

THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF A WORK OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

By Jonathan Edwards

(1741)

*Applied to that uncommon operation that has lately
appeared on the minds of the people of New England:
with a particular consideration of the extraordinary
circumstances with which this work is attended.*

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MR. COOPER'S PREFACE TO THE READER.

There are several *dispensations*, or days of grace, which the church of God has been under from the beginning of time. There is the one under the patriarchs; one under the law of Moses; and there is that one of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which we are now under. This is the brightest day that has ever shone, and exceeds the others for peculiar advantages. To us who are so happy as to live under the *evangelical* dispensation, may those words of our Saviour be directed which he spoke to his disciples when he was first setting up the Messiah's kingdom in the world, and gospel-light and power began to spread abroad:

“Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them.” (Luk 10.23-24.)

The *Mosaic* dispensation, though darkened with types and figures, yet far exceeded the former. But the gospel dispensation so much exceeds in glory, that it eclipses the glory of the legal, as the stars disappear when the sun arises and goes forth in its strength.

And the chief thing that renders the gospel so glorious, is that *it is the ministration of the Spirit*. Under the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit was to be poured out in more plentiful measures. This was not only in miraculous gifts, as in the first times of the gospel, but in His internal saving operations accompanying the outward ministry, to produce numerous conversions to Christ, and give spiritual life to souls who before were dead in trespasses and sins, and so prepare them for eternal life. Thus the apostle speaks when he runs a comparison between the Old Testament and the New, the law of Moses and the gospel of Jesus Christ:

“For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious — so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away with — how will the ministration of the Spirit not be *more* glorious?” (2Cor 3.6-8)

This blessed time of the *gospel* has several other labels which may raise our esteem and value for it. It is called by the evangelical prophet, “The acceptable year of the Lord” (Isa 61.2). Or as it may be read, the *year of liking*, or of benevolence, or of the good will of the Lord — because it would be the special period in which He would display his grace and favour in an extraordinary manner, and deal out spiritual blessings with a full and liberal hand.

It is also styled by our Saviour, the *regeneration* (Mat 19.28). This may refer not only to that glorious restitution of all things, which is looked for at the close of the Christian dispensation, but to the renewing work of grace in particular souls, carried on from the beginning to the end of it. But few were renewed and sanctified under the former dispensations, compared with the instances of the grace of God in gospel-times. Such numbers were brought into the gospel-church when it was first set up, as to give occasion for that pleasing and admiring question which was indeed a *prophecy* of it, “Who are these who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows?” (Isa 60.8) Then the power of the divine Spirit so accompanied the ministry of the word, that thousands were converted under one sermon.

But notwithstanding this large effusion of the Spirit when gospel-light first dawned upon the world — that pleasant spring of religion which then appeared on the face of the earth — there

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was a gradual *withdrawing* of His saving light and influences. And so the gospel came to be *less* successful, and the state of Christianity *withered* in one place and another.

Indeed at the time of the *Reformation* from popery, when gospel-light broke in upon the church, and dispelled the clouds of antichristian darkness that covered it, the power of divine grace so accompanied the preaching of the word, that it had admirable success in the conversion and edification of souls; and the blessed fruits of this appeared in the hearts and lives of its professors. That was one of “the days of the Son of man,” on which the exalted Redeemer rode forth in His glory and majesty on the white horse of the pure gospel, “conquering and to conquer;” and the bow in his hand, like that of Jonathan, did not return empty. But what a dead and barren time it has now been, for a great while, with all the churches of the Reformation. The golden showers have been restrained; the influences of the Spirit suspended; and the consequence has been that the gospel has not had any eminent success. Conversions have been rare and dubious. Few sons and daughters have been born to God. And the hearts of Christians have not been so quickened, warmed, and refreshed under the ordinances, as they have been [in the past].

This has been the sad state of religion among us in this land for many years — except for one or two distinguished places, which have been visited at times with a shower of mercy, while other towns and churches have not been rained upon. This will be acknowledged by all who have their spiritual senses exercised, as it has been lamented by faithful ministers and serious Christians. Accordingly, it has been a constant petition in our public prayers, from Sabbath to Sabbath, “That God would pour out his Spirit upon us, and revive his work in the midst of the years.” And besides our annual fast-days appointed by government, most of the churches have set apart days in which to seek the Lord by prayer and fasting, that He would “come and rain down righteousness upon us.”

And *now*, “Behold! The Lord whom we have sought, has suddenly come to his temple.”^{Mal 3.1} The dispensation or grace that we are now under, is certainly such as neither we nor our fathers have seen. And in some circumstances, it is so wonderful that I believe there has not been the like since the extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit immediately after our Lord's ascension. The apostolical times seem to have returned upon us — there has been such a display of the power and grace of the divine Spirit in the assemblies of his people, and such testimonies that He has given to the word of the gospel. I remember a remarkable passage of the late reverend and learned Mr. Howe,¹ which I think it worthwhile to transcribe here.

“In such a time, when the Spirit will be poured forth plentifully, surely ministers will have their proportionate share. And when such a time as that comes, I believe you will hear many other kinds of sermons (or those will who live till such a time) than you usually do now-a-days: souls will surely be dealt with at another rate. It is plain, too sadly plain, there is a great retraction of the Spirit of God even from us. We do not know how to speak living sense into souls; how to get within you: our words die in our mouths, or drop and die between you and us. We even faint when we speak; long-experienced unsuccessfulness makes us despond. We do not speak as persons who hope to prevail, who expect to make you serious, heavenly, mindful of God, and to

¹ John Howe (1630-1705) was an English Puritan theologian. He served briefly as chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. “The Prosperous State of the Christian Church before the End of Time, by a plentiful Effusion of the Holy Spirit,” p. 80.

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walk more like Christians. The methods of alluring and convincing souls, even those that some of us have known, are lost from among us in great part. Other ways have been taken than we can now tell how to fall upon, for mollifying the obdurate, and awakening the self-secure, and convincing and persuading the obstinate, and winning the disaffected. Surely there will be a large share who will come even to the part of ministers, when such an effusion of the Spirit comes as expected. They will know how to speak to better purpose, with more compassion, with more seriousness, with more authority and allurements, than we can now find."

We have found our own remarkable day to be agreeable to the just expectation of this great and excellent man. A number of *preachers* have appeared among us, to whom God has given such a large measure of his Spirit, that we are sometimes ready to apply to them the character of Barnabas: "he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith." (Act 11.24) They preach the gospel of the grace of God from place to place, with uncommon zeal and assiduity.

The doctrines they insist on are the doctrines of the Reformation, under the influence of which the power of godliness so flourished in the last century. The points on which their preaching mainly turns are those important ones of man's guilt, corruption, and impotence; supernatural regeneration by the Spirit of God, and free justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ; and the marks of the new birth.

The manner of their preaching is not with the enticing words of man's wisdom. "However, they speak wisdom among those who are mature." (1Cor 2.6) An ardent love for Christ and souls warms their breasts, and animates their labours. God has made His ministers active spirits, a flame of fire in his service; and His word in their mouths has been "like a fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces." (Jer 23.29) In most places where they have laboured, God has evidently worked with them, and "confirmed the word by accompanying signs." (Mar 16.20) Such a power and presence of God in religious assemblies, has not been known since God set up his sanctuary among us. He has indeed "glorified the house of his glory." (Isa 60.7)

This work is truly extraordinary in respect of its *extent*. It is more or less in the several provinces that measure many hundreds of miles on this continent. "He sends forth his commandment on earth! His word runs very swiftly." (Psa 147.15) It has entered and spread in some of the most populous towns, the chief places of concourse and business. And — blessed be God! — it has visited the seats of learning, both here and in a neighbouring colony. O may the Holy Spirit constantly reside in them both, seize our devoted youth, and form them as polished shafts, to successfully fight the Lord's battles against the powers of darkness when they will be called out to service! — It is also extraordinary with respect to the *numbers* who have been the subjects of this operation. Stupid sinners have been awakened by the hundreds; and it has been widely asked in some places, "What must I do to be saved?" I truly believe that in this metropolis of ours, there were some thousands last winter, who were under such religious impressions as they had never felt before.

The work has been remarkable also for the *various sorts* of persons who have been under its influence. — These have been of *all ages*. Some *elderly* persons have been snatched as brands out of the burning, made monuments of divine mercy, and born to God, though "out of due time," as the apostle says in his own case (1Cor 15.8). But here with us, it has lain mostly among the young. Sprightly youth have been made to bow like willows to the Redeemer's

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sceptre, and to willingly subscribe with their own hands to the Lord. And out of the mouths of babes, some little children, God has ordained praise to Himself, to still the enemy and the avenger. — They have also been of all *ranks* and *degrees*. Some are of the great and rich; but more of the low and poor — and of other countries and nations. Ethiopia has stretched out her hand: some poor *negroes* have, I trust, been brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God — those of all *qualities* and *conditions*.

The most *ignorant*, the foolish things of the world, babes in knowledge, have been made “wise unto salvation” (2Tim 3.15), and been taught those heavenly truths which have been hidden from the wise and prudent. Some of the *learned* and knowing among men, have had those things revealed to them by the Father in heaven, which flesh and blood do not teach. And of these, some who had gone into the modern notions, and had only the polite religion of the present times, have had their prejudices conquered, their carnal reasonings overcome, and their understandings made to bow to gospel mysteries. They now receive “the truth as it is in Jesus” (Eph 4.21), and their faith no longer “stands in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.” (1Cor 2.5) Some of the most *rude* and disorderly have become regular in their behaviour, and sober in all things. The *gay* and airy² have become grave and serious.

Some of the *greatest sinners* have appeared to be turned into real saints: drunkards have become temperate; fornicators and adulterers are now of chaste conduct; swearers and profane persons have learned to fear that glorious and fearful Name, THE LORD THEIR GOD; carnal worldlings have been made to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” (Mat 6.33) Even deriders and scoffers at this work and its instruments, have come under its conquering power. Some of this stamp, who have gone to hear the preacher — as some did with Paul, wondering “What will this babbler say?” (Act 17.18) — have not been able to resist the power and the Spirit with which he spoke. They have sat trembling under the word, and gone away from it weeping; afterward they clung to the preacher. So Dionysius the Areopagite did with Paul. (Act 17.34) Diverse instances of this kind have come to my knowledge.

The *virtuous* and civil have been convinced that morality is not to be relied on for life; and so they are excited to seek the new birth, and a vital union to Jesus Christ by faith. The *formal* professor likewise has been awakened out of his dead formalities, brought under the power of godliness; taken away from his false rests, and brought to build his hope on the Mediator's righteousness alone. At the same time, many of the *children of God* have been greatly quickened and refreshed. They have been awakened out of the sleeping frames they had fallen into, and are excited to be “diligent to make their calling and election sure.” (2Pet 1.10) They have had precious, reviving, and sealing times. — The divine influence has been this extensive and general in this glorious season.

One more thing is worthy of remark, and this is the *uniformity* of the work. By the accounts I have received in letters, and conversation with ministers and others who live in different parts of the land where this work is going on, it is the same work that is carried on in one place as in another. The method of the Spirit's operation on the minds of the people is the same as usual at other times, though with some variety of circumstances. And the particular appearances with which this work is attended, that have not been so common at other times,

² The phrase refers to those who are fun-loving, flighty, and fanciful.

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are also much the same. These points are indeed objected by many *against* the work. But though conversion is the same work in its main strokes wherever it is wrought, it still seems reasonable to suppose that at an extraordinary season in which God is pleased to carry on a work of His grace in a more observable and glorious manner, in a way that He would have the world take notice of — *at such a time*, I say, it seems reasonable to suppose that there may be some particular appearances in the work of conversion, which are not common *at other times* — when true conversions are yet wrought — or when some circumstances attending the work may be carried on to an unusual degree and height. If it were not thus, then the work of the Lord would not be so much regarded and spoken of, and so God would not have so much of the glory from it. Nor would the work itself be likely to spread so fast; for God has evidently made use of example and discourse in carrying it on.

And as to the *fruits* of this work (which we have been asked so often to wait for), blessed be God! So far as there has been time for observation, they appear to be abiding. I do not mean that none have lost their impressions, or that there are no instances of hypocrisy and apostasy. Scripture and experience lead us to expect these at such a season. To me, it is a matter of surprise and thankfulness that as yet there have not been more. But I mean that a great number of those who have been awakened, are still seeking and striving to “enter by the narrow gate” (Mat 7.13). Most of those who were thought to be converted, continue to give evidence of their being new creatures, and seem to cling to the Lord with full purpose of heart. To be sure, a new *face* of things continues in this town, though many circumstances concur to render such a work not so observable here ³ as in smaller and more distant places. Many things that are not becoming of the profession of the gospel, are in a measure reformed. Taverns, dancing-schools, and those meetings which have been called *assemblies*, which have always proved unfriendly to serious godliness, are frequented much less. Many have reduced their dress and apparel to make themselves look more like followers of the humble Jesus.

It has been both surprising and pleasant to see that some younger people — also of that sex which is most fond of such vanities — have put away the “finery of their ornaments” (Isa 3.18), as the effect and indication of their seeking the inward glories of “the King’s daughter.” ⁴ Religion is now much more the subject of conversation at friends’ houses, than I ever knew it. The doctrines of grace are espoused and relished. Private religious meetings have greatly multiplied. Public assemblies (especially lectures) are much better attended; and our listeners were never so attentive and serious. There is indeed an extraordinary appetite for “the sincere milk of the word.” (1Pet 2.2)

It is more than twelve months since an evening lecture was set up in this town. There are now several: two constantly on Tuesday and Friday evenings. This is when some of our most capacious houses are well-filled with hearers who, by their looks and deportment, seem to have come to hear, that their souls might live. An evening in God’s courts is now esteemed better than many elsewhere. There is also great resort to ministers in private. Our hands continue full of work; and many times we have more than we can discourse with distinctly and separately. I have written thus largely and particularly, that persons at a distance, who

³ Here: *i.e.*, in the city of Boston, in New England.

⁴ 1Pet 3.4; Mat 21.5.

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desire to know the present state of religion here — those into whose hands these papers will come — may receive some satisfaction.

And now, can anyone be at a loss as to *what spirit* to ascribe this work? To attribute it to the devil, as some do, is to make the old serpent like the foolish woman “who pulled down her house with her hands.” (Pro 14.1) Our Saviour has taught us to argue otherwise in such a case as this. “Every kingdom divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (Mat 12.25-26)

Some entertain *prejudices* against this work, and others revile and reproach it. This does not make it look less like a work of God. It would otherwise lack one mark of its being so. For the spirit of this world, and the spirit which is of God, are contrary to one another. I do not wonder that Satan rages, and shows his rage in some who are under his influence, when his kingdom is so shaken, and his subjects desert him by the hundreds, I hope by the thousands. — The prejudices of some, I have no doubt, are owing to the lack of opportunity to be rightly informed, and to their having received misrepresentations from abroad. Others may be offended because they have not experienced anything like such a work *in themselves*. And if these things are so, then they must begin again, and get another foundation laid than that on which they have built. And this is what men are hardly brought to do. Others, perhaps, may dislike the present work because it supports and confirms some principles which they have not yet embraced, and against which such prejudices hang about their minds, because they cannot be easily shaken off. For it is certain that these fruits do not grow on Arminian ground.

I hope none dislike the work because they have not been used as instruments in it. For if we love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, we will rejoice to see Him increase, even if we decrease. If any are resolutely set to disbelieve this work, to reproach and oppose it, they must be left to the free sovereign power and mercy of God to enlighten and rescue them. If they have had an opportunity to be rightly informed, I am ready to think they would have been disbelievers, and opposers of the miracles and mission of our Saviour, had they lived in His days. The malignity which some of them have revealed, to me approaches the unpardonable sin. And they need to beware, lest they indeed sin “the sin which is unto death.” (1Joh 5.16) For as I believe it can be committed in *these* days, as well as in the days of the *apostles*, so I think persons are now in *more* danger of committing it, than at other times. At least let them come under the awe of this word: “Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, He shall destroy them, and not build them up.” (Psa 28.5)

But if any are disposed to receive conviction, and have a mind open to light, and are really willing to know about the present work, whether it is of God, it is with great satisfaction and pleasure that I can recommend to them the following sheets. They will find in them the “distinguishing marks” of such a work, as they are found in the Holy Scriptures, applied to the uncommon operation that has been on the minds of many in this land. Here the matter is tested by the infallible touchstone of the Holy Scriptures, and it is weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, with great judgment and impartiality.

A performance of this kind is seasonable and necessary. And I heartily desire to bless God, who inclined this servant of His to undertake it, and has graciously assisted him in it. The Reverend Author is known to be “a scribe instructed for the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat 13.52) The place where he has been called to exercise his ministry has been famous for experiential

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religion; and he has had opportunities to observe this work in many places where it has powerfully appeared, and to converse with numbers who have been the subjects of it. These things qualify him for this undertaking above most. His arguments in favour of the work, are strongly drawn from Scripture, reason, and experience. And I believe that every candid, judicious reader will say that he writes very free from an enthusiastic or a party spirit.⁵

The use of human learning is asserted; a methodical way of preaching, the fruit of study as well as prayer is recommended; and the exercise of charity in judging others is pressed and urged. And those things which are esteemed blemishes, and are likely to be the hinderances of the work, are cautioned and warned against with great faithfulness. — Many, I believe, will be thankful for this publication. Those who have already entertained favourable thoughts of this work, will be confirmed by it; and the doubting may be convinced and satisfied. But if there are any who cannot after all, see the signatures of a divine hand on the work, it is to be hoped they will be prevailed upon to spare their censures, and stop their oppositions, lest “they even be found to fight against God.” (Act 5.39)

I still had several things to say, which I see I must suppress, or I will go far beyond the limits of a preface. And I fear I need to ask pardon both from the reader and the publishers for the length I have already run. Only, I cannot help expressing my wish that those who have been conversant in this work in one place or another, would transmit accounts of it to such a hand as the Reverend Author of this discourse, to be compiled into a narrative. It would be like that of the conversions at Northampton, which was published a few years ago, so that the world may know this surprising dispensation, in its beginning, progress, and various circumstances.

This, I apprehend, would be for the honour of the Holy Spirit, whose work and office has been treated so reproachfully in the Christian world. It would be an open attestation to the divinity of a despised gospel. And it might have a happy effect on the other places where the sound of this marvelous work would by this means be heard. I cannot help but think it would be one of the most useful pieces of church history the people of God are blessed with. Perhaps it would come the nearest to the Acts of the Apostles of anything extant; and all the histories in the world do not come up to that. There we have something as surprising as in the book of Genesis; and a new creation of another kind seems to open to our view. But I must forbear.

I will only add my prayer, That the worthy Author of this discourse may long be continued a burning and shining light in the golden candlestick where Christ has placed him, and from there diffuse his light through these provinces! That the divine Spirit whose cause is espoused here, would accompany this and the other valuable publications of his servant, with his powerful influences. That they may promote the Redeemer's interest, serve the ends of vital religion, and so add to the Author's present joy, and future crown!

W. COOPER.⁶

Boston, Nov. 20, 1741.

⁵ That is, free from bias (blind passion or over-emotionalism) and partisanship.

⁶ William Cooper (1693-1743). An eminent revivalist preacher in Boston during the Great Awakening. He served at the church in Brattle Street. He was a close friend and supporter of Jonathan Edwards. Hence this lengthy preface to the Reader, draws on his personal experience of the events, circumstances, and conversions which Edwards describes.

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THE MARKS OF A WORK OF THE TRUE SPIRIT.

Jonathan Edwards

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. — 1John 4.1

In the apostolic age, there was the greatest outpouring of the Spirit of God that ever was; both as to His extraordinary influences and gifts, and His ordinary operations in convincing, converting, enlightening, and sanctifying the souls of men. But as the influences of the true Spirit abounded, so counterfeits also abounded. The devil was abundant in mimicking both the ordinary and extraordinary influences of the Spirit of God, as is manifest by innumerable passages of the apostles' writings. This made it very necessary that the church of Christ should be furnished with some certain rules — distinguishing and clear marks — by which she might proceed safely in judging the true from the false, without danger of being imposed upon. The giving of such rules is the plain design of this chapter (1John 4), where we have this matter more expressly and fully treated than anywhere else in the Bible. The apostle, by set purpose, undertakes to supply the church of God with those marks of the true Spirit that may be plain and safe, and well-accommodated to our use and practice. And so that the subject might be clearly and sufficiently handled, he insists upon it throughout the chapter, which makes it wonderful that what is said here, is no more taken notice of today, in this *extraordinary day*, when there is such an uncommon and extensive operation on the minds of people, and such a variety of opinions concerning it, and so much talk about the work of the Spirit.

The apostle's discourse on this subject is introduced by an occasional mention of the indwelling of the Spirit, as the sure evidence of an interest in Christ. "And he that keeps his commandments dwells in Him, and He in him; and by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us." (1Joh 3.24) From this we may infer that the design of the apostle is not only to give marks by which to distinguish the true Spirit from the false, in his *extraordinary* gifts of prophecy and miracles, but also in his *ordinary* influences on the minds of his people, in order to their union to Christ, and being built up in him. This is also manifest from the marks themselves that are given, which we will note hereafter.

The words of the text are an introduction to this discourse of the distinguishing signs of the true and false Spirit. — Before the apostle proceeds to lay down these signs, he exhorts Christians, first, against an over-credulousness, and a forwardness to admit every specious appearance as the work of a true Spirit. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God." (1Joh 4.1) And second, he shows that there were many counterfeits, "because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (*ibid.*)" These not only pretended to have the Spirit of God in his extraordinary gifts of inspiration, but also to be the great friends and favourites of heaven, to be eminently holy persons, and to have much of the ordinary saving, sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God on their hearts. Hence we are to look at these words as a direction to *examine* and *test* their pretences to the Spirit of God, in both these respects.

Therefore, my design at this time is to show what are the true, certain, and distinguishing evidences of a work of the Spirit of God, by which we may safely proceed in judging any operation we find in ourselves, or see in others. And here I would observe that we are to take

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the *Scriptures* as our guide in such cases. This is the great and standing rule which God has given to His church, in order to guide them in things relating to the great concerns of their souls; and it is an infallible and sufficient rule. There are undoubtedly sufficient marks given to guide the church of God in this great affair of judging spirits, without which it would lie open to woeful delusion, and be exposed to, imposed on, and devoured by its enemies, without remedy. And we need not be afraid to trust these rules. Doubtless that Spirit who composed the Scriptures knew how to give us good rules by which to distinguish His operations from all that is falsely pretended to be from Him. And this, as I observed before, the Spirit of God has done here by set purpose, and has done it more particularly and fully than anywhere else. So that, in my present discourse, I will go nowhere else for rules or marks for the testing of spirits, but will confine myself to those that I find in this chapter.

But before I proceed to speak to these particularly, I would prepare my way by first observing negatively, in some instances, what are *not* signs or evidences of a work of the Spirit of God.

SECT. I. Signs by which NOT to Judge a Work of the Spirit

NEGATIVE SIGNS; or, what are *not* the signs by which we are to judge a work — and especially, what are no evidences that a work is *not* from the Spirit of God.

1. The work is unusual and extraordinary.

Nothing can be certainly concluded from this: that a work is carried on in a very unusual and extraordinary way, provided that the variety or difference is such that it may still be comprehended within the limits of scripture rules. What the church has been used to, is not a rule by which we are to judge, because there may be new and extraordinary works of God; and *previously* He has evidently worked in an extraordinary manner. He has brought to pass new things, strange works, and has worked in such a manner as to surprise both men and angels.

And because God has done thus in times past, we have no reason to think that he will not do so still. The prophecies of Scripture give us reason to think that God has things to accomplish which have never yet been seen. No deviation from what has been usual up to now, however great, is an argument that a work is *not* from the Spirit of God, if it is no deviation from His prescribed rule. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in his operation; we know that he uses a great variety; and we cannot tell how great a variety He may use within the compass of the rules that He himself has fixed. We should not limit God where he has not limited himself.

Therefore, it is not reasonable to determine that a work is *not* from God's Holy Spirit, just because of the extraordinary degree in which the minds of persons are influenced. If they seem to have an extraordinary conviction of the dreadful nature of sin, and a very uncommon sense of the misery of a Christless condition; or if they have extraordinary views of the certainty and glory of divine things, and are proportionately moved with very extraordinary affections of fear and sorrow, desire, love, or joy; or if the apparent change is very sudden, and the work is carried on with very unusual swiftness, and the persons affected are very numerous, and many of them are very young, with other unusual circumstances that do not infringe on scripture marks of a work of the Spirit — then these things are no argument that the work is *not* of the Spirit of God. The extraordinary and unusual degree of influence, and the power of operation, if in its nature it is agreeable to the rules and marks given in Scripture, it is rather an argument in its *favour*. For by however much higher the degree which, in its nature, is agreeable to the rule, there is that much more *conformity* to the rule; and its conformity is that much more evident. When things are in small degrees, though they are really agreeable to the rule, it is not so easily seen whether their nature agrees with the rule.

There is a great inclination in persons to doubt things that are strange. Especially elderly persons doubt that something is right, which they have never been used to in their day, and have not heard of in their day, and have not heard of in the days of their fathers. But if it is a good argument that a work is *not* from the Spirit of God, because it is very unusual, then it was so in the apostles' days. The work of the Spirit *then*, was carried on in a manner that, in very many respects, was altogether *new* — such that it had never been seen or heard since the world began. The work *then*, was carried on with more visible and remarkable power than ever. Nor had such mighty and wonderful effects of the Spirit of God been seen before in sudden changes, and in such great multitudes who were so greatly engaged and zealous —

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such a sudden alteration in towns, cities, and countries; such swift progress, and so vast an extent of the work — and many other extraordinary circumstances might be mentioned. The great unusualness of the work surprised the Jews. They didn't know what to make of it, but could not believe it to be the work of God. Many looked at the persons who were the subjects of it, as bereft of reason — as you may see in Act 2.13; 26.24; and 1Cor 4.10.

And from scripture prophecy, we have reason to suppose that at the commencement of that last and greatest outpouring of the Spirit of God, which is to come in the latter ages of the world, the manner of the work will be *very* extraordinary, such as was never before seen. So that there will be occasion to then say, as in Isa 66.8, “Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.” It may be reasonably expected that the extraordinary manner of the work *then*, will bear some proportion to the very extraordinary events, and that glorious change in the state of the world, which God will bring to pass by it.

2. It produces bodily or emotional effects.

A work is not to be judged by any effects on the bodies of men, such as tears, trembling, groans, loud outcries, agonies of body, or failing bodily strength. The influence persons are under is not to be judged one way or another by such effects on the body; and the reason is because the Scripture nowhere gives us any such rule. We cannot conclude that persons are under the influence of the true Spirit because we see such effects on their bodies, because this is not given as a mark of the true Spirit. Nor on the other hand, do we have any reason to conclude from any such outward appearances, that persons are *not* under the influence of the Spirit of God, because there is no rule of Scripture given to us to judge of spirits by, that either expressly or indirectly excludes such effects on the body; nor does reason exclude them. It is easily accounted for from the consideration of the nature of divine and eternal things, and the nature of man, and the laws of the union between soul and body, how a right influence, a true and proper sense of things, might have such effects on the body, even those that are of the most extraordinary kind, such as taking away bodily strength, or throwing the body into great agonies, and extorting loud outcries.

None of us can help but suppose, and would be ready to say at any time, that the misery of hell is doubtless so dreadful, and eternity so vast, that if a person were to have a clear apprehension of that misery *as it is*, it would be more than his feeble frame could bear — especially if at the same time, he saw himself in great danger of it, and utterly uncertain whether he would be delivered from it, and indeed, to have no security from it for even one day or hour. If we consider human nature, we must not wonder that when persons have a great sense of that which is so amazingly dreadful, and also have a great view of their own wickedness and God's anger, that things seem to them to forebode speedy and immediate destruction. We see the nature of man is such that when he is in danger of some terrible calamity to which he is greatly exposed, he is ready on every occasion to think that *now* it is coming.

When persons' hearts are full of fear, as in time of war, they are ready to tremble at the shaking of a leaf, and to expect the enemy every minute, and to say within themselves, *Now* I will be

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slain. If we were to suppose that a person saw himself over a great pit full of fierce and glowing flames, hanging by a thread that he knew is very weak and not sufficient to bear his weight, and he knew that multitudes had been in such circumstances before, and that most of them had fallen and perished — and he saw nothing within reach that he could take hold of to save him, what *distress* would he be in! How ready to think that *now* the thread was breaking, that now, *this minute*, he would be swallowed up in those dreadful flames! And would he not be ready to cry out in such circumstances? How much more those who see themselves in this manner hanging over an infinitely more dreadful pit, or held over it in the hand of God, who at the same time, they see is exceedingly provoked! No wonder that the wrath of God, when it manifested but a little to the soul, overbears human strength.

So it may easily be accounted for, that a true sense of the glorious excellency of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of his wonderful dying love, and the exercise of a truly spiritual love and joy, would be such that it very much overcomes bodily strength. We are all ready to admit that no man can see God and live; and that it is but a very small part of that apprehension of the glory and love of Christ, which the saints enjoy in heaven, that our present frame can bear. Therefore it is not at all strange that God might sometimes give his saints such foretastes of heaven, as to diminish their bodily strength. It was not inexplicable that the queen of Sheba fainted, and had her bodily strength taken away, when she came to see the glory of Solomon. Much less is it inexplicable that she who is the antitype of the queen of Sheba, namely the *Church*, who is brought, as it were, from the utmost ends of the earth, from being an alien and stranger, far off, in a state of sin and misery, should faint when she comes to see the glory of *Christ*, who is the antitype of Solomon. And this will be especially so in that prosperous, peaceful, glorious kingdom which He will set up in the world in its latter age.

Some object against such extraordinary appearances, that we have no instances of them recorded in the New Testament, under the extraordinary effusions of the Spirit. If this were allowed, I can see no force in the objection, if neither reason nor any rule of Scripture *exclude* such things — especially considering what was observed in the foregoing particular. I don't know that we have any express mention in the New Testament of any person's weeping, or groaning, or sighing through fear of hell, or a sense of God's anger. But is there anybody so foolish as to argue from this, that in whomever these things appear, their convictions are *not* from the Spirit of God? And the reason why we don't argue this way, is because these are easily accounted for, from what we know of the nature of man, and from what the Scripture informs us in general, concerning the nature of eternal things, and the nature of the convictions of God's Spirit. So that, there is no need for anything to be said in particular concerning these external, circumstantial effects. Nobody supposes that there is any need of express scripture for every external, accidental manifestation of the inward motion of the mind:. And even if such circumstances are not particularly recorded in sacred history, yet there is a great deal of reason to think, from the general accounts we *have*, that it could not be otherwise, that such things must occur in those days.

And there is also reason to think that such a great outpouring of the Spirit was not wholly without those more extraordinary effects on persons' bodies. The jailer in particular seems to have been an instance of that nature, when in the utmost distress and amazement, he came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. His falling down at that time does not seem to

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be designed to put himself into a posture of supplication, or in humble address to Paul and Silas; for he doesn't seem to have said anything to them then. But *first* he brought them out, and *then* he says to them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Act 16.29-30) His falling down seems to be from the same cause as his trembling. The psalmist gives an account of his crying out aloud, and a great weakening of his body under convictions of conscience, and a sense of the guilt of sin. "When I kept silence, my bones grew old, through my roaring all day long; for day and night Your hand was heavy upon me. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer." (Psa 32.3-4)

We may at least argue this much from it: that such an effect of conviction of sin may well be supposed in some cases. For if we supposed anything of a progression ⁷ in the expressions, the psalmist would still not represent his case by what would be absurd, and to which no degree of that exercise of mind which he spoke of, would have any tendency. We read of the disciples in Mat 14.26, that when they saw Christ coming to them in the storm, and took him for some terrible enemy threatening their destruction in that storm, "they cried out for fear." Why then should it be thought strange that persons should cry out for fear when God appears to them as a terrible enemy, and they see themselves in great danger of being swallowed up in the bottomless gulf of eternal misery? The spouse, time and again, speaks of herself as overpowered by the love of Christ, so as to weaken her body and make her faint. Song 2.5, "Sustain me with raisin cakes; comfort me with apples; for I am lovesick." And chap. 5.8, "I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick." From this we may argue at least that such an effect may well be supposed to arise from such a cause in the *saints* in some cases; and that such an effect will sometimes be seen in the church of Christ.

It is a weak objection that the impressions of enthusiasts have a great effect on their bodies. That Quakers used to tremble,⁸ is no argument that Saul, afterwards Paul, and the jailer, did not tremble from real convictions of conscience. Indeed, all such objections from the effects on the body, whether greater or lesser, seem to be exceedingly frivolous. Those who argue from there, proceed in the dark. They don't know what ground they go upon, nor by what rule they judge. The root and course of things is to be looked at; and the nature of the operations and affections are to be inquired into and examined by *the rule of God's word*, and not by the motions of the blood and animal spirits.⁹

3. It occasions a great deal of noise about religion.

It is no argument that an operation on the minds of people is *not* the work of the Spirit of God, just because it occasions a great deal of noise about religion. For though true religion has a nature *contrary* to that of the Pharisees — which was ostentatious, and delighted to present itself to the view of men for their applause — yet such is human nature. It is morally impossible for there to be a great concern, strong affection, and general zealousness of mind

⁷ Originally, *auxesis*: growth or development.

⁸ In Edwards' day, the term "enthusiasts" was an epithet, disparaging those who are driven by their emotions or experiences, and not by Scripture. Quakers were mocked at the time for their trembling, "the moving of the Spirit," because they were guided by that *inward moving*, and not by the authority of Scripture alone. See Sect. II.1 below.

⁹ *Blood and animal spirits*: these refer to instinctual impulses, emotional reactions, or "gut feelings."

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among a people, without causing a notable, visible, and open commotion and alteration among that people. Surely, it is no argument that the minds of people are *not* under the influence of God's Spirit, just because they are greatly moved. For indeed, spiritual and eternal things are so great, and of such infinite concern, that it would be a great absurdity if men were but moderately moved and affected by them.

And surely it is no argument that they are *not* moved by the Spirit of God, if they are affected by these things in some measure, as these things deserve, or in some proportion to their importance. When was there ever any such thing since the world began, as a people in general being greatly affected in any affair whatsoever, without noise or stir? The nature of man will not allow it.

Indeed Christ says, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation." Luk 17.20. That is, it won't consist in what is outward and visible; it won't be like earthly kingdoms, set up with outward pomp in some particular place, which will especially be the royal city and seat of the kingdom. As Christ explains himself in the words that follow next, "Nor will they say, Look here, or look there; for *behold*, the kingdom of God is within you." Not that the kingdom of God will be set up in the world, upon the ruin of Satan's kingdom, without a very observable and great effect — a mighty change in the state of things, to the observation and astonishment of the whole world. For such an effect as this is even held out in the prophecies of Scripture, and is so expressed by Christ himself in this very place — even in his own explanation of these forementioned words: "For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven, shines to another part under heaven, so also the Son of man will be in his day." (Luk 17.24) This is to distinguish Christ's coming to set up his kingdom, from the coming of *false* Christ's, which he tells us will be in a *private* manner in the deserts, and in the *secret* chambers. Whereas, this event of setting up the kingdom of God, would be open and public, in the sight of the whole world with clear manifestation — like lightning that cannot be hidden, but glares in everyone's eyes, and shines from one side of heaven to the other. And we find that when Christ's kingdom came by that remarkable pouring out of the Spirit in the apostles' days, it occasioned a great stir everywhere. What a mighty opposition there was in Jerusalem, on the occasion of that great effusion of the Spirit! And so too in Samaria, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and other places! The affair filled the world with noise, and gave occasion for some to say of the apostles, that they had "turned the world upside down." (Act 17.6)

4. Great impressions are made on the imagination.

It is no argument that an operation on the minds of a people, is *not* the work of the Spirit of God, just because many who are the subjects of it, have great impressions made on their imaginations. That persons have many impressions on their imaginations, does not prove that they have nothing else. It is easily accounted for, that there should be much of this nature among a people where a great multitude of all kinds of constitutions have their minds engaged with intense thought and strong affections about invisible things. Indeed, it would be strange if there were not. Such is our nature, that we cannot think of invisible things, without a degree of imagination. I dare appeal to any man of the greatest powers of mind, whether he is able to fix his thoughts on God, or Christ, or the things of another world, without imaginary ideas attending his meditations? And the more engaged the mind is, and the more intense the contemplation and affection, the more lively and strong the imaginary idea will ordinarily be

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— especially when attended with surprise. And this is the case when the mental prospect is very new, and takes strong hold of the passions, such as fear or joy; and when the change of the state and views of the mind is *sudden*, from a contrary extreme, such as from what was extremely *dreadful*, to that which is extremely ravishing and *delightful*. It is no wonder that many persons do not distinguish very well between what is imaginary and what is intellectual and spiritual; or that they are apt to lay too much weight on the imaginary part, and are most ready to speak of that part in the account they give of their experiences — especially persons of less understanding and of distinguishing capacity.

God has given us such a faculty as the imagination, and has so made us, that we cannot think of spiritual and invisible things without some exercise of this faculty. So too, it appears to me that such is our state and nature, that this faculty is really subservient and helpful to the other faculties of the mind, when a proper use is made of it. Though oftentimes, when the imagination is too strong, and the other faculties too weak, it overbears, and disturbs them in their exercise. It appears manifest to me, in many instances with which I have been acquainted, that God has really made use of this faculty for truly divine purposes; especially in some who are more ignorant. God seems to condescend to their circumstances, and to deal with them as babes — as of old He instructed his church, while in a state of ignorance and minority, by types and outward representations. I can see nothing unreasonable in such a position. Let others who have much occasion to deal with souls in spiritual concerns, judge whether experience doesn't confirm this.

It is no argument that a work is *not* of the Spirit of God, that some who are the subjects of it have been in a kind of ecstasy, in which they have been carried beyond themselves, and have had their minds transported into a train of strong and pleasing imaginations, and a kind of vision, as though they were rapt up even to heaven, and there saw glorious sights. I am acquainted with some instances of this kind. And I see no need for bringing in the help of the devil into the account that we give of these things, nor yet supposing them to be of the same nature with the visions of the prophets, or of St. Paul's rapture into paradise. Human nature, under these intense exercises and affections, is all that needs to be brought into the account. If it may be well accounted for, that persons under a true sense of the glorious and wonderful greatness and excellency of divine things, and soul-ravishing views of the beauty and love of Christ, should have the strength of nature overpowered, as I have already shown that it may, then I think it is not at all strange, that among great numbers who are thus affected and overborne, there should be some persons of particular constitutions, who should have their imaginations thus affected. The effect is no different than what bears a proportion and analogy to other effects of the strong exercise of their minds. It is no wonder, when the thoughts are so fixed, and the affections are so strong — and the whole soul is so engaged, ravished, and swallowed up — that all other parts of the body are so affected as to be deprived of their strength, and the whole frame is ready to dissolve. Is it any wonder that in such a case, the brain in particular (especially in some constitutions), which we know is most especially affected by intense contemplations and exercises of mind, should be so affected that its strength and spirits should be diverted for a season, and taken away from the impressions made on the organs of our external senses, and be wholly employed in a train of pleasing and delightful imaginations, corresponding with the present frame of the mind? Some are ready to interpret such things wrongly, and to lay too much weight on them as prophetic visions,

divine revelations, and sometimes significations from heaven of what will come to pass. The issue of this, in some instances which I have known, has shown to be otherwise. Yet, it appears to me that such things are sometimes evidently from the Spirit of God, though indirectly. That is, their extraordinary frame of mind, and that strong and lively sense of divine things which occasions them, is from His Spirit — and also as the mind continues in its holy frame, and retains a divine sense of the excellency of spiritual things even in its rapture. This holy frame and sense is from the Spirit of God, though the imaginations that attend it are but incidental. And therefore, there is commonly something or other in them that is confused, improper, and false.

5. One means used is setting an example, or following another's.

It is no sign that a work is *not* from the Spirit of God, that *example* is a great means of doing that work. It is surely no argument that an effect is *not* from God, just because *means* are used in producing it. For we know that it is God's manner to make use of means in carrying on his work in the world. And so it is no more an argument against the divinity of an effect, that this means is made use of, than if it was by any other means. It is agreeable to Scripture that persons should be influenced by one another's good example. The Scripture directs us to *set* good examples to that very end: Mat 5.16; 1Pet 3.1; 1Tim 4.12; Tit 2.7. And it also directs us to be *influenced* by the good examples of others, and to follow them: 2Cor 8.1-7; Heb 6.12; Phi 3.17; 1Cor 4.16; 11.1; 2The 3.9; 1The 1.7. By these passages, it appears that *example* is one of God's means. And certainly, it is no argument that a work is *not* of God, just because His own means are made use of to effect it.

And as it is a *Scriptural* way of carrying on God's work by example, so it is a *reasonable* way. It is no argument that men are not influenced by *reason*, just because they are influenced by *example*. This way of persons presenting truth to one another, has a tendency to enlighten the mind, and to convince reason. None will deny that when persons signify things to one another by *words*, it may rationally be supposed to tend to enlighten each other's *minds*; but the same thing may be signified by *actions*, and signified much more fully and effectually. Words are of no use other than as they convey our own ideas to others; but actions, in some cases, may do it much more fully.

There is a *language* in actions; and in some cases, it is much clearer and more convincing than in words. It is therefore no argument against the goodness of the effect, that persons are greatly affected by seeing others so — though the impression is made only by seeing the tokens of great and extraordinary affection in others, in their behaviour — taking for granted what they are affected by, without hearing them say one word. There may be language sufficient in such a case, in their behaviour alone, to convey their minds to others, and to signify to them their sense of things, more than can possibly be done by words alone. If a person were to see another under extreme bodily torment, he might receive much clearer ideas, and more convincing evidence of what that person suffered, by his actions in his misery, than he could only by the words of an unaffected and indifferent relater. In like manner, he might receive a greater idea of anything that is excellent and very delightful, from the behaviour of one who is in actual enjoyment of it, than by the dull narration of someone who is inexperienced and insensible himself.

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I desire that this matter may be examined by the strictest reason. Isn't it manifest that effects produced in persons' minds are *rational*, since not only weak and ignorant people are much influenced by example, but also those who make the greatest boast of their strength of reason? They are more influenced by reason held forth in *this* way, than almost any other. Indeed, the religious affections of many, when raised by this means — such as by hearing the word preached, or any other means — may prove flashy, and soon vanish, as Christ represents the stony-ground hearers. But the affections of some who are thus moved by *example*, are abiding, and prove to be of saving issue.

There was never yet a time of remarkable outpouring of the Spirit, and of a great revival of religion, without *example* having a main hand. So it was at the Reformation, and in the apostles' days in Jerusalem, and Samaria, and Ephesus, and other parts of the world, as will be most manifest to anyone who attends to the accounts we have in the Acts of the Apostles. As in those days one person was moved by another, so one city or town was influenced by the example of another.

“So that you were examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God is spread abroad.” (1The 1.7-8)

It is no valid objection against examples being so much used, that the Scripture speaks of *the Word* as the principal means of carrying on God's work. For the word of God is the principal means, nevertheless, by which other means operate and are made effectual. Even the sacraments have no effect except by the word. And so it is, that *example* becomes effectual. For all that is visible to the eye is unintelligible and vain, without the word of God to instruct and guide the mind. It is the word of God that is indeed held forth and applied by example, as the word of the Lord sounded forth to other towns in Macedonia and Achaia, by the example of those in Thessalonica who believe.

That *example* should be a great means of propagating the church of God seems to be signified several ways in Scripture. It is signified by Ruth's following Naomi out of the land of Moab into the land of Israel, when she resolved that she would not leave her, but would go wherever she went, and lodge wherever she lodged; and that Naomi's people would be her people, and Naomi's God, her God. Ruth, who was the ancestral mother of David and of Christ, was undoubtedly a great *type* of the church; upon which account her history is inserted in the canon of Scripture. In her leaving the land of Moab and its gods, to come and put her trust under the shadow of the wings of the God of Israel, we have a type of the conversion not only of the Gentile church, but of *every* sinner, who is naturally an alien and stranger. But in his conversion, he forgets his own people, and his fathers house, and he becomes a fellow-citizen with the saints, and a true Israelite.

The same thing seems to be signified in the effect that the example of the spouse, when she was lovesick, had on the “daughters of Jerusalem,” *i.e.*, *visible Christians*, who are first awakened, by seeing the spouse in such extraordinary circumstances, and then are converted. See Song 5.8-9, and 6.1. This is undoubtedly one way that “the Spirit and the bride say, *Come*” (Rev 22.17) — *i.e.* the Spirit in the Bride. It is foretold that the work of God would be very

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much carried on by this means in the last great outpouring of the Spirit; and that it would introduce the glorious day of the church, so often spoken of in Scripture.

“And the inhabitants of one city will go to another, saying, Let us go at once to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass that ten men from the nations of every language, will take hold of the skirt of a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” (Zec 8.21-23)

6. It is accompanied by great imprudences and irregularities in conduct.

It is no sign that a work is *not* from the Spirit of God, that many who seem to be the subjects of it, are guilty of great imprudences and irregularities in their conduct. We are to consider that the end for which God pours out his Spirit, is to make men *holy*, and not to make them *politicians*. Is it no wonder that in a mixed multitude of all sorts — wise and unwise, young and old, those of weak and strong natural abilities, under strong impressions of mind — there are many who behave themselves imprudently. There are but few who know how to conduct themselves under vehement affections of any kind, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. To do so requires a great deal of discretion, strength, and steadiness of mind. A thousand imprudences will not prove that a work is *not* of the Spirit of God — indeed, if there are not only imprudences, but many things prevailing which are irregular, and really contrary to the rules of God’s holy word. That it should be this way may be well-accounted for from the exceeding weakness of human nature, together with the remaining darkness and corruption of those who are *yet* the subjects of the saving influences of God’s Spirit, and have a real zeal for God.

We have a remarkable instance, in the New Testament, of a people who partook largely of that great effusion of the Spirit in the apostles’ days, among whom there nevertheless abounded imprudences and great irregularities — namely, the church at Corinth. There is scarcely any church more celebrated in the New Testament for being blessed with large measures of the Spirit of God, both in His *ordinary* influences in convincing and converting sinners, and also in his *extraordinary* and miraculous gifts. Yet, what manifold imprudences, what great and sinful irregularities and strange confusion they ran into at the Lord’s supper, and in the exercise of church discipline! To these may be added their indecent way of attending to other parts of public worship, their jarring contention about their teachers — and this was in the very exercise of their extraordinary gifts of prophecy, speaking with tongues and the like, in which they spoke and acted by the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God!

If we see great imprudences and even sinful irregularities in some who are great instruments to carry on the work, it won’t prove that it is *not* the work of God. The apostle Peter himself, who was a great, eminently holy, and inspired apostle — one of the chief instruments of setting up the Christian church in the world — when he was actually engaged in this work, was guilty of great and sinful error in his conduct, which the apostle Paul speaks of here:

“When Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed. For before certain came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he

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withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the other Jews likewise dissembled with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their deceit.”

(Gal 2.11-13)

If a great pillar of the Christian church — one of the chief of those who are the very foundations on which, next to Christ, the whole church is said to be built — was guilty of such an irregularity, is it any wonder if other lesser instruments, who don't have that extraordinary conduct of the divine Spirit which he had, should be guilty of many irregularities?

And in particular, it is no evidence that a work is *not* of God, if many who are either the subjects or instruments of it, are guilty of presumption in censuring others as unconverted. For this may be done through mistakes they have embraced concerning the marks by which they are to judge of the hypocrisy and carnality of others; or from not duly apprehending the latitude that the Spirit of God uses in the methods of His operations; or from lack of making due allowance for that infirmity and corruption that may be left in the hearts of the saints; as well as through lacking a due sense of their own blindness and weakness and remaining corruption, by which spiritual pride may have a secret vent this way, under some disguise, and not be discovered.

If we allow that truly pious men may have a great deal of remaining blindness and corruption, and may be liable to mistakes about the marks of hypocrisy, as undoubtedly *all* will allow, then it is not inexplicable that they should sometimes run into such errors as these. It is as easy, and on some accounts *easier* to explain, why the remaining corruption of good men might sometimes have an unobserved vent *this* way, than in most other ways; and without doubt (however lamentable) many holy men have erred in this way.

Lukewarmness in religion is abominable, and zeal is an excellent grace; yet above all other Christian virtues, this zeal needs to be strictly watched for and searched out. For it is that with which corruption — particularly pride and human passion — is exceedingly apt to mix unobserved. And it is observable that there was never a time of great reformation to cause a revival of *zeal* in the church of God, that it has not been attended in some notable instances with irregularity, and running some way or other into an undue *severity*. Thus in the apostles' days, a great deal of zeal was spent concerning unclean meats, with heated spirits in Christians one against another, both parties condemning and censuring one another, as if they were not true Christians. While the apostle had charity for *both*, as influenced by a spirit of real piety, He says, “He who eats, eats *to the Lord*, and gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, does so to the Lord, and gives God thanks.” (Rom 14.6) So also in the church of Corinth, they had fallen into a way of extolling some ministers, and censuring others; and they were puffed up against one another. Yet these things were no sign that the work so wonderfully carried on then, was *not* the work of God.

And after this, when religion was still greatly flourishing in the world, and a spirit of eminent holiness and zeal prevailed in the Christian church, the zeal of Christians spilled into a very improper and undue severity in the exercise of church discipline towards delinquents. In some cases, they would by no means admit them into their charity and communion, however humble and penitent they appeared. And in the days of Constantine the Great, the zeal of Christians against heathenism spilled into a degree of persecution. So in that glorious revival

of religion, at the reformation, zeal in many instances appeared in a very improper severity, and even a degree of persecution; yea, in some of the most eminent reformers; as in the great Calvin in particular. And many in those days of the flourishing of vital religion, were guilty of severely censuring others that differed from them in opinion in some points of divinity.

7. *It is intermixed with errors in judgment or delusions of Satan.*

Nor are many errors in judgment, and some delusions of Satan intermixed with the work, any argument that the work in general is not of the Spirit of God. However great a spiritual influence may occur, it is not to be expected that the Spirit of God would *now* be given in the same manner as it was to the apostles, to infallibly guide them in points of Christian doctrine, so that what they taught might be relied on as a rule for the Christian church. And if many delusions of Satan appear at the same time that a great religious concern prevails, it is not an argument that the work in general is not the work of God, any more than it was an argument in Egypt, that there were no true miracles wrought there by the hand of God, because Jannes and Jambres wrought false miracles at the same time by the hand of the devil. Yes, the same persons may be the subjects of much of the influences of the Spirit of God, and yet in some things, be led away by the delusions of Satan. This is no more of a paradox than many other things that are true of real saints in the present state, where grace dwells with so much corruption, and the new man and the old man subsist together in the same person; and the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil remain together for a while in the same heart. Many godly persons in this age and others, have undoubtedly exposed themselves to woeful delusions, by an aptness to lay too much weight on impulses and impressions, as if they were immediate revelations from God — to signify something that is future, or to direct them where to go, and what to do.

8. *Some who are worked upon at first, later fall away.*

If some, who were thought to be worked upon by the Spirit, fall away into gross errors or scandalous practices, it is no argument that the work in general is not the work of the Spirit of God. That there are some counterfeits, is no argument that nothing is true. Such things are always expected in a time of reformation. If we look into church history, we will find no instance of any great revival of religion, that has not been attended with many such things. Instances of this nature in the apostles' days were innumerable. Some fell away into gross heresies, others into vile practices, even though they seemed to be the subjects of a work of the Spirit — and were accepted for a while among those who were truly so, as their brethren and companions — and were not suspected till they went out from them (1Joh 2.18-19). And some of these were teachers and officers, and eminent persons in the Christian church — those whom God had endowed with miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, as it would appear in the beginning of the 6th chapter of the Hebrews. An instance of these was Judas. He was one of the twelve apostles, and had long been constantly united to, and intimately conversant with, a company of truly experienced disciples — without being discovered or suspected, till he revealed himself by his scandalous practice.

He had been treated by Jesus himself, in all external things, as if he had truly been a disciple, even investing him with the character of an apostle, sending him out to preach the gospel, and enduing him with miraculous gifts of the Spirit. For though Christ *knew* him, yet he did not

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then clothe himself with the character of omniscient Judge and searcher of hearts. But He acted the part of a minister of the visible church (for he was his Father's minister). And therefore he did not reject him till Judas had revealed himself by his scandalous practice. Thereby Jesus gives an example to guides and rulers of the visible church, not to take it upon themselves to act the part of a searcher of hearts, but to be influenced in their administrations by what is *visible* and *open*. — There were some instances then of those apostates who were esteemed eminently full of the grace of God's Spirit. An instance of this nature was probably Nicolas, one of the seven deacons, who was looked at by the Christians in Jerusalem, in the time of that extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit, as a man full of the Holy Ghost. For that reason, he was chosen for that office, out of the multitude of Christians, as you may see in Acts 6.3, 5. Yet he afterwards fell away and became the head of a sect of vile heretics, of gross practices, called from his name the sect of the *Nicolaitans*.¹⁰ (Rev 2.6 and 15)

So in the time of the reformation from popery, how great was the number of those who for a while seemed to join with the reformers, yet fell away into the grossest and most absurd errors, and abominable practices. And it is particularly observable that in times of a great pouring out of the Spirit to revive religion in the world, a number of those who for a while seemed to partake in it, have fallen off into whimsical and extravagant errors, and gross enthusiasm, boasting of high degrees of spirituality and perfection, censuring and condemning others as carnal. Thus it was with the Gnostics in the apostles' times; and thus it was with several sects at the Reformation, as Anthony Burgess observes in his book called *Spiritual Refinings*, Part I, Sermon 23, p. 132:

“The first worthy reformers and glorious instruments of God, found a bitter conflict in this, so that they were exercised not only with formalists, and traditionary papists on the one side, but with men who pretended to be more enlightened than the reformers were, on the other side. Hence those who adhered to the Scripture, and would test revelations by it, were called *Literists* and *Vowelists*, as men acquainted with the words and vowels of the Scripture, but having nothing of the Spirit of God. And wherever in any town the true doctrine of the gospel broke forth to displace popery, such opinions quickly arose, like tares that came up among the good wheat. Great divisions were raised by this, and the Reformation was made abominable and odious to the world — as if it had been the sun to give heat and warmth for those worms and serpents to crawl out of the ground. Hence they inveighed against Luther, and said he had only promulgated a carnal gospel.”

For a while, some of the leaders of those wild enthusiasts had been highly esteemed by the first reformers, and were peculiarly dear to them. Thus also in England, at the time when vital religion much prevailed in the days of King Charles I, the *Interregnum*, and Oliver Cromwell, such things as these abounded. And so in New England, in her purest days, when vital piety

¹⁰ But though these heretics assumed his name, it does not follow that Nicolas countenanced their enormities. See Calmet's *Dictionary*, “Nicolas”. — *Edward's footnote*.

Though the early church fathers made this connection, Nicolas was a common name; there is little other reason to link him to this cult of Balaam; hence, Edwards' caution. — WHG

flourished, such things as these broke out. Therefore the devil's sowing such tares is no proof that a true work of the Spirit of God is not gloriously carried on.

9. It is promoted by ministers who insist on the terrors of God's holy law.

It is no argument that a work is not from the Spirit of God, that it seems to be promoted by ministers insisting very much on the terrors of God's holy law, and who do that with a great deal of pathos and earnestness. If there is really a hell of such dreadful and never-ending torments as is generally supposed, of which multitudes are in great danger — and into which most men in Christian countries actually fall from generation to generation, for lack of a sense of its terribleness, and so for lack of taking due care to avoid it — then why isn't it proper for those who have the care of souls to take great pains to make men sensible of it? Why should they not be told as much of the truth as possible? If I am in danger of going to hell, I would be glad to know as much as I possibly can of the dreadfulness of it. If I am prone to neglect due care to avoid it, the one who does me the best kindness, will do the most to represent to me the *truth* of the case, and to set forth my misery and danger in the liveliest manner.

I appeal to everyone, whether this isn't the very course they would take if exposed to any great *temporal* calamity? If any of you who are heads of families saw one of your children in a house on fire, and in imminent danger of soon being consumed in the flames — yet seemed to be insensible of its danger, and neglected to escape after you called out to the child repeatedly — would you go on to speak of the danger only in a cold and indifferent manner? Wouldn't you cry aloud, and call earnestly to the child, and represent the danger the child was in, and its own folly in delaying, doing so in the most lively manner of which you were capable? If you were to continue to speak to the child only in a cold manner, as you would do in ordinary conversation about indifferent matters, wouldn't those around you begin to think you were bereft of reason yourself? This is not the way of mankind in temporal affairs of great moment, which require earnest heed and great haste, and about which they are greatly concerned. They are not prone to speak to others of their danger, and warn them but a little, or in a cold and indifferent manner. Nature teaches men otherwise. If we who have the care of souls, knew what hell was, had seen the state of the damned, or by any other means had become sensible of how dreadful their case was — and at the same time knew that most men went there, and saw that our hearers were not sensible of their danger — it would be morally impossible for us to avoid most earnestly setting before them the dreadfulness of that misery, and their great exposure to it, and even cry aloud to them.

When ministers preach of hell and warn sinners to avoid it, doing so in a cold manner — even though they may say *in words* that it is infinitely terrible — they contradict themselves. For *actions*, as I observed before, have a *language* as well as words. If a preacher's words represent the sinner's state as infinitely dreadful, while his behaviour and manner of speaking contradict it — showing that the preacher doesn't truly think so — he defeats his own purpose. For the language of his actions in such a case, is much more effectual than the bare meaning of his words. Not that I think the law alone should be preached: ministers may preach *other* things too little. The gospel is to be preached *as well as* the law; and the law is to be preached only to make way for the gospel, and in order that it may be preached more effectually. The main work of ministers is to preach the gospel: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." (Rom 10.4) So that a minister would greatly miss it if he were to insist so much on the terrors

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of the law, as to forget his Lord, and neglect to preach the gospel. Yet the law is very much to be insisted on; and the preaching of the gospel is likely to be in vain without it.

And certainly such earnestness and affection in speaking is beautiful, as becomes the nature and importance of the subject. Not that there isn't such a thing as an indecent boisterousness in a preacher, something besides what naturally arises from the nature of his subject, and in which the *matter* and *manner* do not well agree. Some say it is an unreasonable thing to frighten persons to heaven; but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavour to frighten persons away from hell. They stand on its brink, and are ready to fall into it, and yet they are senseless of their danger. Isn't it a reasonable thing to frighten a person out of a house on fire? The word *frighten* is commonly used for sudden, causeless fear, or groundless surprise. But surely a just fear, for which there is good reason, is not to be spoken against under any such label.

SECT. II. Scripture Evidences of a Work of the Spirit

What are distinguishing scripture evidences of a work of the Spirit of God.

Having shown, in some instances, what are *not* evidences that a work wrought among a people isn't a work of the Spirit of God, I now proceed in the second place, as proposed, to show **POSITIVELY** what are the sure, distinguishing scripture evidences and marks of a work of the Spirit of God. By these we may proceed to judge any operation that we find in ourselves, or that we see among a people, without danger of being misled. And in doing this, as I said before, I will confine myself wholly to those marks which are given to us by the apostle in the chapter in which my text is found (1John 4), where this matter is particularly handled, and more plainly and fully than anywhere else in the Bible. And in speaking to these marks, I will take them in the order in which I find them in the chapter.

1. It raises the esteem of Jesus Christ in their eyes.

When the operation is such that it raises their esteem of that Jesus who was born of the Virgin, and was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem; and it seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of what the gospel declares to us about his being the Son of God, and the Saviour of men — it is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God. The apostle gives us this sign in the 2d and 3d verses:

“By this you may know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is of God; and every spirit that does *not* confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is *not* of God.” (1John 4.2-3)

This implies a confession not only that there was such a person who appeared in Palestine, and did and suffered those things that are recorded about him, but that he was *Christ*, *i.e.* the Son of God, anointed to be Lord and Saviour, as the name *Jesus Christ* implies. That this much is implied in the apostle's meaning, is confirmed by the 15th verse, where the apostle is still on the same subject of signs of the true Spirit; “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God.” And it is to be observed that the word *confess*, as it is often used in the New Testament, signifies more than merely *allowing*. It implies establishing and confirming a thing by testimony, and declaring it with a manifestation of esteem and affection. So it is in Mat 10.32: “Whoever therefore confesses me before men, him will I *confess* also before my Father who is in heaven.” Rom 15.9: “I will *confess* to you among the Gentiles, and sing unto your name.” And Phi 2.11: “That every tongue shall *confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” And that this is the force of the expression, as the apostle John uses it in the place cited, is confirmed in the next chapter: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and everyone who loves Him who begot, also loves him who is begotten of Him.” (1Joh 5.1) And this is confirmed by that parallel place of the apostle Paul, where we have the same rule given to distinguish the true Spirit from all counterfeits: “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed (or will show an ill or low esteem of Him); and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Ghost.” (1Cor 12.3)

So that, if the spirit that is at work among a people, is plainly observed to work so as to convince them of Christ, and lead them to Him — to confirm their minds in the belief of the

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history of Christ as he appeared in the flesh; and that he is the Son of God, and was sent by God to save sinners; and that he is the only Saviour, and that they stand in great need of him — and if he seems to produce in them higher and more honourable thoughts of Him than they used to have, and to incline their affections more to Him, then it is a sure sign that it is the true and right Spirit — however incapable we may be to determine whether that conviction and affection is in that manner, or to that degree, as to be saving faith or not.

But the words of the apostle are remarkable. The person to whom the Spirit gives testimony, and for whom he raises their esteem, must be that Jesus who appeared in the flesh, and not another Christ in his stead; nor any mystical fantastical Christ; such as “the light within.” The spirit of Quakers extols this, while it diminishes their esteem of and dependence upon an outward Christ — or Jesus *as he came in the flesh* — and leads them away from Him. But the spirit that gives testimony for that Jesus, and leads to Him, can be none other than the Spirit of God.

The devil has the bitterest and most implacable enmity against the person of Christ, especially in his character as the Saviour of men. The devil mortally hates the story and doctrine of Christ’s redemption; he would never go about begetting in men more honourable thoughts of Him, nor lay greater weight on his instructions and commands. The Spirit that inclines men’s hearts to the seed of the woman, is *not* the spirit of the serpent that has such an irreconcilable enmity against Him. He who heightens men’s esteem of the glorious Michael, that prince of angels, is *not* the spirit of the dragon that is at war with him.¹¹

2. It operates against Satan’s interests by discouraging sin.

When the spirit that is at work operates *against* the interests of Satan’s kingdom — which lies in encouraging and establishing sin, and cherishing men’s worldly lusts — this is a sure sign that it is a *true*, and not a *false* spirit. We have this sign given to us in the 4th and 5th verses. “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world, therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them.” (1Joh 4.4-5) Here is a plain antithesis: it is evident that the apostle is still comparing those who are influenced by the two opposite kinds of spirits, the true and the false, and showing the difference. The one is of God, and overcomes the spirit of the world; the other is of the world, and speaks of and savours the things of the world. Here the spirit of the devil is called, “he that is in the world.” Christ says, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (Joh 18.36) But it is otherwise with Satan’s kingdom; he is “the god of this world.” (2Cor 4.4)

What the apostle means by the *world*, or “the things that are of the world,” we learn by his own words in the 2d chapter of this epistle, 15th and 16th verses. “Do not love the world, nor the things that are in the world: if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1Joh 2.15-16) So that, by *the world*, the apostle

¹¹ **Rev 12:7-9** “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

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evidently means everything that pertains to the interest of sin, and it comprehends all the corruptions and lusts of men, and all those acts and objects by which they are gratified.

So we may safely determine from what the apostle says, that the spirit that is at work among a people in such a way as to lessen men's esteem of the pleasures, profits, and honours of the world, and to take their hearts away from an eager pursuit of these things; and to engage them in a deep concern about a future state and the eternal happiness which the gospel reveals. He puts them to earnestly seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mat 6.33). And so the spirit that convinces them of the dreadfulness of sin, the guilt it brings, and the misery to which it exposes them, must be the Spirit of God.

It is not to be supposed that Satan would convince men of sin, and awaken the conscience. It can in no way serve his end to make that candle of the Lord shine brighter, and to open the mouth of that vicegerent of God in the soul. It is in the devil's interest, whatever he does, to lull the conscience to sleep, and keep it quiet. To have that conscience with its eyes and mouth open in the soul, would tend to clog and hinder all the devil's designs of darkness, and to evermore disturb his affairs, cross his interest, and disquiet him, so that he can manage nothing to his mind without molestation. Would the devil, when he is about to establish men in sin, take such a course in the first place, to enlighten and awaken the conscience of men to see the dreadfulness of sin, and to make them exceedingly afraid of it, and sensible of their misery because of their past sins, and their great need of deliverance from their guilt? Would he make them more careful, inquisitive, and watchful to discern what is sinful, and to avoid future sins, and so be more afraid of the devil's temptations, and more careful to guard against them? What do those men do with their reason, who suppose that the Spirit that operates this way, is the spirit of the devil?

Possibly some may say that the devil may even awaken men's consciences to deceive them, and make them think they have been the subjects of a saving work of the Spirit of God, while they are indeed still in the gall of bitterness. But it may be replied to this, that the man who has an awakened conscience, is the least likely to be deceived of any man in the world; it is the drowsy, insensible, stupid conscience that is most easily blinded. The more sensible that the conscience is in a diseased soul, the less easily it is quieted without a real healing. The more sensible the conscience is made of the dreadfulness of sin, and of the greatness of a man's own guilt, the less likely he is to rest in his own righteousness, or to be pacified with nothing but shadows. A man who has been thoroughly terrified with a sense of his own danger and misery, is not easily flattered and made to believe he is safe, without any good grounds. To awaken the conscience, and convince it of the evil of sin, cannot tend to establish sin, but it certainly tends rather to make way for sin and Satan to be cut out.

Therefore, this is a good argument that the Spirit that operates this way, cannot be the spirit of the devil, unless we suppose that Christ didn't know how to argue, when he told the Pharisees that *Satan would not cast out Satan*, Mat 12.25-26. They supposed that the Spirit by which he worked, was the spirit of the devil. And therefore, if we see persons made sensible of the dreadful nature of sin; and of the displeasure of God against it; and of their own miserable condition as they are in themselves because of sin; and they are earnestly concerned for their eternal salvation; and sensible of their need of God's pity and help; and are engaged to seek it in the use of the means that God has appointed — then we may certainly conclude

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that it is from the Spirit of God, whatever effects this concern has on their bodies — even if it causes them to cry aloud, or to shriek, or to faint; or even if it throws them into convulsions, or whatever other way the blood and spirits are moved.

The influence of the Spirit of God is still more abundantly manifest if persons have their hearts *drawn away* from the world, and weaned from the objects of their worldly lusts, and taken away from worldly pursuits by the sense they have of the excellency of divine things, and the affection they have for those spiritual enjoyments of another world, which are promised in the gospel.

3. It causes men to have a greater regard for the Holy Scriptures.

The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard for the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God. The apostle gives us this rule in the 6th verse: “*We are of God*; he who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” (1Joh 4.6) *We are of God*; that is, “We the apostles are sent forth by God, and appointed by Him to teach the world, and to deliver those doctrines and instructions which are to be their rule; *he who knows God, hears us*,” etc. — The apostle’s argument here equally reaches all who, in the same sense, are *of God*; that is, all those whom God has appointed and inspired to deliver to His church, its rule of faith and practice — all the prophets and apostles whose doctrine God has made the foundation on which He has built his church (Eph 2.20); in a word, all the penmen of the Holy Scriptures. The devil would never attempt to beget in persons a regard for that divine word which God has given to be the great and standing rule for the direction of His church in all religious matters, and all concerns of their souls, in all ages. A spirit of delusion will not incline persons to seek direction from the mouth of God. “To the law and to the testimony,” is never the cry of those evil spirits that have no light in them; for it is God’s own direction to expose their delusions.

“And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who have familiar spirits, and wizards who peep and mutter,’ shouldn’t a people seek their God? Should the living seek the dead? *To the law and to the testimony!* If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”
(Isa 8.19-20)

The devil does not say the same as Abraham did: “They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” (Luk 16.29) Nor the same as the voice from heaven said concerning Christ, “Hear him.” (Luk 9.35) Would the spirit of error, in order to deceive men, beget in them a high opinion of the infallible rule, and incline them to think highly of it, and be very conversant with it? Would the prince of darkness, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness, lead men to the sun? The devil has ever shown a mortal spite and hatred towards that holy book, the Bible. He has done everything in his power to extinguish that light; and to draw men away from it. He knows it is that light by which his kingdom of darkness is to be overthrown. For many ages he has experienced its power to defeat his purposes, and baffle his designs; it is his constant plague. It is the main weapon which Michael uses in his war with him; it is the sword of the Spirit that pierces him and conquers him. It is that great and strong sword with which God punishes Leviathan, that crooked serpent. It is that sharp sword we read about, Rev 19.15, that proceeds out of the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, with which he strikes his

enemies. Every text is a dart to torment the old serpent. He has felt the stinging smart thousands of times. Therefore he is engaged *against* the Bible, and hates every word in it; and we may be sure that he will never attempt to raise a person's esteem of it, or affection for it. And accordingly, we see it common in enthusiasts, that they depreciate this written rule, and set up the "light within," or some other rule *above* it.

4. It is a spirit of truth, which convicts them of the gospel truth.

Another rule by which to judge spirits, may be drawn from those terms given to the opposing spirits in the last words of the 6th verse: "The spirit of *truth*, and the spirit of *error*." These words exhibit the two opposite characters, first of the Spirit of God, and then of *other* spirits which counterfeit His operations. Therefore, if by observing the manner of the operation of a spirit that is at work among a people, we see that it operates as a spirit of truth, leading persons to truth, convincing them of those things that are true, then we may safely determine that it is a right and true spirit. For instance, if we observe that the spirit at work makes men more sensible than they used to be, that there is a God, and that he is a great and sin-hating God; that life is short and very uncertain; that there is another world; that they have immortal souls and must give account of themselves to God; that they are exceedingly sinful by nature and practice; that they are helpless in themselves; and it confirms them in other things that are agreeable to some sound doctrine — then the spirit that works this way, operates as a spirit of *truth*. He represents things as they truly are. He brings men to the light. For whatever makes truth manifest is light, as the apostle Paul observes: "But all things that are exposed, are made manifest by the light; for whatever makes manifest is light." (Eph 5.13) And therefore we may conclude that it is *not* the spirit of darkness that thus reveals and makes manifest the truth.

Christ tells us that Satan is a liar, and the father of lies; and his kingdom is a kingdom of darkness. It is upheld and promoted only by darkness and error. Satan has all his power of dominion *by darkness*. Hence we read of the *power* of darkness, in Luk 22.53 and Col 1.13. And devils are called "the rulers of the darkness of this world." (Eph 6.12) Whatever spirit removes our darkness, and brings us to the light, *undeceives* us; and by convincing us of the truth, it does us a kindness. If I am brought to a sight of the truth, and I am made sensible of things as they really are, my duty is to immediately thank God for it, without stopping first to inquire by what means I have such a benefit.

5. It is a spirit of love toward God and men.

If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love toward God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God. The apostle insists upon this sign from the 6th verse to the end of the chapter. "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who does not love, does not know God. For God is love," etc. Here it is evident that the apostle is still comparing those two sorts of persons that are influenced by the opposite kinds of spirits. And he mentions love as a *mark* by which we may know who has the true spirit. But this is especially evident in the 12th and 13th verses. "If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." (1Joh 4.12-13) In these

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verses, love is spoken of as if it were that in which the very nature of the Holy Spirit consists; or as if *divine love* dwelling in us, and the *Spirit of God* dwelling in us, were the same thing — as it is in the last two verses of the foregoing chapter,¹² and in the 16th verse of this chapter.¹³ Therefore, this last mark which the apostle gives of the true Spirit, he seems to speak of as the most eminent. And so he insists much more largely upon it than upon all the rest. And he speaks expressly of both love to God and men — of *love to men* in the 7th, 11th, and 12th verses; and of *love to God* in the 17th, 18th, and 19th verses; and of both together in the last two verses; and of love to men, as arising from love to God, in these last two verses.¹⁴

Therefore, when the spirit that is at work among the people tends this way, and brings many of them to high and exalting thoughts of the Divine Being, and of His glorious perfections; and he works in them an admiring and delightful sense of the excellency of Jesus Christ; representing him as the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely, and makes him precious to the soul; winning and drawing the heart with those motives and incitements to love, which the apostle speaks of in that passage of Scripture we are camped on — *namely*, the wonderful, free love of God in giving his only-begotten Son to die for us; and the wonderful dying love of Christ toward us who had no love toward him, but were his enemies — must be the Spirit of God. As in verses 9 and 10.

“In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. In this is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

And ver. 16. “And we have known, and believed, the love that God has to us.” And ver. 19. “We love him because he first loved us.” The spirit that excites to love based upon these motives, and makes the attributes of God — as revealed in the gospel and manifested in Christ — delightful objects of contemplation. And He makes the soul to long for God and Christ — for their presence and communion — for acquaintance with them, and conformity to them — and to live so as to please and honour them. The spirit that quells contentions among men, and gives a spirit of peace and good will, excites us to acts of outward kindness, and earnest desires for the salvation of souls; and he causes a delight in those who appear as the children God and followers of Christ. I say, when a spirit operates in this way among a people, there is the highest kind of evidence of the influence of a true and divine spirit.

Indeed, there is a *counterfeit* love that often appears among those who are led by a spirit of delusion. There is commonly in the wildest enthusiasts, a kind of union and affection arising from self-love, occasioned by their agreeing in those things in which they greatly differ from all others, and from which they are objects of the ridicule of the rest of mankind. This will naturally cause them to prize so much more, those peculiarities that make them the objects

¹² **1Joh 3:23-24** And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

¹³ **1Joh 4:16** And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

¹⁴ **1Joh 4:17-19** Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

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of others' contempt. Thus the ancient Gnostics, and the wild fanatics that appeared at the beginning of the Reformation, boasted of their great love for one another. One sect of them, in particular, called themselves the *Family of Love*.¹⁵ But this is quite another thing than the Christian love I just described. Theirs is only the working of a natural self-love, and not true benevolence, any more than the union and friendship which may exist among a company of pirates who are at war with the rest of the world.

There is enough said in this passage about the nature of a truly Christian love, to thoroughly distinguish it from all such counterfeits. It is love that arises from an apprehension of the wonderful riches of the free grace and sovereignty of God's love to us in Christ Jesus. It is attended with a sense of our own utter unworthiness, being the enemies and haters of God and Christ, and renouncing all our own excellence and righteousness. See verses 9-11 and 19. The surest character of true divine supernatural love — distinguishing it from counterfeits that arise from a natural self-love — is that the Christian virtue of *humility* shines in it; that which above all others renounces, abases, and annihilates what we term *self*. Christian love, or true charity, is a humble love. "Charity does not vaunt itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek her own, is not easily provoked." (1Cor 13.4-5) Therefore, when we see love in a person, that is attended by a sense of their own littleness, vileness, weakness, and utter insufficiency; and so too with self-diffidence, self-emptiness, self-renunciation, and poverty of spirit — these are the manifest tokens of the Spirit of God.

He that thus dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him. What the apostle speaks of as a great evidence of the true Spirit, is *God's love* or *Christ's love*, as in verse 12: "His love is perfected in us." What kind of love that is, we may see best in what appeared in Christ's example. The love that appeared in that Lamb of God, was not only a love to friends, but to enemies, and a love attended with a meek and humble spirit. "Learn from me," he says, "for I am meek and lowly in heart." (Mat 11.29) Love and humility are two things, of anything in the world, that are most contrary to the spirit of the devil. For the character of that evil spirit, above all things, consists in pride and malice.

Things Satan would not do

Thus I have spoken particularly to the several marks the apostle gives us of a work of the true Spirit. Some of these things the devil *would not do* if he could. For example,

- he would not awaken the conscience and make men sensible of their miserable state because of sin, and sensible of their great need of a Saviour;
- he would not confirm men in the belief that Jesus is the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners, nor raise men's value and esteem of Him;
- he would not beget in men's minds an opinion of the necessity, usefulness, and truth of the Holy Scriptures, nor incline them to make much use of them;

¹⁵ A European religious sect known as the *Family of Love* started ca. 1540. Its members embraced the teachings and writings of Henry Nicholas, a Dutch spiritualist. In England they were known as *Familists*.

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- he would not show men the truth in things that concern their souls' interest — so as to *undeceive* them, and lead them out of darkness into light, and give them a view of things as they really are.

And there are other things that the devil *neither can nor will do*. He will not give men a spirit of divine love, or Christian humility and poverty of spirit — nor *could* he if he would. He cannot give those things which he does not have himself. These things are as contrary as possible to his nature. And therefore, when there is an extraordinary influence or operation appearing on the minds of a people, if these things mentioned are found in it, we are safe in determining that it is the work of God —

- whatever other circumstances it may be attended with;
- whatever instruments are used;
- whatever methods are taken to promote it;
- whatever means a sovereign God, whose judgments are a great deep, employs to carry it on;
- whatever motion there may be of the animal spirits; and,
- whatever effects may be wrought on men's bodies.

These marks that the apostle has given us, are sufficient to stand alone, and support themselves. They plainly show the *finger of God*, and are sufficient to outweigh a thousand such little objections which many make from the oddities, irregularities, errors in conduct, and the delusions and scandals of some professors.

Answering an Objection

Obj. But here, in objection to the *sufficiency* of the marks given, some may say what the apostle Paul said in 2Cor 11.13-14:

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ; and no wonder, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

Ans. To this I answer that it cannot be an objection against the sufficiency of these marks to distinguish the *true* from the *false* spirit in those false apostles and prophets in whom the devil was transformed into an angel of light, because it is principally with a view toward *them* that the apostle has given us these marks. This appears by the words of John's text, “Do not believe every spirit, but *test* the spirits, whether they are of God.” And *this* is the reason he gives — “because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1Joh 4.1) As if to say,

“There are many who have gone out into the world who are the ministers of the *devil*, who transform themselves into the prophets of God, and in whom the spirit of the devil is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *test* the spirits by these rules that I will give you, so that you may be able to distinguish the true spirit from the false, under such a crafty disguise.”

Those *false prophets* that the apostle *John* speaks of, are doubtless the same sort of men as those *false apostles* and deceitful workers that the apostle *Paul* speaks of, in whom the devil was transformed into an angel of light. And therefore we may be sure that *these marks* are especially adapted to distinguish between the *true* Spirit, and the *devil* transformed into an angel of light, because they are given especially for that end. That is the apostle's declared purpose and design, to give marks by which the true Spirit may be distinguished from that

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sort of counterfeit. And if we look over what is said about these false prophets, and false apostles (as there is much said about them in the New Testament), and take notice in what manner the devil was transformed into an angel of light in them, we won't find anything that in the least injures the sufficiency of these marks to distinguish the *true* Spirit from such *counterfeits*.

The devil transformed himself into an angel of light in them, as there was a *show*, and a great *boast* of extraordinary knowledge in divine things — Col 2.8; 1Tim 1.6-7; 6.3-5; 2Tim 2.14-18; Tit 1.10, 16. Hence their followers called themselves *Gnostics*, from their great pretended knowledge. And the devil in them mimicked the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, in visions, revelations, prophecies, miracles, etc. Hence they are called *false* apostles and *false* prophets (see Mat 24.24). Again, there was a false show of, and lying pretensions to, great holiness and devotion *in words*. (Rom 16.17-18; Eph 4.14) Hence they are called “deceitful workers” (2Cor 11.13), and “wells and clouds without water.” (2Pet 2.17; Jude 12) They also made a show of extraordinary piety and righteousness in their superstitious worship (Col 2.16-23). So they had a false, proud, and bitter zeal. (Gal 4.17-18; 1Tim 1.6; 6.4-5) And likewise, they had a false show of humility in affecting an extraordinary outward lowliness and dejection, when indeed they were “vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind:” and made a righteousness of their humility, and were exceedingly lifted up by their eminent piety. (Col 2.18, 23)

But how do such things as these in the least injure those things that have been mentioned as the distinguishing evidences of the true Spirit? Besides such vain shows which may be from the *devil*, there are common influences of the *Spirit* which are likewise mistaken for saving grace. But these are out of the question, because although they are not *saving*, yet they are the work of the true Spirit.

I have thus fulfilled what I first proposed, in considering what are the certain, distinguishing marks by which we may safely proceed in judging any work that falls under our observation, as to whether it is the work of the Spirit of God or not. I now proceed to the APPLICATION.

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SECT. III. Practical inferences.

1. The recent extraordinary influence is generally from the Spirit of God.

From what has been said, I will venture to draw this inference: *that the extraordinary influence that has lately appeared, causing an uncommon concern and zealously of mind about the things of religion, is undoubtedly, in general, from the Spirit of God.* There are but two things that need to be known in order to judge such a work: namely, *facts* and *rules*. We have the *rules* of the word of God laid before us. As to the *facts*, there are but two ways that we can come at them, so as to compare them with the rules: either by our own observation, or by information from others who have had an opportunity to observe them.

As to this work, there are many things concerning it that are notorious and which, unless the apostle John was off, his rules are sufficient to determine it to be, in general, the work of God. The Spirit that is at work takes persons' minds away from the vanities of the world; engages them in a deep concern about eternal happiness; puts them to earnestly seek their salvation; and convinces them of the dreadfulfulness of sin, and of their own guilty and miserable state as they are by nature. It awakens men's consciences, makes them sensible of the dreadfulfulness of God's anger, and causes in them a great desire for and an earnest care and endeavour to obtain His favour. It puts them upon a more diligent improvement of the means of grace which God has appointed, accompanied with a greater regard for the word of God, a desire to hear and read it, and to be more conversant with it than they used to be. And it is notoriously manifest that the spirit that is at work, in general, operates as a spirit of *truth*, making persons more sensible of what is really true in those things that concern their eternal salvation. For example, that they must die, and that life is very short and uncertain; that there is a great sin-hating God to whom they are accountable, and who will fix them in an eternal state in another world; and that they stand in great need of a Saviour. It makes persons more sensible of the value of Jesus who was crucified, and their need of him; and it puts them to earnestly seeking an interest in him.

Surely these things should be apparent to people in general through the land. For these things are not done in a corner; the work has not been confined to a few towns in some remoter parts, but has been carried on in many places all over the land, and in most of the principal, populous, and public places in it. Christ has worked among us in this respect, in the same manner that he worked his miracles in Judea. It has now been continued for a considerable time, so that there has been a great opportunity to observe the manner of the work. And all those who have been very conversant with the subjects of it, see a great deal more. They see that by the rules of the apostle, it clearly and certainly shows it to be the work of God.

And here I would observe, that the nature and tendency of a spirit that is at work, may be determined with much greater certainty, and less danger of being imposed upon, when it is observed in a great multitude of people of all sorts, and in various places, than when it is only seen in a few people, in some particular place, who have been quite conversant with one another. A few particular persons may agree to put a cheat upon others by a false pretence, and by professing things of which they never were conscious. But the work is spread over great parts of a country, in places distant from one another, among people of all sorts and all ages, and in multitudes possessed of a sound mind, good understanding, and known integrity. It would be the greatest absurdity to suppose from all the observation that can be made, and

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by all that is heard from and seen in them — for many months together, and by those who are most intimate with them in these affairs, and have long been acquainted with them — that it cannot yet be determined what kind of influence the operation they are under, has on people's minds. Can it not be determined,

- whether it tends to awaken their consciences, or stupefy them;
- whether it inclines them more to seek their salvation, or neglect it;
- whether it seems to confirm them in a belief of the Scriptures, or leads them to deism;
- whether it makes them have more regard for the great truths of religion, or less?

Here it is to be observed that for persons to profess they are so convinced of certain divine truths, as to esteem and love them in a *saving manner* — and for them to profess that they are *more convinced* or confirmed in the truth of them, than they used to be; and that they find they have a greater *regard* for them than they had before — are two very different things. Persons of honesty and common sense have a much greater right to demand that credit be given to the latter profession, than to the former.¹⁶ Indeed in the former, it is less likely that people in general would be deceived, than some particular persons. But whether persons' convictions, and the alteration in their dispositions and affections, are in a degree and manner that is *saving*, is beside the present question. If there are such effects on people's judgments, dispositions, and affections, as have been spoken of, whether they are in a degree and manner that is saving or not, it is nevertheless a sign of the influence of the Spirit of God. Scripture rules serve to distinguish the *common* influences of the Spirit of God, as well as those that are *saving*, from the influence of other causes.

By the providence of God, I have for some months been among those who have been the subjects of the work in question. And particularly, I have been able to see and observe those extraordinary things which many persons have been offended by, such as persons' crying out aloud, shrieking, being put into great agonies of body, etc. For several months I have seen the manner and results of such operations, and their fruits — many of these being persons with whom I have been intimately acquainted in soul concerns, both before and since. I look upon myself as called to give my testimony on this occasion. So far as the nature and tendency of such a work is capable of falling under the observation of a bystander, to whom those who have been the subjects of it have endeavoured to open their hearts — or so far as it can be approached by diligent and particular inquiry — this work has all those marks that have been pointed out. And this has been the case in very many instances, in *every article*. And in many other instances, all those marks have appeared in a very *great degree*.

The subjects of these uncommon appearances, have been of two sorts: either those who have been in great distress from an apprehension of their sin and misery; or those who have been overcome with a sweet sense of the greatness, wonderfulness, and excellency of divine things.

Of the multitude, there have been very few of those of the former sort whom I have had an opportunity to observe. But their distress has arisen apparently from real proper conviction, and from being sensible in a degree, of that which was the truth. I don't suppose, when such

¹⁶ That is, it's easier to believe that saved people are reassured by a revival, than it is to believe that lost people are truly converted by one. — WHG

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things were observed to be common, that these persons laid themselves under those violent restraints to avoid outward manifestations of their distress, which perhaps they would have done otherwise. Yet there have been very few in whom there has been any appearance of feigning or affecting such manifestations, and very many for whom it would undoubtedly have been utterly impossible for them to avoid. Generally, in these agonies, they appeared to be in the perfect exercise of their reason. And those of them who could speak, have been well able to give an account of the circumstances of their mind and the cause of their distress at the time; and they were able to remember and give an account of it afterwards. I have known a very few instances of those who, in their great extremity, have for a short space been deprived of the use of reason in some measure. But among the many hundreds, and maybe thousands, who have lately been brought to such agonies, I have never known one who was lastingly deprived of their reason.

In some that I have known, melancholy has evidently been mixed in. And when it is so, the difference is very apparent; their distresses are of another kind, and they operate in quite another manner than when their distress is from mere conviction. It is not only the truth that distresses them, but many vain shadows and notions that will not give way either to Scripture or reason. Some in their great distress have not been well able to give an account of themselves, or to declare the sense they have of things, or to explain to others the manner and cause of their trouble. Yet I have no reason to think they were not under proper convictions, and a good issue ¹⁷ has been manifested in them. But this won't be at all wondered at by those who have had much to do with souls who are under spiritual difficulties. Some things of which they are sensible, are altogether new to them — their ideas and inward sensations are new, and therefore they don't know how to express them in words. Some who, upon first inquiry, said they didn't know what was the matter with them, upon being particularly examined and interrogated, have been able to represent their case, though of themselves they could not find expressions and forms of speech to do it.

Some suppose that terrors producing such effects are only a fright. But certainly there ought to be a distinction made between a very great fear, or extreme distress arising from an apprehension of some dreadful truth — a cause that is fully proportionate to such an effect — and a *needless, causeless* fright. The latter fright is either of two kinds: first, when persons are terrified with that which is *not* the truth (I have seen very few instances of this except in the case of melancholy); or secondly, when they are in a fright from some terrible outward appearance and noise, and a general notion arising from that. These persons apprehend that there is something or other that is terrible; but they don't know what, without having in their minds any particular truth whatsoever. I have seen very little appearance of such a fright, among either old or young.

Those who are in such an extremity, commonly express a great sense of their exceeding wickedness; the multitude and aggravations of their actual sins; their dreadful pollution, enmity, and perverseness; their obstinacy and hardness of heart; a sense of their great guilt in the sight of God; and the dreadfulfulness of the punishment due to sin. Very often they have a lively idea of the horrible pit of eternal misery. And at the same time, it appears to them that

¹⁷ *Issue* here means a result, an outcome, or the fruit produced by the operation.

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the great God who has them in His hands, is exceedingly angry, and his wrath appears amazingly terrible to them. God appears so provoked to them, and his great wrath so increased, that they are apprehensive of great danger, and that He won't bear with them any longer. Rather, He will now immediately cut them off, and send them down to the dreadful pit that they have in view; at the same time, they see no refuge. They see more and more of the vanity of everything they used to trust in, and with which they flattered themselves — till they are brought to wholly despair in it all, and to see that they are at the disposal of the mere will of the God who is so angry with them.

Very many, in the midst of their extremity, have been brought to an extraordinary sense of their fully deserving that wrath, and the destruction which was then before their eyes. They feared every moment, that it would be executed upon them. They have been greatly convinced that this would be altogether just, and that God is indeed absolutely sovereign. Very often, some text of Scripture expressing God's sovereignty has been driven home upon their minds, by which they have been calmed. They have been brought, as it were, to lie at God's feet. And after great agonies, a little before the light has arisen, they have been composed and quiet, in submission to a just and sovereign God; but their bodily strength is greatly spent. Sometimes their lives appear almost gone, and then light appears; and a glorious Redeemer, with his wonderful, all-sufficient grace has been represented to them, often in some sweet invitation of Scripture. Sometimes the light comes in suddenly, sometimes more gradually, filling their souls with love, admiration, joy, and self-abasement — drawing forth their hearts after the excellent lovely Redeemer, with longings to lie in the dust before him, and that others might behold, embrace, and be delivered by him. They had longings to live to his glory, but they were sensible that they can do nothing of themselves — appearing vile in their own eyes and being highly jealous over their own hearts. All the appearances of a real change of heart have followed; and grace has acted from time to time, in the same manner that it used to act in those who were converted formerly, with the same difficulties, temptations, buffetings, and comforts — excepting that in many, the light and comfort have been in higher degrees than ordinary. Many very young children have been thus worked upon. There have been some instances very much like those of whom we read, that “when the devil had cried with a loud voice, and tore them sorely, he came out of them.” (Mar 1.26; see also 9.26) And probably *those* instances were designed to be a type of such things as *these*. Some have several turns of great agonies before they are delivered; others have been in such distress, but it passed away, and no deliverance at all has followed.

Some object to it as great confusion, when there is a number together in such circumstances making a noise. They say, God cannot be the author of it, because he is the God of order, not of confusion. But let it be considered that the proper notion of *confusion* is the breaking of that order of things by which they are properly disposed and duly directed to their end. So that the order and due connexion of the *means* being broken, they fail to attain their *end*. Now, the conviction of sinners for their conversion, *is in fact* obtaining the end of religious means. It's not that I think the persons who are thus extraordinarily moved should endeavour to refrain from such outward manifestations (which they well can), and they should refrain to their utmost at the time of their solemn worship. Rather, if God is pleased to convince the consciences of persons, so that they cannot avoid great outward manifestations of it — even to the extent of interrupting and breaking off those public means that they were attending —

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I don't think this is confusion, nor an unhappy interruption, any more than if a company were to meet on the field to pray for rain, and were broken off from their exercise by a plentiful shower. I wish to God that all the public assemblies in the land were broken off from their public exercises with such confusion as this the next Sabbath day! We need not be sorry for breaking the order of *means*, by obtaining the *end* to which that order is directed. He who is going to fetch a treasure, need not be sorry that he is stopped by meeting the treasure in the midst of his journey.

Besides those who are overcome with conviction and distress, I have seen many recently, who have had their bodily strength taken away with a sense of the glorious excellency of the Redeemer, and the wonders of his dying love; with a very uncommon sense of their own littleness and exceeding vileness attending it; and with all the expressions and appearances of the greatest abasement and abhorrence of themselves. Not only *new* converts, but many who were (we hope) *formerly* converted, have had their love and joy attended with a flood of tears, and a great appearance of contrition and humiliation, especially for not having lived more to God's glory since their conversion. These have had a far greater sight of their vileness and the evil of their hearts than they ever had, with an exceedingly earnest desire to live better for the time to come. But this is attended with greater self-diffidence¹⁸ than ever. Many have been overcome with pity for the souls of others, and longing for their salvation.

I might mention many other things in this extraordinary work, corresponding to every one of those marks which have been insisted on. So that, if the apostle John knew how to give signs of a work of the true Spirit, *this* is such a work.

Providence has cast my lot in a place where the work of God has formerly been carried on. I had the happiness to be settled in that place for two years with the venerable Stoddard.¹⁹ I was then acquainted with a number of persons who, during that season, were worked upon under his ministry. I have been intimately acquainted with the experiences of many others who were worked upon under his ministry *before* that period, in a manner agreeable to the doctrine of all orthodox divines. And a work has been carried on there recently, very much with uncommon operations; but it is evidently the *same* work that was carried on there in different periods, even though attended with some new circumstances. And if this is not in general the work of God, then certainly we must throw aside all talk of conversion and Christian experience; and not only that, but we must throw aside our Bibles, and give up revealed religion. It's not that I suppose the degree of the Spirit's influence is to be determined by the degree of its effect on men's bodies; or that those are always the best experiences which have the greatest influence on the body. As to the imprudences, irregularities, and mixture of delusion that has been observed, it is not at all to be wondered that a *reformation*, after a long-continued and almost universal *deadness*, should at first (when the revival is new) be attended with such things.

In the first creation, God did not make a complete world at once; but there was a great deal of imperfection, darkness, and mixture of chaos and confusion *after* God first said, "Let there

¹⁸ *Self-diffidence*: lack of self-confidence; suspecting our own motives; self-doubt; self-distrust (in a good sense).

¹⁹ Rev. Solomon Stoddard died in 1729, aged 86. Edwards was his grandson. He had been Stoddard's assistant for two years before becoming pastor of the Congregational Church of Northampton, Massachusetts.

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be light,” and *before* the whole stood out in perfect form. When God at first began his great work for the deliverance of his people, after their long-continued bondage in Egypt, there were false wonders mixed with the true for a while. This hardened the unbelieving Egyptians, and made them doubt the divinity of the whole work. When the children of Israel first went to bring up the ark of God after it had been neglected and long absent, they didn’t seek the Lord in due order, 1Chr 15.13. At the time when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan also came among them (Job 1.6). And Solomon’s ships, when they brought gold, and silver, and pearls, also brought apes and peacocks (1Kng 10.22). When daylight first appears after a night of darkness, we must expect to have darkness mixed with light for a while, and not have perfect day and the sun risen at once. The fruits of the earth are first green before they are ripe; they come to their proper perfection gradually. And so it is, Christ tells us, with the kingdom of God:

“The kingdom of God is as if a man were to toss seed on the ground, and sleep and rise, night and day; and the seed springs up and grows, he knows not how. For the earth brings forth fruit by herself: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” (Mar 4.26-28)

The imprudences and errors that have attended this work, are less to be wondered at if it is considered that chiefly *young persons* have been the subjects of it. They have less steadiness and experience; and being in the heat of youth, they are much more ready to run to extremes. Satan will keep men secure as long as he can; but when he can do that no longer, he often endeavours to drive them to extremes, and thus to dishonour God and wound religion in that way. Doubtless it has been one occasion of much misconduct, that in many places people see plainly that their ministers have an ill-opinion of the work. And therefore, with just reason, they dare not apply to them as their guides in it; and so they are without guides. It is no wonder then, that when people are like sheep without a shepherd, they wander out of the way. A people in such circumstances, stand in great and continual need of guides, and their guides stand in continual need of much more wisdom than they have on their own. And even if people have ministers who favour the work, and rejoice in it, it is not to be expected that either the people or their ministers would know how to conduct themselves in such an extraordinary state of things — not while it is new, and something they never experienced before, having no time to see the tendency, consequences, and results of it. The happy influence of experience is very manifest today, in the people among whom God has settled my abode.

The work which has been carried on there this year has been much purer than what was wrought there six years earlier.²⁰ It seems now to be more purely spiritual; free from natural and corrupt mixtures, and anything savouring of enthusiastic wildness and extravagance. It has worked more by deep humiliation and abasement before God and men; and they have been much freer from imprudences and irregularities. Particularly, there has been a remarkable difference in this respect: that whereas many before, in their comforts and rejoicings, forgot their distance from God too much, and were ready in their conversation to talk too lightly of the things of God and of their own experiences. But now they seem to have

²⁰ “Mr. Stoddard in his *Guide to Christ*, speaks of it as a common thing for persons while in a natural condition, and before they have ever truly accepted Christ, to have Scripture promises come to them with a great deal of refreshing: which they take as tokens of God’s love, and hope that God has accepted them; and so are confident of their good estate. Pages 8, 9. *Impression anno 1735.*” — Edwards’ footnote in *Religious Affections* (1746).

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no disposition that way, but rejoice with a more solemn, reverential, humble joy, as God directs. (Psa 2.11) It isn't because their joy is not as great, for in many instances it is much greater. Many among us who were worked on in that former season, have now had much greater communications from heaven than they had then. Their rejoicing operates in another manner — it abases them, breaks their hearts, and brings them into the dust. When they speak of their joys, it is not with laughter, but a flood of tears. Thus, those who laughed before, weep now; and yet by their united testimony, their joy is vastly purer and sweeter than that which before had raised their animal spirits more. They are now more like Jacob when God appeared to him at Bethel. He saw the ladder that reached to heaven, and said, "How awesome is this place!" (Gen 28.17) And like Moses when God showed him His glory on the mount. Moses "made haste and bowed himself to the earth." (Exo 34.8)

2. Do nothing to hinder the work; rather, promote it.

Let us all be warned from this, to *by no means oppose or do anything in the least to clog or hinder the work; but on the contrary, do our utmost to promote it.* Now that Christ has come down from heaven in a remarkable and wonderful work of his Spirit, it suits all his professed disciples to acknowledge Him, and give him honour.

Having the example of the Jews in Christ's and the apostles' times, is enough to beget in those who don't acknowledge this work, a great vigilance for themselves, making them exceedingly cautious of what they say or do. Christ was then in the world, and the world didn't know him. He came to his own professing people, and his own did not receive him. That coming of Christ had been much spoken of in the prophecies of Scripture which they had in their hands, and it had been long expected. And yet, because Christ came in a manner they did not expect, and which was not agreeable to their carnal reason, they would not own him. Indeed, they opposed him, counted him a madman, and pronounced the spirit that he worked by to be the spirit of the devil. They stood and wondered at the great things done, and didn't know what to make of them. Yet they met with so many stumbling-blocks, that they finally *could not* acknowledge him. And when the Spirit of God came to be poured out so wonderfully in the apostles' days, they looked upon it as confusion and distraction. They were *astonished* by what they saw and heard, but not *convinced*. And especially, the work of God was then rejected by those who were most conceited of their own understanding and knowledge, agreeable to Isa 29.14:

"Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden."

Many who had a reputation for religion and piety, had a great spite against the work, because they saw that it tended to diminish their own honour, and to reproach their formality and lukewarmness. Some, on these accounts, maliciously and openly opposed and reproached the work of the Spirit of God. They called it the work of the devil, against their inward conviction, and so they were guilty of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. (Mat 12.31)

There is another, a *spiritual coming* of Christ to set up his kingdom in the world, that is as much spoken of in scripture prophecy as that first coming, and which has long been expected by the church of God. We have reason to think, from what is said about this, that it will be in many respects parallel with the other. And certainly that low state into which the visible

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church of God has lately sunk, is very parallel with the state of the Jewish church when Christ came. And therefore it is no wonder at all that when Christ comes, his work would appear to be a strange work to most; indeed, it would be wonder if it were otherwise. Whether the present work is the beginning of that great and frequently predicted coming of Christ to set up his kingdom or not, it is evident from what has been said, that it is a work of the same Spirit, and of the same nature. And there is no reason to doubt that the conduct of persons who long continue to refuse acknowledging Christ in the work — especially those who are set to be teachers in his church — will in like manner provoke God, as it was with the Jews of old, while they refuse to acknowledge Christ. And this is notwithstanding what they may plead about the great stumbling-blocks that are in the way, and the cause they have to doubt the work. The teachers of the Jewish church found innumerable stumbling-blocks that were (to them) insuperable.

Many things appeared in Christ, and in the work of the Spirit after his ascension, which were exceedingly strange to them. They seemed assured that they had just cause for their scruples.²¹ Christ and his work were a stumbling-block to the Jews. “But blessed is he,” says Christ, “who is not offended because of me.” (Luk 7.23) As strange and unexpected as the manner of Christ’s appearance was, he hadn’t been in Judea long, working miracles, before all those who had an opportunity to observe, and yet refused to acknowledge him, brought fearful guilt upon themselves in the sight of God. Christ condemned them, that although “they could discern the face of the sky, and of the earth, yet they could not discern the signs of those times; yes, and why even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?” (Luk 12.56-57)

It is not to be supposed that the great Jehovah had bowed the heavens, and appeared here now for so long a time, in such a glorious work of his power and grace, in so extensive a manner, in the most public places of the land, and in almost all parts of it, without giving such evidences of His presence, that great numbers, and even many teachers in his church, can remain guiltless in his sight without ever receiving and acknowledging Him, and giving Him honour, and appearing to rejoice in his gracious presence. Or without so much as once giving him thanks for so glorious and blessed a work of his grace, in which his goodness more appears than if he had bestowed on us all the temporal blessings that the world affords. A long-continued silence in such a case, is undoubtedly provoking to God; *especially* in ministers. It is a secret kind of opposition that really tends to hinder the work. Such silent ministers stand in the way of the work of God. As Christ said of old, “He that is not with us is against us.” Those who stand wondering at this strange work, not knowing what to make of it, and refusing to receive it — and maybe sometimes ready to speak contemptibly of it, as was the case with the Jews of old — would do well to consider and tremble at St. Paul’s words to them:

“Beware therefore, lest what is spoken of in the prophets, comes upon you: Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish; for I work a work in your days, which you will by no means believe, even if a man were to declare it to you.” (Act 13.40-41)

Those who cannot believe the work to be true, because of the extraordinary degree and manner of it, should consider how it was with the unbelieving lord in Samaria. He said,

²¹ *Scruples*: moral and ethical objections to something.

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“Behold, if the Lord were to make windows in heaven, could this thing be?” To whom Elisha said, “Behold, you shall see it with your eyes, but will not eat of it.” (2Kng 7.19) Let all to whom this work is a cloud and darkness — as the pillar of cloud and fire was to the Egyptians — take heed that it not be their destruction, while it gives light to God’s Israel.

I would entreat those who calm themselves by thinking they’re proceeding on a principle of prudence, and are waiting to see the issue of things — and what fruits those who are the subjects of this work will bring forth in their lives and conversations — to consider whether this will justify long refraining from acknowledging Christ, when he appears so wonderfully and graciously present in the land. It is probable that many of those who are thus waiting, don’t know what they are waiting for. If they wait to see a work of God without difficulties and stumbling-blocks, it will be like the fool’s waiting at the river side to have the water all run by. A work of God without stumbling-blocks is never to be expected. “For offences must come.” (Mat 18.7) There was never yet any great manifestation of himself that God made to the world, without many difficulties attending it. It is with the works of God, as it is with his word: they seem at first full of things that are strange, inconsistent, and difficult to the carnal unbelieving hearts of men. Christ and his work always was, and always will be “a stumbling stone and rock of offence, a trap and a snare” to many. (Isa 8.14) The prophet Hosea (14.5) speaking of a glorious revival of religion in God’s church — when God would “be like the dew to Israel, who would grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots as Lebanon, whose branches would spread,” etc. — concludes it all with this: “Who is wise, and will understand these things? prudent, and will know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just will walk in them; but the transgressors will fall in them.” (Hos 14.9)

It is probable that the stumbling-blocks that now attend this work, will in some respects be increased, and not diminished. We will probably see more instances of apostasy and gross iniquity among professors. And if one kind of stumbling-block is removed, it is to be expected that others will come. It is with Christ’s works as it was with his parables: things that are difficult to men’s dark minds, are ordered on purpose, to test their dispositions and spiritual sense — and so that those of corrupt minds and an unbelieving, perverse, cavilling spirit, “seeing might see and not understand.” (Mar 4.12) Those who are now waiting to see the issue of this work, think they will be better able to determine by and by; but probably many of them are mistaken. The Jews who saw Christ’s miracles, waited to see better evidences of his being the Messiah. They wanted a sign from heaven, but they waited in vain; their stumbling-blocks did not diminish, but increased. They found no end to them, and so they were more and more hardened in unbelief. Many have been praying for that glorious reformation spoken of in Scripture, who don’t know what they have been praying for (as it was with the Jews when they prayed for the coming of Christ), and if it should come, would not acknowledge or receive it.

This pretended prudence, in persons waiting so long before they acknowledged this work, will probably prove to be the greatest imprudence in the end. By this they will fail to have any share of so great a blessing, and will miss the most precious opportunity to obtain divine light, grace, and comfort, heavenly and eternal benefits, that God ever gave in New England. While the glorious fountain is set open in so wonderful a manner, and multitudes flock to it and receive a rich supply for the wants of their souls, *they* stand at a distance — doubting, wondering, and receiving nothing. And they are likely to continue this way till the precious

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season is past. It is indeed to be wondered at, that those who have doubted the work which has been attended with such uncommon external appearances, should be easy in their doubts, without taking thorough pains to inform themselves by going to where such things can be seen, narrowly observing and diligently inquiring into them — by not contenting themselves with observing two or three instances, nor resting till they were fully informed by their own observation. I don't doubt that if this course had been taken, it would have convinced all whose minds are not shut up against conviction. How greatly have they erred, who only from the uncertain reproofs of others, have ventured to speak disdainfully of these things! That caution of an unbelieving Jew might teach them more prudence:

“Keep away from these men and leave them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest perhaps you be found to fight against God.” (Act 5.38-39)

Whether what has been said in this discourse is enough to produce conviction that this is the work of God or not, I yet hope that for the future, they will at least hearken to the caution of Gamaliel, just mentioned, so as not to oppose it, or say anything which has even an indirect tendency to bring it into discredit, lest they be found opposers of the Holy Ghost. No kinds of sins are so hurtful and dangerous to the souls of men, as those committed against the Holy Ghost. We do better to speak against God the Father, or the Son, than to speak against the Holy Spirit in his gracious operations on the hearts of men. Nothing will so tend forever to prevent our having any benefit of His operations on our own souls.

If there are any who still resolutely go on speaking contemptibly of these things, I would beg them to take heed that they not be guilty of the unpardonable sin. When the Holy Spirit is greatly poured out, and men's lusts, lukewarmness, and hypocrisy are reproached by its powerful operations, *then* is the most likely time of any, for this sin to be committed. If the work goes on, it is good if among the many who show enmity against it, some are not guilty of this sin, if none have been already. Those who maliciously oppose and reproach this work, and call it the work of the devil, lack but one thing of the unpardonable sin, and that is doing it against their inward conviction. Though some are prudent enough not to openly oppose and reproach this work, yet it is to be feared — at this day, when the Lord is going forth so gloriously against his enemies — that many who are silent and inactive, especially ministers, will bring that curse of the angel of the Lord upon themselves. “Curse you Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse bitterly its inhabitants; because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” (Jdg 5.23)

Since the great God has come down from heaven, and manifested himself in so wonderful a manner in this land, it is vain for any of us to expect anything other than to be greatly affected by it in our spiritual state and circumstances one way or another, respecting the favour of God. Those who don't become happier by it, will become far more guilty and miserable. It is always so. Such a season proves an acceptable year and a time of great favour to those who accept and improve it; but it proves a day of vengeance to others. (Isa 61.2) When God sends forth his word, it shall not return to him void; much less his Spirit. (Isa 55.11) When Christ was on the earth in Judea, many slighted and rejected him; but the issue of it proved to be no matter of indifference to them. God made all those people feel that Christ had been among them — those who did not feel it to their *comfort*, felt it to their great *sorrow*. When God only

sent the prophet Ezekiel to the children of Israel, he declared that whether they would hear or whether they would forbear hearing, they would yet know that there had been a prophet among them (Eze 2.5). How much more may we suppose that when God has appeared so wonderfully in this land, that He will make everyone know that the great Jehovah had been in New England.

I come now to the last place.

3. Take heed to avoid all errors and misconduct in the work.

I would appeal to those who are the friends of this work, who have been partakers of it, and are zealous to promote it. Let me earnestly exhort them to give diligent heed to themselves to avoid all errors and misconduct, and whatever may darken and obscure the work; and to give no occasion to those who stand ready to reproach it. The apostle Paul was careful to cut off any occasion for reproach from those who desired an occasion. He exhorts Titus to maintain a strict care and watch over himself, that both his preaching and behaviour might be such that it “cannot be condemned; that whoever was an opponent might be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of them.” (Tit 2.7-8) We need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. It is of no small consequence that in *this* day we should behave ourselves innocently and prudently. We must expect that the great enemy of this work will especially try his utmost with us; and he will especially triumph if he can prevail in anything to blind and mislead us. He knows it will do more to further his purpose and interest, than if he prevailed against a hundred *others*. We need to watch and pray, for we are but little children. This roaring lion is too strong for us, and this old serpent is too sly²² for us.

Humility and self-diffidence, and an entire dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ, will be our best defense. Let us therefore maintain the strictest watch against spiritual pride, or being lifted up with extraordinary experiences and comforts, and the high favours of heaven that any of us may have received. After such favours, we especially need to keep a strict and jealous eye on our own hearts, lest there arise self-exalting reflections upon what we have received, and high thoughts of ourselves — as if we were now some of the most eminent of saints, and peculiar favourites of heaven, and the secret of the Lord is especially with us. Let us not presume that we, above all, are fit to be promoted as the great instructors and judges²³ of this evil generation — nor in a high conceit of our own wisdom and discerning, assume for ourselves the airs of prophets, or extraordinary ambassadors of heaven. When we have great revelations of God made to our souls, we should not shine brightly in our own eyes. Moses, when he had been conversing with God on the mount, though his face shone so as to dazzle the eyes of Aaron and the people, he did not shine in his own eyes: “he did not know his face shone.” (Exo 34.29)

Let none think they are out of danger of this spiritual pride, even in their best frames. God saw that the apostle Paul (though probably the most eminent saint who ever lived) was not out of danger from it, not even when he had just been conversing with God in the third heaven.

²² Originally, “subtle” — meaning insidious, pernicious, wily.

²³ Originally, “censors.”

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(2Cor 12.7) *Pride is the worst viper in the heart.* It is the first sin that ever entered into the universe; it lies lowest of all in the foundation of the whole building of sin; and it is the most secret, deceitful, and unsearchable in its ways of working, of any lusts whatsoever. It is ready to mix with everything; nothing is so hateful to God, contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and of so dangerous a consequence. And there is no one sin that so lets the devil into the hearts of the saints, and exposes them to his delusions. I have seen it in many instances, even in eminent saints. The devil has come in at this door immediately after some eminent experience and extraordinary communion with God, and has woefully deluded and led those persons astray, till God has mercifully opened their eyes and delivered them; and they themselves have afterwards been made sensible that it was *pride* that betrayed them.

Some of the true friends of the work of God's Spirit have erred in giving too much heed to impulses and strong impressions on their minds, as though they were immediate significations from heaven to *them*, of something that would come to pass, or something that it was the mind and will of God that they should do, *which was not signified or revealed anywhere in the Bible without those impulses.* These impressions, if they are truly from the Spirit of God, are of a quite different nature from His gracious influences on the hearts of the saints. They are of the nature of the *extraordinary gifts* of the Spirit, and they are properly *inspiration*, such as the prophets, apostles, and others had of old — which the apostle distinguishes from the *grace* of the Spirit. (1Cor 13.8, 13)

Grace vs. Gifts

One reason why some have been ready to lay weight on such impulses, is an opinion they have had that the glory of the approaching happy days of the church would partly consist in restoring those *extraordinary gifts* of the Spirit. This opinion, I believe, arises partly through lack of duly considering and comparing the nature and value of those two kinds of influences of the Spirit: namely, those that are *ordinary and gracious*, and those that are *extraordinary and miraculous*. The former are by far the most excellent and glorious; as the apostle largely shows. Speaking of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, he says, "But covet earnestly the *best* gifts; and yet I will show you a more excellent way" (1Cor 12.31), *i.e.* a more excellent way of the influence of the Spirit. And then he goes on in the next chapter to show what that more excellent way is — even the grace of the Spirit, which summarily consists in charity, or divine love. And throughout that chapter he shows the great preference of that above inspiration. God communicates his own nature to the soul in saving *grace* in the heart, more than in all miraculous *gifts*. The blessed image of God consists in *that* and not in *these*. The excellency, happiness, and glory of the soul, immediately consists in the former. That is a root which bears infinitely more excellent fruit. Salvation and the eternal enjoyment of God is promised to divine *grace*, but not to *inspiration*. A man may have those extraordinary gifts, and yet be abominable to God, and go to hell.

The spiritual and eternal life of the soul consists in the grace of the Spirit, which God bestows only on his favourites and dear children. He has sometimes thrown out the others, as it were to dogs and swine, as he did to Balaam, Saul, and Judas; and to some who, in the primitive times of the Christian church, committed the unpardonable sin. (Heb 6.4) Many wicked men at the day of the judgment will plead, "Have we not prophesied in your name, cast out devils in your name, and done many wonderful works in your name?" The greatest privilege of the

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prophets and apostles, was not in being inspired and working miracles, but in their eminent holiness. The grace that was in their hearts, was a thousand times more their dignity and honour, than their miraculous gifts. The things in which we find David comforting himself, are not being a king or a prophet, but the holy influences of the Spirit of God in his heart, communicating to him divine light, love, and joy. The apostle Paul abounded in visions, revelations, and miraculous gifts, above all the apostles; yet he esteems all things but loss for the excellency of the spiritual knowledge of Christ. It was not the gifts, but the grace of the apostles, that was the proper evidence of their names being written in heaven. (Luk 10.20) Christ directs them to rejoice in this, much more than in the devils being subject to them. To have grace in the heart, is a higher privilege than the blessed Virgin herself had, in having the body of the second person in the Trinity conceived in her womb by the power of the Highest overshadowing her.

“And it came to pass as he spoke these things, a certain woman in the crowd lifted up her voice, and said to him; ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nursed you!’ But he said, ‘Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!’” (Luk 11.27-28)

See also, to the same purpose, Mat 12.47-50. The influence of the Holy Spirit, or divine charity in the heart, is the greatest privilege and glory of the highest archangel in heaven. Indeed, this is the very thing by which the creature has fellowship with God himself, with the Father and the Son, in their beauty and happiness. By this means the saints are made partakers of the divine nature (2Pet 1.4), and have Christ’s joy fulfilled in themselves. (Joh 17.13)

The ceasing of all extraordinary gifts

The ordinary sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God are the *end* of all extraordinary gifts, as the apostle shows in Eph 4.11-13. They are good for nothing any further than as they are subordinate to this end. They will be so far from profiting anyone without it, that they will only aggravate their misery. This is, as the apostle observes, the most excellent way of God’s communicating his Spirit to his church. It is the greatest glory of the church in all ages. This glory is what makes the church on earth most like the church in heaven: when prophecy, and tongues, and other miraculous gifts *cease*, and God communicates his Spirit only in that more excellent way of which the apostle speaks, namely, *charity*, or divine love, “which never fails.” Therefore the glory of the approaching happy state of the church does not at all require these extraordinary gifts. As that state of the church will be nearest of any to its perfect state in heaven, so I believe it will be like it in this: that all extraordinary gifts will have ceased and vanished away; and all those stars, and the moon with the reflected light that they gave in the night, or in a dark season, will be swallowed up in the sun of divine love.

The apostle speaks of these gifts of inspiration as *childish things* in comparison to the influence of the Spirit in divine love. They are things given to the church only to support it in its *minority*, till the church had a complete standing rule established, and all the ordinary means of grace were settled. These were things that would cease as the church advanced to the state of *manhood*. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things;” 1Cor 13.11 compared with the three preceding verses. When the apostle, in this chapter, speaks of prophecies, tongues, and revelations ceasing and vanishing away in the church (1Cor 13.8) — when the Christian church would be advanced from a state of minority to a state of manhood — he seems to

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regard its coming to an adult state *in this world*, as well as in *heaven*. For he speaks of such a state of manhood in which those three things, Faith, Hope, and Charity, would remain *after* miracles and revelation had ceased, as in the last verse: “and now abide (μὲνεῖ, *remain*) Faith, Hope, and Charity, these three.” (1Cor 13.13)

The apostle’s manner of speaking here shows an evident reference to what he had been saying just before. And here is a manifest antithesis between *remaining*, and that *failing, ceasing, and vanishing away*, spoken of in the 8th verse. The apostle had been showing how all those gifts of inspiration which were the leading-strings of the Christian church in its infancy, would vanish away when the church came to a state of manhood. Then he returns to observe what things remain after those had failed and ceased. And he observes that those three things will remain in the church, Faith, Hope, and Charity. And therefore, the adult state of the church that he speaks of, is the more perfect one which it will arrive at *on earth*, especially in the latter ages of the world. And this was more properly observed about the church at Corinth, on two accounts. First, because the apostle had previously observed to that church, that they were in a state of *infancy*, 1Cor 3.1-2.²⁴ And because that church seems above all others to have abounded with miraculous gifts. When the expected glorious state of the church comes, the increase of light will be so great that it will in some respect correspond to what is said in verse 12, about *seeing face to face*. (See also Isa 24.23. and 25.7.)²⁵

Therefore I do not expect a restoration of these miraculous gifts in the approaching glorious times of the church, nor do I desire it. It appears to me that it would add nothing to the glory of those times, but rather diminish from it. For my part, I would rather enjoy the sweet influences of the Spirit — showing Christ’s spiritual divine beauty, infinite grace, and dying love, drawing forth the holy exercises of faith, divine love, sweet complacency, and humble joy in God — for one quarter of an hour, than to have prophetic visions and revelations the whole year. It appears to me much more probable that God would give immediate revelation to his saints in the dark times of prophecy, than now in the approach of the most glorious and perfect state of his church on earth. It does not appear to me that there is any need of those extraordinary gifts to introduce this happy state, and set up the kingdom of God through the world. I have seen so much of the power of God in a more excellent way, as to convince me that God can easily do without it.

I would therefore entreat the people of God to be very cautious how they give heed to such things. I have seen them fail in very many instances, and know by experience that impressions being made with great power upon the minds of true, even eminent saints — even in the midst of extraordinary exercises of grace, and sweet communion with God, and attended with texts of Scripture strongly impressed on the mind — are no sure signs of their being revelations *from heaven*. I have known such impressions to fail in some instances, even though attended with all these circumstances. Those who leave the sure word of prophecy which God has given us as a light shining in a dark place — to follow such impressions and impulses — leave the

²⁴ **1Cor 3:1-2** And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able.

²⁵ **Isa 24:23** Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously. **Isa 25:7** And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations.

guidance of the polar star, to follow a *Jack with a lantern*.²⁶ Therefore it is no wonder that sometimes they are led into woeful extravagancies.

Do not despise human learning

Moreover, seeing that inspiration is not to be expected, *let us not despise human learning*. Those who assert that human learning is of little or no use in the work of the ministry, do not well consider what they say; if they did, they wouldn't say it. By *human learning* I mean, and I suppose others mean, the improvement of common knowledge by human and outward means. And therefore, to say that human learning is of no use, is like saying that the education of a child, or the common knowledge which a grown man has *more* than a little child, is of no use. At that rate, a child of four years old would be as fit for a teacher in the church of God, with the same degree of grace — and capable of doing as much to advance the kingdom of Christ by his instruction — as a very knowing man of thirty years of age. If adult persons have greater ability and advantage to do service because they have more knowledge than a little child, then doubtless if they have *more* human knowledge still, with the same degree of grace, they would have still greater ability and advantage to do service. An increase of knowledge, without doubt, increases a man's advantage either to do good or hurt, however he is disposed. It is too manifest to be denied that God made great use of human learning in the apostle Paul, as he also did in Moses and Solomon.

And if knowledge obtained by human means is not to be despised, then it will follow that the means of obtaining it are not to be neglected: namely, *study* — and that this is of great use in preparing for publicly instructing others. And though having the heart full of the powerful influences of the Spirit of God may at some time enable persons to speak profitably, even very excellently, without study, this will not warrant needlessly casting ourselves down from the pinnacle of the temple — depending on the angel of the Lord to bear us up and keep us from dashing our foot against a stone — when there is another way to go down, even if it is not as quick. And I would pray that the *method* used in public discourses, which tends to greatly help both the understanding and the memory, may not be wholly neglected.

Judging and Censuring other Christians

Another thing I would beg the dear children of God to more fully consider, is how far and on what grounds, the rules of the Holy Scriptures will truly justify their passing censures upon other professing Christians as hypocrites, and ignorant of real religion. We all know that there is a judging and censuring of some sort or other, that the Scripture very often and very strictly *forbids*. I desire that those rules of Scripture may be looked into, and thoroughly weighed. And I desire that it be considered whether taking it upon ourselves to discern the state of others, and to pass sentence on them as wicked men, even though professing Christians of a good visible conversation — is really forbidden by Christ in the New Testament. If it *is*, then doubtless the disciples of Christ ought to avoid this practice, however sufficient they may think they are for it, or however needed, or whatever good they think it may do. It is plain that the sort of judgment which God claims as *His* prerogative, whatever that may be, is *forbidden*.

²⁶ Or *Jack O' Lantern* — a Halloween tradition of lighting a candle inside a hollowed out pumpkin, carved as a scary face. It comes from the Irish legend of *Stingy Jack*, a deceiving drunkard who bargains with Satan, and is doomed to roam the earth, between heaven and hell, with only an ember to light his way.

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We know that a certain judging of the hearts of the children of men is often spoken of as the great prerogative of God, and which belongs *only* to Him, as in 1Kng 8.39: “Forgive, and act, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart you know — for you, even you alone, know the hearts of all the children of men.” And if we examine this, we will find that judging hearts, which is spoken of as God’s prerogative, relates not only to the aims and dispositions of men’s hearts in particular actions, but chiefly to the state of their hearts as professors of religion, and it is with regard to that profession. This will appear very obvious by looking over the following scriptures: 1Chr 28.9; Psa 7.9-11; Psa 26 throughout; Pro 16.2, 17.3, and 21.2; Job 12.23-25; and Rev 2.22-23. That sort of judging which is God’s proper business, is forbidden to us, as in Rom 14.4: “Who are you to judge another man’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls.” “There is one lawgiver who is able to save or destroy; who are you to judge another?” (Jas 4.12) “But with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged by you or by man’s judgment. Indeed, I do not even judge myself — but He who judges me is the Lord.” (1Cor 4.3-4)

Again, whatever kind of judging is the proper work and business of the Day of Judgment, is what we are forbidden, as in 1Cor 4.5,

“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes; who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart. And then every man will have praise from God.”

But to distinguish *hypocrites* who have the form of godliness and the visible conduct of godly men, from *true saints* — or to separate the sheep from the goats — is the proper business of the Day of Judgment. Indeed, it is represented as the *main* business and end of that day. Therefore, those greatly err who take it upon themselves to positively determine who are sincere and who are not; to draw the dividing line between true saints and hypocrites; to separate the sheep from the goats, setting the one on the right hand and the other on the left; and to distinguish and gather up the tares from among the wheat. Many servants of the Owner of the field think they are sufficient for this, and are eager to offer their service to this end. But their Lord says, “No, lest while you gather up the tares, you also root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest;” and in the time of the harvest I will take care to see that a thorough separation is made — as in Mat 13.28-30. This agrees with that forementioned prohibition of the apostle, “Judge nothing before the time.” (1Cor 4.5) In this parable, the *servants* who have care of the fruit of the *field*, doubtless means the same as the servants who have care of the fruit of the *vineyard* in Luke 20. Elsewhere they are represented as servants of the Lord of the Harvest, appointed as labourers in his harvest. These we know are *ministers of the gospel*.

Now is that parable in the 13th chapter of Matthew fulfilled: “While men sleep” (during a long sleepy, dead time in the church), “the enemy has sowed tares.” *Now* is the time “when the blade has sprung up,” and religion is reviving; and *now* some of the servants who have the care of the field say, “Let us go and gather up the tares.” — I know there is a great inclination in men who suppose they have experienced some of the power of religion, to think they are sufficient to discern and determine the state of others by a little conversation with them; but experience has taught me that *this is an error*. I once did not imagine the heart of man to be as unsearchable as it is. I am less charitable, and also less uncharitable than I once was. I find

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more things in wicked men that may counterfeit and make a fair show of piety; and more ways that the remaining corruption of the godly may make them *appear* like carnal men, formalists and dead hypocrites, than I once knew of. The longer I live, the less I wonder that God claims it as His prerogative to test the hearts of the children of men, and directs that this business should be left alone till the harvest. I desire to adore the wisdom of God and his goodness to me and my fellow-creatures, that he has not committed this great business into the hands of such a poor, weak, and dim-sighted creature, one with so much blindness, pride, partiality, prejudice, and deceitfulness of heart. But He has committed it into the hands of One who is infinitely more fit for it, and has made it His prerogative.

The talk of some newly converted persons, and the account they give of their experiences, is exceedingly satisfying. It is such that it forbids and banishes the thought of their being any other than the precious children of God. It obliges, and as it were *forces*, full charity. Yet we must allow the Scriptures to stand good, which speak of everything in the saint belonging to the spiritual and divine life, as *hidden* (Col 3.3-4). Their food is the hidden manna; they have meat to eat that others know nothing of; a stranger does not share their joys (Pro 14.10). The heart in which they possess their divine distinguishing ornaments, is the *hidden* man, and it is in the sight of God alone, 1Pet 3.4. Their new name which Christ has given them, no man knows except the one who receives it, Rev 2.17. The praise of the true Israelites, whose circumcision is that of the heart, is not of men but *of God*, Rom 2.29. That is, they can be certainly known and discerned to be Israelites, so as to have the honour that belongs to such men, only from God. This appears by the use of a similar expression by the same apostle, in 1Cor 4.5. There he speaks of its being God's prerogative to judge who are upright Christians, and what He will do at the Day of Judgment, adding, "and then every man will have praise from God."

The instance of *Judas* is remarkable. Though he had been so long among the rest of the disciples, who were all persons of *true* experience, yet his associates never seemed to have entertained a thought of his being any other than a true disciple — not till he revealed himself by his scandalous practice. — And the instance of *Ahithophel* is also very remarkable. David did not suspect him, even though David was so wise and holy a man, so great a divine, and had such a great acquaintance with Scripture. He knew more than all his teachers, more than the ancients. He had grown old in experience, and was in the greatest ripeness of his judgment. He was a great prophet, and intimately acquainted with Ahithophel, being his familiar friend and most intimate companion in religious and spiritual concerns. Yet David not only never discovered him to be a hypocrite, but he relied on Ahithophel as a true saint. He relished his religious discourse; it was sweet to him; and he counted him an eminent saint. So that David made Ahithophel, above any other man, his guide and counsellor in matters of the soul. Yet Ahithophel was not only no saint, but he was a notoriously *wicked* man, a murderous, vile wretch.

"Wickedness is in the midst of it; deceit and guile do not depart from her streets. For it was not an open enemy who reproached me — then I could have borne it. Nor was it one who hated me, who exalted himself against me — then I would have hidden myself from him. But it was *you*, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company." (Psa 55.11-14)

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To suppose that men have the ability and the right to determine the state of the souls of visible Christians, and so to make an open separation between saints and hypocrites — that true saints may be of one visible company, and hypocrites of another, separated by a partition that men make — carries in it an *inconsistency*. For it supposes that God has given men power to make another visible church, within His visible church. For *visible Christians* or *visible saints* means persons who have a right to be received as such in the eye of public charity. None can have a right to exclude anyone from this visible church, except in the way of that regular ecclesiastical proceeding which God has established in his visible church.²⁷ — I beg of those who have a true zeal for promoting this work of God, to well-consider these things. I am persuaded that many of those who have much to do with souls, if they do not hearken to me now, will be of the same mind when they have had more experience.

Avoid heated controversies

Another thing I would entreat the zealous friends of this glorious work of God to avoid, is managing any controversy with opposers with too much heat, and with the appearance of an angry zeal; and particularly by insisting too much in public prayer and preaching, on the *persecution* of these opposers. If their persecution were ten times as great as it is, I think it would still be best not to say so much about it. If it becomes Christians to be like lambs — not apt to complain and cry when they are hurt — then it becomes them to be dumb and not to open their mouth, following the example of our dear Redeemer; and not be like swine, that are apt to scream loudly when they are touched. We should not be quick to think and speak of fire from heaven when the Samaritans oppose us, and won't receive us into their villages. God's zealous ministers would do well to think of the direction the apostle Paul gave to a zealous minister:

“And the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves; if God perhaps will give them repentance, so that they may come to acknowledge the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (2Tim 2.24-26)

Don't put New Wine in Old Skins

I would humbly recommend to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and would advance his kingdom, a good attendance to that excellent rule of prudence which Christ has left us:

“No man puts a piece of new cloth into an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break and the wine runs out, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Mat 9.16-17)

I am afraid the wine is now running out in some parts of this land, for lack of attending to this rule. For I believe we have confined ourselves too much to a certain stated method and form in the management of our religious affairs. This has had a tendency to cause all our religion to degenerate into mere formality. Yet whatever has the appearance of a great innovation — that which greatly tends to shock and surprise people's minds, and set them to talking and disputing, also greatly tends to hinder the progress of the power of religion. It raises the

²⁷ That is, proper church discipline under Matthew 18.

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opposition of some, diverts the minds of others, and perplexes many with doubts and hesitations. It causes people to swerve from their great business, and turn aside to vain squabbling. Therefore that which is very much beside the common practice, unless it is a thing of considerable importance in its own nature, had better be avoided. In this we will follow the example of one who had the greatest success in propagating the power of religion:

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law to God, but under law toward Christ) that I might win those who are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker of it with you.” (1Cor 9.20-23)