to the ocean from where they flowed. But the high-sounding praises of the triumphant church above is, and *will be*, grace returning in broad rivers and swimming streams forever. There will be a constant influx and reflux, there will be *actio gratiarum*, a returning of graces, in complete and delightful perfection. For as God bestows his bounties through Christ with the greatest delight and joy, so believers here, according to their measure, capacity, and experience, return thanks for bounties in hand, and for hope in possession and in reversion, with inexpressible joy, frankness, satisfaction, and delight. But in heaven, the pleasure and joy will exceed everything of the kind *here* — *as the heavens are higher than the earth*, and as an elegant feast exceeds a scanty taste, or an imperfect report. There, grace will run in a perpetual circulation. What a delightful, transporting thought!

Finally, charity is derived from *charis*, grace, and it denotes a generous, benevolent mind, true nobility, and real greatness, evidenced by a readiness to relieve the needy freely and with delight. So *liberality*, in 1Cor 16.3, is *grace*, according to the original.¹ And *grace*, in 2Cor 8.6-7,² signifies the liberal contributions of the churches to supply the wants of the needy. In 2Cor 9.5-6,³ we have the very spirit of a truly charitable man: he bestows cheerfully, readily, and bountifully. This still is the very nature of grace.

Now I would just observe that the salvation of God's people, from first to last, is of mere bounty, good pleasure, and rich grace:

- that this grace, bestowed on poor, naked, defiled, and deformed sinners, will render them exceeding rich, lovely, amiable, and graceful;
- that having received this grace, they will be active for God, move towards him as their centre, and give him all the glory of their salvation, shouting Grace! Grace to it!
- that all this grace is through Jesus Christ;
- that every partaker of this grace loves Jesus Christ, and is sorry that he cannot love him more;
- that by grace, Jehovah is pleased to give himself to his people; and having received this grace, the children of God give themselves to their Father.

¹ **1Cor 16:3** And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your **gift** to Jerusalem.

² **2Cor 8:6** So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this **grace** in you as well. ⁷ But as you abound in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us-- *see* that you abound in this **grace** also.

³ **2Cor 9:5** Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous **gift** [Gr. *eulogia*] beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter of generosity* [*eulogia*] and not as a grudging obligation. ⁶ But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Question 26. What is faith? How does it differ from hope, love, repentance, etc.?

This query is two-fold. The former part requires a definition of faith. Perhaps most readers think the answer to this is so easy that it is needless to spend time on it. However, I don't think so, but I am sure the subject is very important. Happy are those who are most acquainted with it, and are able to give a good account of it. I find a good and infallible definition of faith given in Heb 11.1: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

This is a solid answer to the former part of the query. Here we may infer that faith deals with and it regards things that are absent and at a distance, which we cannot now fully enjoy, nor see with the eyes of our bodies, nor see imperfectly with the eyes of our minds. Faith, then, is a persuasion of, and a concern about absent things, upon proper information and evidence. Or thus: the faith by which the believer lives and is saved, is an effectual persuasion of absent things, based upon divine testimony. For instance, faith is an affecting persuasion that there is a glorious, yet compassionate God, though never seen by an eye of flesh — that He only spoke the word, and the whole creation was formed — that the Scripture is a true account of the most important things, given by God himself — that man is under the curse for his sin — and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the sole Redeemer from the curse, and the only way to eternal glory.

Faith is a persuasion that it will be as God has promised, and that Jehovah is the fountain and centre of all felicity, bliss, and joy. To live by faith is to live upon the promises of a faithful God, being persuaded that He will take care of us, manage in the best manner for us here, and glorify us hereafter. Again, to live by faith, is to be persuaded that Jesus is the Lord our righteousness, and so we wholly depend upon him for salvation, living upon him as the glorious mark aimed at in our whole conversation. Much more might be added, but I hasten to the second part of the query, which is,

How does faith differ from hope, love, repentance, etc.?

— FAITH is the persuasion that what is revealed in Scripture is true, and that the things mentioned and promised in it have a real existence. Hence, faith is the substance or foundation of things hoped for, and the evidence, or certainty of things not seen.

— LOVE is a delight, satisfaction, rest, and pleasure in the things revealed, promised and behoved.

— HOPE is a craving, wishful desire, and expectation of the things revealed, promised, believed and loved.

— PATIENCE is a submissive, quiet waiting for God's time to bestow what he has graciously promised, what the heart believes, and what the soul loves.

— REPENTANCE is the change wrought in the mind, affections, and conduct, by the revelation of Gospel truths, and believing them.

Question 27. May hope, love, repentance, patience, etc., evidence that a person is regenerated, and on the way to glory, even if he should be more in doubt about the truth of his faith, etc.?

Yes. For I cannot love what I do not believe, nor hope for what I am not persuaded of. But this point should be handled with some care. We have glorious truths revealed in the gospel. One man hears them, and believes them in a traditional way; but he is in no way affected by them, nor much concerned about them. Therefore, he doesn't regard them. This man's faith is dead, or more

plainly, he is a stranger to the faith that accompanies salvation. Another hears the same truths; feels in himself a strong persuasion of the reality and importance of them; he greatly loves the things revealed, upon the evidence that he feels in himself of the truth of the report, even though he doesn't see them. Thus he loves Jesus Christ, and eternal glory. Indeed, he loves the law, the Gospel, the worship of God, his ordinances, people, house, and ways. Now everyone who loves these, believes the truth of them. So my love for these things will at once evidence my faith, regeneration, etc. Again, if I hope for eternal life through Christ, I must believe that there is eternal life, and that it is obtained through Christ. I observed above, that repentance is wrought in the mind, affections, and conduct, by the revelation, report, and belief of Gospel truths.

Divine revelation comes with power and authority, and works upon the mind; or rather, the Holy Spirit enlightens and affects the mind by, and according to, the Word. Upon this new and affecting light, this new and strong evidence, there is an inward change. Salvation is now a weighty point, which was little minded before. Jesus is now the chief among ten thousand, though before there appeared in him no desirable beauty. When this living light is experienced, the Bible is the chief book, even though much neglected and slighted in times past. Heaven is earnestly longed for, but hell dreaded. Holiness is now rather wished for than experienced, sin being felt and hated, though much delighted in before. This inward alteration has a strong influence on the affections, which will also appear in the life and conduct. In short, old things have passed away, and all things have become new. Notwithstanding this change, the light will increase under the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit. Then it will discover more sin still remaining, which causes godly sorrow. This is commonly called *repentance*, though in reality repentance takes in all the inward changes of the mind, and the reformation of manners — or perhaps more properly, the change in life and conduct is the fruit and evidence of true repentance. Now, if I find this inward change, then I may humbly conclude that I am regenerated, justified, effectually called, etc.

After all, a doubting believer may object to this purpose: "I believe all the above truths and particulars, and yet I often question whether mine is the faith of God's elect. The devils and the unconverted believe, and I fear my faith is no better." It's true, devils and unconverted persons do believe; but they don't *love* the truths which they believe. Love and affection for the truth believed, is a better evidence of true grace than strong confidence. A person may be very confident, yet the fruit of his faith be very sour. Where the fruit is good the tree cannot be bad. I conclude on the whole, that love, hope, repentance, patience, humility, resignation, obedience, etc. are certain effects and evidences of true faith; and that it is better to judge our state by *those*, than by faith. Yet by all means, let it be noted that I reckon no faith is true, but that which depends upon Christ, and the free promise, and which lays the creature low and wounded in the dust. *This* faith, and this *alone*, will work by love and affect the heart, so that the command of God will be embraced. It was this faith that determined Moses to choose affliction and reproach with the people of God, rather than the enjoyment of sin. This faith made the primitive Christians glory in tribulation.

Some ingenious writers choose to look at *faith* as the root and principle; while hope, love, etc. are only hope diversified, or hope taking different roads or actuating the several natural affections according to the good pleasure of the Holy Spirit, and the different circumstances of the soul. I don't fault these thoughts, but perhaps they are too abstract and metaphysical for common readers, who yet may be savoury good Christians. Whoever would enjoy the comfort and satisfaction that is to be found in believing, let him think much about an unseen Jesus. Let him pray for the gracious teaching of the Holy Spirit. All men are fallible; imperfections abound here. Yet the Lord is often pleased to favour his people with evidences of their interest in Christ.

Question 28. What is the real difference between true faith and mere presumption?

The query implies that faith and presumption resemble each other in some things; though in other things they differ widely. On both these accounts, we are apt to run into mistakes. Therefore, in order to distinguish in this important point, I would attempt, first, to show where there seems to be some resemblance:

Faith renders a person bold, courageous, and resolute. We see this very evidently in Stephen, the apostles, the whole multitude of martyrs and confessors, and all believers more or less to this day. For what is a Christian without some courage? How else can he encounter so many enemies, and face so many oppositions on the way to glory? A disciple of Christ must have a heroic disposition.

Presumption also renders a person bold and headstrong. This is awfully evident in Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, along with their company. Notwithstanding their being warned by Moses, seriously and solemnly, they took their censers, and presumed to stand with boldness before the Lord. They heard all that Moses said, and yet they didn't seem to be affected in the least, till the earth opened and swallowed them all. It is to be feared that this is the case with many to this day, till they sink down to the horrible pit.

Faith yields the believer a considerable degree of contentment and satisfaction. By faith Paul was brought to be content in all conditions; and in the same way, many others were enabled to be content with their allotment here. *Presumption also gives great satisfaction for the present*, as it induces the man to be a lover of sinful pleasure, more than a lover of God, or Jesus Christ, etc.

Faith excites one to despise all opposition; it gives some degree of strength against all obstacles. In this, the believer follows Christ, who despised the shame, and endured all the contradictions of sinners. "None of those things move me," says the apostle (Act 20.24). *Presumption resembles faith in this, for it fills a person with pride, so that he despises everyone in his way.* There were many of this sort in the days of the apostles. They were presumptuous, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil about dignities. They were fierce, and despisers of those who were good. This is generally the case with a presumptuous person.

Faith renders one active and enterprising. It works by love, so that the believer is neither barren nor unfruitful in his belief and knowledge. *Presumption likewise renders one daringly bold and enterprising.* The presumption of those in Act 19.13-14, was amazing. They attempted to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, though they were themselves under the dominion of sin and Satan.

Faith enables and encourages one to expect very great things indeed; for it is the evidence of things hoped for. *Presumption here also is the ape of faith.* So that the person says, "I will have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart." The presumptuous generally expect great success *here*; and heaven *hereafter*.

Many particulars more might be added this way. But to avoid tediousness, I proceed to consider where they evidently *disagree*.

They differ in their author and origin. FAITH is the gift of God, comes from above, and is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit. But PRESUMPTION is the brat of Satan, begotten of a corrupt heart, whatever its appearance might be in the world.

They differ in their nature and definition. FAITH is a belief of the word of God universally and consistently, according to the degree of light received, and the evidence felt and observed — the promise, precept, and threatening. But PRESUMPTION is a partial, inconsistent, and unseasonable belief of the Scripture. This will appear if we consider how,

They differ in their fruits and effects. This is perhaps the surest way to distinguish them, and to separate precious FAITH from vile PRESUMPTION. Let these particulars be weighed:

I. FAITH excites one to love and regard the whole Scripture as the word of God, even though some parts of it speak against the believer's strongest corruption. The good man loves that law which condemns every sin. It is possible that a believer may find a sad inclination to covetousness, yet he loves the Word that says, "You shall not covet." The holy commandment shows that sin is exceedingly sinful; yet he says, *The law is holy, just and good, though no good thing dwell in my flesh*, Rom 7.12, 18. Faith compares one part of the Word with another. And upon this universal and consistent belief, he proceeds boldly and courageously, as noted above; this affords him contentment in trouble. PRESUMPTION also disposes a person to love the Word, but the person's love is for those portions of Scripture that he imagines give the most liberty to his most beloved and reigning sin. Jehu was resolved to go to the throne through all opposition. And upon every victory and fresh slaughter, he was ready to shout aloud and say, "*This is the word of the Lord.*" Presumption drives on unadvisedly to its own ruin, like Israel, which presumed to go up against Amalek. They built on a former promise, Num 14.40, but they disobeyed the command which was *not* to go at that time, verses 41-43. Presumption generally makes the promise and precept clash; but faith shows how harmoniously they agree, and so defend each other.

II. FAITH purifies the heart, and mortifies sin, so that if a Christian is confident, he will be humble. If he is holy, he will bewail his remaining corruption. If he despises opposition, he will think others much better than himself. If he is enterprising and active, he is on his guard against sin. If he hopes for great things, it is in God's revealed way, and according to His promise. But PRESUMPTION makes the man filthier, and adds more strength to his corruption. The person will be headier, high-minded, proud, and self-conceited. He seldom bewails his sin from the heart, nor does he choose to think others better than himself. He makes light of sin, if he can only have his own way. He depends more on his own promises than upon God's. See a full account of persons under the influence of presumption, in 2Pet 2, from verse 10 to the end of the chapter.

III. By FAITH a believer is enabled to put his whole trust in, and dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the promise of God. Yet the same faith excites him to all diligence in every part of divine worship, both private and public, according to the Scripture — and to embrace all the means revealed and appointed for spiritual growth, so that the Gospel may be adorned, and God glorified. Faith perceives that fervent praying and circumspect watching are not only consistent, but must go together. It rests in and lives upon Christ. And yet it teaches the necessity of, and in some measure, the way to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to *live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world* (Tit 2.12). Alas! I fear many specious professors don't have faith. They don't seem to know *how* to live upon Christ, nor to his glory and praise. PRESUMPTION pretends to trust much upon Christ, but it is sure to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, one way or another. It makes persons negligent in the discharge of duty. Some seldom or never pray, and yet they say they believe in Christ, even though they neglect Gospel ordinances. They don't care whether they read or hear much about real and practical religion. Many talk much about the promises, yet they are evidently under the dominion of sin.

IV. FAITH makes a person more quick-sighted, for the understanding is enlightened, and the Holy Spirit is the teacher. Yet the man who lives by faith, will observe the word of exhortation, and will receive reproof and instruction. His conscience being tender, he will be convinced of his error and mistake, and then he will reform. "Reprove him, and he will be wiser," Pro 9.9. Faith will patiently bear keen rebukes, Mic 7.9. But the PRESUMPTUOUS man is wiser than others in his own conceit.

It is generally impossible to convince him of error. He is so blind, so bigoted, and so resolute, that he doesn't care who is offended, stumbled, hardened, or grieved.

V. FAITH renders the saint sensible of his own infirmities, so that he is humble in himself, on account of his manifold weaknesses. He feelingly bewails them before God and men. And yet he is still resolved to trust in the Lord, and endeavour to keep on in His way, through all inward and outward discouragements. PRESUMPTION so hardens, that a person gradually becomes like one who is past all feeling. And in this woeful state, he will neither lament his case, nor be humbled before God or man, but will proceed to his own ruin.

In many other particulars, faith and presumption differ. Yet in others they seem to be so akin, that we should earnestly pray for a discerning spirit, and be very careful to test ourselves by the Word of God, that we may clearly and comfortably distinguish the great difference. As a good tree brings forth good fruit, so faith, being from heaven, produces heavenly fruit. What is said in Jas 3.13f, of that wisdom which is from above, and that which is *not*, is true regarding faith and presumption. There are many presumptuous persons who are entirely destitute of, and strangers to, true faith. They are altogether unacquainted with unfeigned repentance, the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit, and the consolation of the children of God. Yet, perhaps there isn't a godly person in the world who is entirely free from presumption. The weak in faith often fear that they have no faith, but only presumption; yet that is their infirmity. We should endeavour to judge more skilfully and discern more judiciously. If I am convinced that much presumption still remains, then I should lament and bewail it, but not conclude that I am quite destitute of faith, even though I find but a small degree of it. I should rather pray for more faith; then presumption will have less room. If I am strong in faith, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, I may yet be guilty of much presumption. The note in Psalm 19.12-13 should be well-weighed by everyone who desires to enjoy much comfort in his soul here, and glory hereafter. ¹

Question 29. Is it possible for a person to be a true believer, who entirely neglects private prayer?

It is a common maxim that God has no still-born children. I suppose the design of the maxim is this: that children born naturally, who are not born dead, or dying, generally *cry* — so too, as soon as a child of God is born again, or regenerated, he *cries*. Or it may be said of him soon after his regeneration, as it was said of Saul, “Behold, he *prays*.” Prayer is a child's crying, speaking, and complaining to his Father. Is it possible for a child to be raised by his father and mother and yet never speak to either of them, or ask anything of them, unless it is now and then in company? Surely it cannot be! I believe no instance can be produced. So, as the spirit of prayer is promised, and given in some degree to every child of God (for everyone who is godly will pray, Psa 32.6) — I conclude that the person who entirely neglects private prayer, can produce no evidence that he is a child of God. When we have so many exhortations and encouragements to pray, and have so many evidences that it was the common practice of both Old and New Testament saints, and as I believe that no good man will attempt to disprove the point, I think it needless to spend much time proving it. I suppose that those who are no friends to private prayer, are no great admirers of social prayer either, and consequently they are not much acquainted with that valuable piece of the spiritual armour, *all prayer*, Eph 6.18.

¹ **Psa 19:12-13** Cleanse me from secret *faults*. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

If it is asked how often a person should pray in private, I will briefly give my opinion. If a person doesn't retire somewhere to pray at least once or twice every day, I think he is very barren in his soul. He doesn't seem to have a good taste for spiritual things, nor is he fond of following the footsteps of the flock of Christ. He doesn't appear to much desire converse with God, nor to wrestle in prayer, pleading his own want, and the divine promises through Christ. Those who are willing to excuse themselves will say that they "pray in their heart," and spontaneously converse with God. I believe good men pray much in this way. Therefore this way of praying should be continued. But if this were all, then where would be the propriety and necessity of that command, "enter into your closet, and shut your door?" Why should our blessed Lord so often retire to a private place to pray? Not enlarging any further, I answer the query in the *negative*, believing certainly that the person who entirely neglects private prayer is in the broad way.

Question 30. Which is the best way to cure lukewarmness and trifling indifference in private prayer?

Trifling indifference in private prayer is very daunting, and it has tempted many to neglect it to a lamentable degree. But surely negligence will by no means mend the matter. The best place for a person to judge his real state in religion is generally *in private*, when the eye of God chiefly observes. Now when a good man endeavours to consider his frame and circumstances in prayer, yet he finds lukewarmness, deadness, and formality prevailing — so that he has little heart to engage in this important work, and has but few words, and those are very lifeless — he doesn't know what to do, nor what course to take. To a person in this uncomfortable situation, I would humbly propose the following particulars, praying for the divine blessing.

I. Entering into his closet, or any retired place, whether in the house or out, by night or by day, let him commune with his own heart to this purpose:

"Now I am retiring out of the world, as it were. I am going to kneel down before, and in the presence of, the great Jehovah; in whose awful presence holy angels veil their faces — a God glorious in holiness. Therefore, with what reverence and godly fear I should approach this throne! A God full of grace, ready to hear, pity, and pardon through Jesus Christ. Therefore, with what confidence and humble boldness I should address Him!"

With His pure eye he beholds the hypocrite, and hates his prayer; but he hears the very groanings of the weak in faith. He knows all his wants and all his infirmities. He regards the prayer of the destitute, and grants the desire of the helpless. *A contrite spirit, he will not despise*, but will be *near to the one who trembles at His word*. Having weighed these things, we should,

II. Consider the chief springs of lukewarmness in prayer. If love for sinful objects, or even for the perishing things of this world, engages and carries away the whole heart and affections, so that divine promises or threatenings are seldom thought of, and the heart is very little impressed with a sense of divine love or fear of wrath — then vital religion is neither delighted in nor relished. Alas! what a deplorable state the poor soul must be in! What a stranger to true consolation! No wonder private prayer is dead and lifeless. The person should fall down before God, confess his sin, and bewail his case. If a believer falls gradually into a wretched state of formality in prayer, let him consider where this comes from, and how he has fallen. Let him pray for repentance, and entreat that he may be revived. If a lifeless frame proceeds from ignorance and darkness, then we should carefully read and hear the word of God, and heed it more earnestly. The Psalmist was often quickened by the word. We are great losers by an indolent temper and disposition.

III. Be sure to consider where life, light, and warmth in prayer are to be expected from. The Holy Ghost is the promised Spirit of grace and supplication. He helps the infirmities of poor saints. He brings to remembrance the fulness and suitableness of Christ; he explains and applies promises; he encourages the weak to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; he enables the person to see what a poor creature he is, what he lacks, and what his errand is to the throne of grace. This is how life, light, and strength are communicated; then private prayer is delighted in, and not easily neglected. I don't think anyone can be lively and savoury in his private addresses, unless he either experiences the kind and sweet assistance of the Spirit of prayer; or else, feeling his want, he importunately entreats and craves the help and direction he longs for. I am persuaded that no man prays rightly unless he is excited to look to the love, person, sufferings, righteousness, and faithfulness of our great Redeemer, the blessed Intercessor, who has much incense to offer up with the weak breathings and imperfect prayers of all the saints. We must have faith in prayer, dealing with Christ, and pleading promises, or else we will be formal.

IV. Predestination is very conducive to liveliness in prayer. We should meditate on our present state — what are our privileges, mercies, infirmities, temptations, and trials; what are the promises and threatenings; what and who are our enemies, etc. When the mind runs, wanders, and rambles from morning to evening upon the world with its intoxicating lusts, thinking little or not at all of Divine Providence, the cause and glory of God, our growth or declension in grace, our comfort here, and our great salvation hereafter — then in such a case, we must be shamefully trifling and formal in prayer. And if we are not wounded for, and cured of this disease, we are apt to leave prayer entirely in a little time.

V. Religious and experimental conversation will greatly help in private prayer. *As iron sharpens iron, so a believer sharpens the face and heart of his brother*, Pro 27.17. When our conversation is worldly, carnal, and void of religion, it is no wonder if we are quite disconcerted for private converse with God, who will not hear sinners. Our devotion will of course be insipid, sleepy, and loathsome. We may expect and fear that God will say, *I will spew you and your prayer out of my mouth*, Rev 3.16. We are commanded to *exhort one another daily*, Heb 3.13.

VI. It might be of great service to consider the loss sustained by lukewarmness in prayer, and the very desirable gain by warm and lively devotion. While we briefly survey the gain by the one, it is not very difficult to guess the loss by the other. When life and light are experienced in the closet, and the soul draws near to God — his only and rich portion, his exceeding joy and great reward — there is freedom and bold access to the throne of grace. The soul is fed with sweet and heavenly consolation. There the love of God is shed abroad in the heart; the believer is sealed to the day of redemption. Moses was retired when he had his view from Mount Pisgah. Jacob was alone when he pleaded and wrestled, obtained strength, and prevailed. Hannah's prayer was private when she was comforted, and her countenance was no longer sad. Daniel was in private prayer when he was favoured with great revelations. In prayer (almost if not quite private), Jesus Christ was transfigured. In private prayer Cornelius was directed to send for Peter to preach the Gospel, that the door of salvation might be opened to the Gentiles. Peter also was at private prayer when he was directed or persuaded to go with the messengers sent by the centurion, doubting nothing. Paul seems to have been wrestling with God in private, when that good word came to him, "My grace is sufficient for you," 2Cor 12.9. While the believer's soul is poured out in prayer, his faith is strengthened, and he obtains fresh vigour to run his race honourably through the wilderness. In private, the lively Christian reveals his concerns to his Father, tells him what treatment he meets with in the world. He thanks Him most heartily for all that is done for him, for all that he has in

hand, and much more in hope. And he often says, *Thus it pleased you, O Father*. The one who is dead and lifeless in prayer, is a stranger to all or most of these things, and many more.

VII. Some will be ready to say, “Alas! I am so pestered with vain and impertinent thoughts in private prayer, that I am ashamed and afraid to enter my closet. And when I come out, I am rather loaded with guilt. I am often tempted to give up private prayer on that very account.” True, such a frame is much to be lamented. If these thoughts flow naturally from a heart that is swallowed up and lost in cares and pleasures of this world, then they are very sinful. The particulars already noted may, and ought to be, seriously considered. But our thoughts in prayer may run upon those things that our very souls hate, and things we seldom or never think of at other times; and so they cause us much grief. A great part of this may be caused by Satan, and proceed from the law that is yet in our members. This may be, and often is, where much life in prayer is experienced, though still more is longed for. These things should by no means hinder private prayer, but should often remind us of that needful advice, to “watch and pray,” Mat 26.41.

Question 31. What is the difference between the real spirit and the mere gift of prayer?

The Spirit of prayer is a very valuable and precious gift, but it is common among divines and other Christians, to make a distinction between the *spirit* and the *gift* of prayer. That distinction is the sum and substance of the query. Therefore, the *gift* of prayer generally means, “freedom and fluency, or a flow of words, properly, pertinently, agreeably, and affectionately expressed in prayer.” The *Spirit* of prayer means, “An agreeable temper and disposition of mind towards God in prayer.” The Spirit maybe considered either as meaning the Holy Ghost assisting and helping our infirmities, enlightening our mind, bringing promises to our remembrance, suiting our cases, strengthening and emboldening our faith in Christ, and thus, in some measure, dictating the very words of prayer. Or else it more properly designs our own spirit engaged in prayer under the gracious influence of the Spirit of God. Now, this spirit of prayer in the believer, is the very breathing of the new creature, or new nature, which is none other than a new disposition wrought in the soul. In order to explain the point a little further, we may observe the properties and operations of this Spirit — where it is *before* prayer, *in* prayer, and *after* it.

Before prayer, the Spirit will excite the person to think; and while he is thinking, he is enlightened to see what a poor helpless creature he is, and so he is pressed to pray for relief, lest he perish. He is led, while thus meditating, to see the fulness of Christ, and his suitableness. He looks upon the one whom he pierced. He considers the promises made by a faithful and almighty God. He thinks how others have been answered. And though he is convinced of his utter unworthiness, yet he is resolved, in a kind of heroic though humble boldness, to pour out his soul before God. Then,

In prayer, this spirit ¹ is neither idle nor inactive; but will excite us to eye God more than man, to look over former meditations afresh, so that we feel our wants and plead the promises. This spirit draws out our affections towards God, through Jesus Christ, towards the glorious inheritance above and the endless felicity of the people of God. So that the very soul is, as it were, poured out afresh before God — loving, hoping, and apprehending great things, admiring the glory, grace, and goodness of God, what He has promised to, and provided for, a worm so vile as he finds and feels himself to be. Under this very desirable assistance of the Spirit in prayer, there is generally a wonderful freeness and pertinency of expression. The words proceed with ease, but are very

¹ Pike uses both upper and lower case *spirit*, to perhaps distinguish God’s Spirit from ours, *re*: Rom 8.16. – WHG

weighty, savoury, and importunate, evidencing the intenseness of the mind, the warmth of the heart, and the simplicity of the soul. But there are times and seasons when a believer may be under the influence of the good Spirit, and yet is much straitened in thoughts and words. The person may be under such deep convictions of sin, under darkness and fear, that he doesn't know what to do; his ignorance is such that he doesn't know what to say — yet the Spirit assists him to groan out his complaints before God. Such prayers as these are generally heard, and graciously answered, though we may fear they are hateful before God.

After prayer, this Spirit will excite us to watch and make observations, to wait for answers to the petitions made; if the vision tarries, the Spirit says *wait for it*. The person will be enabled to wait in the way of duty, as he has made his supplication according to the will of God. And while he waits, a desirable agreement and harmony may be observed between his heart and tongue, his word and works, his lip and life, his prayer and practice. If he has had desirable freedom in prayer, he will be on his watch lest a snare and a fall be at hand, lest pride should rise, and Satan get the advantage, and so he be taken by the fowler, and a sad cloud soon follow the bright gleam. Jonah's plant for shade was quickly up, and quickly down. After a dark and lifeless opportunity in prayer, the Spirit will set the believer to examine into the cause for it, to spy out lurking sins, to be more watchful, and to *continue* in prayer, notwithstanding this discouragement. The believer often learns many useful lessons from dry and mortifying seasons. Under the influence of the Spirit, the man will be made humble.

Now let us consider a little the gift of prayer as *separate* from the Spirit. This is no more than a natural capacity, proceeding from quick natural parts, strong memory, and fluency of utterance. These are often greatly assisted by acquirements; such as a religious education and advantages, much reading and hearing, extensive acquaintance with men and things. Some of these persons may study beforehand how to place and pronounce their words, how to express themselves so as to come up to or exceed others, more than what they want and should chiefly aim at in prayer. Others who are full of words give themselves little concern to *think* beforehand; when they are engaged in prayer, they generally run over the same words and phrases, for the most part, in a lifeless and insipid manner. But that threadbare form of words and set of phrases, hardly deserve to be termed *the gift of prayer*. Those who are for cultivating the gift of prayer *merely*, may also have their thoughts employed before, in, and after prayer. Yet they have no eye to the glory of God, the intercession of Christ, the influence of the Holy Ghost, mortifying sin, cleansing and purifying the soul, the increase of faith, and growth in grace — all of which are eyed by those who are assisted by, and endued with, *the Spirit of prayer*.

From these hints, it is easy to observe — That the Spirit of prayer is a precious gift bestowed in different degrees, on all the children of God, and on them only. That everyone endued with the Spirit also has some degree of the gift of prayer. That there may be large gifts in prayer, yet without the inwrought influence of the Spirit. That the Spirit of prayer is a Spirit of faith and holiness. Though a person may be reckoned a gifted man, yet if his heart and tongue clash, if his works contradict his words, so that his lip and life disagree, *his prayer and his practice will jar*. It may be concluded that his prayer is little better than “great swelling words of vanity,” 2Pet 2.18. That those who are endued with the Spirit, may be too negligent about the *gift* of prayer. We should study to cultivate an agreeable and useful gift. A door of utterance in *prayer* is very necessary as well as in *preaching*. But we should beware lest we quench the Spirit.

A FEW FREE THOUGHTS ON THE CHARACTER AND HAPPINESS OF THE HAPPY MAN.

By Samuel Pike

The happy man was once miserable, and in all respects like others: divested of God's love and image, degenerated and earthly, sensual and devilish; without strength and entirely helpless, having no will or power to return to God or seek happiness in Him. But through God's most free and rich grace, in a time and manner most pleasing to Him who is rich in mercy, and who works all things according to the counsel of his own will, the man is convinced by the divine Spirit, of his wretchedness and sinfulness, by nature and by practice; and he feels what an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from God. So that now he fears the consequence of his sad prevarication, being a constant expectant that the taper of life would soon dwindle into oblivion, and he would then feel the fiery indignation and vindictive wrath of an inexorable God, a *Consuming Fire*. But this valley of Achor ¹ becomes a door of hope; and being miserable and helpless, the man becomes the object of divine mercy and succour. He is now drawn by the Father to the Son — seeing the inability of the law. And by faith wrought in him, and apprehending the sufficiency of the anointed Lord Jesus as able, mighty, and willing to save him, even to the uttermost, he is now turned to the stronghold as a prisoner of hope; and he has fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him.

The offices and sweet characters of Christ conveyed inexpressible joy and comfort to him, and were like ointment poured out. He saw him just such a Saviour as he wanted in every respect, and accepted him on Gospel terms, as a Prince as well as a Saviour — for wisdom and sanctification, as well as for righteousness and redemption. And soon the joyous moment came when he was enabled by the Holy Ghost to call him “my Lord.” “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” With a holy becoming boldness, the soul claims relation to Christ, and with a holy triumph proclaimed it. *Mine* according to the tenor of the Gospel-covenant, and effectual soul-satisfying application — given to and bestowed on me, to be all that to me which my soul wanted: a complete and whole Saviour.

His soul now magnifies the Lord, and his spirit rejoices in God his Saviour. He has now received beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. His is the blessedness of that man to whom the Lord does not impute sin. Being justified by faith, he has peace with God through Jesus Christ his Lord. Feeling the soul-enriching union with Christ, knowing that he is in him by the Spirit that He has given him, there is therefore now no condemnation to him. Because he is a son, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying, “Abba, Father.” God says to him, “You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. — Son, all I have is yours.” For being made a child, he has become an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ. He feels that he has passed from death to life; that though once afar off, he has now been made near by the blood of Christ. He is no longer a stranger or foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God. His soul, at the discovery of this rich and free grace, stands astonished, lost in wonder and admiration, crying, “Why me, Lord? What am I or my father's house, that you have brought me to this? Oh! the depth and unsearchable riches of the wisdom and love of God!

Being born of God, he now bears the image of his Father; born from heaven, he is now travelling there; delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son,

¹ *Valley of Achor* (valley of trouble), where Achan was stoned for taking what was forbidden. He caused Israel to be defeated by their enemies at Ai. All he owned, including flocks and herds, were also stoned and burned. (Joshua 7).

The Character of the Happy Man

he becomes a willing subject of the Prince of Peace; worships God in the Spirit; works outside of himself; rejoices in Christ Jesus; and has no confidence in the flesh. He is a new creature; old things have passed away, and all things have become new. His understanding is illuminated; he is light in the Lord, and walks as a child of light. His will is renewed, for to will is present with him; his affections are changed, for he delights in the law of God after the inner man. And with the mind he serves the law of God, not walking after the flesh, but after the Spirit; savouring the things that are of God; sowing to the Spirit; having his fruit unto holiness, walking blameless in all the ordinances of the Lord, educated in the school of obedience unto life — in consequence of his being made a partaker of the divine nature, and renewed in the spirit of his mind.

In short, he is inwardly and outwardly changed. Having quit with the prodigal the drudgery of the citizen of the country, he has come to his Father's house. Being delivered out of Egypt like Israel, he is led to the holy mountain to receive the law written on the fleshly tablet of his heart; "for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made him free from the law of sin and death." His trade is religion or practical godliness, being diligent in the work of God, to which he is created anew — watching unto prayer and self-denial, going about doing good, visiting the sick, the fatherless, and the widow, directing all (by precept or precedent) to the knowledge and love of God. He walks in the valley of self-abasement, humiliation, and godly sincerity, in the plain garment of simplicity and lowliness. But he has a richer suit to appear in court, called "the best robe, the wedding garment, and white linen, or righteousness of Christ."

I cannot help looking back on what he once was. By nature he was, in his blood, loathsome, defiled, and unclean; but now there is a beauty and perfect loveliness put on him. He is stripped of his filthy garments, and is fair with the beauty he has received out of Christ's wardrobe. He shines in the beams of Christ's righteousness — it is indeed sometimes hidden from him, and he has only the humbling sight and sense of his deformity. But he is never more fair than when he judges himself to be most deformed; indeed the higher he is, the lower; the richer, the poorer; the fuller, the emptier; the stronger, the weaker — strange paradoxes! Union and communion with Christ, in his *life*, which is said to be hidden with Christ in God. His graces and spiritual life are continued like beams, by the constant emission of light and heat from the Sun; and the stream of his holy joys and comforts is perpetuated by the constant flowing of the Fountain.

Blot the bright promulgator of light and heat out of the firmament, and the bright stars are at once engulfed in the blackness of darkness; so take away Christ, or separate the soul from him, and all its graces, life, and comfort are no more. The happy man says of Christ, *all my springs are in You*. From your merits and Spirit flow my redemption, justification, sanctification, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost, and blessedness in the world to come. He has a Benjamin's portion, a plentiful inheritance in Christ, the mercy of mercies in whom, like an inexhaustible fountain, all necessary mercies are treasured, and with whom they shall be conferred. Christ, his Rose of Sharon, never withers; nothing unlovely is found in Christ. He is a sea of sweetness without one drop of gall. All is wholly and altogether lovely, and his incomparable excellencies are pure and unmixed. New wonders are, and will be, eternally rising out of him. He is a deep which no line of any created understanding, angelical or human, can fathom. The happy man who possesses him, and has property in him, may well say with Esau, "I have enough." It is a happiness indeed commensurate with the unlimited capacities, and suitable to the exigencies and desires of his large high-born soul. And in order to hold fast to what he has attained, and increase with all the increase of God, he walks closely with God, panting after growing communion with, and conformity to him. And in every duty, use of ordinances, and acts of lively obedience to God in Christ, he has special

The Character of the Happy Man

irradiations of divine life, light, and love. And the more constant his acting is toward Christ, the more continued is his actual enjoyment of special communion with Christ. He finds that obedience is the very place where manifest love delights to display its glories; and “by keeping Christ’s commandments, he abides in his love.” This is his constant prayer (not satisfied with favour, though full with the blessing of the Lord): All you sovereign winds of the Spirit of God, breathe upon the garden of my soul, that the sweet odours of your plants may be increased, and may also be dispersed afar, and carried into the nostrils of my well-beloved, that while the King sits at his table, my perfume may send forth a sweet smell.

If he is rich (though it is very rare that riches and this happiness are together), he is faithful in the mammon of unrighteousness, not trusting to such uncertainties, trading with his Lord’s talent as a steward who must give a good account, laying up in store for himself a good foundation against the time to come. *If he is poor* (perhaps like Lazarus) as to temporals, yet he has a large freehold estate in Christian contentment, so that having nothing, he possesses all things. He knows how to be abased, and how to abound, and glories that, through perfect weakness, he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. He is wafted by Hermon’s spicy gales, and enjoys the sweet balmy air, with Arabia’s perfumes. He expands aloft and drinks the floating joys ever springing, finding within himself a well of water springing up into everlasting life, issuing and flowing from the throne, and from there watering the city of God. He is filled with joy and peace in believing, and abounds in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost, partaking of those joys that a stranger to God does not intermeddle with. He bids them all taste, that they may see how gracious his Lord is, saying, *Come and welcome to the vital feast, and feel and know with me that God is yours*. He simply believes God (because He has said it), and considers what He says in order to speak after him, to hope and expect from Him, and to obey perfectly.

He lives much at home, though in the exercise of his godlike graces he most affectionately helps, assists, and forwards others on the way to heaven, knowing that he who has God at home (that is, in his own soul), has all riches, all perfections. As he loves God in consequence of His love first to him, so he loves His children who, with himself, are also begotten of God. The law of love is preserved inviolably in his heart, and ever appears legible in his life. He knows he has passed from death unto life, because he loves the brethren; he is drawn to love most those whom God loves. God’s jewels and peculiar treasure are his, having all his delight, with David, in the saints and the excellent of the earth. ^{Psa 16.3}As he is born of incorruptible seed, so is he sustained by spiritual food, and has meat to eat which the world knows nothing of; his drink is the sincere milk of the word, and the wine of the kingdom. He sleeps in the lofty chamber of divine tranquility, on a green bed of perfect love; his pillow is made of promises, and round about and underneath him are the everlasting arms. He breakfasts every morning on spiritual prayer, and sups every night on the same, having access by faith into that grace in which he stands, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. He was a paradox to himself, but now he sees how it is. As for the world, they don’t know him; his happiness does not lie exposed to common observation. As a saint, he is one of God’s hidden ones; a jewel among the rubbish, a pearl among pebbles, and precious among the vile. He has put on the robe of salvation, the beautiful garment of gladness. Jesus is his beauteous dress; he is clothed with the sun, and the moon is under his feet, where it should be. He feels and knows by happy experience, that he has in heaven an enduring substance; and where his treasure is, there is his heart also — so that,

*Unchained and disengag’d from earthly dross,
he treads the thorny footsteps of the Saviour’s cross.*

The Character of the Happy Man

His citizenship and conversation are in heaven; he is entitled to all the privileges and immunities of the kingdom of grace and glory. Grace rises gradually in his soul as the sun rises in the heavens, shining more and more unto the perfect day. He is always ready to give an answer for the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear. Death is not terrible, nor does he dread judgment. He is both habitually and actually ready, waiting till preferred from cross to crown, warfare to rest, and is taken into the joy of his Lord.

*With him numbered may I be,
in time and to eternity.*

THE CHARACTER OF AN HONEST MAN.

He does not look to what he *might* do, but what he *should*. Justice is his first guide; the second law of his actions is expediency. He would rather complain than offend; and hates sin more for its iniquity than its danger. His simple uprightness works in him that confidence which oftentimes wrongs him, and gives advantage to the subtle, when he pities their faithlessness rather than repents of his credulity. He has but one heart, and that lies open to sight. Were it not for discretion, he never thinks of anything for which he would avoid a witness. His word is his parchment, and yes, his oath, which he will not violate for fear or for loss. The mishaps of following events may cause him to blame his providence, but they can never cause him to eat his promise. Nor does he say, *I did not see this*, but *This I said*. When he is made his friend's executor, he defrays debts, pays legacies, and scorns gaining by orphans, or ransacking graves; and therefore he will be true to a dead friend, because he does not see him.

All his dealings are square and above board. He discovers the fault of what he sells, and restores the overseen gain of a false reckoning. He esteems a bribe venomous, even if it comes gilded over with the colour of gratuity. His cheeks are never stained with the blushes of recantation. Nor does his tongue falter to make good a lie with the secret glosses of double or reserved senses. And when his name is traduced, his innocence bears him out with courage. Then look, he goes on the plain way of truth, and will either triumph in his integrity, or suffer with it. His conscience overrules his providence, so that in all things, good or bad, he respects the *nature* of the actions, not the *sequel*; if he sees what he must do, let God see what will follow. He never loads himself with burdens above his strength, or beyond his will. And once bound, what he *can* do he *will* do; nor does he will anything but what he can do. His ear is the sanctuary of his absent friend's name, and of his present friend's secret; neither of them can miscarry in his trust. He remembers the wrongs of his youth, and repays them with that usury which he himself would not take. He would rather lack than borrow, and rather beg than not pay. His fair conditions are without dissembling, and he loves actions above words. Finally, he hates falsehood worse than death. He is a faithful client of truth. He is no man's enemy; and it is a question whether he is more another man's friend or his own. And if there were no heaven, he would yet be virtuous.

THE CHARACTER OF THE FAITHFUL MAN.

His eyes have no other objects than what are absent and invisible — which they see so clearly that to them, sense is blind; that which is present they don't see. If I may rather say, that which is past or future, is *present* to them. In this he exceeds all others, so that to him nothing is impossible; nothing difficult, whether to bear or undertake it. He walks every day with his Maker, and talks with him familiarly, and lives ever in heaven, and sees all earthly things beneath him. When he goes in to converse with God, he doesn't wear his own clothes, but takes them out of the rich

The Character of the Happy Man

wardrobe of his Redeemer; and then he dares to boldly press in and claim a blessing. The celestial spirits do not scorn his company, nor indeed, his service. He deals in these worldly affairs as a stranger, and has his heart ever at home. Without a written warrant he dares do nothing, and with it anything. His war is perpetual, without truce, without intermission, and his victory certain. He meets with the infernal powers, and tramples them under feet. The shield that he ever bears before him, can neither be missed nor pierced; if his hand is wounded, yet his heart is safe. He is often tripped, seldom foiled, never vanquished. He has white hands, and a clean soul, fit to lodge God in, all the rooms of which are set apart for his holiness. Iniquity has often called at the door, and craved entertainment, but with a repulse; or if sin will be his tenant by force, it cannot be his lord. His faults are few, and those he has, God will not see. He is allied so high, that he dare call God father, his Saviour brother, heaven his patrimony; and he thinks it no presumption to trust to the attendance of angels. His understanding is enlightened with the beams of divine truth; God has acquainted him with his will, and what he knows he dares to confess. There is no more love in his heart than liberty in his tongue. If torments, if death, stand between him and Christ, he contemns them; and if his own parents lie in his way to God, his holy carefulness makes them his footsteps. His experiences have drawn forth rules of confidence which he dares to oppose against all the fears of distrust — in this he thinks it is safe to charge God with what He has done, and with what He has promised. Examples are his proofs, and instances his demonstrations.

What has God given which He cannot give? What have others suffered which he may not be enabled to endure? Is he threatened banishment? there he sees the loved Evangelist in Patmos — with cutting in pieces? he sees Isaiah under the saw — drowning? he sees Jonah diving in the living gulf — burning? he sees the three children in the hot walk of the furnace — devouring? he sees Daniel in the sealed den amidst his terrible companions — stoning? he sees the first martyr under his heap of many grave-stones — beheading? lo there the Baptist's neck bleeding in Herodias' platter. He emulates their pain, their strength, their glory. He doesn't weary himself with cares; for he knows he doesn't live at his own cost; nor does he idly omit means, but uses them only with diffidence. In the midst of bad rumours and amazements, his countenance doesn't change; for he knows both whom he has trusted, and where death can lead him. He is not so sure he shall die, as that he shall be restored; and faces down his death with his resurrection. Finally, he is rich in works; busy in obedience; cheerful and unmoved in expectation; better with evils; in common opinion, miserable; but in true judgment more than a man.

THE END.