

RICHES OF J. C. PHILPOT

by J.C. Philpot

A compilation of writings and sermons from J.C. Philpot, the 19th-century Strict Baptist preacher, presenting his theological teachings emphasizing sovereign grace, experimental religion, and biblical exposition in the Reformed and Strict Baptist tradition.

11 Chapters

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Volume 1

Man's religion & God's religion

"That no flesh should glory in His presence." 1 Cor. 1:29

Man's religion is to build up the creature. God's religion is to throw the creature down in the dust of self-abasement, and to glorify Christ.

A mystery to yourself

"I find then, the law that, to me, while I desire to do good, evil is present." Romans 7:21

Are you not often a mystery to yourself? Warm one moment—cold the next! Abasing yourself one hour—exalting yourself the following! Loving the world, full of it, steeped up to your head in it today—crying, groaning, and sighing for a sweet manifestation of the love of God tomorrow! Brought down to nothingness, covered with shame and confusion, on your knees before you leave your room—filled with pride and self-importance before you have got down stairs! Despising the world, and willing to give it all up for one taste of the love of Jesus when in solitude—trying to grasp it with both hands when in business!

What a mystery are you! Touched by love—and stung with hatred! Possessing a little wisdom—and a great deal of folly! Earthly-minded—and yet having the affections in heaven! Pressing forward—and lagging behind! Full of sloth—and yet taking the kingdom with violence! And thus the Spirit, by a process which we may feel but cannot adequately describe—leads us into the mystery of the two natures perpetually struggling and striving against each other in the same bosom—so that one man cannot more differ from another, than the same man differs from himself.

But the mystery of the kingdom of heaven is this—that our carnal mind undergoes no alteration, but maintains a perpetual war with grace. And thus, the deeper we sink in self-abasement under a sense of our vileness, the higher we rise in a knowledge of Christ, and the blacker we are in our own view—the more lovely does Jesus appear.

O, what slow learners!

"So Jesus said, Do you also still not understand?" Matthew 15:16

What lessons we need day by day to teach us anything aright, and how it is for the most part, "line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." O, what slow learners!—what dull, forgetful scholars!—what ignoramuses!—what stupid blockheads!—what stubborn pupils! Surely no scholar at a school, old or young, could learn so little of natural things as we seem to have learned of spiritual things after so many years instruction—so many chapters read—so many sermons heard—so many prayers put up—so much talking about religion. How small, how weak is the amount of growth, compared with all we have read and heard and talked about! But it is a mercy that the Lord saves whom He will save—and that we are saved by free grace—and free grace alone!

Take me as I am

"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved." Jeremiah 17:14

Here is this sin—Save me from it! Here is this snare—Break it to pieces! Here is this lust—Lord, subdue it! Here is this temptation—Deliver me out of it! Here is my proud heart—Lord, humble it! Here is my unbelieving heart—Take it away, and give me faith—give me submission to Your mind and will. Take me as I am with all my sin and shame and work in me everything well pleasing in Your sight!

Nothing but a huge clod of dust

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Colossians 3:2

Everything upon earth, as viewed by the eyes of the Majesty of heaven—is base and paltry. Earth is after all, nothing but a huge clod of dust, and as such, as insignificant in the eyes of its Maker as the small dust of the balance, or the drop of the bucket. What, then, are its highest objects—its loftiest aims—its grandest pursuits—its noblest employments—in the sight of Him who inhabits eternity, but base and worthless? Vanity is stamped on all earth's attainments. All earthly pursuits and high accomplishments—wealth, rank, learning, power, or pleasure—end in death! The breath of God's displeasure soon lays low in the grave all that is rich and mighty, high and proud. But that effectual work of grace on the heart, whereby the chosen vessels of mercy are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, calls them out of those low, groveling pursuits—those earthly toys—those base and sensual lusts—in which other men seek at once their happiness and their ruin.

How can they escape?

"He will keep the feet of His saints." 1 Samuel 2:9

The Lord sees His poor scattered pilgrims traveling through a valley of tears, journeying through a waste-howling wilderness—a path beset with baits, traps, and snares in every direction. How can they escape? Why, the Lord 'keeps their feet.' He carries them through every rough place—as a tender parent carries a little child. When about to fall—He graciously lays His everlasting arms underneath them. And when tottering and stumbling, and their feet ready to slip—He mercifully upholds them from falling altogether.

But do you think that He has not different ways for different feet? The God of creation has not made two flowers, nor two leaves upon a tree alike—and will He cause all His people to walk in precisely the same path? No. We have each our path—each our troubles—each our trials—each peculiar traps and snares laid for our feet. And the wisdom of the all-wise God is shown by His eyes being in every place—marking the footsteps of every pilgrim—suiting His remedies to meet their individual case and necessity—appearing for them when nobody else could do them any good—watching so tenderly over them, as though the eyes of His affection were bent on one individual—and carefully noting the goings of each, as though all the powers of the Godhead were concentrated on that one person to keep him from harm!

God shall supply

"And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:19

Until we are brought into the depths of poverty, we shall never know nor value Christ's riches. If, then, you are a child of God, a poor and needy soul, a tempted and tried believer in Christ—God shall supply all your needs! They may be very great. It may seem to you, sometimes, as though there were not upon all the face of the earth such a wretch as you—as though there never could be a child of God in your state—so dark, so stupid, so blind and ignorant, so proud and worldly, so presumptuous and hypocritical, so continually backsliding after idols, so continually doing things that you know are hateful in God's sight. But whatever your need be—it is not beyond the reach of divine supply! And the deeper your need, the more is Jesus glorified in supplying it.

Do not say then, that your case is too bad—your needs are too many—your perplexities too great—your temptations too powerful. No case can be too bad! No temptations can be too powerful! No sin can be too black! No perplexity can be too hard! No state in which the soul can get, is beyond the reach of the almighty and compassionate love, that burns in the bosom of the Redeemer!

Our infirmities

"For we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Hebrews 4:15

The child of God, spiritually taught and convinced, is deeply sensible of his infirmities. Yes, that he is encompassed with infirmities—that he is nothing else but infirmities. And therefore the great High Priest to whom he comes as a burdened sinner—to whom he has recourse in the depth of his extremity—and at whose feet he falls overwhelmed with a sense of his helplessness, sin, misery, and guilt—is so suitable to him as one able to sympathize with his infirmities.

We would, if left to our own conceptions, naturally imagine that Jesus is too holy to look down in compassion on a filthy, guilty wretch like ourselves. Surely, surely, He will spurn us from His feet. Surely, surely, His holy eyes cannot look upon us in our blood, guilt, filth, wretchedness, misery and shame. Surely, surely, He cannot bestow one heart's thought—one moment's sympathy—or feel one spark of love towards those who are so unlike Him. Nature, sense, and reason would thus argue, "I must be holy, perfectly holy—for Jesus to love—I must be pure, perfectly pure—spotless and sinless, for Jesus to think of. But that I, a sinful, guilty, defiled wretch—that I, encompassed with infirmities—that I, whose heart is a cage of unclean birds—that I, stained and polluted with a thousand iniquities—that I can have any inheritance in Him—or that He can have any love or compassion towards me—nature, sense, reason, and human religion in all its shapes and forms, revolts from the idea."

It is as though Jesus specially address Himself to the poor, burdened child of God who feels his infirmities, who cannot boast of his own wisdom, strength, righteousness, and consistency—but is all weakness and helplessness. It seems as if He would address Himself to the case of such a helpless wretch—and pour a sweet cordial into his bleeding conscience. We, the children of God—we, who each know our own plague and our own sore—we, who carry about with us day by day a body of sin and death, that makes us lament, sigh, and groan—we, who know painfully what it is to be encompassed with infirmities—we, who come to His feet as being nothing and having

nothing but sin and woe—we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our infirmities, but One who carries in His bosom that sympathizing, merciful, feeling, tender, and compassionate heart!

Why are you in despair?

"Why are you in despair, O my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise Him, the saving help of my countenance, and my God." Psalm 42:11

Do you forget, O soul, that the way to heaven is a very strait and narrow path—too narrow for you to carry your sins in it with you? God sees it good that you should be cast down. You were getting very proud, O soul. The world had gotten hold of your heart. You were seeking great things for yourself. You were secretly roving away from the Lord. You were too much lifted up in SELF. The Lord has sent you these trials and difficulties and allowed these temptations to fall upon you, to bring you down from your state of false security.

There is reason therefore, even to praise God for being cast down, and for being so disturbed. How this opens up parts of God's Word which you never read before with any feeling. How it gives you sympathy and communion with the tried and troubled children of God. How it weans and separates you from dead professors. How it brings you in heart and affection, out of the world that lies in wickedness. And how it engages your thoughts, time after time, upon the solemn matters of eternity—instead of being a prey to every idle thought and imagination, and tossed up and down upon a sea of vanity and folly. But, above all, when there is a sweet response from the Lord, and the power of divine things is inwardly felt, in enabling us to hope in God, and to praise His blessed name—then we see the benefit of being cast down and so repeatedly and continually disturbed.

Treasure in earthen vessels

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." 2 Corinthians 4:7

Do not be surprised if you feel that in yourself you are but an earthen vessel—if you are made deeply and daily sensible of your frail body. Do not be surprised if your clay house is often tottering—if sickness sometimes assails your mortal tabernacle—if in your flesh there dwells no good thing; if your soul often cleaves to the dust—and if you are unable to retain a sweet sense of God's goodness and love. Do not be surprised nor startled at the corruptions of your depraved nature—at the depth of sin in your carnal mind—at the vile abominations which lurk and work in your deceitful and desperately wicked heart. Bear in mind that it is the will of God that this heavenly treasure which makes you rich for eternity, should be lodged in an earthen vessel.

We have ever to feel our native weakness—and that without Christ we can do nothing—that we may be clothed with humility, and feel ourselves the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints. We thus learn to prize the heights, breadths, lengths, and depths of the love of Christ, who stooped so low to raise us up so high!

Trials, temptations, strippings, emptyings

The very trials and afflictions, and the sore temptations through which God's family pass, all eventually endear Christ to them. And depend upon it, if you are a child of God, you will sooner or later, in your travels through this wilderness, find your need of Jesus as "able to save to the

uttermost." There will be such things in your heart, and such feelings in your mind—the temptations you will meet with will be such—that nothing short of a Savior that is able to save to the uttermost can save you out of your desperate case and felt circumstances as utterly lost and helpless.

This a great point to come to. All trials, all temptations, all strippings, all emptyings that do not end here are valueless—because they lead the soul away from God. But the convictions, the trials, the temptations, the strippings, the emptyings, that bring us to this spot—that we have nothing, and can do nothing, but the Lord alone must do it all—these have a blessed effect, because they eventually make Jesus very near and dear unto us.

No fear!

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:18

Those who have every reason to fear as to their eternal state before God, have for the most part, no fear at all. They are secure, and free from doubt and fear. The depths of human hypocrisy—the dreadful lengths to which profession may go—the deceit of the carnal heart—the snares spread for the unwary feet—the fearful danger of being deceived at the last—these traps and pitfalls are not objects of anxiety to those dead in sin.

As long as they can pacify natural conscience, and do something to soothe any transient conviction—they are glad to be deceived! God does not see fit to disturb their quiet. He has no purpose of mercy towards them—they are not subjects of His kingdom—they are not objects of His love. He therefore leaves them carnally secure, as in a dream—from which they will not awake until the day of judgment.

These difficulties!

"From all your idols will I cleanse you." Ezekiel 36:25

When there are no crosses, temptations, or trials, a man is sure to go out after and cleave to idols. It matters not what experience he has had. If once he ceases to be plagued and tried, he will be setting up his household gods in the secret chambers of his heart. Profit or pleasure, self-indulgence or self-gratification, will surely, in one form or another, engross his thoughts, and steal away his heart. Nor is there anything too trifling or insignificant to become an idol. Whatever is meditated on preferably to God—whatever is desired more than He—whatever more interests us, pleases us, occupies our waking hours, or is more constantly in our mind—becomes an idol, and a source of sin. It is not the magnitude of the idol, but its existence as an object of worship—that constitutes idolatry. I have seen some 'Burmese idols' not much larger than my hand—and I have seen some 'Egyptian idols' weighing many tons. But both were equally idols—and the comparative size had nothing to do with the question.

So spiritually, an idol is not to be measured by its size, or its relative importance or non-importance. A flower may be as much an idol to one man, as a chest full of gold to another. If you watch your heart, you will see idols rising and setting all day long, nearly as thickly as the stars by night. But God sends trials, difficulties, temptations, besetments, losses, afflictions, to pull down these idols—or rather to pull away our hearts from them. These difficulties pull us out of fleshly ease—make us cry for mercy—pull down all rotten props—hunt us out of false refuges—and strip

us of vain hopes and delusive expectations.

Idolatry!

"You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." 1 Thessalonians 1:9

Nothing is too small or too insignificant which, at times, may not be an idol. What is an idol? Something my carnal mind loves. How may I know whether my carnal mind loves it? When we think of it, and are very much pleased with it. We pet it, love and fondle it, dallying and playing with it, like a mother with her babe. See how she takes the little thing and gazes at it. Her eyes are fixed on it—she dotes upon it because she loves it. Thus we may know an idol if we examine our own hearts—by what our imagination, desires and secret thoughts are going out after. Instead of being spiritually-minded, having his heart and affections in heaven, he has something in his mind which it is going out after—something or other laying hold of the affections.

The child of God has, more or less, all these evil propensities working within. There is idolatry in every man's heart. How deep this idolatry is rooted in a man's heart! How it steals upon his soul! Whatever is indulged in—how it creeps over him, until it gets such power that it becomes master. A man does not know himself if he does not know what power this idolatry has over him. None but God can make the man know it—and when the Lord delivers him, he then turns to God and says, "What a vile wretch I have been! What a monster to go after these idols, loving this thing, and that. A wretch—a monster of iniquity, the vilest wretch that ever crawled on the face of God's earth—for my wicked heart to go out after these idols!" When the soul is brought down to a sense of its vileness and loathsomeness—and God's patience and forbearance—it turns to God from idols, to serve the only living and true God, who pardons the idolater.

Inward conflicts

Through the inward conflicts, secret workings, mysterious changes, and ever-varying exercises of his soul, the true Christian becomes established in a deep experience of his own folly and God's wisdom—his own weakness and Christ's strength—his own sinfulness and the Lord's goodness—his own backslidings and the Spirit's recoveries—his own base ingratitude and Jehovah's patience—the aboundings of sin and the superaboundings of grace. He thus becomes daily more and more confirmed in the vanity of the creature—the utter helplessness of man—the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of the human heart—the sovereignty of distinguishing grace—the fewness of heaven-taught ministers—the scanty number of living souls—and the great rareness of true religion.

Wounds, bruises, putrefying sores

"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: They have not been closed, neither bound up, neither soothed with ointment." Isaiah 1:5, 6

Every thought, word, and action is polluted by sin. Every mental faculty is depraved. The will chooses evil. The affections cleave to earthly things. The memory, like a broken sieve, retains the bad and lets fall the good. The judgment, like a bribed or drunken judge, pronounces mindless or wrong decisions. The conscience, like an opium eater, lies asleep and drugged in stupefied silence.

When all these 'master faculties of the mind' are so drunken and disorderly—need we wonder that the bodily members are a godless, rebellious crew? Lusts call out for gratification. Unbelief and infidelity murmur. Tempers growl and mutter. Every bad passion strives hard for the mastery. O the evils of the human heart, which, let loose, have filled earth with misery, and hell with victims—which deluged the world with the flood—burnt Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven—and are ripening the world for the final conflagration! Every sin—which has made this fair earth a 'present hell' has filled the air with groans, and has drenched the ground with blood—dwells in your heart and mine!

Now, as this is opened up to the conscience by the Spirit of God, we feel indeed to be of all men most sinful and miserable—and of all most guilty, polluted, and vile. But it is this—and nothing but this—which cuts to pieces our 'fleshly righteousness, wisdom, and strength'—which slays our delusive hopes—and lays us low at the footstool of mercy—without one good thought, word, or action to propitiate an angry Judge. It is this which brings the soul to this point—that if saved, it can only be saved by the free grace, sovereign mercy, and tender compassion of Almighty God!

The wilderness wanderer

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Psalm 107:4

The true Christian finds this world to be a wilderness. There is no change in the world itself. The change is in the man's heart. The wilderness wanderer thinks it altered—a different world from what he has hitherto known—his friends, his own family, the employment in which he is daily engaged, the general pursuits of men—their cares and anxieties, their hopes and prospects, their amusements and pleasures, and what I may call 'the general din and whirl of life'—all seem to him different to what they were—and for a time perhaps he can scarcely tell whether the change is in them, or in himself.

This however is the prominent and uppermost feeling in his mind—that he finds himself, to his surprise—a wanderer in a world which has changed altogether its appearance to him. The fair, beautiful world, in which was all his happiness and all his home—has become to him a dreary wilderness. Sin has been fastened in its conviction on his conscience. The Holy Spirit has taken the veil of unbelief and ignorance off his heart. He now sees the world in a wholly different light—and instead of a paradise it has become a wilderness—for sin, dreadful sin, has marred all its beauty and happiness.

It is not because the world itself has changed that the Christian feels it to be a wilderness—but because he himself has changed. There is nothing in this world which can really gratify or satisfy the true Christian. What once was to him a happy and joyous world has now become a barren wilderness. The scene of his former pursuits, pleasures, habits, delights, prospects, hopes, anticipations of profit or happiness—is now turned into a barren wasteland. He cannot perhaps tell how or why the change has taken place, but he feels it—deeply feels it. He may try to shake off his trouble and be a little cheerful and happy as he was before—but if he gets a little imaginary relief, all his guilty pangs come back upon him with renewed strength and increased violence. God means to make the world a wilderness to every child of His, that he may not find his happiness in it, but be a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth.

Temptation

"The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation." 2 Peter 2:9

Few will sincerely and spiritually go to the Lord, and cry from their hearts to be delivered from the power of a temptation—until it presses so weightily upon their conscience, and lies so heavy a burden upon their soul, that none but God can remove it. But when we really feel the burden of a temptation—when, though our flesh may love it, our spirit hates it—when, though there may be in our carnal mind a cleaving to it, our conscience bleeds under it, and we are brought spiritually to loathe it and to loathe ourselves for it—when we are enabled to go to the Lord in real sincerity of soul and honesty of heart, beseeching Him to deliver us from it—I believe, that the Lord will, sooner or later, either remove that temptation entirely in His providence or by His grace, or so weaken its power that it shall cease to be what it was before, drawing our feet into paths of darkness and evil.

As long, however, as we are in that state of which the prophet speaks, "Their heart is divided—now shall they be found faulty" (Hosea 10:2)—as long as we are in that carnal, wavering mind, which James describes—"A double minded man is unstable in all his ways"—as long as we are hankering after the temptation—casting longing, lingering side glances after it, rolling it as a sweet morsel under our tongue—and though conscience may testify against it, yet not willing to have it taken away, there is no hearty cry—nor sigh—nor spiritual breathing of our soul—that God would remove it from us.

But when we are brought, as in the presence of a heart-searching God, to hate the evil to which we are tempted—and cry to Him that He would—for His honor and for our soul's good—take the temptation away, or dull and deaden its power—sooner or later the Lord will hear the cry of those who groan to be delivered from those temptations, which are so powerfully pressing them down to the dust.

Idling life away like an idiot or a madman

When one is spiritually reborn, he sees at one and the same moment God and self—justice and guilt—power and helplessness—a holy law and a broken commandment—eternity and time—the purity of the Creator, and the filthiness of the creature. And these things he sees—not merely as declared in the Bible—but as revealed in himself as personal realities, involving all his happiness or all his misery in time and in eternity.

Thus it is with him as though a new existence had been communicated, and as if for the first time he had found there was a God! It is as though all his days he had been asleep, and were now awakened—asleep upon the top of a mast, with the raging waves beneath—as if all his past life were a dream, and the dream were now at an end. He has been hunting butterflies—blowing soap bubbles—fishing for minnows—picking daisies—building houses of cards—and idling life away like an idiot or a madman. He had been perhaps wrapped up in a religious profession—advanced even to the office of a deacon, or mounted in a pulpit. He had learned to talk about Christ, and election, and grace, and fill his mouth with the language of Zion. But what did he experimentally know of these things? Nothing, absolutely nothing! Ignorant of his own ignorance (of all kinds of ignorance the worst)—he thought himself rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing—and knew not that he was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

This wily devil!

What a foe to one's peace is one's own spirit! What shall I call it? It is often an infernal spirit. Why? Because it bears the mark of Satan upon it. The pride of our spirit, the presumption of our spirit, the hypocrisy of our spirit, the intense selfishness of our spirit, are often hidden from us. This wily devil, SELF, can wear such masks and assume such forms! This serpent, SELF, can so creep and crawl, can so twist and turn, and can disguise itself under such false appearances—that it is often hidden from ourselves.

Who is the greatest enemy we have to fear? We all have our enemies. But who is our greatest enemy? He whom you carry in your own bosom—your daily, hourly, and unmovable companion, who entwines himself in nearly every thought of your heart—who sometimes puffs up with pride, sometimes inflames with lust, sometimes inflates with presumption, and sometimes works under pretended humility and fleshly holiness. God is determined to stain the pride of human glory. He will never let SELF, (which is but another word for the creature,) wear the crown of victory. It must be crucified, denied, and mortified!

To bathe in the ocean of endless bliss!

"Passing through the Valley of Weeping." Psalm 84:6

Every living soul that has been experimentally taught his lost condition—that has known something of a resting place in Christ—that has turned his back upon both the world and the professing church—and gone weeping Zionward, that he may live in Jesus, feel His power, taste His love, know His blood, rejoice in His grace—every such soul shall, like Israel of old, be borne safely through this waste-howling wilderness—shall be carried through this valley of tears—and taken to enjoy eternal bliss and glory in the presence of Jesus—to bathe in the ocean of endless bliss!

The King in His beauty

"Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty." Isaiah 33:17

Where in heaven or on earth can there be found such a lovely Object as the Son of God? If you have never seen any beauty in Jesus you have never seen Jesus—He has never revealed Himself to you—you never had a glimpse of His lovely face—nor a sense of His presence—nor a word from His lips—nor a touch from His hand. But if you have seen Him by the eye of faith—and He has revealed Himself to you even in a small measure—you have seen a beauty in Him beyond all other beauties, for it is a holy beauty, a divine beauty, the beauty of His heavenly grace, the beauty of His uncreated and eternal glory.

How beautiful and glorious does He show Himself to be in His atoning blood and dying love. Even as sweating great drops of blood in Gethsemane's gloomy garden, and as hanging in torture and agony upon Calvary's cross—faith can see a beauty in the glorious Redeemer, even in the lowest depths of ignominy and shame! How is your Beloved better than others? My Beloved is dark and dazzling, better than ten thousand others!

Can the Ethiopian change his skin?

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Jeremiah 13:23

Before the soul can know anything about salvation, it must learn deeply and experimentally the nature of sin—and of itself, as stained and polluted by sin. The soul is proud—and needs to be humbled. The soul is careless—and needs to be awakened. The soul is alive—and needs to be killed. The soul is full—and requires to be emptied. The soul is whole—and needs to be wounded. The soul is clothed—and requires to be stripped. The soul is, by nature, self-righteous, self-seeking, buried deep in worldliness and carnality, utterly blind and ignorant—filled with presumption, arrogance, conceit, and enmity. It hates all that is heavenly and spiritual.

Sin, in all its various forms, is its natural element. To make man the direct opposite of what he originally is—to make him love God instead of hating Him—to make him fear God instead of mocking Him—to make him obey God instead of rebelling against Him—to make him to tremble at His dreadful majesty instead of defiantly charging against Him—to do this mighty work, and to effect this wonderful change requires the implantation of a new nature by the immediate hand of God Himself! Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

That heavenly Teacher

We do not learn that we are sinners merely by reading it in the Bible. It must be wrought—I might say, burnt into us. Nor will anyone sincerely and spiritually cry for mercy—until sin is spiritually felt and known—in its misery, in its dominion, in its guilt, in its entanglements, in its wiles and allurements, in its filth and pollution, and in its condemnation. Where the Holy Spirit works, He kindles sighs, groans, supplications, wrestlings, and pleadings to know Christ—feel His love—taste the efficacy of His atoning blood—and embrace Him as all our salvation and all our desire. And though there may, and doubtless will be, much barrenness, hardness, deadness, and apparent carelessness often felt—still that heavenly Teacher will revive His work, though often by painful methods—nor will He let the quickened soul rest short of a personal and experimental enjoyment of Christ and His glorious salvation.

Preserving grace before regeneration

"To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." Jude 1

What a mercy it is for God's people that before they have a 'vital union' with Christ—before they are grafted into Him experimentally—they have an 'eternal, immanent union' with Him before all worlds. It is by virtue of this eternal union that they come into the world—at such a time, at such a place, from such parents, under such circumstances—as God has appointed.

It is by virtue of this eternal union that the circumstances of their lives are ordained. By virtue of this eternal union they are preserved in Christ before they are effectually called. They cannot die until God has brought about a vital union with Christ! Whatever sickness they may pass through—whatever injuries they may be exposed to—whatever perils assault them on sea or land—die they will not, die they cannot—until God's purposes are executed in bringing them into a vital union with the Son of His love.

Thus, this eternal union watched over every circumstance of their birth—watched over their childhood—watched over their manhood—watched over them until the appointed time and spot, when "the God of all grace," according to His eternal purpose, was pleased to quicken their souls,

and thus bring about an experimental union with the Lord of life and glory.

Free!

"If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." John 8:36

To be made free implies a liberty from the WORLD and the spirit of covetousness in the heart. If we were to follow into their shops some who talk much of 'gospel liberty,' we might find that the world's fetter had not been struck off their heart—that they had a 'golden' chain, though invisible to their own eyes, very closely wrapped round their heart.

And there is a being made free from the power of SIN. I greatly fear, if we could follow into their holes and corners, and secret chambers, many who prattle about gospel liberty, we would find that sin had not yet lost its hold upon them, that there was some secret or open sin that entangled them, that there was some lust—some passion—some evil temper—some wretched pride or other—that wound its fetters very close round their heart.

And also there is a being made free from SELF—proud self, presumptuous self, self-exalting self, flesh-pleasing self, hypocritical self—self in all its various shapes and turns—self in all its crooked hypocrisy and windings. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!

These fugitive, transitory things

"The world is passing away with its lusts, but he who does God's will remains forever." 1 John 2:17

There is a reality in true religion, and indeed, rightly viewed, a reality in nothing else. For every other thing passes away like a dream of the night, and comes to an end like a tale that is told. Now you cannot say of a thing that passes away and comes to an end that it is real. It may have the appearance of reality—when in fact it is but a shadow. Money, jewels, pictures, books, furniture, securities—are transitory. Money may be spent, jewels be lost, books be burnt, furniture decay, pictures vanish by time and age, securities be stolen. Nothing is real but that which has an abiding substance. Health decays, strength diminishes, beauty flees the cheek, sight and hearing grow dim, the mind itself gets feeble, riches make to themselves wings and flee away, children die, friends depart, old age creeps on—and life itself comes to a close.

These fugitive, transitory things are then mere shadows. There is no substance, no enduring substance in them. They are for time, and are useful for a time. Like our daily food and clothing, house and home—they support and solace us in our journey through life. But there they stop—when life ends they end with it. But real religion—and by this I understand the work of God upon the soul—abides in death and after death, goes with us through the dark valley, and lands us safe in a blessed eternity. It is, therefore, the only thing in this world of which we can say that it is real! "The world is passing away with its lusts, but he who does the will of God will remain forever."

A sad motley mixture

(The following is an excerpt from Philpot's letter to a church which desired him to come as their pastor)

"To me, the very least of all saints." Ephesians 3:8

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." 1 Timothy 1:15

Many are foolishly apt to think that a minister is more spiritual than anyone else. But I am daily more and more sensible of the desperate wickedness of my deceitful heart, and my miserable ruined state as a sinner by nature and by practice. I feel utterly unworthy of the name of a Christian, and to be ranked among the followers of the Lamb. I have no desire to palm myself off on any church, as though I were anything. I am willing to take a low place.

The more you see of me, you will be sure to find out more of my infirmities, failings, waywardness, selfishness, obstinacy, and evil temper. I am carnal, very proud, very foolish in imagination, very slothful, very worldly, dark, stupid, blind, unbelieving and ignorant. I cannot but confess that I am a strange compound—a sad motley mixture of all the most hateful and abominable vices that rise up within me, and face me at every turn.

Enlarge my heart

"I will run the way of Your commandments, when You shall enlarge my heart." Psalm 119:32

The Word of God is full of precepts—but we are totally unable to perform them in our own strength. We cannot, without divine assistance, perform the precept with a single eye to the glory of God—from heavenly motives—and in a way acceptable to the Lord, without special power from on high. We need an extraordinary power to be put forth in our hearts—a special work of the Spirit upon the conscience, in order to spiritually fulfill in the slightest degree, the least of God's commandments.

None but the Lord Himself can enlarge the heart of His people. None but the Lord can expand their hearts Godwards, and remove that narrowedness and contractedness in divine things which is the plague and burden of a God-fearing soul. When the Lord is absent—when He hides His lovely face—when He does not draw near to visit and bless—the heart contracts in its own narrow compass. But when the Lord is pleased to favor the soul with His own gracious presence, and bring Himself near to the heart, His felt presence opens, enlarges, and expands the soul—so as to receive Him in all His love and grace.

Our refuge!

"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation—my stronghold." Psalm 18:2

On every side are hosts of enemies ever invading our souls—trampling down every good thing in our hearts—accompanied by a flying troop of temptations, doubts, fears, guilt and bondage sweeping over our soul. And we, as regards our own strength, are helpless against them. But there is a refuge set before us in the gospel of the grace of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, as King in Zion, is there held up before our eyes—as the Rock of our refuge—our strong Tower—our impregnable Fortress—and we are encouraged by every precious promise and every gospel invitation when we are overrun and distressed by these wandering, ravaging, plundering tribes—to flee unto and find a safe refuge in Him.

Keep me safe, O God, for in You I take refuge. O Lord my God, I take refuge in You—save and deliver me from all who pursue me.

Supernatural light

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6

Until, then, this supernatural light of God enters into the soul, a man has no saving knowledge of Jehovah. He may say his prayers—read his Bible—attend preaching—observe ordinances—bestow all his goods to feed the poor—or give his body to be burned—but he is as ignorant of God as the cattle that graze in the fields! He may call himself a Christian, and be thought such by others—talk much about Jesus Christ—hold a sound creed—maintain a consistent profession—pray at a prayer meeting with fluency and apparent feeling—stand up in a pulpit and contend earnestly for the doctrines of grace—excel hundreds of God's children in zeal, knowledge and conversation. And yet, if this ray of supernatural light has never shone into his soul—he is only twofold more the child of hell than those who make no profession!

Little heathen

(from Philpot's biography, written by his son)

There was nothing my father mistrusted more than 'childhood piety.' He insisted that children should never be taught or allowed to use the language of 'personal possession' in reference to God. To sing, for instance, "Rock of Ages, cleft for ME" or, "MY Jesus." Herein he was most logical. For by early influence and example you can train up a child to be a little patriot—a little Catholic—a little Calvinist—or a little Bolshevik. But no power on earth can make him a child of God. He took great care that we, his children, attended the means of grace, and never missed chapel or family prayers. But he never expected us to be anything but little heathen. We had, it is true, to be well behaved little heathen. If not, we got "the stick," or its equivalent.

Wearied, torn & half expiring

The poor sheep has gone astray—and having once left the fold, it is pretty sure to have gotten into some strange place or other. It has fallen down a rock—or has rolled into a ditch—or is hidden beneath a bush—or has crept into a cave—or is lying in some deep, distant ravine, where none but an experienced eye and hand can find it out.

Just so with the Lord's lost sheep. They get into strange places. They fall off rocks—slip into holes—hide among the bushes—and sometimes creep off to die in caverns. When the sheep has gone astray, the shepherd goes after it to find it. Here he sees a footprint—there a little lock of wool torn off by the thorns. Every nook he searches—into every corner he looks—until at last he finds the poor sheep wearied, torn and half expiring, with scarcely strength enough to groan forth its misery. The shepherd does not beat it home, nor thrust the goad into its back—but he gently takes it up, lays it upon his shoulder, and brings it home rejoicing.

I am weak & ignorant, full of sin

I am weak and ignorant, full of sin and compassed with infirmity. But I bless God that He has in some measure shown me the power of eternal things, and by free and sovereign grace stopped me in that career of vanity and sin in which, to all outward appearance, I was fast hurrying down to the chambers of death.

By the grace of God

"By the grace of God I am what I am." 1 Corinthians 15:10

What but sovereign grace—rich, free and superabounding grace—has made the difference between you and the world who cannot receive Him? But for His divine operations upon your soul, you would still be of the world, hardening your heart against everything good and godlike, walking on in the pride and ignorance of unbelief and self-righteousness, until you sank down into the chambers of death!

The anointing

"But the anointing which you have received from Him remains in you." 1 John 2:27

All the powers of earth and hell are combined against this holy anointing, with which the children of God are so highly favored. But if God has locked up in the bosom of a saint one drop of this divine unction, that one drop is armor against all the assaults of sin—all the attacks of Satan—all the enmity of self—and all the charms, pleasures, and amusements of the world. Waves and billows of affliction may roll over the soul—but they cannot wash away this holy drop of anointing oil. Satan may shoot a thousand fiery darts to inflame all the combustible material of our carnal mind—but all his fiery darts cannot burn up that one drop of oil which God has laid up in the depths of a broken spirit. The world, with all its charms and pleasures, and its deadly opposition to the truth of God, may stir up waves of ungodliness against this holy anointing—but all the powers of earth combined can never extinguish that one drop which God has Himself lodged in the depths of a believer's heart.

And so it has been with all the dear saints of God. Not all their sorrows, backslidings, slips, falls, miseries, and wretchedness, have ever—all combined—drunk up the anointing that God has bestowed upon them. If sin could have done it—we would have sinned ourselves into hell long ago—and if the world or Satan could have destroyed it or us—they would long ago have destroyed both. If our carnal mind could have done it—it would have swept us away into floods of destruction. But the anointing abides sure, and cannot be destroyed—and where once lodged in the soul, it is secure against all the assaults of earth, sin, and hell. But the anointing which you have received from Him remains in you.

Can I be a child of God, and be thus?

Perhaps you are a poor, tempted creature—and your daily sorrow, your continual trouble is that you are so soon overcome—that your temper, your lusts, your pride, your worldliness, and your carnal, corrupt heart are perpetually getting the mastery. And from this you sometimes draw bitter conclusions. You say, in the depth of your heart, "Can I be a child of God, and be thus? What mark have I of being in favor with God when I am so easily—so continually overcome?" But the Spirit reveals Christ—taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us—applying the word with power to our hearts, and bringing the sweetness, reality, and blessedness of divine things into our soul. It is only in this way that He overcomes all unbelief and infidelity, doubt and fear, and sweetly assures us that all is well between God and the soul. Faith keeps eyeing the atonement—faith looks not so much to sin, as to salvation from sin—at the way whereby sin is pardoned, overcome, and subdued.

The truth shall make you free!

"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

To a spiritual mind, sweet and self-rewarding is the task, if task it can be called, of searching the Word as for hidden treasure. No sweeter, no better employment can engage heart and hands than, in the spirit of prayer and meditation—of separation from the world—of holy fear—of a desire to know the will of God and do it—of humility, simplicity, and godly sincerity—to seek to enter into those heavenly mysteries which are stored up in the Scriptures—and this, not to furnish the head with notions, but to feed the soul with the bread of life.

Truth—received in the love and power of it, informs and establishes the judgment, softens and melts the heart, warms and draws upward the affections, makes and keeps the conscience alive and tender—is the food of faith—is the strength of hope—is the main-spring of love. To know the truth is to be made blessedly free—free from error—free from the vile heresies which everywhere abound—free from presumption—free from self-righteousness—free from the curse and bondage of the law—free from the condemnation of a guilty conscience—free from a slavish fear of the opinion of men—free from the contempt of the world—free from the scorn of worldly professors—free from following a multitude to do evil—free from companionship with those who have a name to live, but are dead. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free!

Sin cannot be subdued in any other way

"The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." Galatians 2:20

There is no way except by being spiritually immersed into Christ's death and life—that we can ever get a victory over our besetting sins. If, on the one hand, we have a view of a suffering Christ, and thus become immersed into His sufferings and death—the feeling, while it lasts, will subdue the power of sin. Or, on the other hand, if we get a believing view of a risen Christ, and receive supplies of grace out of His fullness—that will lift us above sin's dominion.

If sin is powerfully working in us, we need one of these two things to subdue it. When there is a view of the sufferings and sorrows, agonies and death of the Son of God, power comes down to the soul in its struggles against sin and gives it a measure of holy resistance and subduing strength against it. So, when there is a coming in of the grace and love of Christ—it lifts up the soul from the love and power of sin into a purer and holier atmosphere.

Sin cannot be subdued in any other way. You must either be immersed into Christ's sufferings and death—or you must be immersed into Christ's resurrection and life. A sight of Him as a suffering God—or a view of Him as a risen Jesus—must be connected with every successful attempt to get the victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave. You may strive, vow, and repent—and what does it all amount to? You sink deeper and deeper into sin than before. Pride, lust, and covetousness come in like a flood—and you are swamped and carried away almost before you are aware! But if you get a view of a suffering Christ, or of a risen Christ—if you get a taste of His dying love—a drop of His atoning blood—or any manifestation of His beauty and blessedness—there comes from this spiritual immersion into His death or His life a subduing power—and this gives a victory over temptation and sin which nothing else can or will give.

Yet I believe we are often many years learning this divine secret—striving to repent and reform, and cannot—until at last by divine teaching we come to learn a little of what the Apostle meant when he said, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." And when we can get into this life of faith—this hidden life, then our affections are set on things above. There is no use setting to work by 'legal strivings'—they only plunge you deeper in the ditch. You must get Christ into your soul by the power of God—and then He will subdue—by His smiles, blood, love, and presence—every internal foe.

Two kinds of repentance

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret—but worldly sorrow brings death." 2 Corinthians 7:10

There are two kinds of repentance which need to be carefully distinguished from each other, though they are often sadly confounded—evangelical repentance, and legal repentance. Cain, Esau, Saul, Ahab, Judas, all repented—but their repentance was the remorse of natural conscience—not the godly sorrow of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. They trembled before God as an angry judge—but were not melted into contrition before Him as a forgiving Father. They neither hated their sins nor forsook them—they neither loved holiness nor sought it. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord—Esau plotted Jacob's death—Saul consulted the witch of Endor—Ahab put honest Micaiah into prison—and Judas hanged himself.

How different from this forced and false repentance of a reprobate, is the repentance of a child of God—that true repentance for sin, that godly sorrow, that holy mourning which flows from the Spirit's gracious operations. This repentance does not spring from a sense of the wrath of God in a broken law—but from His mercy in a blessed gospel—from a view by faith of the sufferings of Christ in the garden and on the cross—from a manifestation of pardoning love—and is always attended with self-loathing and self-abhorrence, with deep and unreserved confession of sin and forsaking it, with most hearty, sincere, and earnest petitions to be kept from all evil, and a holy longing to live to the praise and glory of God.

Have we nothing to give to Christ?

Have we nothing to give to Christ? Yes! Our sins—our sorrows—our burdens—our trials—and above all, the salvation and sanctification of our souls. And what has He to give us? What? Why—everything worth having—everything worth a moment's anxious thought—everything for time and eternity!

Suffering

"But the God of all grace, who has called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while—make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you." 1 Peter 5:10

There is no divine establishment, no spiritual strength, no solid settlement—except by suffering. But after the soul has suffered, after it has felt God's chastising hand, the effect is to perfect—to establish—to strengthen—and to settle it. By suffering, a man becomes settled into a solemn conviction of the character of Jehovah as revealed in the Scripture, and in a measure made experimentally manifest in his conscience. He is settled in the persuasion that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His

purpose"—in the firm conviction that everything comes to pass according to God's eternal purpose—and are all tending to the good of the Church, and to God's eternal glory. His soul, too, is settled down into a deep persuasion of the misery, wretchedness, and emptiness of the creature—into the conviction that the world is but a shadow—and that the things of time and sense are but bubbles that burst the moment they are grasped—that of all things sin is most to be dreaded—and the favor of God above all things most to be coveted—that nothing is really worth knowing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified—that all things are passing away—and that he himself is rapidly hurrying down the stream of life, and into the boundless ocean of eternity. Thus he becomes settled in a knowledge of the truth, and his soul remains at anchor, looking to the Lord to preserve him here, and bring him in peace and safety to his eternal home.

In this scene of confusion & distraction

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for—but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Romans 8:26

We don't know what we ought to pray for. How often do we find and feel this to be our case—darkness covers our mind—ignorance pervades our soul—unbelief vexes our spirit—guilt troubles our conscience—a crowd of evil imaginations, or foolish or worse than foolish wanderings distract our thoughts—Satan hurls in thick and fast his fiery darts—a dense cloud is spread over the mercy-seat—infidelity whispers its vile suggestions—until, amid all this rabble throng, such confusion and bondage prevail that words seem idle breath, and prayer to the God of heaven but empty mockery.

In this scene of confusion and distraction, when all seems going to the wreck—how kind, how gracious is it in the blessed Spirit to come, as it were, to the rescue of the poor bewildered saint, and to teach him how to pray and what to pray for. He is therefore said to help our weaknesses, for these evils of which we have been speaking are not willful, deliberate sins, but wretched infirmities of the flesh. He helps, then, our infirmities—by subduing the power and prevalence of unbelief—by commanding in the mind a solemn calm—by rebuking and chasing away Satan and his fiery darts—by awing the soul with a reverential sense of the power and presence of God—by presenting Jesus before our eyes as the Mediator at the right hand of the Father—by raising up and drawing forth faith upon His Person and work, blood and righteousness—and, above all, by Himself interceding for us and in us with groans that words cannot express.

His own sore

"When a prayer or plea is made by any of Your people Israel—each one aware of his own sore and his own afflictions, and spreading out his hands toward this Temple—then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with each man according to all he does, since You know his heart, for You alone know the hearts of men." 2 Chronicles 6:29, 30

The man for whom Solomon prays is he who knows and feels, painfully feels, his "own sore" and his "own afflictions"—whose heart is indeed a grief to him—whose sins do indeed trouble him. How painful this sore often is! How it runs night and day! How full of ulcerous matter! How it shrinks from the probe! Most of the Lord's family have a "sore"—each some tender spot—something perhaps known to himself and to God alone—the cause of his greatest grief. It may be some secret slip he has made—some sin he has committed—some word he has

spoken—or some evil thing he has done. He has been entangled, and entrapped, and cast down—and this is his grief and his sore which he feels—and that at times deeply before God. For such Solomon prays, Then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with each man according to all he does, since You know his heart, for You alone know the hearts of men. Yes—God alone knows the heart—He knows it completely—and sees to its very bottom!

What are we, when we have no trials?

The Lord has appointed the path of sorrow for the redeemed to walk in. Why? One purpose is to wean them from the world—another purpose is to show them the weakness of the creature—a third purpose is to make them feel the liberty and vitality of genuine godliness made manifest in their soul's experience.

What are we, when we have no trials? Light, frothy, worldly-minded, carnal, frivolous. We may talk of the things of God, but they are at a distance—there are no solemn feelings—no melting sensations—no real brokenness—no genuine contrition—no weeping at the divine feet—no embracing of Christ in the arms of affection. What can bring a man here? A few dry notions floating to and fro in his brain? That will never bring the life and power of vital godliness into a man's heart. It must be by being 'experimentally acquainted with trouble.' When he is led into the path of tribulation, he then begins to long after, and, in God's own time and way, he begins to drink into, the sweetness of vital godliness, made manifest in his heart by the power of God. When affliction brings a man down, it empties him of all his high thoughts, and lays him low in his own eyes.

Spiritual poverty

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." Matthew 5:3

Spiritual poverty is a miserable feeling of soul-emptiness before God, an inward sinking sensation that there is nothing in our hearts spiritually good, nothing which can deliver us from the justly merited wrath of God, or save us from the lowest hell. To be poor in spirit, then, is to have this wretched emptiness of spirit, this nakedness and destitution of soul before God. He who has never thus known what it is to groan before the Lord with breakings forth of heart as a needy, naked wretch—he who has never felt his miserable destitution and emptiness before the eyes of a heart-searching God—has not yet experienced what it is to be spiritually poor.

The religion of a dead professor

How different the religion of a child of God is, from the religion of a dead professor! The religion of a dead professor—begins in self, and ends in self—begins in his own wisdom, and ends in his own folly—begins in his own strength, and ends in his own weakness—begins in his own righteousness, and ends in his own damnation! There is in him never any going out of soul after God, no secret dealings with the Lord.

But the child of God, though he is often faint, weary, and exhausted with many difficulties, burdens and sorrows—yet he never can be satisfied except in living union and communion with the Lord of life and glory. Everything short of that leaves him empty. All the things of time and sense leave a child of God unsatisfied. Nothing but vital union and communion with the Lord of life, to feel His presence, taste His love, enjoy His favor, see His glory—nothing but this will ever satisfy the

desires of ransomed and regenerated souls. This the Lord indulges His people with.

Have we not leaned upon a thousand things?

"Behold, you trust on the staff of this bruised reed, even on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it." Isaiah 36:6

Have we not leaned upon a thousand things? And what have they proved? Broken reeds that have run into our hands, and pierced us. Our own strength and resolutions—the world and the church—sinners and saints—friends and enemies—have they not all proved, more or less, broken reeds? The more we have leaned upon them, like a man leaning upon a sword, the more have they pierced our souls. The Lord Himself has to wean us—from the world—from friends—from enemies—from self—in order to bring us to lean upon Himself—and every prop He will remove, sooner or later, that we may lean wholly and solely upon His Person, love, blood, and righteousness.

No sight, short of this

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree." 1 Peter 2:24

We beg of the Lord, sometimes, to give us a broken heart—a contrite spirit—a tender conscience—and a humble mind. But it is only a view by faith of what the gracious Redeemer endured upon the cross, when He bore our sins in his own body with all their weight and pressure, and with all the anger of God due to them, that can really melt a hard, and break a stony heart. No sight, short of this, can make sin felt to be hateful—bring tears of godly sorrow out of the eyes, sobs of true repentance out of the bosom, and the deepest, humblest confessions before God as to what dreadful sinners and base backsliders we have been before the eyes of His infinite Purity, Majesty, and Holiness.

Oh, what hope is there for our guilty souls—what refuge from the wrath of God so justly our due—what shelter from the curse of a fiery law, except it be in the cross of Jesus? O for a view of Him revealed to the eyes of our enlightened understanding, as bearing our sins in His own body on the tree!

The penetrating light of the spirit

"For God . . . has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6

"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things." 1 John 2:20

The only saving light is the light of God shining into the soul—giving us to see and know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent." A man may have the clearest light in his judgment, and yet never have the penetrating light of the Spirit producing conviction in his soul. He may have the soundest knowledge of the doctrines of grace, and see the harmonious scheme of salvation—and yet never have by divine teaching, seen a holy God, nor have ever felt the spirituality of God's righteous law condemning him as a transgressor. If we do not have this penetrating light of the Spirit, we shall be sure to go astray. We shall be entangled in some error—plunge into some heresy—imbibe some doctrine of devils—drink into some dreadful

delusion—or fall into some dreadful sin—and have our faith shipwrecked forever.

A false light can but wreck us on the rocks of presumption or despair. But the light of divine life in the soul is accompanied with all the graces of the Spirit. It is the light of the glory of God—the light of Jesus' countenance—and the light of the Spirit's teaching—and therefore an infallible guide and guard. And this infallible pilot will guide the soul to whom it is given safe into the harbor of endless rest and peace.

All true religion

Jesus is our sun, and without Him all is darkness—our life, and without Him all is death—the beginner and finisher of our faith—the substance of our hope—the object of our love. It is the Spirit who quickens us to feel our need of Christ—to seek all our supplies in Him and from Him—to believe in Him unto everlasting life, and thus live a life of faith upon Him. By His secret teachings, inward touches, gracious smiles, soft whispers, sweet promises, manifestations of Christ's glorious Person and work, Christ's agonizing sufferings and dying love—the Holy Spirit draws the heart up to Christ. He thus wins our affections, and setting Christ before our eyes as "the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely One," draws out that love and affection towards Jesus which puts the world under our feet.

All true religion flows from the Spirit's grace, presence and power.

The regenerating operations of the Holy Spirit

From the very nature of the fall, it is impossible for a dead soul to believe in God—know God—or love God. It must be quickened into spiritual life before it can savingly know the only true God. And thus there lies at th

Volume 2

Accepted!

"Accepted in the Beloved." Ephesians 1:6

We are ever looking for something in SELF to make ourselves acceptable to God. We are often sadly cast down and discouraged when we cannot find in ourselves—that holiness—that obedience—that calm submission to the will of God—that serenity of soul—that spirituality—that heavenly-mindedness—which we believe to be acceptable in His sight!

Our crooked tempers—our fretful, peevish minds—our rebellious thoughts—our coldness and barrenness—our alienation from good—our headlong proneness to evil—with the daily feeling that we get no better, but rather worse—make us think that God views us just as we view ourselves! And this brings on great darkness of mind and bondage of spirit—until we seem to lose sight of our acceptance in Christ—and get into the miserable dregs of self—almost ready to quarrel with God because we are so vile, and only get worse as we get older!

Now the more we get into these dregs of self—and the more we keep looking at the dreadful scenes of wreck and ruin which our heart presents to daily view—the farther do we get from the grace of the gospel—and the more do we lose sight of the only ground of our acceptance with God. It is "in the Beloved" that we are accepted—and not for any good words—good works—good thoughts—good hearts—or good intentions of our own!

If our acceptance with God depended on anything in ourselves, we would have to believe we might be children of God today—and children of the devil tomorrow! What, then, is to keep us from sinking altogether into despair, without hope or help? Why, a knowledge of our acceptance "in the Beloved"—independent of everything in us—good or bad!

Blundering & stumbling on in darkness

After the Lord has quickened our souls, for a time we often go blundering on, not knowing there is a Jesus. We think that the way of life is to keep God's commandments—obey the law—cleanse ourselves from sin—reform our lives—cultivate universal holiness in thought, word, and action—and so we go—blundering and stumbling on in darkness—and all the while never get a single step forward.

But when the Lord has allowed us to weary ourselves to find the door, and let us sink lower and lower into the pit of guilt and ruin, from feeling that all our attempts to extricate ourselves have only plunged us deeper and deeper—and when the Spirit of God opens up to the understanding and brings into the soul some spiritual discovery of Jesus, and thus makes known that there is a Savior, a Mediator, and a way of escape—this is the grand turning point in our lives, the first opening in the valley of Achor (trouble), of the door of hope.

When you are in the wilderness

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her."
Hosea 2:14

When you are in the wilderness, you have no friend—no creature help—no worldly comfort—these have all abandoned you. God has led you into the wilderness to bereave you of these earthly ties, of these 'creature refuges and vain hopes,' that He may Himself speak to your soul.

If, then, you are separated from the world by being brought into the wilderness—if you are passing through trials and afflictions—if you are exercised with a variety of temptations—and are brought into that spot where the creature yields neither help nor hope—then you are made to see and feel that nothing but God's voice speaking with power to your soul can give you any solid grounds of rest or peace. But is not this profitable? It may be painful—it is painful—but it is profitable, because by it we learn to look to the Lord and the Lord alone—and this must ever be a blessed lesson to learn for every child of God.

O what crowds of pitiable objects

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:16

What heart can conceive or tongue recount the daily, hourly triumphs of the Lord Jesus Christ's all-conquering grace? We see scarcely a millionth part of what He, as a King on his throne, is daily doing. What a crowd of needy petitioners every moment surrounds His throne! What urgent needs and woes to answer—what cutting griefs and sorrows to assuage—what broken hearts to bind up—what wounded consciences to heal—what countless prayers to hear—what earnest petitions to grant—what stubborn foes to subdue—what guilty fears to quell! What grace, what kindness, what patience, what compassion, what mercy, what love, what power, what authority, does this Almighty Sovereign display! No circumstance is too trifling—no petitioner too insignificant—no case too hard—no difficulty too great—no seeker too importunate—no beggar too ragged—no bankrupt too penniless—no debtor too insolvent—for Him not to notice and not to relieve.

Sitting on His throne of grace His all-seeing eye views all—His almighty hand grasps all—and His loving heart embraces all whom the Father chose—whom He Himself redeemed by His blood—and whom the blessed Spirit has quickened into life by His invincible power. The hopeless—the helpless—the outcasts whom no man cares for—the tossed with tempest and not comforted—the ready to perish—the mourners in Zion—the bereaved widow—the wailing orphan—the sick in body—and still more sick in heart—the racked with hourly pain—the fevered consumptive—the wrestler with death's last struggle.

O what crowds of pitiable objects surround His throne—and all needing a look from His eye—a word from His lips—a smile from His face—a touch from His hand! O could we but see what His grace is—what His grace has—what His grace does—and could we but feel more what it is doing in and for ourselves, we would have more exalted views of the reign of grace now exercised on high by Zion's enthroned King!

Trouble, sorrow & affliction

"And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." Psalm 107:7

Those very times when God's people think they are faring ill, may be the seasons when they are really faring well. For instance, when their souls are bowed down with trouble, it often seems to them that they are faring ill. God's hand appears to be gone out against them. Yet perhaps they never fare better than when under these circumstances of trouble, sorrow and affliction. These things wean them from the world. If their heart and affections were going out after idols—they instrumentally bring them back. If they were hewing out broken cisterns—they dash them all to pieces. If they were setting up, and bowing down to idols in the chambers of imagery, affliction and trouble smite them to pieces before their eyes—take away their gods—and leave them no refuge but the Lord God of hosts.

So that when a child of God thinks he is faring very ill, because burdened with sorrows, temptations, and afflictions—he is never faring so well. The darkest clouds in due time will break, the most puzzling enigmas will sooner or later be unriddled by the blessed Spirit interpreting them—and the darkest providences cleared up—and we shall see that God is in them all—leading and guiding us by the right way, that we may go to a city of habitation.

From a burning hell—to a blissful heaven!

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us." Romans 8:18

What is to be compared with the salvation of the soul? What are riches, honors, health, long life? What are all the pleasures which the world can offer, sin promise, or the flesh enjoy? What is all that men call good or great? What is everything which the eye has seen, or the ear heard, or has entered into the carnal heart of man—put side by side with being saved in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation?

For consider what we are saved FROM, as well as what we are saved UNTO. From a burning hell—to a blissful heaven! From endless wrath—to eternal glory! From the dreadful company of devils and damned spirits, mutually tormenting and tormented—to the blessed companionship of the glorified saints, all perfectly conformed in body and soul to the image of Christ, with thousands and tens of thousands of holy angels—and, above all, to seeing the glorious Son of God as he is, in all the perfection of His beauty, and all the ravishments of His presence and love. To be done forever with all the sorrows, troubles, and afflictions of this life—all the pains and aches of the present clay tabernacle—all the darkness, bondage, and misery of the body of sin and death. To be perfectly holy in body and soul, being in both without spot, or blemish, or any such thing, and ever to enjoy uninterrupted communion with God!

Our own wisdom, righteousness & strength

"Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." 1 Corinthians 3:18

The fruit and effect of divine teaching is to cut in pieces, and root up all our fleshly wisdom, strength, and righteousness. God never means to patch a new piece upon an old garment. All our wisdom, our strength, our righteousness must be torn to pieces! It must all be plucked up by the roots—that a new wisdom, a new strength, and a new righteousness may arise upon its ruins.

But until the Lord is pleased to teach us, we never can part with our own righteousness—never give up our own wisdom—never abandon our own strength. These things are a part and parcel of ourselves—so ingrained within us—so innate in us—so growing with our growth—that we cannot willingly part with an atom of them until the Lord Himself breaks them up, and plucks them away. Then, as He brings into our souls some spiritual knowledge of our own dreadful corruptions and horrible wickedness—our righteousness crumbles away at the divine touch. As He leads us to see and feel our ignorance and folly in a thousand instances, and how unable we are to understand anything aright but by divine teaching—our wisdom fades away. As He shows us our inability to resist temptation and overcome sin, by any exertion of our own—our strength gradually departs, and we become like Samson, when his locks were cut off.

Upon the ruins, then, of our own wisdom, righteousness and strength, does God build up Christ's wisdom, Christ's righteousness, and Christ's strength. But only so far as we are favored with this special teaching are we brought to pass a solemn sentence of condemnation upon our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness—and sincerely seek after the Lord's.

Oh! Sweet grace, blessed grace!

"For by grace are you saved." Ephesians 2:8

We are saved by grace—free grace, rich grace, sovereign grace, distinguishing grace—without one atom of works, without one grain of creature merit, without anything of the flesh. Oh! sweet grace, blessed grace! Oh! what a help—what a strength—what a rest for a poor toiling, striving, laboring soul—to find that grace has done all the work—to feel that grace has triumphed in the cross of Christ—to find that nothing is required, nothing is needed, nothing is to be done!

Dying

"As dying, and, behold, we live." 2 Corinthians 6:9

Though we die, and die daily—yet, behold, we live. And in a sense, the more we die, the more we live. The more we die to self—the more we die to sin. The more we die to pride and self-righteousness—the more we die to creature strength. The more we die to sinful nature—the more we live to grace. This runs all the way through the life and experience of a Christian.

Nature must die, that grace may live. The weeds must be plucked up, that the crop may grow. The flesh must be starved, that the spirit may be fed. The old man must be put off, that the new man may be put on. The deeds of the body must be mortified, that the soul may live unto God. As then we die—we live. The more we die to our own strength, the more we live to Christ's strength. The more we die to creature hope, the more we live to a good hope through grace. The more we die to our own righteousness, the more we live to Christ's righteousness. The more we die to the world, the more we live to and for heaven. This is the grand mystery—that the Christian is always dying, yet always living—and the more he dies, the more he lives. The death of the flesh, is the life of the spirit. The death of sin, is the life of righteousness. The death of the creature, is the very life of God in the soul. "As dying, and, behold, we live."

Which is better?

"You are not your own." 1 Corinthians 6:19

Remember that you must belong to someone. If God is not your master—the devil will be. If grace does not rule—sin will reign. If Christ is not your all in all—the world will be. We must have a master of one kind or another. Which is better—a bounteous benevolent Benefactor—a merciful, loving, and tender Parent—a kind, forgiving Father and Friend—a tender-hearted, compassionate Redeemer? or a cruel devil, a miserable world, and a wicked, vile, abominable heart? Which is better—to live under the sweet constraints of the dying love of a dear Redeemer—under gospel influences—gospel principles—gospel promises—and gospel encouragements? or to live with sin in our heart, binding us in iron chains to the judgment of the great day?

Even taking the 'present life'—there is more real pleasure, satisfaction, and solid happiness in half an hour with God—in reading his Word with a believing heart, in finding access to His sacred presence, in knowing something of His favor and mercy—than in all the delights of sin, all the lusts of the flesh, all the pride of life, and all the amusements that the world has ever devised to kill time and cheat self—thinking, by a deathbed repentance, at last to cheat the devil.

There must be continual trials

"The Lord tries the righteous." Psalm 11:5

To keep water fresh, it must be perpetually running. And to keep the life of God up in the soul, there must be continual trials. This is the reason why the Lord's people have so many conflicts, trials, painful exercises, sharp sorrows, and deep temptations—to keep them alive unto God—to bring them out of, and to keep them out of that slothful, sluggish, wretched state of carnal security. The Lord, therefore, tries the righteous. He will not allow His people to be at ease in Zion—to be settled on their lees—and get into a wretched Moabitish state. He therefore sends upon them afflictions, tribulations, and trials—and allows Satan to tempt and harass them.

Personal, spiritual, experimental knowledge

It is our dim, scanty, and imperfect knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in His eternal love—and in His grace and glory—which leaves us so often cold, lifeless, and dead in our affections towards Him. If there were more blessed revelations to our soul of the Person and work, grace and glory, beauty and blessedness of the Lord Jesus Christ—it is impossible but that we would more and more warmly and tenderly fall in love with Him—for He is the most glorious object that the eyes of faith can see! He fills heaven with the resplendent beams of His glorious majesty—and has ravished the hearts of thousands of His dear family upon earth by the manifestations of His bleeding, dying love. Just in proportion to our personal, spiritual, experimental knowledge of Him, will be our love to Him.

Help from the sanctuary

"May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble. May the name of the God of Jacob set you up on high, send you help from the sanctuary, grant you support from Zion." Psalm 20:1, 2

When the soul has to pass through the trying hour of temptation, it needs help from the sanctuary. All other help leaves the soul just where it found it. Help is sent from the sanctuary because his name has been from all eternity, registered in the Lamb's book of life—engraved upon the palms of His hands—borne on His shoulder—and worn on His heart. Communications of life and grace from the sanctuary produce spirituality and heavenly-mindedness. The breath of heaven in his

soul draws his affections upward—weans him from earth—and makes him a pilgrim and a sojourner here below, looking for a city with eternal foundations—a city designed and built by God!

Holy wrestling

Wherever the Lord brings trials upon the soul, He pours out upon it the spirit of grace and supplication. If the child of God has a burden—if he is laboring under a strong temptation—if his soul is passing through some pressing trial—he is not satisfied with merely going through a 'form of prayer.' There is at such times and seasons, a holy wrestling—there are fervent desires—there are unceasing groans—there is a laboring to enter into rest—there is a struggling after deliverance—there is a crying unto the Lord—until He appears and manifests Himself in the soul.

A disciple of Jesus

A disciple of Jesus is one who is admitted by the Lord Jesus into His school—whom He Himself condescends personally to instruct—and who therefore learns of Him to be meek and lowly of heart. A disciple of Jesus is one who sits meekly at the Redeemer's feet—receiving into his heart the gracious words which fall from His lips.

But a true and sincere disciple not only listens to his Master's instructions, but acts as He bids. So a disciple of Jesus is one who copies his Master's example—and is conformed to his Master's image. A disciple of Jesus is also characterized by the love which he bears to his Master. He is one who treasures up the words of Christ in his heart—ponders over His precious promises—and delights in His glorious Person, love, and blood. A disciple of Jesus is one who bears some reflection to the image of his heavenly Master. He carries it about with him wherever he goes, that men may take knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus. The true disciple shines before men with some sparkles of the glory of the Son of God.

To have some of these divine features stamped upon the heart, lip, and life is to be a disciple of Jesus. To be much with Jesus is to be made like unto Jesus—to sit at Jesus' feet is to drink in Jesus' words—to lean upon Jesus' bosom is to feel the warm heart of Jesus pulsating with love—and to feel this pulsation, causes the heart of the disciple to beat in tender and affectionate unison. To look up to Jesus, is to see a face more marred than the sons of men—yet a face beaming with heavenly beauty, dignity, and glory. To be a disciple of Jesus, is to copy His example—to do the things pleasing in His sight—and to avoid the things which He abhors. To be a disciple of Jesus, is to be as meek as He was—humble as He was—lowly as He was—self-denying as He was—separate from the world as He was—living a life of communion with God, as He lived when He walked here below.

To take a worm of the earth and make him a disciple of Jesus is the greatest privilege God can bestow upon man! To select an obstinate, ungodly, perverse rebel, and place him in the school of Christ and at the feet of Jesus—is the highest favor God can bestow upon any child of the dust. How unsurpassingly great must be that kindness whereby the Lord condescends to bestow His grace on an enemy—and to soften and meeken him by His Spirit—and thus cause him to grow up into the image and likeness of His own dear Son. Compared with this high privilege, all earthly honors, titles and robes sink into utter insignificance!

Sovereign, supreme disposal

"He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things."
Ephesians 1:22

God has put all things, events, and circumstances under the authority of Christ! How vast—how numerous—how complicated are the various events and circumstances which attend the Christian here below, as he travels onward to his heavenly home! But if all things are put under Jesus' feet, there cannot be a single circumstance over which He has not supreme control. Everything in providence and everything in grace are alike subject to His disposal. There is not a trial—a temptation—an affliction of body or soul—a loss—a cross—a painful bereavement—a vexation—a grief—a disappointment—a case, state or condition—which is not put under Jesus' feet.

He has sovereign, supreme disposal over all events and circumstances. As possessed of infinite knowledge He sees them—as possessed of infinite wisdom He can manage them—and as possessed of infinite power He can dispose and direct them for our good and His own glory. How much trouble and anxiety would we save ourselves, could we firmly believe, realize, and act on this! If we could see by the eye of faith that every foe and every fear—every difficulty and perplexity—every trying or painful circumstance—every looked-for or unlooked-for event—every source of care, whether at present or in prospect—are all put under His feet at His sovereign disposal—what a load of anxiety and care would be often taken off our shoulders!

You must not love one of these glittering baubles

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." 1 John 2:15

This is a very wide sentence. It stretches forth a hand of vast grasp. It places us, as it were, upon a high mountain, and it says to us, "Look around you—there is not one of these things which you must love." It takes us, again, to the streets of a crowded city—it shows us shop windows filled with objects of beauty and ornament—it points us to all the wealth and grandeur of the rich and noble, and everything that the human heart admires and loves. And having thus set before us, it says, "None of these things are for you. You must not love one of these glittering baubles—you must not touch one of them, or scarcely look at them, lest, as with Achan, the golden wedge and the Babylonish garment should tempt you to take them and hide them in your tent."

The precept takes us through the world as a mother takes a child through a bazaar with playthings and ornaments on every side, and says—"You must not touch one of these things." In some such similar way the precept would, as it were, take us through the world—and when we had looked at all its playthings and its ornaments, it would sound in our ears—"Don't touch any one of them—they are not yours—not for you to enjoy—not for you even to covet!" Can anything less than this be intended by those words which should be ever sounding in the ears of the children of God—Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world?

One unmingled scene of happiness & pleasure

"In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." John 14:2

O that we could lift our eyes to those blessed abodes—those mansions of heavenly bliss where no sorrow intrudes, where sin is unknown, where tears are wiped from off all faces, where there is no languishing body, no wasting sickness, no pining soul, no doubt, no fear, no darkness, no

distress—but one unmingled scene of happiness and pleasure—and the whole soul and body are engaged in singing the praises of the Lamb!

And what crowns the whole—there is the eternal enjoyment of those pleasures which are at the right hand of God forevermore! But how lost are we in the contemplation of these things—and though our imagination may seem to stretch itself beyond the utmost conception of the mind, into the countless ages of a never-ending eternity, yet are we baffled with the thought—though faith embraces the blessed truth. But in that happy land, the immortal soul and the immortal body will combine their powers and faculties to enjoy to the uttermost all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

The rod was dipped in love

"I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him." Micah 7:9

It is a view of our sins against God that enables us to bear the indignation of the Lord against us and them. As long as we are left to a spirit of pride and self-righteousness, we murmur at the Lord's dealings when His hand lies heavy upon us. But let us only truly feel what we rightly deserve—that will silence at once all murmuring. You may murmur and rebel sometimes at your hard lot in providence. But if you feel what you deserve—it will make you water with 'tears of repentance' the hardest cross.

So in grace, if you feel the weight of your sins, and mourn and sigh because you have sinned against God, you can lift up your hands sometimes with holy wonder at God's patient mercy that He has borne with you so long—that He has not smitten you to the earth, or sent your guilty soul to hell. You will see, also, that the heaviest strokes were but fatherly chastenings—that the rod was dipped in love—and that it was for your good and His glory that it was laid on you. When this sense of merited indignation comes into the soul, then meekness and submission come with it, and it can say with the prophet—"I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him." You would not escape the rod if you might.

The best teacher

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John 1:17

The way to learn truth is to be much in prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ. Beg of Him to teach you Himself—for He is the best teacher. The words which He speaks, they are spirit and life. What He writes upon our hearts is written in characters which will stand every storm and live at last. We forget what we learn from 'man'—but we never forget what we learn from Jesus. 'Men' may deceive—Christ cannot.

Though you may receive truth from a minister's lips, it is always mixed with human infirmity. But what you get from the lips of Jesus, you get in all its purity and power. It comes warm from Him—it comes cold from 'men.' It drops like the rain and distills like the dew from His mouth—it comes only second-hand from men. If I preach to you the truth, I preach indeed as the Lord enables me to speak. But it is He who must speak with power to your souls to do you any real good. Look then away from me—look beyond me—to Him who alone can teach us both. By looking to Jesus in the inmost feelings of your soul, you will draw living truth from out of His bosom into your own—from His heart into your heart—and thus will come feelingly and experimentally to know the

blessedness of His own declaration—"I am the truth."

Buried in the grave of carnality & worldliness

"If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God." Colossians 3:1

How many there are even of those who desire to fear God who are kept down by the world, and to whom it has not lost its attractive power. They are held fast, at least for a time, by worldly business, or entangled by worldly people or worldly engagements—their partners in business or their partners in life—their carnal relatives or their worldly children—their numerous connections or their social habits—their strong passions or their deep-rooted prejudices—all bind and fetter them down to earth.

There they grovel and lie amid the smoke and stir of this dim spot which men call earth—and so bound are they with the cords of their sins, that they scarcely seek deliverance from them, or ever desire to rise beyond the mists and fogs of this dim spot into a purer air so as to breathe a heavenly atmosphere, and rise up with Jesus from the grave of their corruptions. But they shall never be buried in the grave of carnality and worldliness.

A solitary drop of this holy anointing oil

"The anointing which you received from Him remains in you, and you don't need for anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in Him." 1 John 2:27

Have you ever had a solitary drop of this holy anointing oil fall upon your heart? One drop, if it be but a drop, will sanctify you forever to the service of God. There was not much of the holy anointing oil used for the service of the tabernacle, when we consider the size and quantity of what had to be consecrated. When he went through the sacred work, he touched one vessel after another with a drop of oil—for one drop sanctified the vessel to the service of the tabernacle. There was no repetition of the consecration needed—it abode. So if you ever had a drop of God's love shed abroad in your heart—a drop of the anointing to teach you the truth as it is in Jesus—a drop to penetrate, to soften, to heal, to feed, and give light, life, and power to your soul—you have the unction from the Holy One—you know all things which are for your salvation, and by that same holy oil you have been sanctified and made fit for an eternal inheritance.

Practical atheists

We profess to believe in an All-mighty, All-present, All-seeing God. But we would be highly offended if a person said to us, "You do not really believe that God sees everything—that He is everywhere present—that He is an Almighty Jehovah." We would almost think that he was taking us for an atheist! And yet 'practical atheists,' we daily prove ourselves to be. For instance, we profess to believe that God sees everything. And yet we are plotting and planning as though He saw nothing. We profess to know that God can do everything. And yet we are always cutting out schemes, and carving out contrivances, as though He were like the gods of the heathen, looking on and taking no notice. We profess to believe that God is everywhere present to relieve every difficulty and bring His people out of every trial. And yet when we get into the difficulty and into the trial—we speak, think, and act, as though there were no such omnipresent God, who knows the

circumstances of our case, and can stretch forth His hand to bring us out of it.

Thus the Lord is obliged to thrust us into trials and afflictions, because we are such blind fools, that we cannot learn what a God we have to deal with, until we come experimentally into those spots of difficulty and trial, out of which none but such a God can deliver us. This, then, is one reason why the Lord often plunges His people so deeply into a sense of sin. It is to show them what a wonderful salvation from the guilt, filth, and power of sin, there is in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the same reason, too, they walk in such scenes of temptation. It is in order to show them what a wonder-working God He is, in bringing them out. This too is the reason why many of them are so harassed and plagued. It is that they may not live and act as though there were no God to go to—no Almighty friend to consult—no kind Jesus to rest their weary heads upon.

It is in order to teach them experimentally and inwardly those lessons of grace and truth which they never would know until the Lord, as it were, thus compels them to learn—and actually forces them to believe what they profess to believe. Such pains is He obliged to take with us—such poor scholars, such dull creatures we are. No child at a school ever gave his master a thousandth part of the trouble that we have given the Lord to teach us. In order, then, to teach us what a merciful and compassionate God He is—in order to open up the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of His love—He is compelled to treat, at times, His people very roughly—and handle them very sharply. He is obliged to make very great use of His rod, because He sees that foolishness is so bound up in the hearts of His children—that nothing but the repeated rod of correction will ever drive it far from them!

Dead in sin

"You were made alive when you were dead in trespasses and sins." Ephesians 2:1

To be dead in sin is to have no present part or lot with God—no knowledge of Him—no faith, no trust, no hope in Him—no sense of His presence—no reverence of His awesome Majesty—no desire after Him or inclination toward Him—no trembling at His word—no longing for His grace—no care or concern for His glory. To be dead in sin is to be as a beast before Him, intent like a brute on satisfying the cravings of lust, or the movements of mere animal passion—without any thought or concern what shall be the outcome, and to be bent upon carrying out into action every selfish purpose, as if we were self creators—our own judge—our own lord—and our own god. O what a terrible state is it to be thus dead in sin, and not to know it—not to feel it—to be in no way sensible of its present danger and certain end—unless delivered from it by a mighty act of sovereign power! It is this lack of all sense and feeling which makes the death of the soul to be but the prelude to that second death which stretches through a boundless eternity.

Continual salvation

"I cried unto You; save me, and I will keep Your testimonies." Psalm 119:146

If you know anything for yourself, inwardly and experimentally of the evils of your heart—the power of sin—the strength of temptation—the subtlety of your unwearied foe—and that daily conflict between nature and grace, the flesh and the spirit, which is the peculiar mark of the living family of heaven—you will find and feel your need of salvation as a daily reality. There is present salvation—an inward, experimental, and continual salvation communicated out of the fullness of

Christ as a risen Mediator. You need to be daily and almost hourly saved from the guilt, filth, power, love, and practice of indwelling sin. "I cried unto You; save me, and I will keep Your testimonies."

The fatal mistake of thousands

The fatal mistake of thousands is to offer unto God the fruits of the flesh—instead of the fruits of the Spirit. Fleshly holiness, fleshly exertions, fleshly prayers, fleshly duties, fleshly religious forms, fleshly zeal—these are what men consider good works, and present them as such to God. But well may He who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity, say to all such fleshly workers, 'And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?' All that the flesh can do is evil, for every imagination of man's heart is only evil continually—and to present the fruits of this filthy heart to the Lord Almighty, is to offer defiled food upon His altar!

A broken heart—a contrite spirit—a tender conscience—a filial fear of God—a desire to please Him—a dread to offend the great God of heaven—a sense of the evil of sin—a desire to be delivered from sin's dominion—a mourning over our repeated backslidings—grief at being so often entangled in our lusts and passions—an acquaintance with our helplessness and weakness, simplicity and godly sincerity—a hanging upon grace for daily supplies—watching the hand of Providence—a singleness of eye to the glory of God—these are a few of the fruits of the Spirit.

The great secret of vital godliness

The great secret of vital godliness is to be nothing—that Christ may be all in all. Every stripping, sifting, and emptying—every trial, exercise and temptation that the soul passes through, has but one object—to beat out of man's heart that cursed spirit of independence which the devil breathed into him when he said, "You shall be as gods." A man must well near be bled to death before this venom can be drained out of his veins!

If the devil ever feels joy

If the devil ever feels joy—it is in making souls miserable. The cries of the damned are his music. Their curses and blasphemies are his songs of triumph. Their anguish and despair are his wretched feast.

Fear not!

"Tell those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will. . . . come and save you." Isaiah 35:4

"Fear not!" "Ah! but Lord," the soul says, "I do fear. I fear myself more than anybody. I fear—my base, wicked heart—my strong lusts and passions—my numerous inward enemies—the snares of Satan—the temptations of the world. I do fear. I cannot help but fear." Still the Lord says, "Fear not!" Here is a child trembling before a large mastiff dog—but the father says, "Do not fear, he will not hurt you, only keep close to me." Who is that dog but Satan, that huge mastiff, whose jaws are reeking with blood? If the Lord says, "Fear not!" why need we fear him? He is a chained enemy. But how the timid soul needs the divine "Fear not!" For without Him, it is all weakness—with Him, all strength; without Him, all trembling—with Him, all boldness.

The desire of our soul

"The desire of our soul is to Your name, and to the remembrance of You." Isaiah 26:8

How sweet and expressive is the phrase, "The desire of our soul." How it seems to carry our feelings with it! How it seems to describe the longings and utterings of a soul into which God has breathed the spirit of grace and mercy! "The desire of our soul"—the breathing of our heart, the longing of our inmost being, the cry, the sigh, the panting of our new nature, the heavings, gaspings, lookings, longings, pantings, hungerings, thirstings, and ventings forth of the new man of grace—all are expressed in those sweet and blessed words—"The desire of our soul."

And what a mercy it is, that there should ever be in us "the desire" of a living soul—that though the righteous dealings of God are painful and severe, running contrary to everything nature loves—yet that with all these, there should be dropped into the heart that mercy, love, and grace, which draw forth the desire of the soul toward the Name of God. This is expressed in the words that follow—"With my soul have I desired You in the night; yes, with my spirit within me I will seek You early." Is your soul longing after the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it ever, in the night season, panting after the manifestation of His presence? hungering and thirsting after the dropping of some word from His lips—some sweet whisper of His love to your soul? These are marks of saving grace. The carnal, the unregenerate, the ungodly, have no such desires and feelings as these!

O Self! Self!

Oh, to be kept from myself—my vile, proud, lustful, hypocritical, worldly, covetous, presumptuous, obscene self. O Self! Self! Your desperate wickedness, your depravity, your love of sin, your abominable pollutions, your monstrous heart-wickedness, your wretched deadness, hardness, blindness, and indifference. You are a treacherous villain, and, I fear, always will be such!

That dear, idolized creature

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live." Galatians 2:20

The crucifixion of self is indispensable to following Christ. What is so dear to a man as himself? Yet this beloved self is to be crucified. Whether it be proud self—or ambitious self—or selfish self—or covetous self—or, what is harder still—religious self—that dear, idolized creature, which has been the subject of so much fondling, petting, pampering, nursing—this fondly loved self has to be taken out of our bosom by the hand of God, and nailed to Christ's cross! The same grace which pardons sin also subdues it! To be crucified with Christ! To have everything that the flesh loves and idolizes put to death! How can a man survive such a process? "Nevertheless I live!" As the world, sin, and self are crucified, subdued, and subjugated by the power of the cross, the life of God springs up with new vigor in the soul. Here, then, is the great secret of vital godliness—that the more that sin and self, and the world are mortified, the more do holiness and spirituality of mind, heavenly affections and gracious desires spring up and flourish in the soul. O! blessed death! O! still more blessed life! I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live.

Unquenched and unquenchable!

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Song of Solomon 8:7

The bride uses a figure which shall express the insuperable strength of divine love against all opposition—and she therefore compares it to a fire which burns and burns unquenched and unquenchable, whatever be the amount of water poured upon it. Thus the figure expresses the flame of holy love which burned in the heart of the Redeemer as unquenchable by any opposition made to it.

How soon is earthly love cooled by opposition! A little ingratitude, a few hard speeches, cold words or even cold looks, seem often almost sufficient to quench love that once shone warm and bright. And how often, too, even without these cold waters thrown upon it, does it appear as if ready to die out by itself. But the love of Christ was unquenchable by all those waters. Not all the ingratitude, unbelief, or coldness of His people could quench His eternal love to them! He knew what the Church was in herself, and ever would be—how cold and wandering her affections—how roving her desires—how backsliding her heart! But all these waters could not extinguish His love! It still burnt as a holy flame in His bosom, unquenched, unquenchable! "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." Song of Solomon 8:7

Crawl like a serpent, roar like a lion

"That no advantage may be gained over us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes." 2 Corinthians 2:11

Satan well knows both how to allure and how to attack—for he can crawl like a serpent, and he can roar like a lion! He has snares whereby he entangles, and fiery darts whereby he impales. Most men are easily led captive by him at his will, ensnared without the least difficulty in the traps that he lays for their feet—for they are as ready to be caught as he is to catch them! Why would Satan need to roar against them as a lion, if he can wind himself around them and bite them as a serpent?

If you want to see what sin really is

To cast the sinning angels out of heaven—to banish Adam from Paradise—to destroy the old world by a flood—to burn Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven—these examples of God's displeasure against sin were not sufficient to express His condemnation of it. He would therefore take another way of making it manifest. And what was this? By sending His own Son out of His bosom, and offering Him as a sacrifice for sin upon the tree at Calvary, He would make it manifest how He abhorred sin, and how His righteous character must forever condemn it. See here the love of God to poor guilty man in not sparing His own Son—and yet the hatred of God against sin, in condemning it in the death of Jesus.

It is almost as if God said, "If you want to see what sin really is, you cannot see it in the depths of hell. I will show you sin in blacker colors still—you shall see it in the sufferings of My dear Son—in His agonies of body and soul—and in what He as a holy, innocent Lamb endured under My wrath, when He consented to take the sinner's place." What wondrous wisdom—what depths of love—what treasures of mercy—what heights of grace—were thus revealed and brought to light in God's unsparing condemnation of sin, and yet in His full and free pardon of the sinner!

If you have ever had a view by faith of the suffering Son of God in the garden and upon the cross—if you have ever seen the wrath of God due to you, falling upon the head of the

God-Man—and viewed a bleeding, agonizing Immanuel—then you have seen and felt in the depths of your conscience what a dreadful thing sin is. Then the broken-hearted child of God looks unto Him whom he has pierced, and mourns and grieves bitterly for Him, as for a firstborn son who has died. Under this sight he feels what a dreadful thing sin is. "Oh," he says, "did God afflict His dear Son? Did Jesus, the darling of God, endure all these sufferings and sorrows to save my soul from the bottomless pit? O, can I ever hate sin enough? Can I ever grieve and mourn over it enough? Can my stony heart ever be dissolved into contrition enough, when by faith I see the agonies, and hear the groans of the suffering, bleeding Lamb of God?"

Christians hate their sins. They hate that sinful, that dreadfully sinful flesh of theirs which has so often, which has so continually, betrayed them into sin. And thus they join with God in passing condemnation upon the whole of their flesh—upon all its actings and workings—upon all its thoughts and words and deeds—and hate it as the prolific parent of that sin which crucified Christ, and torments and plagues them.

Hard-hearted, cold-blooded, wise-headed

We are surrounded with snares. Temptations lie spread every moment in our path. These snares and these temptations are so suitable to the lusts of our flesh, that we would certainly fall into them, and be overcome by them, but for the restraining providence or the preserving grace of God. The Christian sees this—the Christian feels this. The hard-hearted, cold-blooded, wise-headed professor sees no snares. He is entangled in them, he falls by them, and not repenting of his sins or forsaking them, he makes utter shipwreck concerning the faith.

The child of God sees the snare—feels the temptation—knows the evil of his heart—and is conscious that if God does not hold him up, he shall stumble and fall. As then a burnt child dreads the fire, so he dreads the consequence of being left for a moment to himself—and the more is he afraid that he shall fall. If his eyes are more widely opened to see the purity of God—the blessedness of Christ—the efficacy of atoning blood—and the beauties of holiness—the more also does he see the evil of sin, the dreadful consequences of being entangled therein. And not only so, but his own helplessness and weakness and inability to stand against temptation in his own strength. And all these feelings combine to raise up a more earnest cry—Hold me up, and I shall be safe!

Our sanctuary

"Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." Ezekiel 11:16

Every place in which the Lord manifests Himself, is a sanctuary to a child of God. Jesus is now our sanctuary, for He is the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands. We see the power and glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Every place is a sanctuary, where God manifests Himself in power and glory to the soul. Moses, doubtless, had often passed by the bush which grew in Horeb—it was but a common thorn bush, in no way distinguished from the other bushes of the thicket. But on one solemn occasion it was all in a flame of fire, for the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the

midst—and though it burned with fire, it was not consumed. God being in the bush, the ground round about was holy, and Moses was bidden to take off his shoes from his feet. Was not this a sanctuary to Moses? It was—for a holy God was there!

Thus wherever God manifests Himself, that becomes a sanctuary to a believing soul. We don't need places made holy by the ceremonies of man—but places made holy by the presence of God! Then a stable, a hovel, a hedge, any unadorned corner may be, and is a sanctuary, when God fills your heart with His sacred presence, and causes every holy feeling and gracious affection to spring up in your soul.

Poor, miserable, paltry works of a polluted worm!

"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Isaiah 64:6

We once thought that we could gain heaven by our own righteousness. We strictly attended to our religious duties, and sought by these and various other means to recommend ourselves to the favor of God, and induce Him to reward us with heaven for our sincere attempts to obey His commandments. And by these religious performances we thought we would surely be able to make a ladder whereby we could climb up to heaven.

This was our tower of Babel, whose top was to reach unto heaven, and by mounting which, we thought to scale the stars. But the same Lord who stopped the further building of the tower of Babel, by confounding their speech and scattering them abroad on the face of the earth—began to confound our speech, so that we could not pray, or talk, or boast as before—and to scatter all our religion like the chaff of the threshing floor. Our mouths were stopped—we became guilty before God—and our bricks and mortar became a pile of confusion!

When, then, the Lord was pleased to discover to our souls by faith, His being, majesty, greatness, holiness, and purity—and thus gave us a corresponding sense of our filthiness and folly—then all our creature religion and natural piety which we once counted as gain, we began to see was but loss—that our very religious duties and observances, so far from being for us, were actually against us—and instead of pleading for us before God as so many deeds of righteousness, were so polluted and defiled by sin perpetually mixed with them, that our very prayers were enough to sink us into hell, had we no other iniquities to answer for in heart, lip or life.

But when we had a view by faith of the Person, work, love, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ—then we began more plainly and clearly to see, with what religious toys we had been so long amusing ourselves—and what is far worse, mocking God by them! We had been secretly despising Jesus and His sufferings—Jesus and His death—Jesus and His righteousness—and setting up the poor, miserable, paltry works of a polluted worm in the place of the finished work of the Son of God.

Mere toys & baubles

True religion must be everything or nothing with us. In religion, indifference is ruin—neglect is destruction. Of all losses, the loss of the soul is the only one that is utterly irreparable and irremediable. You may lose property, but you may recover the whole or a portion of it—you may lose health, but you may be restored to a larger measure of bodily strength than before your

illness—you may lose friends, but you may obtain new ones, and those more sincere and valuable than any whom you have lost. But if you lose your soul, what is to make up for that loss?

Do you ever feel what a tremendous stake heaven or hell is? Have you ever felt that to gain heaven is to gain everything that can make the soul eternally happy—and to lose heaven is not only to lose eternal bliss, but to sink down into unfathomable, everlasting, unutterable woe? It is this believing sight and pressing sense of eternal things—it is this weighty, at times overpowering, feeling that they carry in their bosom an immortal soul, which often makes the children of God view the things of time and sense as mere toys and baubles, trifles lighter than vanity, and pursuits empty as air, and gives them to feel that the things of eternity are the only solid, enduring realities.

Heavenly dew

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain; My speech shall condense as the dew." Deuteronomy 32:2

The dew falls imperceptibly. No man can see it fall. Yet its effects are visible in the morning. So it is with the blessing of God upon His Word. It penetrates the heart without noise—it sinks deep into the conscience without anything visible going on. And as the dew opens the pores of the earth and refreshes the ground after the heat of a burning day, making vegetation lift up its drooping head, so it is with the blessing of God resting upon the soul.

Heavenly dew comes imperceptibly, falls quietly, and is manifested chiefly by its effects, as softening, opening, penetrating, and secretly causing every grace of the Spirit to lift up its drooping head. Whenever the Lord may have been pleased to bless our souls, either in hearing, in reading, or in private meditation, have not these been some of the effects? Silent, quiet, imperceptible, yet producing an evident impression—softening the heart when hard—refreshing it when dry—melting it when obdurate—secretly keeping the soul alive—so that it neither withers up by the burning sun of temptation, nor dies for lack of grace. May God give you the dew of heaven!

Coming up from the wilderness

"Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Song of Solomon 8:5

To come up from the wilderness, is to come up out of OURSELVES—for we are ourselves the wilderness! It is our wilderness heart that makes the world what it is to us—our own barren frames—our own bewildered minds—our own worthlessness and inability—our own lack of spiritual fruitfulness—our own trials, temptations, and exercises—our own hungering and thirsting after righteousness. In a word, it is what passes in our own bosom that makes the world to us a dreary desert.

Carnal people find the world no wilderness. It is an Eden to them! Or at least they try hard to make it so. They seek all their pleasure from, and build all their happiness upon it. Nor do they dream of any other harvest of joy and delight, but what may be repaid in this 'happy valley,' where youth, health, and good spirits are ever imagining new scenes of gratification.

But the child of grace, exercised with a thousand difficulties, passing through many temporal and spiritual sorrows, and inwardly grieved with his own lack of heavenly fruitfulness, finds the wilderness within. But he still comes up out of it, and this he does by looking upward with believing eyes to Him who alone can bring him out. He comes up out of his own righteousness, and shelters

himself under Christ's righteousness. He comes up out of his own strength, and trusts to Christ's strength. He comes up out of his own wisdom, and hangs upon Jesus' wisdom. He comes up out of his own tempted, tried, bewildered, and perplexed condition, to find rest and peace in the finished work of the Son of God.

And thus he comes up out of the wilderness of self, not actually, but experimentally. Every desire of his soul is to be delivered from his 'wilderness sickening sight' that he has of sin and of himself as a sinner. Every aspiration after Jesus, every longing look, earnest sigh, piteous cry, or laboring groan—all are a coming up from the wilderness. His turning his back upon an ungodly world—renouncing its pleasures, its honors, its pride, and its ambition—seeking communion with Jesus as his chief delight—and accounting all things but loss and rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus his Lord as revealed to his soul by the power of God—this, also, is coming up from the wilderness.

When we gaze upon the lifeless corpse

From the cradle to the coffin, affliction and sorrow are the appointed lot of man. He comes into the world with a wailing cry, and he often leaves it with an agonizing groan! Rightly is this earth called "a valley of tears," for it is wet with them in infancy, youth, manhood, and old age. In every land, in every climate, scenes of misery and wretchedness everywhere meet the eye, besides those deeper griefs and heart-rending sorrows which lie concealed from all observation. So that we may well say of the life of man that, like Ezekiel's scroll, it is "written with lamentations, and mourning and woe."

But this is not all. The scene does not end here! We see up to death, but we do not see beyond death. To see a man die without Christ is like standing at a distance, and seeing a man fall from a lofty cliff—we see him fall, but we do not see the crash on the rocks below. So we see an unsaved man die, but when we gaze upon the lifeless corpse, we do not see how his soul falls with a mighty crash upon the rock of God's eternal justice! When his temporal trials come to a close—his eternal sorrows only begin! After weeks or months of sickness and pain, the pale, cold face may lie in calm repose under the coffin lid—when the soul is only just entering upon an eternity of woe!

But is it all thus dark and gloomy both in life and death? Is heaven always hung with a canopy of black? Are there no beams of light, no rays of gladness, that shine through these dark clouds of affliction, misery, and woe that are spread over the human race? Yes! there is one point in this dark scene out of which beams of light and rays of glory shine! God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There, on the other side, is my solitary soul

"For what will it profit a man, if he will gain the whole world, and forfeit his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:26

Here is my scale of profit and loss. I have a soul to be saved or lost. What then shall I give in exchange for my soul? What am I profited if I gain the whole world and lose my soul? This deep conviction of a soul to be saved or lost lies at the root of all our religion. Here, on one side, is the WORLD and all its profits—its pleasures—its charms—its smiles—its winning ways—its comforts—its luxuries—its honors—to gain which is the grand struggle of human life. There, on the

other side, is my solitary SOUL—to live after death, forever and ever, when the world and all its pleasures and profits will sink under the wrath of the Almighty. And this dear soul of mine—my very self, my only self, my all—must be lost or saved!

Even your own relatives think you are almost insane

"The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him."
John 14:17

The world—that is, the world dead in sin, and the world dead in profession—men destitute of the life and power of God—must have something that it can see. And, as heavenly things can only be seen by heavenly eyes, they cannot receive the things which are invisible.

Now this explains why a religion that presents itself with a degree of beauty and grandeur to the natural eye will always be received by the world—while a spiritual, internal, heartfelt and experimental religion will always be rejected. The world can receive a religion that consists of forms, rites, and ceremonies. These are things seen. Beautiful buildings, painted windows, pealing organs, melodious choirs, the pomp and parade of an earthly priesthood, and a whole apparatus of 'religious ceremony,' carry with them something that the natural eye can see and admire. The world receives all this 'external religion' because it is suitable to the natural mind and intelligible to the reasoning faculties.

But the quiet—inward—experimental—divine religion—which presents no attractions to the outward eye, but is wrought in the heart by a divine operation—the world cannot receive this—because it presents nothing that the natural eye can rest upon with pleasure, or is adapted to gratify their general idea of what religion is or should be. Do not marvel, then, that worldly professors despise a religion wrought in the soul by the power of God. Do not be surprised if even your own relatives think you are almost insane, when you speak of the consolations of the Spirit, or of the teachings of God in your soul. They cannot receive these things, for they have no experience of them—and being such as are altogether opposed to the carnal mind, they reject them with enmity and scorn.

Straight paths

"Make straight paths for your feet." Hebrews 12:13

Surrounded as we are with a crooked generation, professing and profane, whose ways we are but too apt to learn—beset on every hand by temptations—to turn aside into some crooked path, to feed our pride, to indulge our lusts, to gratify our covetousness—blinded and seduced sometimes by the god of this world—hardened at other times by the deceitfulness of sin—here misled by the example, and there bewitched by the flattery of some friend or companion—at one time confused and bewildered in our judgment of right and wrong—at another time entangled, half resisting, half complying, in some snare of the wicked one—what a struggle have some of us had to make straight paths for our feet—and what pain and grief that we should ever have made crooked ones. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had nearly slipped." "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay. He set my feet upon a rock, and gave me a firm place to stand."

Have nothing to do with them

"But mixed themselves with the nations, and learned their works. They served their idols, which became a snare to them." Psalm 106:35, 36

The 'carnal professors' of the day see nothing wrong, nothing amiss, nothing inconsistent in their conduct or spirit—though they are sunk in worldliness, carnality or covetousness! But where there is divine life, where the blessed Spirit moves upon the heart with His sacred operations and secret influences, there will be light to see, and a conscience to feel, what is wrong, sinful, inconsistent, and improper.

It is but too evident that we cannot be mixed up with the professors of the day without drinking, in some measure, into their spirit and being more or less influenced by their example. We can scarcely escape the influence of those with whom we come much and frequently into contact. If they are dead, they will often benumb us with their corpse-like coldness. If they are light and trifling, they will often entangle us in their carnal levity. If they are worldly and covetous, they may afford us a shelter and an excuse for our own worldliness and covetousness.

Abhor that loose profession—that ready compliance with everything which feeds the pride, worldliness, covetousness, and lusts of our depraved nature—which so stamps the present day with some of its most perilous and dreadful characters. They have a mere form of godliness, but deny the power. Have nothing to do with them!

The foulest filth under the cleanest cloak

"Take heed therefore to yourselves!" Acts 20:28

There are few Christians who have not ever found SELF to be their greatest enemy. The pride, unbelief, hardness, and impenitence of a man's own heart—the deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and wickedness of his own fallen nature—the lusts and passions, filth and folly of his own carnal mind—will not only ever be his greatest burden, but will ever prove his most dreaded foe!

Enemies we shall have from outside, and we may at times keenly feel their bitter speeches and cruel words and actions. But no enemy can injure us like ourselves! In five minutes a man may do himself more real harm, than all his enemies united could do to injure him in fifty years! To yourself you can be the most insidious enemy and the greatest foe! In all its forms, SELF in its inmost spirit is still a deceitful—subtle—restless—proud—and impatient creature—masking its real character in a thousand ways, and concealing its destructive designs by countless devices. We have but to look on the professing church to find the highest pride under the lowest humility—the greatest ignorance under the vainest self-conceit—the basest treachery under the warmest profession—the vilest sensuality under the most heavenly piety—and the foulest filth under the cleanest cloak. Take heed unto yourselves!

Familiarity with sacred things

"Take heed therefore to yourselves!" Acts 20:28

This was Paul's public warning to the elders of the church at Ephesus. It was Paul's private warning to his friend and disciple, his beloved son, Timothy. And do not all who write or speak in the name of the Lord need the same warning?

Familiarity with sacred things has a natural tendency to harden the conscience, where grace does not soften and make it tender. Men may preach and pray until both become a mere mechanical habit—and they may talk about Christ and His sufferings until they feel as little touched by them as a 'tragic actor' on the stage, of the sorrows which he impersonates. Well, then, may the Holy Spirit sound this note of warning, as with trumpet voice, in the ears of the servants of Christ. Take heed unto yourselves!

Pride, self-conceit & self-exaltation

Pride, self-conceit and self-exaltation, are both the chief temptations, and the main besetting sins, of those who occupy any public position in the church. Therefore, where these sins are not mortified by the Spirit, and subdued by His grace—instead of being, as they should be, the humblest of men—they are, with rare exceptions, the proudest. Did we bear in constant remembrance our slips, falls, and grievous backslidings—and had we, with all this, a believing sight of the holiness and purity of God, of the sufferings and sorrows of His dear Son, and what it cost Him to redeem us from the lowest

Volume 3

The incredible greatness of His power

"I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of His power to us who believe Him." Ephesians 1:19

The work of God on the soul, is a work of sovereign and omnipotent power! See what a mighty power was put forth in turning us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; and how it was the outstretched arm of Omnipotence alone, which could deliver us from the power of darkness and bring us into the eternal heavenly kingdom! Consider the difficulties which grace has to overcome, in the "quickening" of a dead soul into spiritual life. View the depths of the fall. Contemplate—the death of the soul in trespasses and sins—the thorough alienation from the life of God—the darkness, blindness, and ignorance of the understanding—the perverseness of the will—the hardness of the conscience—and the depravity of the affections!

View the soul's obduracy, stubbornness and obstinacy—its pride, unbelief, infidelity and self-righteousness; its passionate love to, habitual practice of, and long imprisonment to sin. Consider its strong prejudices against everything godly and holy!

Contemplate the desperate, implacable enmity of the carnal mind against God Himself—its firm and deep rooted love to the world, in all its varied shapes and forms—and remember also how all its hopes, happiness, and prospects are bound up in the things of time and sense! O what a complicated mass of difficulties, do all these foes form in their firm combination, like a compact, well armed, thoroughly trained army—against any power which would seek to dislodge them from their position!

Add to this—all the power, malice, and deceitful arts of Satan, as the strong armed man—keeping the palace night and day, and yielding to none but the stronger than he!

Consider, too, the sacrifices which must often be made by one who is to live godly in Christ Jesus—the tenderest ties, perhaps, to be broken—the lucrative prospects which have to be abandoned—old friends to be renounced—family connections to be given up—position in life to be lost—shame and contempt to be entailed on oneself!

Viewing, then, a soul dead in sin, with all these difficulties and obstacles in their complicated array, must we not pronounce that to be a mighty act of power which, in spite of all these apparently invincible hindrances, lifts it up and out of them all, into a new and spiritual life? So fully and thoroughly is this fruit and effect of omnipotent power, and of omnipotent power alone, that it is spoken of in the word as—a new and heavenly birth—a new creation—a resurrection—all which terms imply a putting forth of a divine power, as distinct from and independent of any creature effort.

Contemplate also, the mighty power of God in "maintaining" divine life in our soul. We have to see and feel—what mountains of difficulty—what seas of temptation—what winds and storms of

error—what assaults and snares of Satan—what floods of vileness and ungodliness within and without—strong lusts and passions—what secret slips and falls—what backslidings and departures from the living God—what long seasons of darkness, barrenness, and death—what opposition of the flesh to the strait and narrow way—what crafty hypocrites, pretended friends, false professors—all striving to throw down or entangle our steps!

Consider also, what helplessness, inability, and miserable impotency in ourselves to all that is good—and what headlong proneness to all that is evil. We have also to ponder over what we have been and what we still are, since we professed to fear God—and how, when left to ourselves, we have done nothing but sin against and provoke God to His face! And thus as read over article by article, this long dark catalogue, still to have a sweet persuasion that the life of God is in our soul—we realize, believe, and feel, and bless God for His surpassing, superabounding grace, in maintaining this divine life in our soul. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound!"

His secret power & influence

"No man can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him." John 6:44

"I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you." Jeremiah 31:3

None can really come to Jesus by faith, unless this drawing power is put forth. The Holy Spirit—that gracious and blessed Teacher, acts upon the soul by His secret power and influence, puts 'cords of love' and 'bands of mercy' around the heart, and by the attractive influence that He puts forth, draws the soul to Jesus' feet—and in due time reveals Him as the chief among ten thousand—and the altogether lovely one.

As the Spirit reveals and manifests these precious things of Christ to the soul, He raises up a living faith whereby Jesus is sought unto, looked unto, laid hold of, and is brought into the heart with a divine power, there to be enshrined in its warmest and tenderest affections. All through its Christian pilgrimage, this blessed Spirit goes on to deepen His work in the soul, and to discover more and more of the suitability, beauty, and blessedness of the Lord Jesus, as He draws the soul more and more unto Him. There is no maintaining of the light, life, and power of God in our souls, except as we are daily coming unto Jesus as the living stone, and continually living upon Him as the bread of life.

All iniquity

"Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity." Titus 2:14

Sins of heart. Sins of lip. Sins of life. There are five things as regards sin, from which our blessed Lord came to redeem us—its guilt, its filth, its power, its love, its practice. By His death, He redeemed us from sin's guilt. By the washing of regeneration, He delivers us from sin's filth. By the power of His resurrection, He liberates us from sin's dominion. By revealing His beauty, He frees us from sin's love. By making the conscience tender in His fear, He preserves us from sin's practice. The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.

If your flesh had its full swing

"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you may not do the things that you desire." Galatians 5:17

At times, we can hardly tell how we are kept from evil. There is in those who fear God, a spiritual principle which holds them up, and keeps them back from the ways of sin and death in which the flesh would walk. This inner principle of grace and godly fear has, in thousands of instances, preserved the feet of the saints, and kept them from doing things that would have ruined their reputation, blighted their character, brought reproach upon the cause of God, and the greatest grief and distress into their own conscience! They cannot do the EVIL things that they would do. The flesh is always lusting towards evil, but grace is a counteracting principle to repress and subdue it. Grace does not wholly overcome the evil lustings of the flesh, but it can prevent those lustings from being carried out into open action. For the Spirit fights against the flesh, and will not let it altogether reign and rule, nor have its own will and way unchecked. What a mercy lies couched here!

For what would you be, if your flesh had its full swing? What evil is there which you would not do? What crime which you would not commit? What slip which you would not make? What open and horrid fall which you would not be guilty of—unless you were upheld by Almighty power—and the flesh curbed and checked from running its destructive course? We can never praise God sufficiently for His restraining grace—for what would we be without it? "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" Psalm 119:117

A coward's castle

A pastor has no right to turn the pulpit into a coward's castle, and from there attack those in the congregation, whom he is afraid to meet face to face privately. It is cruelly unfair to attack an individual who cannot defend himself—to hold him up, as if on the horns of the pulpit, before the congregation, (who generally know pretty well who is meant), and to condemn him without hearing his side, with the pastor being the only judge and jury.

Some beloved idol?

"It is a land of engraved images, and they are mad over idols." Jeremiah 50:38

Have we not all in our various ways, set up some beloved idol—something which engaged our affections, something which occupied our thoughts, something to which we devoted all the energies of our minds, something for which we were willing to labor night and day? Be it money, be it power, be it esteem of men, be it respectability, be it worldly comfort, be it literary knowledge, there was a secret setting up of SELF in one or more of its various forms, and a bowing down to it as an idol.

The man of business makes money his god. The man of pleasure makes the lust of the flesh his god. The proud man makes his adored SELF his god. The Pharisee makes self-righteousness his god. The Arminian makes free-will his god. The Calvinist makes dry doctrine his god. All in one way or other, however they may differ in the object of their idolatrous worship, agree in this—that they give a preference in their esteem and affection to their peculiar idol, above the one true God. "And the idols He shall utterly abolish." Isaiah 2:18

There is, then, a time to break down these idols which our fallen nature has set up. And have not we experienced some measure of this breaking down, both externally and internally? Have not our idols been in a measure smashed before our eyes, our prospects in life cut up and destroyed, our airy visions of earthly happiness and our romantic paradises dissolved into thin air, our creature-hopes dashed, our youthful affections blighted, and the objects from which we had fondly hoped to reap an enduring harvest of delight removed from our eyes?

And likewise, as to our religion—our good opinion of ourselves, our piety and holiness, our wisdom and our knowledge, our understanding and our abilities, our consistency and uprightness—have they not all been broken down, and made a heap of ruins before our eyes?

That monstrous creature within us!

"I abhor the pride of Jacob." Amos 6:8

O cursed pride, that is ever lifting up its head in our hearts! Pride would even pull down God that it might sit upon His throne. Pride would trample under foot the holiest things to exalt itself! Pride is that monstrous creature within us, of such ravenous and indiscriminate gluttony, that the more it devours, the more it craves! Pride is that chameleon which assumes every color—that actor which can play every part—and yet which is faithful to no one object or purpose—but to exalt and glorify self!

"I will make the pride of the strong to cease." "He shall bring down their pride." (Ezekiel 7:24, Isaiah 25:11) God means to kill man's pride! And oh, what cutting weapons the Lord will sometimes make use of to kill a man's pride! How He will bring him sometimes into the depths of temporal poverty, that He may make a stab at his worldly pride! How He will bring to light the iniquities of his youth, that He may mortify his self-righteous pride! How He will allow sin to break forth, if not openly, yet so powerfully within, that piercing convictions shall kill his spiritual pride! And what deep discoveries of internal corruption will the Lord sometimes employ, to dig down to the root, and cut off the core of that poisonous tree, pride! The Searcher of hearts dissects and anatomizes this inbred evil, cuts down to it through the quivering and bleeding flesh, and pursues with His keen knife its multiplied windings and ramifications. "The lofty looks of man will be brought low, the haughtiness of men will be bowed down, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day." Isaiah 2:11 "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Isaiah 2:17 "The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth." Isaiah 23:9

The soul's natural element

Before the soul can know anything about salvation, it must learn deeply and experimentally the nature of sin, and of itself, as stained and polluted by sin. It is proud—and needs to be humbled. It is careless—and needs to be awakened. It is alive—and needs to be killed. It is full—and requires to be emptied. It is whole—and needs to be wounded. It is clothed—and requires to be stripped. The soul is, by nature, self-righteous, self-seeking, buried deep in worldliness and carnality, utterly blind and ignorant, filled with presumption, arrogance, conceit and enmity—hateful to all that is heavenly and spiritual.

Sin, in all its various forms, is the soul's natural element. Some of the features of the unregenerate nature of man are—covetousness, lust, worldly pleasure, desire of the praise of men, an insatiable thirst after self-advancement, a complete abandonment to all that can please and gratify every new desire of the heart, an utter contempt and abhorrence of everything that restrains or defeats its mad pursuit of what it loves. Education, moral restraints, or the force of habit, may restrain the outbreaking of inward corruption, and dam back the mighty stream of indwelling sin, so that it shall not burst all its bounds, and desolate the land.

But no moral check can alter human nature. A chained tiger is a tiger still. "The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots." To make man the direct contrary of what he originally is—to make him love God instead of hating Him—fear God, instead of mocking Him—obey God, instead of rebelling against Him—to do this mighty work, and to effect this wonderful change—requires the implantation of a new nature by the immediate hand of God Himself. Natural light, natural love, natural faith, natural obedience—in a word, all natural religion—is here useless and ineffectual.

Godly sorrow

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." 2 Corinthians 7:10

Godly sorrow springs from a view of a suffering Savior, and manifests itself by hatred of self—abhorrence of sin—groaning over our backslidings—grief of soul for being so often entangled by our lusts and passions—and is accompanied by softness—meltings of heart—flowings of love to the Redeemer—indignation against ourselves—and earnest desires never to sin more.

But our coward flesh shrinks from them!

"Behold, I have refined you, but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." Isaiah 48:10

What benefit is there in afflictions? Does God send them without an object in view? Do they come merely, as the men of the world think, by chance? No! There is benefit intended by them. The branch cannot bear fruit unless it be pruned. The love of sin cannot be cast out—the soul cannot be meekened, humbled, softened, and made contrite—the world cannot be embittered—the things of time and sense cannot be stripped of their false hue and their magic appearance—except through affliction. Our greatest blessings usually spring from our greatest afflictions—they prepare the heart to receive them—they empty the vessel of the poisonous ingredients which have filled it, and fit it to receive gospel wine and milk. To be without these afflictions—these griefs—these trials—these temptations—is to write ourselves destitute of grace. But our coward flesh shrinks from them! We are willing to walk to heaven—but not to walk there in God's way. Though we see in the Scripture that the path to glory is a rough and rugged way—yet when our feet are planted in that painful and trying path, we shrink back—our coward flesh refuses to walk in that road.

God therefore, as a sovereign, brings those afflictions upon us which He sees most fit for our profit and His glory, without ever consulting us, without ever allowing us a choice in the matter. And He will generally cause our afflictions to come from the most unexpected source, and in a way most

cutting to our feelings—in the way that of all others we would least have chosen—and yet in a way which of all others, is most for our profit. God deals with us like a surgeon dealing with a diseased organ. How painful the operation! How deep the knife cuts! How long it may be before the wound is healed! Yet every stroke of the knife is indispensable! A skillful and faithful surgeon would not do his duty if he did not dissect it to the very bottom. As pain before healing is necessary, and must be produced by the knife—so spiritually, we must be wounded and cut in our souls, as long, and as deeply as God sees needful, that in His own time we may receive the consolation.

Do the afflictions we pass through humble us? Do they deaden the love of the world in our hearts? Do they purge out hypocrisy? Do they bring us more earnestly to the throne of grace? Do they discover to us sins that we have not before seen? Do they penetrate into our very hearts? Do they lay bare the corrupt fountain that we carry within us? Do they search and test us before a heart-searching God? Do they meeken and soften our spirit?

The filthy holes & puddles in which it grovels

"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"
Jeremiah 17:9

The sin of our fallen nature is a very mysterious thing. We read of "the mystery of iniquity." Sin has depths which no human plumb line ever fathomed, and lengths which no mortal measuring line ever yet measured out. Thus the way in which sin sometimes seems to sleep—and at other times to awake with renewed strength, its active, irritable, impatient, restless nature—the many shapes and colors it wears—the filthy holes and puddles in which it grovels—the corners into which it creeps—its deceitfulness—its hypocrisy—its craftiness—its persuasiveness—its intense selfishness—its utter recklessness—its desperate madness—its insatiable greediness—are secrets, painful secrets, only learned by bitter experience. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

The Lord's secret power in our souls

"He gives power to the faint; and to those who have no might He increases strength." Isaiah 40:29

The Lord's people are often in the state that they have no might. All their power seems exhausted, and their strength completely drained away—sin appears to have gotten the mastery over them—and they feel as if they had neither will nor ability to run the race set before them, or persevere in the way of the Lord.

Now what has kept us to this day? Some of you have made a profession ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years. What has kept us? When powerful temptations were spread for our feet, what preserved us from falling headlong into them? When we felt the workings of strong lusts, what kept us from being altogether carried captive by them? When we look at the difficulties of the way, the perplexities which our souls have had to grapple with, the persecutions and hard blows from sinners and saints that we have had to encounter—what has still kept in us a desire to fear God, and a heart in some measure tender before Him? When we view the infidelity, unbelief, carnality, worldly-mindedness, hypocrisy, pride, and presumption of our fallen nature—what has kept us still believing, hoping, loving, longing, and looking to the Lord? When we think of our deadness, coldness, torpidity, rebelliousness, perverseness, love to evil, aversion to good, and all the

abounding corruptions of our nature—what has kept us from giving up the very profession of religion, and swimming down the powerful current that has so long and so often threatened to sweep us utterly from the Lord?

Is it not the putting forth of the Lord's secret power in our souls? Can we not look back, and recall to mind our first religious companions—those with whom we started in the race—those whom we perhaps envied for their greater piety, zeal, holiness, and earnestness—and with which we painfully contrasted our own sluggishness and carnality—admiring them, and condemning ourselves? Where are they all, or the greater part of them? Some have embraced soul-destroying errors—others are buried in a worldly religious system—and others are wrapped up in delusion and fleshly confidence.

Thus, while most have fallen into the snares of the devil, God, by putting forth His secret power in the hearts of His fainting ones, keeps His fear alive in their souls—holds up their goings in His paths that their footsteps slip not—brings them out of all their temptations and troubles—delivers them from every evil work—and preserves them unto His heavenly kingdom. He thus secures the salvation of His people by His own free grace.

How sweet and precious it is to have our strength renewed—to have fresh grace brought into the heart—to feel the mysterious sensations of renovated life—to feel the everlasting arms supporting the soul—fighting our battles for us, subduing our enemies, overcoming our lusts, breaking our snares, and delivering us out of our temptations!

God's house

In the New Testament Scriptures, we find mention made in several places of "the house of the God." The New Testament never, in any one instance, means, by "the house of God," any material building. It has come to pass, through the traditions received from the fathers, that buildings erected by man—collections of bricks and mortar—piles of squared and cemented stones—are often called "the house of God."

In ancient Popish times they invested a consecrated building with the title of "God's house," thus endeavoring to make it appear as though it were a holy place in which God specially dwelt. They thus drew off the minds of the people from any internal communion with God, and possessed them with the idea that He was only to be found in some holy spot, consecrated and sanctified by rites and ceremonies. The same leaven of the Pharisees has infected the Church of England—and thus she calls her consecrated buildings, her piles of stone and cement, "churches," and "houses of God."

And even those who profess a purer faith, who dissent from her unscriptural forms, have learned to adopt the same carnal language, and even they, through a misunderstanding of what "the house of God" really is, will call such a building as we are assembled in this morning, "the house of God." How frequently does the expression drop from the pulpit, and how continually is it heard at the prayer meeting, "coming up to the house of God," as though any building now erected by human hands could be called the house of the living God. It arises from a misunderstanding of the Scriptures, and is much fostered by that priestcraft which is in the human heart, inciting us to believe that God is to be found only in certain buildings set apart for His service.

When the Holy Spirit preaches the gospel

We often know the theory of the gospel, before we know the experience of the gospel. We often receive the doctrines of grace into our judgment, before we receive the grace of the doctrines into our soul. We therefore need to be brought down, humbled, tried, stripped of every prop—that the gospel may be to us more than a sound, more than a name, more than a theory, more than a doctrine, more than a system, more than a creed—that it may be soul enjoyment—soul blessing—and soul salvation. When the Holy Spirit preaches the gospel to the poor in spirit, the humbled, stripped, and tried—it is a gospel of glad tidings indeed to the sinner's broken heart.

We get entangled with some idol

Wherever the grace of God is, it constrains its partaker to desire to live to His honor and glory. But he soon finds the difficulty of so doing. Such is the weakness of the flesh, the power of sin, the subtlety of Satan, the strength of temptation, and the snares spread on every side for our feet, that we can neither do what we want, nor be what we want. Before we are well aware, we get entangled with some idol, or drawn aside into some indulgence of the flesh, which brings darkness into the mind, and may cut us out some bitter work for the rest of our days.

But we thus learn not only the weakness of the flesh, but where and in whom all our strength lies. And as the grace of the Lord Jesus, in its suitability, in its sufficiency and its superaboundings, becomes manifested in and by the weakness of the flesh—a sense of His wondrous love and care in so bearing with us, in so pitying our case, and manifesting mercy where we might justly expect wrath, constrains us with a holy obligation to walk in His fear and to live to His praise.

The sins & slips of the saints

The Scriptures faithfully record the falls of believers—the drunkenness of Noah, the incest of Lot, the unbelief of Abraham, the peevishness of Moses, the adultery of David, the idolatry of Solomon, the pride of Hezekiah, the cowardice of Mark and the cursing and swearing of Peter. But why has the Holy Spirit left on record the sins and slips of the saints? First, that it might teach us that they were saved by grace as poor, lost, and ruined sinners—in the same way as we hope to be saved. Secondly, that their slips and falls might be so many beacons and warnings, to guard the people of God against being overtaken by the same sins. As the apostle speaks—"Now all these things happened to them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition." And thirdly, that the people of God, should they be overtaken by sin, might not be cast into despair—but that from seeing recorded in the Scripture the slips and failings of the saints of old, they might be lifted up from their despondency, and brought once more to hope in the Lord.

Experimental knowledge

"And this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and Him whom You sent, Jesus Christ." John 17:3

An experimental knowledge of Christ in the soul, is the only relief for sin's poverty, guilt, leprosy, bankruptcy and damnation. This is the true way of preaching Christ crucified—not the mere doctrine of the Cross, but a crucified Jesus experimentally known to the soul. I am deeply conscious of my own baseness, ignorance, blindness and folly. But my malady is too deeply rooted to be healed by dry doctrines and speculative theological opinions. The blood of the Lamb,

spiritually and supernaturally sprinkled and applied, is the only healing balm for a sin-sick soul.

Friend, can you understand my riddle?

I find that sin has such power over me, that though I call on the Lord again and again for deliverance, I seem to be as weak as ever when temptation comes. If a window were placed in my bosom, what filth and vileness would be seen by all.

"O you hideous monster sin,

What a curse have you brought in!"

I love it—I hate it. I want to be delivered from the power of it—and yet am not satisfied without drinking down its poisoned sweets. Sin is my hourly companion—and my daily curse. Sin is the breath of my mouth—and the cause of my groans. Sin is my incentive to prayer—and my hinderer of it. Sin made my Savior suffer—and makes my Savior precious. Sin spoils every pleasure—and adds a sting to every pain. Sin fits a soul for heaven—and ripens a soul for hell.

Friend, can you understand my riddle? Is your heart, as my heart? Alas! Alas! We feel sin's power daily and hourly. We sigh and groan at times, to be delivered from the giant strength of our corruptions, which seem to carry us captive at their will. Though sin is a sweet morsel to our carnal mind, it grieves our soul. I am sure I must be a monument of grace and mercy, if saved from the guilt, curse, and power of sin!

My greatest enemy?

I have ever found myself to be my greatest enemy. I never had a foe that troubled me so much as my own heart—nor has any one ever wrought me half the mischief or given me half the plague that I have felt and known within. And it is a daily sense of this which makes me dread myself more than anybody that walks upon the face of the earth! Keep a watchful eye upon every inward foe—and if you fight, fight against the enemy that lurks and works in your own bosom!

There are many plans in a man's heart

"There are many plans in a man's heart; but the Lord's counsel will prevail." Proverbs 19:21

The plans of our heart are generally to find some easy, smooth, flowery path. Whatever benefits we have derived from affliction, whatever mercies we have experienced in tribulation, the flesh hates and shrinks from such a path with complete abhorrence. And, therefore, there is always a secret planning in a man's heart—to escape the cross, to avoid affliction, and to walk in some flowery meadow, away from the rough road which cuts his feet, and wearies his limbs. Another "plan in a man's heart" is, that he shall have worldly prosperity—that his children shall grow up around him, and when they grow up, he shall be able to provide for them in a way which shall be best suited to their station in life—that they shall enjoy health and strength and success—and that there shall not be any cutting affliction in his family, or fiery trial to pass through.

Now these plans the Lord frustrates. What grief, what affliction, what trouble, is the Lord continually bringing into some families! Their dearest objects of affection removed from them, at the very moment when they seemed clasped nearest around their hearts! And those who are spared, perhaps, growing up in such a searedness of conscience and hardness of heart, and,

perhaps, profligacy of life, that even their very presence is often a burden to their parents instead of a blessing—and the very children who should be their comfort, become thorns and briars in their sides!

Oh, how the Lord overturns and brings to nothing the "plans of a man's heart" to make a paradise here upon earth. When a man is brought to the right spot, and is in a right mind to trace out the Lord's dealings with him from the first, he sees it was a kind hand which "blasted his gourds, and laid them low"—it was a kind hand that swept away his worldly prospects—which reduced him to natural as well as to spiritual poverty—which led him into exercises, trials, sorrows, griefs, and tribulations—because, in those trials he has found the Lord, more or less, experimentally precious.

There are many plans in a man's heart. Now you have all your plans—that busy workshop is continually putting out some new pattern—some new fashion is continually starting forth from the depths of that ingenious manufactory which you carry about with you—and you are wanting this, and expecting that, and building up airy castles, and looking for that which shall never come to pass—for "there are many plans in a man's heart; but the Lord's counsel will prevail." And so far as you are children of God, that counsel is a counsel of wisdom and mercy. The purposes of God's heart are purposes of love and affection toward you, and therefore you may bless and praise God, that whatever be the plans of your hearts against God's counsel, they shall be frustrated, that He may do His will and fulfill all His good pleasure.

All are more or less deeply infected with it

"Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not!" Jeremiah 45:5

As we are led aside by the powerful workings of our corrupt nature, we are often seeking great things for ourselves. Riches, worldly comforts, respectability, to be honored, admired and esteemed by men—are the objects most passionately sought after by the world. And so far as the children of God are under the influence of a worldly principle, do they secretly desire similar things.

Nor does this ambition depend upon station in life. All are more or less deeply infected with it, until delivered by the grace of God. The poorest man in these towns has a secret desire in his soul after "great things," and a secret plotting in his mind how he may obtain them. But the Lord is determined that His people shall not have great things. He has purposed to pour contempt upon all the pride of man! He therefore nips all their hopes in the bud, crushes their flattering prospects, and makes them for the most part, poor, needy, and despised in this world.

Whatever schemes or projects the Lord's people may devise that they may prosper and get on in the world, He rarely allows their plans to thrive. He knows well to what consequences it would lead—that this ivy creeping round the stem would, as it were, suffocate and strangle the tree. The more that worldly goods increase—the more the heart is fixed upon them, the more the affections are set upon idols, the more is the heart drawn away from the Lord. He will not allow His people to have their portion here below. He has in store for them a better city, that is a heavenly one, and therefore will not allow them to build and plant below the skies.

A child of God may be secretly aiming at great things, such as respectability, bettering his condition in life, rising step by step in the scale of society. But the Lord will usually disappoint these plans—defeat these projects—wither these gourds—and blight these prospects. He may

reduce him to poverty, as He did Job—smite him with sickness, as He did Lazarus and Hezekiah—take away wife and children, as in the case of Ezekiel and Jacob—or He may bring trouble and distress into his mind by shooting an arrow out of His unerring bow into the conscience.

God has a certain purpose to effect by bringing this trouble, and that is to pull him down from "seeking great things." For what is the secret root of this ambition? Is it not the pride of the heart? When the Lord, then, would lay this ambition low, He makes a blow at the root. He strips away fancied hopes, and breaks down rotten props, the great things (so through ignorance esteemed) sought for previously, and perhaps obtained, fall to pieces. Are you seeking great things for yourself? Don't do it!

Ministers are often desirous

"Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not!" Jeremiah 45:5

Ministers are often desirous of a greater gift in preaching, a readier utterance, a more abundant variety, a more striking delivery than they presently possess. And this, not for the glory of God—but for the glory of the creature! Not that praise may be given God—but that pride, cursed pride, may be gratified—that they may be admired by men.

My desire and aim is not to deceive souls by flattery—not to please any party—not to minister to any man's pride or presumption—but simply and sincerely, with an eye to God's glory, with His fear working in my heart—to speak to the edification of His people. A minister who stands up with any other motives, and aiming at any other ends than the glory of God, and the edification of His people, bears no scriptural marks that he has been sent into the vineyard by God Himself.

Superabounding grace

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Romans 5:20

What are all the gilded toys of time compared with the solemn, weighty realities of eternity! But, alas! what wretches are we when left to sin, self, and Satan! How unable to withstand the faintest breath of temptation! How bent upon backsliding! Who can fathom the depths of the human heart? Oh, what but grace, superabounding grace, can either suit or save such wretches? "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

Job's religion

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" Job 23:3

What a mere shallow pretense to vital godliness satisfies most ministers, most hearers, and most congregations! But there was a reality in Job's religion. It was not of a flimsy, notional, superficial nature. It was not merely a sound Calvinistic creed, and nothing more. It was not a religion of theory and speculation, nor a well-compacted system of doctrines and duties. There was something deeper, something more divine in Job's religion than any such mere pretense, delusion, imitation, or hypocrisy. And if our religion be of the right kind, there will be something deeper in it, something more powerful, spiritual, and supernatural, than notions and doctrines, theories and speculations, merely passing to and fro in our minds, however scriptural and correct. There will be

a divine reality in it, if God the Spirit be the author of it. And there will be no trifling with the solemn things of God, and with our own immortal souls.

The way in which the Spirit of God works

As pride rises, it must be broken down. As self-righteousness starts up, it must be brought low. As the wisdom of the creature exalts itself against the wisdom of God, it must be laid prostrate. The way in which the Spirit of God works is to lay the creature low, by bringing it into nothingness, and crushing it into self-abasement and self-loathing, so as to press out of it everything on which the creature can depend. Like a surgeon, who will run his lancet into the abscess, and let out the gory matter, in order to effect a thorough cure—so the Spirit of the Lord thrusting His sharp sword into the heart, lets out the inward corruption, and never heals the wound until He has thoroughly probed it. And when He has laid bare the heart, He heals it by pouring in the balmy blood of Jesus, as that which, by its application, cleanses from all sin.

The world is passing away

"And the world is passing away with its lusts." 1 John 2:17

The world and all that is in it comes to an end. Where are the great bulk of the men and women who fifty, sixty, or seventy years ago trod London streets? Where are they who rode about in their gay carriages, gave their splendid entertainments, decked themselves with feathers and jewels, and enjoyed all the pleasures of life? Where are they? The grave holds their bodies, and hell holds their souls. "The world passes away." It is like a pageant, or a gay and splendid procession, which passes before the eye for a few minutes, then turns the corner of the street, and is lost to view. It is now to you who had looked upon it just as if it were not, and is gone to amuse other eyes.

So, could you go on for years—enjoying all your natural heart could wish—lay up money by thousands—ride in your carriage—deck your body with jewelry—fill your house with splendid furniture—enjoy everything that earth can give—then there would come, some day or other, sickness to lay you upon a dying bed. To you the world has now passed away with all its lusts—with you all is now come to an end—and now you have, with a guilty soul, to face a holy God. The world is passing away with its lusts.

All these lusts for which men have sold body and soul, half ruined their families, and stained their own name—all these lusts for which they were so mad that they would have them at any price, snatch them even from hell's mouth—all these lusts are passed away, and what have they left? A gnawing worm—a worm that can never die, and the wrath of God as an unquenchable fire. That is all which the love of the world can do for you, with all your toil and anxiety, or all your amusement and pleasure. You have not gained much perhaps of this world's goods, with all your striving after them. But could the world fill your heart with enjoyment, and your money bags with gold, as the dust of the grave will one day fill your mouth, it would be much to the same purpose. If you had got all the world, you would have got nothing after your coffin was screwed down, but grave-dust in your mouth. Such is the end of the world. The world is passing away with its lusts.

DEATH is the great and final extinguisher of all human hopes and pleasures. Look and see how man sickens and dies, and is tumbled into the cemetery, where his body is left to the worms, and his soul to face an angry God, on the great judgment day. The world is passing away with its lusts.

Weary

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

The Lord's purpose in laying burdens upon us is to weary us out. We cannot learn our religion in any other way. We cannot learn it from the Bible, nor from the experience of others. It must be a personal work, wrought in the heart of each—and we must be brought, all of us, if ever we are to find rest in Christ, to be absolutely wearied out of sin and self, and to have no righteousness, goodness, or holiness of our own. The effect, then, of all spiritual labor is to bring us to this point—to be weary of the world, for we feel it, for the most part, to be a valley of tears—to be weary of self, for it is our greatest plague—wearied of professors, for we cannot see in them the grace of God, which alone we prize and value—wearied of the profane, for their ungodly conversation only hurts our minds—wearied of our bodies, for they are often full of sickness and pain, and always clogs to our soul—and weary of life, for we see the emptiness of those things which to most people make life so agreeable.

By this painful experience we come to this point—to be worn out and wearied—and there we must come, before we can rest entirely on Christ. As long as we can rest in the world, we shall rest in it. As long as the things of time and sense can gratify us, we shall be gratified in them. As long as we can find anything pleasing in self, we shall be pleased with it. As long as anything visible and tangible can satisfy us, we shall be satisfied with them. But when we get weary of all things visible, tangible, and sensible—wearied of ourselves, and of all things here below—then we want to rest upon Christ, and Christ alone. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."

Oh, how religious he once used to be!

"For the Son of man came to seek and to save those who are lost." Luke 19:10

Oh, how religious he once used to be! How comfortably he could walk to church with his Bible under his arm, and look as devout and holy as possible! How regularly also, he could read the Scriptures, and pray in his manner, and think himself pretty well, with one foot in heaven. But a ray of heavenly light has beamed into his soul, and shown him who and what God is—what sin and a sinful heart is—and who and what he himself as a sinner is. The keen dissecting knife of God has come into his heart, laid it all bare, and let the gory matter flow out. When his conscience is bleeding under the scalpel, and is streaming all over with the gore and filth thus let out, where is the clean heart once boasted of? Where is his religion now? All buried beneath a load of filth! Where is all his holiness gone? His holy looks, holy expressions, holy manners, holy gestures, holy garb—where are they all gone? All are flooded and buried. The sewer has broken out, and the filthy stream has discharged itself over his holy looks, holy manners, holy words and holy gestures—and he is, as Job says, 'in the ditch.'

We never find the right religion, until we have lost the wrong one. We never find Christ, until we have lost SELF. We never find grace, until we have lost our own pitiful self-holiness. "For the Son of man came to seek and to save those who are lost."

It is a creature of many lives!

Man is a strange compound. A sinner, and the worst of sinners—and yet a Pharisee! A wretch, and the vilest of wretches—and yet pluming himself on his good works! Did not experience convince us to the contrary, we would scarcely believe that a monster like man—a creature, as someone has justly said, "half beast and half devil," should dream of pleasing God by his obedience, or of climbing up to heaven by a ladder of his own righteousness.

Pharisaism is firmly fixed in the human heart. Deep is the root, broad the stem, wide the branches, but poisonous the fruit, of this gigantic tree, planted by pride and unbelief in the soil of human nature. Self-righteousness is not peculiar to only certain individuals. It is interwoven with our very being. It is the only religion that human nature understands, relishes, or admires.

Again and again must the heart be ploughed up, and its corruptions laid bare, to keep down the growth of this pharisaic spirit. It is a creature of many lives! It is not one blow, nor ten, nor a hundred that can kill it. Stunned it may be for a while, but it revives again and again! Pharisaism can live and thrive under any profession. Calvinism or Arminianism is the same to it. It is not the garb he wears, nor the mask he carries, that constitutes the man.

The believer's chief troubles

As earth is but a valley of tears, the Christian has many tribulations in common with the world. Family troubles were the lot of Job, Abraham, Jacob and David. Sickness befell Hezekiah, Trophimus and Epaphroditus. Reverses and losses fell upon Job. Poverty and famine drove Naomi into the land of Moab. Trouble, then, is in itself no sign of grace—for it inevitably flows from, and is necessarily connected with, man's fallen state. But we should fix our eye on two things, as especially marking the temporal afflictions of the Lord's family:

1. That they are all weighed out and timed by special appointment. For though man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards, yet "affliction doesn't come from the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground." Job 5:6
2. That they are specially sanctified, and made to work together for good to those who love God. But the believer's chief troubles are internal, and arise from the assaults of Satan, powerful temptations, the guilt of sin laid on the conscience, doubts and fears about a saving interest in Christ, and a daily, hourly conflict with a nature ever lusting to evil.

A religion that satisfies thousands

"Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." 2 Timothy 3:5

Much that passes for religion, is not true religion at all. Much that goes for hopes of salvation, is nothing but lying refuges. Much is palmed off for the teaching of the Spirit, which is nothing but delusion. Vital godliness is very rare. There are very few people spiritually taught of God. There are very few ministers who really preach the truth. Satan is thus daily deceiving thousands, and tens of thousands. A living soul, however weak and feeble in himself, cannot take up with a religion in the flesh. He cannot rest on the opinions of men, nor be deceived by Satan's delusions. He has a secret gnawing of conscience, which makes him dissatisfied with a religion that satisfies thousands.

Down they sink to the bottom!

"Until the pit is dug for the wicked." Psalm 94:13

In Eastern countries, the ordinary mode of catching wild beasts is to dig a pit, and fix sharp spears in the bottom. And when the pit has been dug sufficiently deep, it is covered over with branches of trees, earth, and leaves, until all appearances of the pitfall are entirely concealed. What is the object? That the wild beast intent upon bloodshed—the tiger lying in wait for the deer, the wolf roaming after the sheep, the lion prowling for the antelope, not seeing the pitfall, but rushing on and over it, may not see their doom until they break through and fall upon the spears at the bottom.

What a striking figure is this! Here are the ungodly, all intent upon their purposes—prowling after evil, as the wolf after the sheep, or the tiger after the deer—thinking only of some worldly profit, some covetous plan, some lustful scheme, something the carnal mind delights in—but on they go, not seeing any danger until the moment comes when, as Job says, "they go down to the bars of the pit." The Lord has been pleased to hide their doom from them. The pit is all covered over with leaves of trees, grass, and earth. The very appearance of the pit was hidden from the wild beasts—they never knew it until they fell into it, and were transfixed!

So it is with the wicked—both with religious professors and the profane. There is no fear of God, no taking heed to their steps, no cry to be directed, no prayer to be shown the way—no pausing, no turning back. On they go, on they go—heedlessly, thoughtlessly, recklessly—pursuing some beloved object. On they go, on they go—until in a moment they are plunged eternally and irrevocably into the pit! There are many such both in the professing church as well as in the ungodly world. The Lord sees what they are, and where they are. He knows where the pit is. He knows their steps. He sees them hurrying on, hurrying on, hurrying on. All is prepared for them. The Lord gives them no forewarning, no notice of their danger, no teachings, no chastenings, no remonstrances, no frowns, no stripes. They are left to themselves to fill up the measure of their iniquity, until they approach the pit that has been dug for them, and then down they sink to the bottom!

Who can come out of the battle alive?

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" Psalm 119:117

We know little of ourselves, and less of one another. We do not know our own needs, what is for our good, what snares to avoid, what dangers to shun. Our path is bestrewed with difficulties, beset with temptations, surrounded with foes, encompassed with perils. At every step there is a snare! At every turn an enemy lurks! Pride digs the pit, carelessness blindfolds the eyes, carnality drugs and intoxicates the senses, the lust of the flesh seduces, the love of the world allures, unbelief paralyzes the fighting hand and the praying knee, sin entangles the feet, guilt defiles the conscience, and Satan accuses the soul. Under these circumstances, who can come out of the battle alive? Only he who is kept by the mighty power of God. "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

God's mercy

"Look upon me, and be merciful to me." Psalm 119:132

When shall we ever get beyond the need of God's mercy? We feel our need of continual mercy as our sins abound, as our guilt is felt, as our corruption works, as our conscience is burdened, as the

iniquities of our heart are laid bare, as our hearts are opened up in the Spirit's light. We need—mercy for every adulterous look—mercy for every covetous thought—mercy for every light and trifling word—mercy for every wicked movement of our depraved hearts—mercy while we live—mercy when we die—mercy to accompany us every moment—mercy to go with us down to the portals of the grave—mercy to carry us safely through the swellings of Jordan—mercy to land us safe before the Redeemer's throne!

"Look upon me, and be merciful to me." Why me? Because I am so vile a sinner. Because I am so base a backslider. Because I am such a daring transgressor. Because I sin against You with every breath that I draw. Because the evils of my heart are perpetually manifesting themselves. Because nothing but Your mercy can blot out such iniquities as I feel working in my carnal mind. I need—inexhaustible mercy, everlasting mercy, superabounding mercy. Nothing but such mercy as this can suit such a guilty sinner!

A flowery path?

Does the road to heaven lie across a smooth, grassy meadow, over which we may quietly walk in the cool of a summer evening, and leisurely amuse ourselves with gathering of flowers and listening to the warbling of the birds? No child of God ever found the way to heaven a flowery path. It is the wide gate and broad way which leads to perdition. It is the strait gate and narrow way—the uphill road, full of difficulties, trials, temptations, and enemies—which leads to heaven, and issues in eternal life. But our Father manifests mercy and grace. He never leaves nor forsakes the objects of His choice. He fulfills every promise—defeats every enemy—appears in every difficulty—richly pardons every sin—graciously heals every backsliding—and eventually lands them in eternal bliss!

Toys & playthings of the religious babyhouse

"I will feed My flock." Ezekiel 34:15

The only real food of the soul must be of God's own appointing, preparing, and communicating. You can never deceive a hungry child. You may give it a plaything to still its cries. It may serve for a few minutes—but the pains of hunger are not to be removed by a doll. A toy horse will not allay the cravings after the mother's milk. So with babes in grace. A hungry soul cannot feed upon playthings. Altars, robes, ceremonies, candlesticks, bowings, mutterings, painted windows, intoning priests, and singing men and women—these dolls and wooden horses—these toys and playthings of the religious babyhouse, cannot feed the soul that, like David, cries out after the living God. Christ, the bread of life, the manna that came down from heaven—is the only food of the believing soul. (John 6:51)

But oh, the struggle! Oh, the conflict!

"I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more." Ezekiel 21:27

Jesus wants our hearts and affections. Therefore every idol must go down, sooner or later, because the idol draws away the affections of the soul from Christ. Everything that is loved in opposition to Him must sooner or later be taken away, that the Lord Jesus alone may be worshiped. Everything which exacts the allegiance of the soul must be overthrown. Jesus shall have our heart and affections, but in having our heart and affection, He shall have it wholly, solely, and undividedly. He shall have it entirely for Himself. He shall reign and rule supreme.

Now, here comes the conflict and the struggle. SELF says, "I will have a part." Self wants to be—honored, admired, esteemed, bowed down to. Self wants to indulge in, and gratify its desires. Self wants, in some way, to erect its throne in opposition to the Lord of life and glory. But Jesus says, "No! I must reign supreme!" Whatever it is that stands up in opposition to Him, down it must go! Just as Dagon fell down before the ark, so self must fall down before Christ—in every shape, in every form, in whatever subtle guise self wears, down it must come to a wreck and ruin before the King of Zion!

So, if we are continually building up SELF, Jesus will be continually overthrowing self. If we are setting up our idols, He shall be casting them down. If we are continually hewing out "cisterns that can hold no water," He will be continually dashing these cisterns to pieces. If we think highly of our knowledge, we must be reduced to total folly. If we are confident of our strength, we must be reduced to utter weakness. If we highly esteem our attainments, or in any measure are resting upon the power of the creature, the power of the creature must be overthrown, so that we shall stand weak before God, unable to lift up a finger to deliver our souls from going down into the pit. In this way does the Lord teach His people the lesson that Christ must be all in all. They learn—not in the way of speculation, nor in the way of mere dry doctrine, not from the mouth of others—but they learn these lessons in painful soul-experience.

And every living soul that is sighing and longing after a manifestation of Christ and desiring to have Him enthroned in the heart—every such soul will know, sooner or later an utter overthrow of self—a thorough prostration of this idol—a complete breaking to pieces of this beloved image—that the desire of the righteous may be granted, and that Christ may reign and rule as King and Lord in him and over him, setting up His blessed kingdom there, and winning to Himself every affection of the renewed heart.

Are there not moments, friends, are there not some few and fleeting moments when the desire of our souls is that Christ should be our Lord and God—when we are willing that He should have every affection—that every rebellious thought should be subdued and brought into obedience to the cross of Christ—that every plan should be frustrated which is not for the glory of God and our soul's spiritual profit? Are there not seasons in our experience when we can lay down our souls before God, and say—"Let Christ be precious to my soul, let Him come with power to my heart, let Him set up His throne as Lord and King, and let self be nothing before Him?"

But oh, the struggle! oh, the conflict—when God answers these petitions! When our plans are frustrated, what a rebellion works up in the carnal mind! When self is cast down, what a rising up of the fretful, peevish impatience of the creature! When the Lord does answer our prayers, and strips off all false confidence—when He does remove our rotten props, and dash to pieces our broken cisterns, what a storm—what a conflict takes place in the soul! But He is not to be moved—He will take His own way. "I will overturn—let the creature say what it will. I will overturn—let the creature think what it will. Down it shall go to ruin! It shall come to a wreck! It shall be overthrown! My purpose shall be accomplished—and I will fulfill all My pleasure. Self is a rebel who has set up an idolatrous temple—and I will overturn and bring the temple to ruin—for the purpose of manifesting My glory and My salvation, that I may be your Lord and your God."

If God has overturned our bright prospects—shall we say it was a cruel hand that laid them low? If He has overthrown our worldly plans—shall we say it was an unkind act? If He has reduced our

false righteousness to a heap of rubbish, in order that Christ may be embraced as our all in all—shall we say it was a cruel deed? Is he an unkind father who takes away poison from his child—and gives him food? Is she a cruel mother who snatches her boy from the precipice on which he was playing? No! The kindness was manifested in the act of snatching the child from destruction! So if the Lord has broken and overthrown our purposes, it was a kind act—for in so doing He brings us to nothing—that Christ may be embraced as our all in all—that our hearts may echo back, "O Lord, fulfill all Your own promises in our souls, and make us willing to be nothing—that upon the nothingness of self, the glory and beauty and preciousness of Christ may be exalted!"

A snake, a monkey, an onion, a bit of rag

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols!" 1 John 5:21

Idolatry is a sin very deeply rooted in the human heart. We need not go very far to find the most convincing proofs of this. Besides the experience of every age and every climate, we find it where we would least expect it—the prevailing sin of a people who had the greatest possible proofs of its wickedness and folly—and the strongest evidences of the being, greatness, and power of God. It is true that now this sin does not break out exactly in the same form. It is true that golden calves are not now worshiped—at least the calf is not, if the gold is. Nor do Protestants adore images of wood, brass, or stone. But rank, property, fashion, honor, the opinion of the world, with everything which feeds the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—are as much idolized now, as Baal and Moloch were once in Judea.

What is an idol? It is that which occupies that place in our esteem and affections, in our thoughts, words and ways, which is due to God only. Whatever is to us, what the Lord alone should be—that is an idol to us. It is true that these idols differ almost as widely as the peculiar propensities of different individuals. But as both in ancient and modern times, the grosser idols of wood and stone were and are beyond all calculation in number, variety, shape, and size. So is it in these inner idols, of which the outer idols are mere symbols and representations. Nothing has been too base or too brutal, too great or too little, too noble or too vile, from the sun walking in its brightness—to a snake, a monkey, an onion, a bit of rag—which man has not worshiped. And these intended representations of Divinity were but the outward symbols of what man inwardly worshiped. For the inward idol preceded the outward—and the fingers merely carved what the imagination had previously devised. The gross material idol, then, is but a symbol of the inner mind of man.

But we need not dwell on this part of the subject. There is another form of idolatry much nearer home—the idolatry not of an ancient Pagan, or a modern Hindu—but that of a Christian. Nor need we go far, if we would but be honest with ourselves, to each find out our own idol—what it is, how deep it lies, what worship it obtains, what honor it receives, and what affection it engrosses. Let me ask myself, "What do I most love?" If I hardly know how to answer that question, let me put to myself another—"What do I most think upon? In what channel do I usually find my thoughts flow when unrestrained?"—for thoughts flow to the idol as water to the lowest spot. If, then, the thoughts flow continually to the farm, the shop, the business, the investment—to the husband, wife, or child—to that which feeds lust or pride, worldliness or covetousness, self-conceit or self-admiration—that is the idol which, as a magnet, attracts the thoughts of the mind towards it.

Your idol may not be mine, nor mine yours—and yet we may both be idolaters! You may despise or even hate my idol, and wonder how I can be such a fool, or such a sinner, as to hug it to my bosom! And I may wonder how a partaker of grace can be so inconsistent as to love such a silly idol as yours! You may condemn me, and I condemn you. And the Word of God, and the verdict of a living conscience may condemn us both.

O how various and how innumerable these idols are! One man may possess a refined taste and educated mind. Books, learning, literature, languages, general information, shall be his idol. Music, vocal and instrumental, may be the idol of a second—so sweet to his ears, such inward feelings of delight are kindled by the melodious strains of voice or instrument, that music is in all his thoughts, and hours are spent in producing those harmonious sounds which perish in their utterance. Painting, statuary, architecture, the fine arts generally, may be the Baal, the dominating passion of a third. Poetry, with its glowing thoughts, burning words, passionate utterances, vivid pictures, melodious cadence, and sustained flow of all that is beautiful in language and expression, may be the delight of a fourth. Science, the eager pursuit of a fifth. These are the highest flights of the human mind. These are not the base idols of the drunken feast, the low jest, the mirthful supper—or even that less debasing but enervating idol—sleep and indolence, as if life's highest enjoyments were those of the swine in the sty. You middle-class people—who despise art and science, language and learning, as you despise the ale-house, and ball field—may still have an idol. Your garden, your beautiful roses, your verbenas, fuchsias, needing all the care and attention of a babe in arms, may be your idol. Or your pretty children, so admired as they walk in the street—or your new house and all the new furniture—or your son who is getting on so well in business—or your daughter so comfortably settled in life—or your dear husband so generally respected, and just now doing so nicely in the farm. Or your own still dearer SELF that needs so much feeding, and dressing and attending to.

Who shall count the thousands of idols which draw to themselves those thoughts, and engross those affections which are due to the Lord alone? You may not be found out. Your idol may be so hidden, or so peculiar, that all our attempts to touch it, have left you and it unscathed. Will you therefore conclude that you have none? Search deeper, look closer—it is not too deep for the eye of God, nor too hidden for the eyes of a tender conscience anointed with divine eye-salve. Hidden diseases are the most incurable of all diseases. Search every fold of your heart until you find it. It may not be so big nor so ugly as your neighbor's. But an idol is still an idol, whether so small as to be carried in the coat pocket, or as large as a gigantic statue. An idol is not to be admired for its beauty, or loathed for its ugliness—but to be hated because it is an idol. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols!"

The mother & mistress of all the sins

"I hate pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the perverse mouth." Proverbs 8:13

"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord." Proverbs 16:5

Of all sins, pride seems most deeply embedded in the very heart of man. Unbelief, sensuality, covetousness, rebellion, presumption, contempt of God's holy will and word, deceit and falsehood, cruelty and wrath, violence and murder—these, and a forest of other sins have indeed struck deep roots into the black and noxious soil of our fallen

Volume 4

Can Christ love one like me?

"That you. . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge." Ephesians 3:17-19

You may wonder sometimes—and it is a wonder that will fill heaven itself with anthems of eternal praise—how such a glorious Jesus can ever look down from heaven upon such crawling reptiles, on such worms of earth—what is more, upon such sinners who have provoked Him over and over again by their misdeeds. Yes, how this exalted Christ, in the height of His glory, can look down from heaven on such poor, miserable, wretched creatures as we—this is the mystery that fills angels with astonishment! We feel we are such crawling reptiles—such undeserving creatures—and are so utterly unworthy of the least notice from Him, that we say, "Can Christ love one like me? Can the glorious Son of God cast an eye of pity and compassion, love and tenderness upon one like me—who can scarcely at times bear with myself—who sees and feels myself one of the vilest of the vile, and the worst of the worst? O, what must I be in the sight of the glorious Son of God?"

And yet, He has loved you with an everlasting love! His love has breadths, and lengths, and depths, and heights unknown! Its breadth exceeds all human span—its length outvies all creature line—its depth surpasses all finite measurement—its height excels even angelic computation! Because His love is so wondrous, so deep, so long, so broad, so high—it is so suitable to our every want and woe.

A woman's best ornament

"Let your beauty be not just the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on fine clothing; but in the hidden person of the heart, in the incorruptible adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God very precious." 1 Peter 3:3, 4

This beauty that comes from within is that meekness, quietness, gentleness, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, humility of mind, tenderness of conscience, which are fitting to the children of God. A gentle and quiet spirit is a woman's best ornament. As to other gay and unbecoming ornaments, let those wear them, who wish to serve and to enjoy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Let the "daughters of Zion" manifest they have other ornaments than what the world admires and approves. Let them covet the teachings of God, the smiles of His love, the whispers of His favor. The more they have of these, the less will they care for the adornments which the "daughters of Canaan" run so madly after—by which also they often impoverish themselves, and by opening a way for admiration, too often open a way for seduction and ruin.

O you filthy creature!

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death?" Romans 7:24

No doubt you have your enemies—and so have we all. But I will tell you where you have an enemy—and a greater enemy than ever you have found in others—yourself! I have often felt that I could do myself more harm in five minutes, than all my enemies could do me in fifty years! I need not fear what others may do or say—I fear myself more than them all—knowing what I am as a sinner—the strength of sin—and the power of temptation.

Be sure of this—that YOU are the worst enemy you ever had—your sin, your lust, your covetousness, your pride, your self-righteousness. God Himself will make you feel your enemy. You shall see something of his accursed designs—how sin has deceived you, betrayed you, brought guilt upon your conscience, and made you a burden to yourself. You shall be brought to feel, and say, "There is nothing I hate so much as my own vile heart—my own dreadfully corrupt nature. O what an enemy do I carry in my own bosom! Of all my enemies, he is surely the worst! Of all my foes, he is the most subtle and strong!"

Have you not sometimes felt as though you could take your lusts by the neck and dash their heads against a stone? Have you not felt you could take out of your breast this vile, damnable heart, lay it upon the ground, and stamp upon it? And when tempted with pride, or unbelief, or infidelity, or blasphemy, or any hateful lust, how you have cried out again and again with anguish of spirit, "O this heart of mine!" We hate our sins, and would, if possible, have no more to do with them, and would say to this lust, idol, or temptation, "O you filthy creature! What an enemy you are to my soul! O that I could forever be done with you! Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thanks be to God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord!"

You never knew what real happiness was!

One false charge against the children of God, is that they are a poor, moping, miserable people, who know nothing of happiness—renounce all cheerfulness, mirth, and gladness—hang their heads down all their days like a bulrush—are full of groundless fears—nurse the gloomiest thoughts in a kind of melancholy—grudge others the least enjoyment of pleasure and happiness—and try to make everyone else as dull and as miserable as their dull and miserable selves.

Is not this a false charge? You know that you never had any real happiness in the things of time and sense—that under all your 'pretended gaiety' there was real gloom—that every 'sweet' was drenched with bitterness—that vexation was stamped upon all that is called pleasure and enjoyment. You never knew what real happiness was, until you knew the Lord, and were blessed with His presence, and some manifestation of His goodness and mercy!

Were it no bigger than a child's doll

"From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Ezekiel 36:25

Idolatry takes a wide range. There are 'respectable' idols and 'vulgar' idols—just as there are marble statues, and other objects of worship made up of shells and feathers. And yet each will still be an idol. Respectable idols we can admire—vulgar idols we detest. But an idol is an idol—however respectable, or however vulgar—however admired, or however despised they may be.

But O how numerous are these respectable idols! Love of money, ambition, craving after human applause, desire to rise in the world—all these we may think are natural desires that may be lawfully gratified. But O, what idols may they turn out to be!

But there are more secret and more dangerous idols. You may have a husband, or wife, or child—whom you love almost as much as yourself—you bestow upon this idol of yours all the affections of your heart. Nothing is too good for it, nothing too dear for it. You don't see how this is an idol. But, whatever you love more than God, whatever you worship more than God, whatever you crave for more than God, is an idol. It may lurk in the chambers of imagery—you may scarcely know how fondly you love it. But let God take that idol out of your bosom—let Him pluck that idol from its niche—and you will then find how you have allowed your affections to wander after that idol and loved it more than God Himself.

It is when the idol is taken away—removed—dethroned—that we learn what an idol it has been. How we hug and embrace our idols! How we cleave to them! How we delight in them! How we bow down to them! How we seek gratification from them! How little are we aware what affections entwine around them—how little are we aware that they claim what God has reserved for Himself when He said, "My son, give me your heart."

Many a weeping widow learns for the first time that her husband was an idol. Many a mourning husband learns for the first time how too dearly, how too fondly, how too idolatrously he loved his wife. Many a man does not know how dearly he loves money until he incurs some serious loss. Many do not know how dearly they hold name, fame, and reputation until some slanderous blight seems to touch that tender spot. Few indeed seem to know how dear SELF is, until God takes it out of its niche and sets Himself there in its room. Self, pride, reputation, the love of money, the love of name and fame—these idols you cannot take with you into the courts of heaven. How would God be moved to jealousy if you could you carry an idol—were it no bigger than a child's doll—into the courts above! "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."

All your filthiness

"From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Ezekiel 36:25

O, what loathsome monsters of iniquity—how polluted, filthy, and vile do we feel ourselves to be—when the guilt of our sin is charged home upon our conscience! Have you not sometimes loathed yourselves on account of your abominations? Has not the filth of your sin sometimes disgusted you—the opening up of that horrible, that ever-running sewer, which you daily carry about with you? We complain, and justly complain—of a reeking sewer which runs through a street—or of a ditch filled with everything disgusting. But do we feel as much—do we complain as often—of the foul sewer which is ever running in our soul—of the filthy ditch in our own bosom? As the sight of this open sewer meets our eyes—and its stench enters our nostrils, it fills us with self-loathing and self-abhorrence before the eyes of a holy God. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."

What things were gain to me

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Philippians 3:7

This includes the loss of all your fancied holiness—of all your vaunted strength—of all your natural or acquired wisdom—of all your boasted knowledge—in a word, of everything in creature religion of which the heart is proud, and in which it takes delight. All, all must be counted loss for Christ's sake—all, all must be sacrificed to His bleeding, dying love. Our dearest joys—our fondest hopes—our most cherished idols—must all sink and give way to the grace, blood, and love of an incarnate God.

Looking down into a filthy pit!

"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"
Jeremiah 17:9

Sometimes we are so astonished—at what we are—at what we have been—or at what we are capable of. We stand sometimes and look at our heart, and see what a seething, boiling, and bubbling is there! And we look at it with indignant astonishment, as we would look into a pool of filthy black mud, all swarming and alive with every hideous creature! So when a man takes a view of his own heart—its dreadful hypocrisy, its vile rebellion, its alarming deceitfulness, its desperate wickedness, of what his heart is capable of plotting, of what evil it can conceive and imagine, it is as if he stood looking down into a filthy pit and saw with astonishment, mingled with self-abhorrence, what his heart is, as the fountain of all iniquity.

A man must have some knowledge of his own heart to understand such language as this. You that are so exceedingly 'pious' and so 'extra good,' and from whose heart the veil has never been taken away to show you what you are, will perhaps think that I am drawing a caricature of human nature, and painting it as the haunt of thieves and prostitutes. Could you but have the veil taken off your heart, you would see that you were capable of doing all that wickedness that others have done, or can do! By this sight of ourselves, we learn what a wonderful God we have to deal with! Surely none so highly prize the grace of God as those who are most led into a knowledge of the fall, and the havoc and ruin, and the guilt and misery which it has brought into our own hearts.

The largest slice of the well-sugared cake

"They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Hebrews 11:13

Many profess that they are strangers and pilgrims here below. But they take care to have as much of this world's comforts as they can scrape together by hook and by crook. They talk about being 'strangers,' yet can be in close friendship with men of the world. And could you see them at the exchange, at the market, behind the counter, or at home with their families—you would not find one mark to distinguish them from the ungodly! Yet they come to chapel—and if called upon to pray, they will tell the people they are "poor strangers and pilgrims in a valley of tears"—while all the time their hearts are in the world—and their eyes stand out with fatness—and they are as light and trifling as a comic actor—and have no concerns except to get the largest slice of the well-sugared cake that the world sets before them!

It is not the 'mere profession of the lips'—but 'grace in the heart,' that makes a man a stranger and a pilgrim. God's people are strangers and sojourners—the world is not their home—nor can they take pleasure in it. Sin is often a burden to them—guilt often lies as a heavy weight upon their conscience—a thousand troubles harass their minds—a thousand perplexities oppress their souls.

They cannot bury their minds in business and derive all their happiness from their successes, for they feel that this earth is not their home. They are often cast down and exercised, because they have to live with such an ungodly heart in such an ungodly world. "They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Can they beat back this monster to his filthy den?

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" Psalm 119:117

The Lord's people are a tempted people. Satan is ever waiting at their gate, constantly suggesting every hateful and improper thought—perpetually inflaming the rebellion and enmity of their carnal mind—and continually plaguing, harassing, and besieging them in a thousand ways! Can they repel him? Can they beat back this monster to his filthy den? Can they beat back this leviathan? They cannot—they feel they cannot. They know that nothing but the voice of Jesus, inwardly speaking with power to their souls, can beat back the lion of the bottomless pit! One whisper, one soft word from the lips of His gracious Majesty, can and will put every temptation to flight! "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

When it comes in the guise of a friend

"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Does not this verse show that the world is an enemy to the Lord—and to the Lord's people? and never so much an enemy—never to be so much dreaded—as when it comes in the guise of a friend. When it steals upon your heart, engrosses your thoughts, wins your affections, draws away your mind from God—then it is to be dreaded. When the world smites us as an enemy—its blows are not to be feared. It is when it smiles upon us as a friend—it is most to be dreaded. When our eyes begin to drink it in, when our ears begin to listen to its voice, when our hearts become entangled in its fascinations, when our minds get filled with its anxieties, when our affections depart from the Lord and cleave to the things of time and sense—then the world is to be dreaded.

Canaanitish idols & heathenish abominations

"You shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their engraved images with fire!" Deuteronomy 7:5

Our hearts are by nature full of Canaanitish idols and heathenish abominations, which must be destroyed! Lusts after evil things, adulterous images, idolatrous desires, strong hankerings after sin—along with evils which have the impudence to wear a religious garb—such as towering thoughts of our own ability, pleasing dreams of creature holiness, swellings up of pride—dressed out and painted in all the tawdry colors of Satanic delusion—how can these abominations be allowed to run rampant in the human heart?

The altars and religious rites of Canaanites were to be destroyed as much as their idols! And thus we may say of that very religious being—man—that his false worship and heathenish notions of God must be destroyed, as well as his more flagrant, though not more dangerous, lusts and abominations. The sentence against both is, "Destroy them!" They must not stand side by side with Immanuel, who is to have the preeminence in all things, and who is "the Alpha and the Omega—the first and the last." And O what a mercy it is to have both our fleshly and religious

abominations both destroyed! For I am sure that God and self never can rule in the same heart—that Christ and the devil can never reign in the same bosom—each claiming the supremacy!

This inward conflict

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Romans 7:18

Now it is this which makes the Lord's people such a burdened people—that makes them so oppressed in their souls as to cry out against themselves daily, and sometimes hourly—that they are what they are—that they would be spiritual, yet are carnal—that they would be holy, yet are unholy—that they would have sweet communion with Jesus, yet have such sensual alliance with the things of time and sense—that they would be Christians in word, thought, and deed—yet, in spite of all, they feel their carnal mind, their wretched depravity intertwining, interlacing, gushing forth—contaminating with its polluted stream everything without and within—so as to make them sigh, groan, and cry being burdened, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

He would not be entangled in these snares for ten thousand worlds—he hates the evils of his heart, and mourns over the corruptions of his nature. They make the tear fall from his eye, and the sob to heave from his bosom—they make him a wretched man—and fill him day after day with sorrow, bitterness, and anguish. None but a saved soul, under divine teaching, can see this evil—and mourn and sigh under the depravity, the corruption, the unbelief, the carnality, the wickedness, and the deceitfulness of his evil heart. This inward conflict, this sore grief, this internal burden, that all the family of God are afflicted with—is an evidence that the life and grace of God are in their bosoms. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Romans 7:25

Desperately wicked

"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9

Without a knowledge of the corruptions and abounding evils of our deceitful and desperately wicked heart—unbelief, infidelity, pride, hypocrisy, worldly mindedness, carnality, sensuality, selfishness—there will be no humility, no self-loathing, no dread of falling, no desire to be kept, no knowledge of the superaboundings of grace, over the aboundings of sin.

So many truly sincere & religious people

"Cornelius. . . a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, who gave gifts for the needy generously to the people, and always prayed to God." Acts 10:1, 2

Yet Cornelius wasn't saved! (Acts 11:14). A generous centurion builds a synagogue (Luke 7:3-5). A young man keeps the commandments from his youth up (Luke 18:21). Balaam prophesies (Numbers 23:16). Saul weeps (1 Samuel 24:16). Judas preaches the gospel (Matthew 10:5-8). Yet none of these men were saved! It is at times, enough to fill one's heart with mingled astonishment and sorrow—to see so many truly sincere and religious people, whose religion will leave them

short of eternal life—because they are destitute of saving grace. To see so much amiability, benevolence, devotedness, self-denial, liberality, loveliness of character, integrity, consistency of life—all inescapably dashed against the rock of inflexible justice, and there shattered and lost—swallowed up with its unhappy possessors in the raging billows beneath—such a sight, did we not know that the Judge of the whole earth cannot do wrong, would indeed stagger us to the very center of our being!

Sick of sin, sick of self, sick of the world

"Delight in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart." Psalm 37:4

By nature we delight in SIN. It is the very element of our nature—and even after the Lord has called us by His grace and quickened us by his Spirit, there is the same love to sin in the heart as there was before. We delight in it—we would wallow in it—take our full enjoyment of it—and swim in it as a fish swims in the waters of the sea!

By nature we also are prone to IDOLATRY. Self is the grand object of all our sensual and carnal worship. Our own exaltation, our own amusement, our own pleasure, our own gratification. Something whereby SELF may be flattered, admired, adored, delighted—is the grand end and aim of man's natural worship. By nature we also delight in the WORLD. It is our element, our home, what our carnal hearts are intimately blended with.

From all these things, then, which are intrinsically evil—which a pure and holy God must hate with absolute abhorrence—we must be weaned and effectually divorced—we need to have these things embittered to us. All the time we are doing homage and worship to self—all the time we are loving the world—all the time we delight in sin—all the time we are setting up idols in the secret chambers of imagery—there is no delighting ourselves in the Lord. We cannot delight ourselves in the Lord until we are purged of creature love—until the idolatry of our hearts is not merely manifested, but hated and abhorred—until by cutting temptations, sharp exercises, painful perplexities, and various sorrows, we are brought to this state—to be sick of SIN, sick of SELF, sick of the WORLD.

Until we are brought to loathe ourselves, we are not brought to that spot where none but God Himself can comfort, please, or make the soul really happy. Now the very means that God employs to embitter the world to us are cutting and grievous dispensations—as unexpected reverses in fortune—or afflictions of body, of family, or of soul. But these very means the Lord employs to divorce our carnal union from the world, stir up the self-pity, the murmuring, the peevishness, and the rebelliousness of our nature, so that we think we are being very harshly dealt with, in being compelled to walk in this trying path.

But only by these cutting dispensations are we eventually brought to delight ourselves in Him, who will give us the desires of our heart. How long you shall be walking in this painful path—how heavy your trials—what their duration shall be—how deep you may have to sink—how cutting your afflictions may be in body or soul, God has not defined, and we cannot. But they must work until they have produced this result—weaned, divorced, and separated us from all that we naturally love and idolatrously cleave unto—and all that we adulterously roam after. If our trials have not done this, they must go on until they produce that effect. The burden must be laid upon the back, affliction must try the mind, perplexities must encumber the feet, until we are brought to this

point—that none but the Lord Himself, with a taste of His dying love, can comfort our hearts, or give us that inward peace and joy which our soul is taught to crave after.

A hundred doctrines floating in the head

By five minutes real communion with the Lord—we learn more, we know more, we receive more, we feel more, and we experience more than by a thousand years of merely studying the Scriptures, or using external forms, rites, and ceremonies. One truth written by the Spirit in the heart, will bring forth more fruit in the life, than a hundred doctrines floating in the head.

However low we may sink

What a mercy it is to have a faithful, gracious, and compassionate High Priest who can sympathize with His poor, tried, tempted family—so that however low we may sink—His piteous eye can see us in our low estate—His gracious ear hear our cries—His loving heart melt over us—and His strong arm pluck us from our destructions! Oh, what would we do without such a gracious and most suitable Savior as our blessed Jesus! How He seems to rise more and more in our estimation, in our thoughts, in our desires, in our affections, as we see and feel what a wreck and ruin we are, what dreadful havoc sin has made with us, what miserable outcasts we are by nature. But oh, how needful it is, dear friend, to be brought down in our soul to be the chief of sinners, viler than the vilest, worse than the worst—that we may really and truly believe in, and cleave unto, this most precious and suitable Savior!

Nothing but a slave!

"You were the servants of sin." Romans 6:17

What a picture does this draw of our sad state, while walking in the darkness and death of unregeneracy! The Holy Spirit here sets forth Sin as a harsh master, exercising tyrannical dominion over his slaves! How this portrays our state and condition in a state of unregeneracy—slaves to sin! Just as a master commands his slave to go here and there—imposes on him certain tasks—and has entire and despotic authority over him—so sin had a complete mastery over us, used us at its arbitrary will and pleasure, drove us here and there on its commands. But in this point we differed from physical slaves—that we did not murmur under our yoke—but gladly and cheerfully obeyed all sin's commands—and never tired of doing the most servile drudgery!

Thus some have had sin as a very vulgar and tyrannical master, who drove them into open acts of drunkenness, uncleanness, and profligacy—yes, everything base, vile, and evil. Others have been preserved through education, through the watchfulness and example of parents, or other moral restraints, from going into such open lengths of iniquity, and outward breakings forth of evil. But still sin secretly reigned in their hearts—pride, worldliness, love of the things of time and sense, hatred to God and aversion to His holy will—selfishness and stubbornness, in all their various forms, had a complete mastery over them! And though sin ruled over them more as a gentleman—he kept them in a more refined, though not less real or absolute slavery! Whatever sin bade them do, that they did, as implicitly as the most abject slave ever obeyed a tyrannical master's command. What a picture does the Holy Spirit here draw of what a man is! Nothing but a slave!—and sin, as his master, first driving him upon God's sword, and then giving him eternal

death as his wages!

A glory, a beauty & a sweetness

How sweet it is to trace the Lord's hand in providence—to look back on the chequered path that He has led us by—to see how His hand has been with us for good—what difficulties He has brought us through—in what straits He has appeared—how in things most trying He has wrought deliverance—and how He has sustained us to the present hour. How sweet are providential favors when they come stamped with this inscription, "This is from the Lord!" How precious every temporal mercy becomes—our very food, lodging, and clothing! How sweet is the least thing when it comes down to us as from God's hands! A man cannot know the sweetness of his daily bread until he sees that God gives it to him—nor the blessedness of any providential dealing until he can say, "God has done this for me—and given that to me." When a man sees the providence of God stamped on every action of life, it casts a glory, a beauty and a sweetness over every day of his life!

Having nothing—and yet possessing all things

"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things." 2 Corinthians 6:10

How can this apparent contradiction be reconciled? It is resolved thus—"having nothing" in self—"possessing all things" in Christ. And just in proportion as I have nothing in self experimentally—so I possess all things in Christ. My own beggary leads me out of self into His riches. My own unrighteousness leads me out of self into Christ's righteousness. My own defilement leads me out of self into Christ's sanctification. My own weakness leads me out of self into Christ's strength. My own misery leads me out of self into Christ's mercy.

Having nothing—and yet possessing all things. These two branches of divine truth, so far from clashing with each other—sweetly, gloriously, and blessedly harmonize. And just in proportion as we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of "having nothing" in self—just so much shall we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of "possessing all things" in Christ.

Riches, honors & comforts

"But we have this treasure in clay vessels." 2 Corinthians 4:7

How different is the estimate that the Christian makes of riches, honors and comforts—from that made by the world and the flesh! The world's idea of riches are only such as consist in gold and silver, in houses, lands, or other tangible property. The world's estimate of honors, are only such as man has to bestow. The world's notion of comfort, is "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." But the true Christian takes a different estimate of these matters, and feels that the only true riches are those of God's grace in the heart, the only real honor is that which comes from God, the only solid comfort is that which is imparted by the Holy Spirit to a broken and contrite spirit.

Now, just in proportion as we are filled by the Spirit of God, shall we take faith's estimate of riches, honors, and comforts. And just so much as we are imbued with the spirit of the world, shall we take the flesh's estimate of these things. When the eye of the world looked on the Apostles, it viewed them as a company of poor ignorant men—a set of wild enthusiasts, who traveled about the

country preaching Jesus, who they said, had been crucified, and was risen from the dead. The natural eye saw no beauty, no power, no glory in the truths they brought forth. Nor did it see that the poor perishing bodies of these outcast men contained in them a heavenly treasure, and that they would one day shine as the stars forever and ever—while those who despised their word would sink into endless woe. The spirit of the world can never understand or love the things of eternity—it can only look to, and can only rest upon, the poor perishing things of time and sense.

The continued teachings of the Spirit

When once, by the operation of the Spirit on our conscience, we have been stripped of formality, superstition, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, presumption, and the other delusions of the flesh that hide themselves under the mask of religion—we have felt the difference between having a name to live while dead, and the power of vital godliness. And as a measure of divine life has flowed into the heart out of the fullness of the Son of God, we desire no other religion but that which stands in the power of God—by that alone can we live, and by that alone we feel that we can die.

And, at last, we are brought to this conviction and solemn conclusion—that there is no other true religion but that which consists in the continued teachings of the Spirit, and the communications of the life of God to the soul. And with the Spirit's teachings are connected all the actings of faith in the soul—all the anchorings of hope in the heart—all the flowings forth of love—every tear of genuine contrition that flows down the cheeks—every sigh of godly sorrow that heaves from the bosom—every cry and groan because of the body of sin—every breath of spiritual prayer that comes from the heart—every casting of our souls upon Christ—all submission to Him—all communion with Him—all enjoyment of Him—and all the inward embracements of Him in His suitability and preciousness.

It will come in at every chink & crevice!

"For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing." Romans 7:18

The world within us is ten thousand times worse than the world outside of us! We may shut and bar our doors, and exclude the outside world—but the world within cannot be so shut out! More—we might go and hide ourselves in a hermit's cave, and never see the face of man again—but even there we would be as carnal and worldly as if we lived in Vanity Fair!

We cannot shut out the world—it will come in at every chink and crevice! This wretched world will intrude itself into our every thought and imagination! I don't know how it may be with you, but I have no more power to keep out the workings of sin in my heart, than I have power by holding up my hand to stop the rain from coming down to the earth! Sin will come in at every crack and crevice, and manifest itself in the wretched workings of an evil heart! The seeds of every crime are in our nature—and therefore, could your flesh have its full swing, there would not be a viler wretch in London than you!

At last to cheat the devil!

If God is not your master—the devil will be. If grace does not rule—sin will reign. If Christ is not your all in all—the world will be. It is not as though we could roam abroad in total liberty. We must have a master of one kind or another. And which is best? A bounteous, benevolent Benefactor—a merciful, loving, and tender Parent—a kind, forgiving Father and Friend—a tender-hearted,

compassionate Redeemer?—OR—A cruel devil, a miserable world, a wicked, vile, abominable heart? Which is better? To live under the sweet constraints of the dying love of a dear Redeemer—under gospel influences, gospel principles, gospel promises, and gospel encouragements?—OR—To walk in imagined liberty, with sin in our heart, exercising dominion and mastery there—and binding us in iron chains to the judgment of the great day?

Even taking the present life—there is more real pleasure, satisfaction, and solid happiness—in half an hour with God—in sweet union and communion with the Lord of life and glory—in reading His word with a believing heart—in finding access to His sacred presence—in knowing something of the droppings in of His favor and mercy—than in all the delights of sin, all the lusts of the flesh, all the pride of life, and all the amusements that the world has ever devised to kill time and cheat self—thinking, by a death-bed repentance—at last to cheat the devil!

Cursed is the man

"Thus says the Lord: Cursed is the man who trust in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord." Jeremiah 17:5

The Lord here does not lay down a man's moral or immoral character as a test of salvation. He does not say, "Cursed is the thief—the adulterer—the extortioner—the murderer—the man that lives in open profanity." He puts all that aside, and fixes His eye and lays His hand upon one mark, which may exist with the greatest morality and with the highest profession of religion. "I will tell you," the Lord says, "who are under My curse—the person who trusts in man—who depends on flesh for his strength—and in so doing, his heart turns away from Me."

That hideous idol self in his little shrine

"Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods." Hosea 14:3

The besetting sin of Israel was the worship of idols. Perhaps, if you have walked into the British Museum, and seen the idols that were worshiped in former days in the South Sea Islands, you have been amazed that rational beings could ever bow down before such ugly monsters. But does the heart of a South Sea Islander differ from the heart of an Englishman? Not a bit! The latter may have more civilization and cultivation—but his heart is the same! And though you have not bowed down to these monstrous objects and hideous figures—there may be as filthy an idol in your heart! Where is there a filthier idol than the lusts and passions of man's fallen nature? You need not go to the British Museum to see filthy idols and painted images. Look within! Where is there a more groveling idol than Mammon, and the covetousness of our heart? You need not wonder at heathens worshiping hideous idols—when you have pride, covetousness, and above all that hideous idol SELF in his little shrine, hiding himself from the eyes of man—but to which you are so often rendering your daily and hourly worship! If a person does not see that the root of all idolatry is SELF, he knows but little of his heart.

Such a perpetual & unceasing conflict?

"For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice." Romans 7:19

What a picture of that which passes in a godly man's bosom! He has in him two distinct principles, two different natures—one holy, heavenly, spiritual, panting after the Lord, and finding the things of God its element. And yet in the same bosom a principle totally corrupt, thoroughly and entirely depraved, perpetually striving against the holy principle within, continually lusting after evil, opposed to every leading of the Spirit in the soul, and seeking to gratify its filthy desires at any cost!

Now, must there not be a feeling of misery in a man's bosom to have these two armies perpetually fighting? That when he desires to do good, evil is present with him—when he would be holy, heavenly minded, tender-hearted, loving, seeking God's glory, enjoying sweet communion with Jehovah, there is a base, sensual, earthly heart perpetually at work—infusing its baneful poison into every thought, counteracting every desire, and dragging him from the heaven to which he would mount, down to the very hell of carnality and filth?

There is a holy, heavenly principle in a man's bosom that knows, fears, loves, and delights in God. Yet he finds that sin in himself, which is altogether opposed to the mind of Christ, and lusts after that which he hates. Must there not be sorrow and grief in that man's bosom to feel such a perpetual and unceasing conflict? Is there ever this piteous cry forced by guilt, shame, and sorrow out of your bosom, "O wretched man that I am!" If not, be assured that you are dead in sin, or dead in a profession.

We need grace, free grace

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you." 2 Peter 1:2

When we see and feel how we need grace every moment in our lives, we at once perceive the beauty in asking for an abundant, overflowing measure of grace. We cannot walk the length of the street without sin. Our carnal minds, our vain imaginations, are all on the lookout for evil. Sin presents itself at every avenue, and lurks like the prowling night-thief for every opportunity of secret plunder. In fact, in ourselves, in our fallen nature, except as restrained and influenced by grace, we sin with well near every breath that we draw.

We need, therefore, grace upon grace, or, in the words of the text, grace to be "multiplied" in proportion to our sins. Shall I say in proportion? No! If sin abounds, as to our shame and sorrow we know it does, we need grace to much more abound! When the 'tide of sin' flows in with its muck and mire, we need the 'tide of grace' to flow higher still, to carry out the slime and filth into the depths of the ocean, so that when sought for, they may be found no more.

We need grace, free grace—grace today, grace tomorrow, grace this moment, grace the next, grace all the day long. We need grace, free grace—healing grace, reviving grace, restoring grace, saving grace, sanctifying grace. And all this multiplied by all our wants and woes, sins, slips, falls, and unceasing and aggravated backslidings. We need grace, free grace—grace to believe, grace to hope, grace to love, grace to fight, grace to conquer, grace to stand, grace to live, grace to die. Every moment of our lives we need keeping grace—supporting grace—upholding grace—withholding grace. May God's grace and peace be multiplied unto you.

We are not flogged into loving Him

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Colossians 3:2

Where are your affections to be set? Are they to be set on "things on the earth"—perishing toys, those polluting vanities, those carking cares, which must ever dampen the life of God in the soul? The expression, "things on the earth," takes in a wide scope. It embraces not only the vain toys, the ambitious hopes, the perishing pleasures in which a gay, unthinking world is sunk and lost—but even the legitimate calls of business, the claims of wife and home, family and friends, with every social tie that binds to earth.

Thus every object on which the eye can rest—every thought or desire that may spring up in the mind—every secret idol that lurks in the bosom—every care and anxiety that is not of grace—every fond anticipation of pleasure or profit that the world may hold out, or the worldly heart embrace—all, with a million pursuits in which man's fallen nature seeks employment or happiness—are "things on the earth" on which the affections are not to be set. We may love our wives and children. We should pursue our lawful callings with diligence and industry. We must provide for our families according to the good providence of God. But we may not so set our affections on these things, that they pull us down from heaven to earth. He who is worthy of all our affections claims them all for Himself. He who is the Bridegroom of the soul demands, as He has fairly won, the unrivaled love of His bride.

But how are we to do this? Can we do this great work by ourselves? No! it is only the Lord Himself, manifesting His beauty and blessedness to our soul, and letting down the golden cord of His love into our bosom, that draws up our affections, and fixes them on Himself. In order to do this, He captivates the heart by some look of love—some word of His grace—some sweet promise—or some divine truth spiritually applied. When He thus captivates the soul, and draws it up, then the affections flow unto Him as the source and fountain of all blessings.

We are not flogged into loving Him, but are drawn by love into love. Love cannot be bought or sold. It is an inward affection that flows naturally and necessarily towards its object, and all connected with it. And thus, as love flows out to Jesus, the affections instinctively and necessarily set themselves "on things above, and not on things on the earth." Jesus must be revealed to our soul by the power of God before we can see His beauty and blessedness—and so fall in love with Him as the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely One! Then everything that speaks of Christ—savors of Christ—breathes of Christ—becomes inexpressibly sweet and precious!

In no other way can our affections be lifted up from earth to heaven. We cannot control our affections—they will run out of their own accord. If then our affections are earthly, they will run towards earthly objects. If they are carnal and sensual, they will flow towards carnal and sensual objects. But when the Lord Jesus Christ, by some manifestation of His glory and blessedness—or the Holy Spirit, by taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to the soul—sets Him before our eyes as the only object worthy of, and claiming every affection of our heart—then the affections flow out, I was going to say naturally, but most certainly spiritually, towards Him. And when this is the case, the affections are set on things above.

O what a company of lusts!

"We have no might against this great company that comes against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are on You." 2 Chronicles 20:12

There is no use fighting the battle in our own strength. We have none. O, when temptation creeps like a serpent into the carnal mind, it winds its secret way and coils around the heart. As the boa-constrictor is said to embrace its victim, entwining his coil around it, and crushing every bone without any previous warning—so does temptation often seize us suddenly in its powerful embrace. Have we in ourselves any more power to extricate our flesh from its slimy folds, than the poor animal has from the coils of the boa-constrictor?

So with the corruptions and lusts of our fallen nature. Can you always master them? Can you seize these serpents by the neck and wring off their heads? To examine our heart is something like examining by the microscope a drop of ditch-water—the more minutely it is looked into, the more hideous forms appear. All these strange monsters, too, are in constant motion, devouring or devoured. And, as more powerful lenses are put on the microscope, more and more loathsome creatures emerge into view, until eye and heart sicken at the sight. Such is our heart. Superficially viewed—passably fair. But examined by the spiritual microscope, hideous forms of every shape and size appear—lusts and desires in unceasing movement, devouring each other, and yet undiminished—and each successive examination bringing new monsters to light!

O what a company of lusts! How one seems to introduce and make way for the other! and how one, as among the insect tribe, is the father of a million! We must take these lusts and passions by the neck, and lay them down at the feet of God, and thus bring the omnipotence of Jehovah against what would destroy us—"Here are my lusts, I cannot manage them. Here are my temptations, I cannot overcome them. Here are my enemies, I cannot conquer them. Lord, I do not know what to do. Will You not subdue my enemies?" This is fighting against sin—not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. Not by the law, but by the gospel. Not by self, but by the grace of God. And if your soul has had many a tussle, and many a wrestle, and many a hand-to-hand conflict with sin, you will have found this out before now—that nothing but the grace, power, and Spirit of Christ ever gave you the victory, or the least hope of victory.

As if this beautiful viper had no poison fang!

"Deliver me from all my transgressions." Psalm 39:8

Ah! how rarely it is that we see sin in its true colors—that we feel what the apostle calls, "the exceeding sinfulness of sin!" O how much is the dreadful evil of sin for the most part veiled from our eyes! Our deceitful hearts so gloss it over, so excuse, palliate, and disguise it—that it is daily trifled, played, and dallied with—as if this beautiful viper had no poison fang! It is only as the Spirit is pleased to open the eyes to see, and awaken the conscience to feel "the exceeding sinfulness of sin," and thus discover its dreadful character, that we have any real sight or sense of its awful nature. Sins of heart, sins of lip, sins of life, sins of omission, sins of commission, sins of ingratitude, sins of unbelief, sins of rebellion, sins of lust, sins of pride, sins of worldliness! As all these transgressions, troop after troop, come in view, and rise up like spectres from the grave, well may we cry with stifled voice, "Deliver me, O deliver me from all my transgressions! Deliver me from the guilt of sin—the filth of sin—the love of sin—the power of sin—and the practice of sin!"

The very remedy for all the maladies which we groan under!

Grace only suits those who are altogether guilty and filthy. Grace is completely opposed to works in all its shapes and bearings. Thus no one can really desire to taste the sweetness and enjoy the

preciousness of grace, who has not "seen an end of all perfection" in the creature, and is brought to know and feel in the conscience, that his good works would damn him as equally with his bad works. When grace is thus opened up to the soul, it sees that grace flows only through the Savior's blood—and that grace superabounds over all the abounding of sin—heals all backslidings—covers all transgressions—lifts up out of darkness—pardons iniquity—and is just the very remedy for all the maladies which we groan under!

Weaned from feeding on husks & ashes

"I will satisfy her poor with bread." Psalm 132:15

The Lord has given a special promise to Zion's poor—"I will satisfy her poor with bread." Nothing else? Bread? Is that all? Yes! That is all God has promised—bread, the staff of life. But what does He mean by "bread"? The Lord Himself explains what bread is. He says, "I am the bread of life: he who comes to Me will not be hungry; and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if anyone eats of this bread he shall live forever." The bread, then, that God gives to Zion's poor is His own dear Son—fed upon by living faith, under the special operations of the Holy Spirit in the heart. "I will satisfy her poor with bread."

But must not we have an appetite before we can feed upon bread? The rich man who feasts continually upon juicy meat and savory sauces, would not live upon bread. To come down to live on such simple food as bread—why, one must be really hungry to be satisfied with that. So it is spiritually. A man fed upon 'mere notions' and a number of 'speculative doctrines' cannot descend to the simplicity of the gospel. To feed upon a crucified Christ, a bleeding Jesus!—he is not sufficiently brought down to the starving point, to relish such spiritual food as this!

Before, then, he can feed upon this Bread of life he must be made spiritually poor. And when he is brought to be nothing but a mass of wretchedness, filth, guilt, and misery—when he feels his soul sinking under the wrath of God, and has scarcely a hope to buoy up his poor tottering heart—when he finds the world embittered to him, and he has no one object from which he can reap any abiding consolation—then the Lord is pleased to open up in his conscience, and bring the sweet savor of the love of His dear Son into his heart—and he begins to taste gospel bread. Being weaned from feeding on husks and ashes, and sick "of the vines of Sodom and the fields of Gomorrah," and being brought to relish simple gospel food, he begins to taste a sweetness in 'Christ crucified' which he never could know—until he was made experimentally poor. The Lord has promised to satisfy such. "I will satisfy her poor with bread."

That secret loveliness

"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Hosea 11:4

Where Christ is made in any measure experimentally known, He has gained the affections of the heart. He has, more or less, taken possession of the soul. He has, in some degree, endeared Himself as a bleeding, agonizing Savior to every one to whom He has in any way revealed Himself. And, thus, the strong cord of love and affection is powerfully wreathed around the tender spirit and broken heart. Therefore His name becomes as 'ointment poured forth'—there is a preciousness in His blood—there is a beauty in His Person—there is that secret loveliness in Him—which wins and attracts and draws out the tender affections of the soul. And thus this cord of

love entwined round the heart, binds it fast and firm to the cross of the Lord Jesus. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."

Lord, I feel my own utter helplessness!

"O send out Your light and Your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to Your holy hill, to your tents." Psalm 43:3

The Christian is often dissatisfied with his state. He is well aware of the shallowness of his attainments in the divine life, as well as of the ignorance and the blindness that are in him. He cannot perceive the path of life. He sees and feels so powerfully the workings of sin and corruption, that he often staggers, and is perplexed in his mind. And therefore, laboring under the feeling of his own shortcomings for the past—his helplessness for the present—and his ignorance for the future—he wants to go forward wholly and solely in the strength of the Lord—to be led, guided, directed, kept—not by his own wisdom and power—but by the supernatural entrance of light and truth into his soul.

When thus harassed and perplexed, he will at times and seasons, as his heart is made soft, cry out with fervency and importunity, as a beggar that will not take a denial, "O send out Your light and Your truth. Let them bring me to Your holy hill, to Your tents." As though he would say, "Lord, I feel my own utter helplessness! I know I must go astray, if You do not condescend to guide me. I have been betrayed a thousand times when I have trusted my own heart. I have been entangled in my base lusts. I have been puffed up by presumption. I have been carried away by hypocrisy and pride. I have been drawn aside into the world. I have never taken a single step aright when left to myself. And therefore feeling how unable I am to guide myself a single step of the way, I come unto You, and ask You to send forth Your light and Your truth, that they may guide me, for I am utterly unable to lead myself." The child of God—feeling his own ignorance, darkness, blindness, and sinfulness—moans, and sighs, and cries unto God—that he might be led every step, kept every moment, guided every inch.

O what a way of learning religion!

"He was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." 2 Corinthians 12:4

Now, doubtless, the apostle Paul, after he had been thus favored—thus caught up into paradise—thought that he would retain the same frame of mind that he was in when he came down from this heavenly place—that the savor, the sweetness, the power, the unction, the dew, the heavenly feeling would continue in his soul. And no doubt he thought he would walk all through his life with a measure of the sweet enjoyments that he then experienced.

But this was not God's way of teaching religion! God had another way which Paul knew nothing of, and that was—if I may use the expression—to bring him from the third heaven, where his soul had been blessed with unspeakable ravishment—down to the very gates of hell. For he says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." The idea "buffeting" is that of a strong man beating a weak one with violent blows to his head and face—bruising him into a shapeless mass! O what a way of learning religion!

Now I want you to see the contrast we have here. The blessed apostle caught up into the third heavens, filled with light, life, and glory—enjoying the presence of Christ—and bathing his soul in the river of divine consolation. Now for a reverse—down he comes to the earth. A messenger of Satan is let loose upon him, who buffets, beats and pounds this blessed apostle into a shapeless mummy—no eyes, no nose, no mouth, no features—but one indistinguishable mass of black and blue!

Such is the mysterious way in which a man learns religion! But what was all this for? Does it not appear very cruel—does it not seem very unkind that, after the Lord had taken Paul up into the third heaven, He would let the devil buffet him? Does it not strike our natural reason to be as strange and as unheard of a thing, as if a mother who had been fondling her babe in her arms, suddenly were to put it down, and let a large savage dog ravage it—and look on, without interfering, while he was tearing the child which she had been a few minutes before dandling in her lap, and clasping to her bosom?

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." Here we have this difficult enigma solved, this mysterious knot untied! We find that the object and end of all these severe dealings was to keep Paul from pride! Three times Paul besought his loving and sympathizing Redeemer, that the trial might be taken away, for it was too grievous to be borne. The Lord heard his prayer and answered it—but not in the way that Paul expected. His answer was, "My grace is sufficient for you." As though He would say, "Paul, beloved Paul, I am not going to take away your trial—it came from Me—it was given by Me. But My grace shall be sufficient for you, for My strength shall be made perfect in your weakness. There is a lesson to be learned, a path to be walked in, an experience to be passed through, wisdom to be obtained in this path—and therefore you must travel in it. Be content then with this promise from My own lips—My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness." The apostle was satisfied with this—he wanted no more, and therefore he burst forth, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." O what a way of learning religion!

Wrought with divine power

"Our gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance." 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Most men's religion is nothing else but 'a round of forms'—some have their 'doings'—some have their 'doctrines'—and others have their 'duties.' And when the one has performed his doings, the other learned his doctrines, and the third discharged his duties—why, he is as good a Christian, he thinks, as anybody. While all the time, the poor deceived creature is thoroughly ignorant of the kingdom of God, which stands not simply in word, but in power. But as the veil of ignorance is taken off the heart, we begin to see and feel that there is a power in vital godliness—a reality in the teachings of the Spirit—that religion is not to be put on and put off as a man puts on and off his Sunday clothes.

Where vital godliness is wrought with divine power in a man's heart, and preached by the Holy Spirit into his conscience—it mingles, daily and often hourly, with his thoughts—entwines itself

with his feelings—and becomes the very food and drink of his soul. Now when a man comes to this spot—to see and feel what a reality there is in the things of God made manifest in the conscience by the power of the Holy Spirit—it effectually takes him out of dead churches, cuts him off from false ministers, winnows the chaff from the wheat, and brings him into close communion with the broken-hearted family of God.

The more lovely does Jesus appear!

The poor believer feels, "I continually find all kinds of evil working in my mind—every base corruption crawling in my heart—everything vile, sensual, and filthy rising up from its abominable deeps. Can I think that God can look down in love and mercy on such a wretch?" When we see our vileness—our baseness—our carnality—our sensuality—how our souls cleave to dust—how we grovel in evil and hateful things—how dark our minds—how earthly our affections—how depraved our hearts—how strong our lusts—how raging our passions—we feel ourselves, at times, no more fit for God than Satan himself!

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Christ does not justify those who are naturally righteous, holy, and religious. But He takes the sinner as he is, in all his filth and guilt—washes him in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness—and clothes the naked shivering wretch, who has nothing to cover him but filthy rags, in His own robe of righteousness! The gospel of the grace of God brings glad tidings of pardon to the criminal—of mercy to the guilty—and of salvation to the lost! That the holy God should look down in love on wretches that deserve the damnation of hell—that the pure and spotless Jehovah should pity, save, and bless enemies and rebels, and make them endless partakers of His own glory—this indeed is a mystery, the depth of which eternity itself will not fathom! The deeper we sink in self-abasement under a sense of our vileness, the higher we rise in a knowledge of Christ. And the blacker we are in our own view, the more lovely does Jesus appear!

We bring affliction upon ourselves

"Haven't you procured this to yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord your God, when He led you by the way?" Jeremiah 2:17

"Haven't you procured this to yourself?" says the Lord to His sinning Israel. Who dares say he has not by his sins—his carnality—his pride—his covetousness—his worldly-mindedness—his unbelief—his foolishness—his rebelliousness—procured to himself many things that have grieved and distressed his soul? If indeed we take no notice of the sin that dwells in us, and pay no regard to our thoughts, desires, words, and actions, and take our stand on our own righteousness—we may refuse to believe that we are such vile sinners. But if we are compelled to look within, and painfully feel that SIN is an indweller—a lodger, whom we are compelled to harbor—a serpent that will creep in and nestle in our heart, whether we will or not—a thief that will break through and steal, and whom no bolt nor bar can keep out—a traitor in the citadel who will work by force or fraud, and against whom no resolution of ours has any avail—if such be our inward experience and conviction, I believe there is not a man or woman here who will not confess, "Guilty, guilty! Unclean, unclean!"

We bring affliction upon ourselves. We procure suffering by our own iniquities. "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." "O!" says the fool—"my

worldly-mindedness, my pride, my covetousness, my carnality, my neglect of divine things, my rebelliousness, my recklessness, the snares I entangled myself in, my various besetting sins—this it is which has provoked the Lord to afflict me so severely, and leave me, fool that I am, to reap the fruit of my own devices!"

A religious animal

"You men of Athens, I perceive that you are very religious in all things. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Acts 17:22, 23

Man has been called, and perhaps with some truth, a religious animal. Religion of some kind, at any rate, seems almost indispensable to his very existence—for from the most civilized nation, to the most barbarous tribe upon the face of the earth, we find some form of religion practiced. Whether this is ingrained into the very constitution of man, or whether it be received by custom or tradition, I will not pretend to decide. But that some kind of religion is almost universally prevalent, is a fact that cannot be denied.

We will always find these two kinds of religion—false and true—earthly and heavenly—fleshly and spiritual—natural and supernatural. Compare this vital, spiritual, heavenly, divine, supernatural religion—this work of grace upon the soul, this teaching of God in the heart, this life of faith within—with its flimsy counterfeit. Compare the actings of real faith, real hope, real love—the teachings, the dealings, the leadings, and the operations of the blessed Spirit in the soul—with rounds of duties, superstitious forms, empty ceremonies, and a notional religion, however puffed up and varnished. Compare the life of God in the heart of a true Christian, amid all his dejection, despondency, trials, temptations, and exercises—compare that precious treasure, Christ's own grace in the soul—with all mere external religion, superficial religion, notional religion. O, it is no more to be compared than a grain of dust with a diamond! No more to be compared than a criminal in a dungeon to the King on the throne! In fact, there is no comparison between them.

What a contrast!

"He who endures to the end, the same will be saved." Mark 13:13

Saved! Saved from what? Saved from hell! Saved from an eternity of endless misery and horror! Saved from the worm which never dies! Saved from the fire which is never quenched! Saved from the sulphurous flames! Saved from the companionship of devils and damned spirits! Saved from ever-rolling ages of ceaseless misery and horror!

Have you not thought sometimes about eternity? What must an eternity of misery be—when you can scarcely bear the pain of a toothache half an hour! O! to be in torment forever! How it racks the soul to think of it! What tongue, then, can express the mercy and blessedness of being saved from hell—from the billows of the sulphurous lake—from infinite despair! When a soul strikes upon the 'rock of perdition,' it is at once swallowed up in a dreadful eternity! Not only are believers saved from all this infinite and unending misery—but they are saved into unspeakable happiness and glory! They are saved into heaven—saved into eternal communion with the infinite God—saved into the eternal enjoyment of His blessed presence—saved into the perfect enjoyment of that perfect and everlasting love in those regions of endless bliss where tears are wiped from off all

faces!

What a

Volume 5

Three books

There are three books which, if a man will read and study, he can dispense with most others.

1. The book of Providence—and this he reads to good purpose, when he sees written down line by line the providential dealings of God with him, and a ray of Divine light gilds every line.
2. The Word of God—and this he reads to profit, when the blessed Spirit applies it with power to his soul.
3. The book of his own heart—and this he studies with advantage, when he reads in the new man of grace the blessed dealings of God with his soul, and in the old man of sin and death, enough to fill him with shame and confusion of face, and make him loathe and abhor himself in dust and ashes.

The whole apparatus of religion

"I perceive that you are very religious in all things." Acts 17:22

Religion, in some shape or other, is indispensable to the very existence of civilized society. There is a natural religion—as well as a spiritual religion. Natural conscience is the seat of the former—a spiritual conscience the seat of the latter. One is of the flesh—the other of the Spirit. One for time—the other for eternity. One for the world—the other for the elect. One to animate and bind men together as component members of society—the other to animate and bind the children of God together as component members of the mystical body of Christ. True religion is what the world does not want—nor does true religion want the world. The two are as separate as Christ and Belial.

But some religion the world must have! And as it will not have, and cannot have the true—it will and must have the false. True religion is spiritual and experimental, heavenly and divine, the gift and work of God, the birthright and privilege of the elect, the peculiar possession of the heirs of God. This the world has not—for it is God's enemy, not His friend—walking in the broad way which leads to perdition, not in the narrow way which leads to eternal life.

Worldly religion cannot exist without an order of men to teach it and practice its ceremonies. Hence come clergy, forming a recognized priestly caste. And as these must, to avoid confusion, be governed, all large corporate bodies requiring a controlling power, thence come bishops and archbishops, ecclesiastical courts, archdeacons—and the whole apparatus of clerical government. The ceremonies and ordinances cannot be carried on without buildings set apart for the purpose—thence churches and cathedrals. As prayer is a part of all religious worship, and carnal men cannot, for lack of the Spirit, pray spiritually—they must have forms of devotion made ready to their hand, thence come prayer-books and liturgies. As there must be mutual points of agreement to hold men together, there must be written formulas of doctrine—thence come

articles, creeds, and confessions of faith. And finally, as there are children to be instructed, and this cannot be safely left to oral teaching, for fear of ignorance in some and error in others, the very form of instruction must be drawn up in so many words—thence come catechisms.

People are puzzled sometimes to know why there is this and that thing in an established religion—why we have churches and clergy, tithes and prayer-books, universities and catechisms—and the whole apparatus of religion. They do not see that all these things have sprung, as it were, out of a moral necessity, and are based upon the very constitution of man—that this great and widespread tree of a human religion has its deep roots in the natural conscience—and that all these branches necessarily and naturally grow out of the broad and lofty stem. The attachment, then, of worldly people to a worldly religion is no great mystery. It is no riddle for a Samson to put forth—or requiring a Solomon to solve.

Things which the angels desire to look into

"Things which the angels desire to look into." 1 Peter 1:12

To the carnal, earthly, debased, degraded mind of man—the mystery of the Person of Christ, of the cross, of the sufferings, blood-shedding, and death of Jesus, whereby He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself—is foolishness. He sees no beauty, blessedness, or glory in the Person of the Son of God—nor any wisdom or grace in atoning blood and dying love.

But not so with these bright and pure beings! They see in the Person and work of Christ not only the depths of infinite wisdom in the contrivance of the whole plan of redemption, and of power in its execution and full accomplishment—but they see such lengths, breadths, depths, and heights of love as fill their minds with holy wonder, admiration and praise. They see in His incarnation, humiliation, sufferings, blood-shedding, and death—such unspeakable treasures of mercy and grace as ever fill their minds with wonder and admiration.

What shame and confusion should cover our face that we should see so little beauty and glory in that redeeming blood and love, which fills the pure minds of the angelic beings with holy and unceasing admiration—and that they should be ever seeking and inquiring into this heavenly mystery, that they may discover in it ever new and opening treasures of the wisdom, grace, mercy, truth, and love of God—when we who profess to be redeemed by precious blood, are, for the most part, so cold and indifferent in the contemplation and admiration of it.

This most precious & suitable Savior!

"For we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Hebrews 4:15

What a mercy it is to have a faithful and gracious compassionate High Priest who can sympathize with His poor, tried, tempted family—so that however low they may sink, His pitiful eye can see them in their low estate—His gracious ear hear their cries—His loving heart melt over them—and His strong arm pluck them from their destructions! Oh what would we do without such a gracious and most suitable Savior as the blessed Jesus! How He seems to rise more and more in our estimation—in our thoughts—in our desires—in our affections—as we see and feel what a wreck and ruin we are, what dreadful havoc sin has made with both body and soul, what miserable outcasts we are by nature. But oh how needful it is, dear friend, to be brought down in our soul to

be the chief of sinners, viler than the vilest, and worse than the worst—that we may really and truly believe in, and cleave unto, this most precious and suitable Savior!

My path

My path has been, and is, one mainly of trial and temptation, having a heart so evil, a tempter so subtle, and so many crosses and snares in which my feet are continually caught and entangled. All here on earth, is labor and sorrow. Our own sins, and the sins of others, will always make it a scene of trouble. Oh, you hideous monster, sin! What a mighty power it has—a power which grace alone can subdue. It seems sometimes subdued, and then rises up worse than before. Well may we cry out, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Hold me up Lord, and I shall be safe!"

The desires of the flesh & of the mind

"Among whom we also once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath, even as others." Ephesians 2:3

We may observe here a distinction drawn by the Apostle between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the mind. Both are opposed to God and godliness, both are the fruits of our fallen nature. But the desires of the FLESH seem to be those grosser and more sensual lusts and passions which are connected, so to speak, with the lower part of our nature. The desires of the MIND are those which are connected with its higher qualities. Thus some are steeped up to the very lips in all manner of vile abominations of sensual lust, in the gratification of which they find all their pleasure. While others, who would scorn, or at least are not tempted to the baser lusts of the flesh, carry out with equal ardour the promptings of a more refined character and disposition. Ambition to rise in the world, thirsting after power over their fellow-men, a craving for fame and distinction in any particular branch of art or science, discontent with their present situation in life, envying everyone superior to them in birth, wealth, talent, accomplishments, position, or worldly happiness—attempts, more or less successful, to rise out of obscurity, poverty, and subjection, and to win for themselves name, fame, and prosperity—how wide a field does this open to our view, as embracing "the desires of the MIND!"

And observe how the Apostle puts upon a level the desires of the flesh and the desires of the mind, and stamps them both with the same black mark of disobedience and its consequences—the wrath of God. We look around us. We see the drunkard staggering in the street, we hear the oath of the common swearer, we view the sons and daughters of Belial manifesting in their very looks how sunk they are in deeds of shame. These we at once condemn. But what do we think of the aspiring tradesman—the energetic man of business—the active, untiring speculator—the man who, without scruple, puts into practice every scheme and plan to advance and aggrandize himself, careless who sinks if he rise? Is he equally guilty in our eyes? What do we think of the artist devoting days and nights to the cultivation of his skill as a painter, as an architect, as a sculptor—of the literary man, buried in his books—of the scientist, devoting years to the particular branch of study which he has selected to pursue—or similar examples of men, whose whole life and all whose energies are spent in fulfilling the desires of their mind?

As far as society, public welfare, the comfort of themselves and their families, and the progress of the world are concerned, there is a vast difference between these two classes—and we would do violence to right feeling to put them upon a level. But when we come to weigh the matter as before

God, with eternity in view, and judge them by the word of truth, we see at once that there is no real difference between them—that the drunkard does but fulfill the desires of his flesh—and the scholar, the artist, the man of business, the literary man—in a word, the man of the world, whatever his world be, little or great—does but each fulfill the desires of his mind. Both are of the earth, earthy—both are sworn enemies to God and godliness, and could you look into the very bottom of his heart, you might find the man of intellect, refinement, and education to be a greater foe to God and His word than the drunkard or the profligate! The sin in both is one and the same, and consists in this, that in all they do they seek to gratify that carnal mind which is enmity against God, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. God is not in all, or indeed in any of their thoughts. Instead of living to and for Him in whom, as creatures of His hand, they live and move and have their being, they live wholly unto and for themselves—and thus are practical rebels against God, as rejecting His rightful claims upon their obedience!

If you are at home in the world

"We are here for only a moment, aliens and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a shadow, gone so soon without a trace!" 1 Chronicles 29:15

If you possess the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and, Jacob—you, like them, confess that you are a stranger—and your confession springs out of a believing heart and a sincere experience. You feel yourself a stranger in this ungodly world. It is not your element. It is not your home. You are in it during God's appointed time, but you wander up and down this world—a stranger to its company—a stranger to its maxims—a stranger to its fashions—a stranger to its principles—a stranger to its motives—a stranger to its lusts—a stranger to its inclinations—and all in which this world moves as in its native element.

Grace has separated you by God's sovereign power, that though you are in the world, you are not of it. I can tell you plainly—if you are at home in the world—if the things of time and sense are your element—if you feel one with—the company of the world—the maxims of the world—the fashions of the world—and the principles of the world—grace has not reached your heart—the faith of God's elect does not dwell in your bosom.

The first effect of grace is to separate. It was so in the case of Abraham. He was called by grace to leave the land of his fathers, and go out into a land that God would show him. And so God's own word to His people is still to come out from among them, and be separate. Separation, separation, separation from the world is the grand distinguishing mark of vital godliness. There may be indeed separation of body where there is no separation of heart. But what I mean is—separation of heart—separation of principle—separation of affection—separation of spirit. And if grace has touched your heart, and you are a partaker of the faith of God's elect, you are a stranger in the world, and will make it manifest by your life and conduct that you are such. "We are here for only a moment, aliens and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a shadow, gone so soon without a trace!"

Thirst

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6

Thirst, as a feeling of the soul, in a spiritual sense, is certainly indicative of divine life. It is as impossible, spiritually viewed, for a man 'dead in sin' to thirst after a living God—as for a corpse in the graveyard to thirst after a draught of cold water from the well. Such a feeling as thirsting after God had no place in my bosom until the Lord was pleased to quicken my soul into spiritual life. I had heard of God by the hearing of the ear. I had seen Him—in creation—in the starry sky—in the roaring sea—in the teeming earth. I had read of Him in the Bible. I had learned His existence by education and tradition. I had some apprehensions of His holiness in my natural conscience. But as to any spiritual thirsting after Him—any earnest desire to fear Him, know Him, believe in Him, or love Him—no such experience or feeling ever dwelt in my bosom! I loved the world too dearly to look to Him who made it—and my self too warmly to seek Him who would bid me crucify and mortify it. A man must be made alive unto God by spiritual regeneration before he can experience any such sensation as is here conveyed by the figure 'thirst.' "If any man thirsts, let him come to Me, and drink."

All the devil's tricks!

"So that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes." 2 Corinthians 2:11

Satan is so wily—his agents so surround us—their designs are so masked—their language so plausible—their manners so insinuating—their appearance often so imposing—their arguments so subtle—their activity so unwearied—their insight into our weaknesses so keen—their enmity against Christ and His gospel so implacable—their lack of all principle and all honesty so thorough—that the net may be drawing around us, before we have the slightest suspicion of these infernal plots being directed against us! Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against all the devil's tricks!

A natural religiosity

There is in some people a natural religiosity—that is, a disposition to be religious. If they had been born in Turkey, they would have been devout Muslims; if in Italy, they would have become priests, monks, or nuns, and as ready to burn a heretic as their fathers; if born and bred in England, they would be devout churchmen, pious dissenters, and so forth—just as the various circumstances of birth and education, habits and associations, might dispose or determine. Now to these naturally religious minds, when fully ripened and blended with a stern spirit of self-denial, which usually accompanies and grows up with it—no system so thoroughly adapts itself as that of Popery—for it just meets and gives full play to that habit of mind which yields, like clay, to every object of groveling, superstitious veneration.

A louder witness

"Be an example to those who believe, in word, in your way of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity." 1 Timothy 4:12

A godly life is a louder witness against the inconsistent conduct of loose professors, than scolding reproofs. There should be—a tenderness of spirit—a holy prudence—a godly awe of the word of truth—and a reverent walking before God—all of which speak plainly against the light, easy, loose, slipshod profession of the day.

Precious & glorious

All that Jesus is and has, all that He says and does is precious and glorious—His miracles of mercy, while here below—His words so full of grace, wisdom, and truth—His going about doing good—His sweet example of patience, meekness and submission—His sufferings and sorrows in the garden and on the cross—His spotless holiness and purity—His tender compassion to poor lost sinners—His atoning blood and justifying obedience—His dying love, so strong and firm—His lowly, yet honorable burial—His glorious resurrection—His ascension and present reign and rule—His constant intercession for His people. What beauty and glory shine forth in all these divine realities! A view of His glory and a foretaste of the bliss and blessedness it communicates has a transforming effect upon the soul.

We are naturally proud, covetous, worldly—grievously entangled in various lusts and passions—prone to evil, averse to good—easily elated by prosperity—soon dejected by adversity—peevish under trials—rebellious under heavy strokes—unthankful for daily mercies of food and clothing—and in other ways ever manifesting our base nature. To be brought from under the power of these abounding evils, we need to be conformed to the image of Christ. Now, this can only be by beholding His glory by faith. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is this believing view of the glory of Christ which supports under heavy trials, producing meekness and resignation to the will of God.

That was more than His holy soul could bear!

Thousands have died in greater bodily agony than the Lord, for He only suffered in body for six hours. But of all the generations of men, none have ever felt what the Lord endured in His soul—for He had to suffer in His soul what the elect would have had to suffer in hell, if He had not suffered it for them.

What is the body? That is not the chief seat of suffering. Martyrs have rejoiced in the flames. It is the soul that feels. It was so with Jesus. His body, it is true, was racked and torn—but it was the racking of His soul in which lay His chief agonies. And the greatest of all was the final stroke God reserved to His last moments—the last drop of the cup in all its bitterness—which was hiding His face from His Son. Nothing else but this last bitter drop extorted the cry of suffering from His lips!

But when, to crown all the scene of suffering, the Father hid His face from Him—that was more than His holy soul could bear! That extorted from Him the dolorous cry—such a cry as earth never before or since heard—a cry which made the sun to hide its face as if in sackcloth; the solid earth to shake; and the very graves to open their mouths as if they could no longer hold their dead! "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46

The religion of man

To the mass of mankind nothing is so attractive in religion as outward beauty and magnificence. The spiritual worship of God—the glory of Jesus—the beauties of holiness—the still small voice of the Spirit—inward communion with the Lord—the consolations of His presence—meltings of heart under the beams of the Sun of Righteousness—all that gives power to vital godliness is beyond the reach of human nature in its highest flights of sensuous devotion! Denied the wings of faith,

she must raise and sustain herself on artificial pinions. These, the Church of Rome furnishes for birds of every size, from the vulture to the wren. A religion of sight, sense, and touch is the religion of man. To this depraved religion, or rather superstition, the Church of Rome panders.

The wings of a butterfly

We are all desperate infidels in heart! Though all through the word of God we see His providence shine forth in the minutest events, though the Lord Himself tells us that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without God's providence or permission—yet to believe that He is everywhere so present, and that He everywhere so directly lives, moves, and acts as to regulate and control the minutest circumstances of daily life—all this so surpasses all our natural credence that nothing can enable us to believe it but the faith of God's own giving and maintaining—and having had ourselves some personal experience of it, so as to set our own seal to its reality and truth.

Most have noticed the wings of a butterfly, and observed the uniformity and beauty of the pattern. Now to produce that beautiful uniformity of pattern, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of little feathers must combine. And were we to have to calculate the exact shape, situation, and tint of marking which every single plume of this countless feather-dust must have, to prevent the whole being a confused blotch, it would exceed all the powers of human mathematics, not to say all the faculties of the human mind! But we might as well believe that a group of boys, by throwing together stone after stone for a number of years, could build up a Westminster Palace—as that all these minute feathers came together by chance!

Now if in 'creation,' and this is but one instance out of a million, we are obliged to recognize a divine hand in so minute a circumstance as the marking of a butterfly's wing, why should we not see the same hand in the minutest events of 'providence' also? The grand difficulty is to see God at all—anywhere or in anything. If once by faith we see Him who is invisible, and feel the presence of a God at hand and not afar off, all other difficulties vanish! Be it our happy portion to be ever watching the hand of God in providence and grace, and surely we shall watch for neither in vain!

Yawning & lounging their time away

"Be diligent in these things; give yourself wholly to them, that your progress may be revealed to all." 1 Timothy 4:15

That their progress may be evident to all, ministers must give themselves wholly to their work. Every pursuit, therefore, however useful for other men as a part of their business or profession, which is not of the things of God, hinders the real and visible profit of a servant of Christ.

Now, we firmly believe that, if instead of yawning and lounging their time away in sloth and idleness, or gossiping from house to house, pastors would—apply their minds to reading, prayer, and meditation—live more alone—commune more with their own heart—be more separate from everything worldly and carnal—and give themselves more to the work, when out of it as well as in it, in the home as well as in the pulpit—they would find the benefit of it, not only in their own souls, but in the exercise of their ministry! A cold, lifeless, indifferent heart—though at various times, every servant of God has to mourn over his coldness and deadness—but a heart habitually cold, lifeless, and indifferent, and rarely otherwise, cannot be expected to warm up and cheer the

drooping, desponding hearts of the family of God.

Pride, worldliness & covetousness

Pride, worldliness and covetousness may reign rampant—even where grosser sins are not committed—or kept hidden from observation.

The blind, three-headed idol

There is scarcely a truth of divine revelation which has not been at some time disputed, and against which a whole army of arguments has not been from some quarter arrayed. Some of these disputants have denied the Sovereignty of God, and have sought to snatch the reins of the government of the world out of the hands of the King of kings and the Lord of lords—that they might commit them to the blind, three-headed idol, "Luck, Chance, and Fortune" and thus reduce all events to that chaos of confusion, that wild and desolate region of uncertainties in which their own dark minds wander in endless mazes lost!

Overcoming the world

"Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1 John 5:5

A man must either overcome the world—or be overcome by it. To overcome the world is to be saved—to be overcome by it is to be lost. He, then, who does not believe that Jesus is the Son of God does not and cannot overcome the world—for he has not the faith of God's elect—he is not born of God—there is no divine life in his soul—and he has therefore no power to resist the allurements, endure the scorn, or rise superior to the frowns and smiles of the world—but is entangled, carried captive, and destroyed by it!

Where the world is loved, the heart is necessarily overcome by it—for in the love of the world, as in the love of sin, is all the strength of the world. Now unless the love of Christ in the soul be stronger than the love of the world, the weaker must give way to the stronger. Those who do not love Christ cannot overcome the world, for such are utter strangers to the faith which purifies the heart from the lust of it, to the hope which rises above it, and to the love which lifts up the soul beyond it.

We must be taught of God

"No man can come to Me, except the Father who sent Me draws him." John 6:44

Four things are absolutely necessary to be experimentally known and felt before we can arrive at any saving or sanctifying knowledge of the truth—

1. Divine light in the understanding.
2. Spiritual faith in the heart.
3. Godly fear in the conscience.
4. Heavenly love in the affections.

Without light we cannot see. Without faith we cannot believe. Without godly fear we cannot reverentially adore. Without love we cannot embrace Him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

We must be taught of God and receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child—or we shall never enter therein.

This reptile heart

"The carnal mind is enmity against God." Romans 8:7

'Enmity against God' must not only include in its bosom the seeds of every other crime—but be in itself the worst of all crimes. To be an enemy to God must be a most dreadful position for a creature to be in—but to be enmity itself must be the concentrated essence of sin and misery! An enemy may be reconciled, appeased, turned into a friend—but enmity, never. Enmity knows no pity, feels no remorse, is subject to no control, is unappeasable and irreconcilable.

And when we think for a moment who and what the great and glorious God is, against whom this reptile heart bears an enmity so enduring and so wicked—when we view Him by the eye of faith as filling heaven and earth with His glory, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, and yet day after day loading all His creatures with benefits, and to His people so full of the tenderest love and compassion—then to see a dying mortal, whom one frown can hurl from all the pride of health and vigor, into the lowest hell of misery and woe—spewing forth, like some miserable toad, his spit and venom against the glorious King of kings and Lord of lords—well may we stand amazed at the height of that presumption and the depth of that wickedness which can so arm a 'worm of earth' against the 'Majesty of heaven!'

What cold—what heartless work

What is religion without a living faith in, and a living love to the Lord Jesus Christ? How dull and dragging, how dry and heavy, what a burden to the mind, and a weariness to the flesh, is a round of forms, where the heart is not engaged and the affections not drawn forth! Reading, hearing, praying, meditation, conversation with the people of God—what cold, what heartless work where Jesus is not! But let Him appear, let His presence and grace be felt, and His blessed Spirit move upon the heart—then there is a holy sweetness, a sacred blessedness in the worship of God and in communion with the Lord Jesus that makes, while it lasts, a little heaven on earth.

Means are to be attended to, ordinances to be prized, the Bible to be read, preaching to be heard, the throne of grace to be resorted to, the company of Christian friends to be sought. But what are all these unless we find Christ in them? It is He who puts life and blessedness into all means and ordinances, into all prayer, preaching, hearing, reading, conversing, and everything that bears the name of religion. Without Him all is dark and dead, cold and dreary, barren and bare! Wandering thoughts at the throne—unbelief at the ordinance—deadness under the word—formality and lip service in family worship—carelessness over the open Bible—carnality in conversation—and a general coldness and stupidity over the whole frame—such is the state of the soul when Jesus does not appear, and when He leaves us to prove what we are, and what we can do without Him!

We are, most of us, so fettered down

We are, most of us, so fettered down—by the chains of time and sense—by the cares of life and daily business—by the weakness of our earthly frame—by the distracting claims of a family—by the miserable carnality and sensuality of our fallen nature—that we live at best a poor, dragging, dying life! We can take no pleasure in the world, nor mix with a good conscience in its pursuits and

amusements. We are many of us poor, moping, dejected creatures—from a variety of trials and afflictions. We have a daily cross and the continual plague of an evil heart. We get little consolation from the family of God or the outward means of grace. We know enough of ourselves to know that in SELF there is neither help nor hope—and never expect a smoother path, a better, wiser, holier heart, or to be able to do tomorrow what we cannot do today.

As then the weary man seeks rest, the hungry food, the thirsty drink, and the sick health—so do we stretch forth our hearts and arms that we may embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and sensibly realize communion with Him. From Him come both prayer and answer—both hunger and food—both desire and the tree of life. He discovers the evil and misery of sin—that we may seek pardon in His bleeding wounds and pierced side. He makes known to us our nakedness and shame, and, as such, our exposure to God's wrath—that we may hide ourselves under His justifying robe. He puts gall and wormwood into the world's choicest draughts—that we may have no sweetness but in and from Him. He keeps us long fasting to endear a crumb—and long waiting to make a word precious. He wants the whole heart, and will take no less; and as this we cannot give, He takes it to Himself by ravishing it with one of His eyes, with one chain of His neck. If we love Him it is because He first loved us; and if we seek communion with Him, it is because He will manifest Himself to us as He does not unto the world.

Forever swallowed up with His presence & love

Nothing distinguishes the divine religion of the child of God, not only from the dead profanity of the openly ungodly, but from the formal lip-service of the lifeless professor—so much as communion with God. God calls elect souls—out of the world—out of darkness—out of sin and death—out of formality and self-righteousness—out of a deceptive profession—to have fellowship with Himself, to be blessed with manifestations of His love and mercy. To this point all His dealings with their souls tend to bring them near to Himself—all their afflictions, trials, and sorrows are sent.

In giving them 'tastes' of holy fellowship here, He grants them foretastes of that eternity of bliss which will be theirs when time shall be no more—in being forever swallowed up with His presence and love! Even in the first awakenings of the Spirit, in the first quickenings of His grace, there is that in the living soul which eternally distinguishes it from all others, whatever be their profession, however in doctrine sound or unsound, however in practice consistent or inconsistent. There is, amid all its trouble, darkness, guilt, confusion, and self-condemnation—a striving after communion with God. There is a sense of His greatness and glory—a holy fear and godly awe of His great name—a trembling at His word—a brokenness—a contrition—a humility—a simplicity—a sincerity—a self-abasement—a distrust of self—a dread of hypocrisy and self-deception—a coming to the light—a laboring to enter the strait gate—a tenderness of conscience—a sense of helplessness and inability—a groaning under the guilt and burden of sin—a quickness to see sin's workings, and an alarm lest they should break forth—all which we never see in a dead, carnal professor—whether the highest Calvinist or the lowest Arminian.

They shall come with weeping

"They shall come with weeping." Jeremiah 31:9

O, how much is needed to bring the soul to its only Rest and Center. What trials and afflictions—what furnaces, floods, rods, and strokes—as well as smiles, promises, and gracious

drawings! What pride and self to be brought out of! What love and blood to be brought unto! What lessons to learn of the freeness and fullness of salvation! What sinkings in self! What risings in Christ! What guilt and condemnation on account of sin! What self-loathing and self-abasement! What distrust of self! What fears of falling! What prayers and desires to be kept! What clinging to Christ! What looking up and unto His divine majesty! What desires never more to sin against Him—but to live, move, and act in the holy fear of God, do we find, more or less daily, in a living soul!

When the body sinks

When the body sinks under a load of pain and disease, and all sources of happiness and enjoyment from health and strength are cut off—when flesh and heart fail, and the eye-strings are breaking in death—what can support the soul or bear it safe through Jordan's swelling flood, but those discoveries of the glory of Christ that shall make it sick of earth, sin, and self; and willing to lay the poor body in the grave, that it may be forever ravished with His glory and His love! Thus we see how the glory of Christ is not only in heaven—but also the unspeakable delight of the saints here on earth, in their days of tribulation and sorrow.

Christ, as revealed to their hearts—supports and upholds their steps—draws them out of the world—delivers them from the power of sin—conforms them to His image—comforts them in death—and lands them in glory! We thus see Christ irradiating also the path of His people on earth, casting His blessed beams on all their troubles and sorrows, and lighting up the way wherein they follow Him from the suffering cross to the triumphant crown.

The general religion of the day

There are few things more sickening to us than this widespread profession of religion—without the vital power. Open profanity is bad. It is grievous to see the sin which runs down our streets like water. The scenes which meet the eye, especially in London, are grievous—but they carry with them their own condemnation, and do not intrude into the sacred precincts of truth and godliness. But a loud, noisy profession, with just enough 'truth in the letter' to salve over the convictions of the natural conscience—but not enough of life or power either to save or sanctify—to deliver from the dominion of sin or separate from the world—like the salt that has lost its savor, is good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. True religion differs as much from the general religion of the day as grace differs from nature, spirit from flesh, and the power of God from the wisdom of man!

Walking with God

"Do two walk together, unless they have agreed?" Amos 3:3

What God hates we must learn to hate. What God loves we must be taught to love. Sin is the especial object of God's hate—and it must be the special object of ours. Christ is the especial object of God's love—and He must be the object of our heart's warmest, tenderest affection. Pride, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, the lusts of the flesh, covetousness—in a word, everything worldly and wicked, earthly, sensual, and devilish—is and ever must be hateful and abominable in the eyes of infinite Purity and Holiness. If not made hateful to us, where is the agreement, where the walking with God?

Humility, brokenness, godly fear, tenderness of conscience, spirituality of mind, singleness of eye to God's glory, separation from the world; faith, hope, love, submission, resignation to the divine will, filial obedience, heavenly fruitfulness in every good word and work—if these, and all other graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, are pleasing and acceptable to God, must they not be also to us, if we are to walk with Him in holy agreement?

If there were no furnace

"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." Isaiah 48:10

"And He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver." Malachi 3:3

If there were no furnace, there would be no fruits of the furnace—no taking away the dross and tin—no bringing forth the gold seven times refined in the fire—no meekness, submission, resignation, confession, self-abhorrence—no forsaking idols—no vomiting up the poisonous draughts of sin and folly!

Known to our hearts by a divine power

The only real knowledge which we can possess of the truth of God, or of any one branch of that truth, is from a vital, experimental, heartfelt acquaintance with it through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Men, learned or unlearned, priest or people, may theorize and speculate, may think they see and understand, may reason and argue, preach and prate, talk and write—wisely and well upon this and that point of doctrine, or upon this or that portion of Scripture. But unless the sacred truth of God is made known to our hearts by a divine power, and laid hold of by a living faith, we have no true knowledge of, as we have no saving interest in it.

What good will the purest, clearest, soundest doctrines—even if preached by an apostle—do us, unless there be that living principle of divine faith in our hearts which mixes with the word, and so profits the soul? We see, then, that it is not truth—the purest and clearest, even when uttered by the Redeemer's own lips, that can save the soul—unless applied to the heart by the special power of God! But when the truth of God is made known to the heart by divine teaching and divine testimony, what a holy sweetness and heavenly savor are then tasted, felt, and realized in it! When thus favored to sit down under the shadow of its Beloved, and find His fruit sweet to its taste, the soul says, with Jeremiah, "Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Let us beware, then, of unsanctified knowledge, or unapplied truth!

A man who reads his eyes out!

"Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches." 1 Corinthians 2:13

It is not reading, learning, or study that can make an able minister of the New Testament. If so, the academies would give us an ample supply. But the greatest readers and most laborious students are usually the most ignorant of the teaching of the Spirit, and the work of faith with power. This learning is not of the schools! A man who reads his eyes out may be most ignorant—for he may

know nothing as he ought to know. And a man who reads nothing but his Bible may be most learned—for he may have the unctuous teachings of the Holy Spirit.

Holiness & truth

As a love of holiness necessarily includes as well as implies a hatred of, and a fleeing from sin—so will a love of truth contain in it a hatred of, and a fleeing from, error. People deny the truth, trifle with it, or are indifferent to it—because they feel no urgent personal need of it.

Such exceedingly religious people

Until the Blessed Spirit quickens the soul into spiritual life, we know nothing really or rightly of the truth as it is in Jesus. We may be strictly orthodox in doctrine—may abhor infidelity and error—may be shocked at profanity and irreverence—may be scrupulously attentive to every relative duty—may repeat, with undeviating regularity, our prayers and devotions—may seem to ourselves and to others exceedingly religious—when, in the sight of a heart-searching God, we are still dead in trespasses and sins!

The world is full of such exceedingly religious people! Every church and every chapel can produce samples in abundance of such "devout and honorable" men and women. We may have a form of godliness in a profession of truth—may have been suckled and bred up from childhood in a sound creed—may have learned the doctrines of grace in theory and as a religious system—may be convinced in our conscience of their substantial agreement with the Word of God—may contend for them in argument, and prove them by texts—may sit under the sound of the gospel with pleasure—or even preach it with eloquence and fervor; and yet know nothing of the truth savingly and experimentally, by divine teaching and divine testimony!

Does the Scripture afford us no example of these characters? Who more religious, more strict, scrupulous, and orthodox than the 'Pharisee' of old? He sat in Moses' seat, as the teacher of the people—he tithed his mint, anise, and cummin with the most scrupulous care—he strained his drinks, that no unclean gnat might unawares pollute him—he prayed and fasted rigidly and regularly—and seemed to himself and to others the prime favorite of heaven. But what was he really and truly? What was he in the sight of God? According to the Lord's own testimony—a hypocrite—a viper—a whited sepulcher, ripening himself for the damnation of hell!

Who were those against whom holy John, fervent Jude, and earnest Peter warned the churches so strongly? Who were those spots in their feasts of charity, feeding themselves without fear? Who were those clouds without water, carried about with winds—those trees whose fruit withered, twice dead, plucked up by the roots? Who else but graceless professors of the truth! It is not then, the form, the letter, the mere outside, the bare shell and husk of truth, that makes or manifests the Christian—but the vital possession of it as a divinely bestowed gift and treasure!

Hard as a stone, cold as ice, motionless as a corpse

Ministers of truth are thought sometimes to speak too strongly of the dreadful state of man through the fall—but, in fact, it is impossible to exaggerate the blindness and darkness of the human heart—nor can pen or tongue adequately set forth the misery and utter helplessness of the unregenerate man.

The Scriptures are much and widely read, it is true, but merely as a duty, a daily or weekly self-imposed task, a religious performance in which a certain amount of merit is invested. It thus becomes a mere sop for conscience in some, and in others amounts at best to a perusing with the eye a certain quantity of words and letters, chapters and verses, unwillingly taken up, badly laid down. The beauty and blessedness—divine sweetness and inexpressible power and savor—seen and felt in the Scriptures by a believing heart are, to the unbelieving multitude unknown, untasted, unfelt, uncared for! Whatever be the subject, however solemn or weighty—and what can be so solemn and weighty as the soul's eternal happiness or misery?—the word of truth, without a divine application, absolutely makes no impression on the conscience. The threatenings produce no terror or trembling—create no fear or conviction—draw out neither sigh nor groan—no, nor raise up one faint, feeble cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The promises, the invitations, the portions that speak of Christ and His sufferings—neither melt nor move, touch nor soften their conscience. The unregenerate heart responds to neither judgment nor mercy. Nothing stirs it Godwards. Hard as a stone, cold as ice, motionless as a corpse—it lies dead in trespasses and sins!

But not so with the heart which the finger of God has touched. It fears, it trembles, it melts, it softens—it is lifted up, it is cast down—it sighs, it prays, it believes, it hopes, it loves, it mourns, it rejoices, it grieves, it repents—in a word, it lives the life of God, and breathes, acts, and moves just as the Blessed Spirit visits and works in it by His gracious power and influence. Under His teaching, the Scriptures become a new book—read, as it were, with new eyes—heard with new ears—thought and pondered over with new feelings—understood with a new understanding—and felt in a new conscience.

When, then, we are favored with a spiritual, experimental knowledge of God's truth, it is putting into our hands a master-key to open cabinets closed against the wise and prudent—a clue to guide the feet amid the mazes, where learned doctors and studious theologians wander and are lost—a light penetrating and pervading the hidden depths of the sanctuary, on the threshold of which the scribe and the Pharisee stumble and fall.

Those divine & heavenly truths

How little do we, for the most part, realize—and daily, hourly, live and feed upon—those divine and heavenly truths which we, as Christians, profess to believe! For the most part, it is only at times and seasons that we so realize who and what Jesus is, as to obtain any sensible victory over—the evils of our heart—the strength of sin, the snares of the world—or the assaults of Satan!

The grand deceit of Satan

To our mind one of the greatest mysteries in religion is the difference between the power of truth on the natural conscience, and the power of truth on the spiritual conscience—between the faith produced in the natural mind by the 'letter of the word,' and the faith wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God through the word. And yet in this lies all the difference between a professor and a possessor—between the damned and the saved.

Here is the grand deceit of Satan as an angel of light—that a man may have the strongest and most unwavering faith in his natural mind, generated there by the 'mere letter of the word'—and yet live and die in his sins an unpardoned criminal, an unsanctified rebel—may obey the precept,

and yet be damned for disobedience! This is the grand key of the cabinet—and he who holds not this key in his hand, be he preacher or writer that attempts to describe the work of the Spirit, will but fumble—for without it he cannot unlock one secret drawer of the heart, or penetrate into any one innermost recess of nature, or of grace!

Tremendous mystery, yet not more tremendous than true, that between a spiritual and a natural faith lay all the difference—between David and Saul—between John and Judas—and that on it hangs life or death, heaven or hell, unutterable bliss or eternal despair!

Divine breathings

There are what we may call 'devotional writings' in Scripture. The Holy Spirit not only inspired men of God to breathe forth prayer and praise, not only taught them to sigh and groan, rejoice and sing—but instructed them to commit to writing those breathings of their soul after the living God. As these divine breathings were usually set to music and sung in the tabernacle worship, they were called "Psalms." What a manual of living experience—what a standing model and exemplar of vital communion with God—what a perpetual stream of consolation and edification to the church of Christ these divine compositions are and ever have been—it is unnecessary for us here to mention. From the lowest depths of trouble and sorrow to the loftiest heights of joy and praise, there is no state or stage, movement or feeling of divine life in the soul, which is not expressed in the simplest and sweetest language in the Psalms. They are thus not only a test and guide of Christian experience—a heavenly prayer-book—a daily devotional companion—a bosom friend in sorrow and joy—a sure chart for the heaven-bound voyager—and an infallible standard of divine teaching—but a treasury of strength and comfort, out of which the Holy Spirit blesses the waiting soul!

We will find eternity too short

We will find eternity too short—to see Christ's beauty—to behold Christ's glory—and to sing Christ's praise!

Shrouded in mystery

The ways of God and His dealings with His people in providence and in grace are usually at the outset shrouded in mystery—and yet in the end shine resplendently forth as stamped with the most perfect wisdom, mercy, and grace!

Composed out of dead men's brains!

We may have men who are clear in doctrine—but where can we find that life and power, that ardent zeal, that burning eloquence, that devotedness to the work, those astonishing labors, that self-denying life, that singleness of eye to the glory of God, that unwearied perseverance, and that flame of holy love—which is the life and power in the soul of a minister? Mere book learning is but a flickering flame, composed out of dead men's brains, too faint to illuminate, too cold to kindle. Sound views of truth are most valuable—no, indispensable. But there may be the soundest creed in the head, with death in the heart and sin in the life. Sound views without divine life merely charm the ear. A flow of words as unceasing as a babbling brook, a voice as musical as the evening nightingale, gestures as elegant as ever graced the stage, pathos as touching as ever bedewed female cheeks with tears, animation as vehement as ever stirred an audience, and eloquence as

ardent as ever led men on to mount the breach or charge a battalion? Alas! what are they all, destitute of spiritual life?

The caged wolf

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Jeremiah 13:23

The caged wolf does not lose his thirst for blood because it is fenced off in the zoo. Likewise, the sensual, depraved heart of man cannot be regenerated by the outward restraints of morality or religion.

We have no abiding city here

"For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have a home in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God Himself and not by human hands." 2 Corinthians 5:1

As then we see and feel that all is passing away, what a mercy it is if we can look beyond this vain scene to that which abides forever and ever! "We have no abiding city here," is a lesson which the Lord writes upon the heart of all His pilgrims. And as it is more deeply engraved upon their bosom, and cut into more legible characters, they look up and out of themselves, to that City which has foundations—of which the maker and builder is God.

It is very blessed when we can use the favors of God in providence without abusing them—when we can see His kind hand in the gift, and not make an idol of it—when we can bless Him for His providential mercies, and yet feel that without Himself they are not only worthless but miserable. How many have lived all their lives in beautiful houses—have never known a day's hunger—have eaten of the fat and drunk of the sweet all the days of their life—have lain down at night in a luxurious bed, where they have felt neither cold nor frost—and yet at last when their mortal existence has come to a close, have made their bed in hell!

A refuge from our sinful, vile & guilty selves!

When we take a review of all the temptations, trials, sins, backslidings, wanderings, and startings-aside that we have been guilty of—all the hard thoughts, peevish and rebellious uprisings, with all the sad unprofitableness, backwardness to good, proneness to evil, determination to have our own will and way—and all that mass of inconsistency which sometimes seems to frighten us in the retrospect—when we look over these things, what reason we have to cling close to the precious blood and righteousness of the Christ, that we may find in Him a refuge from our sinful, vile and guilty selves!

It seems sad that, after so many years experience of the goodness and mercy of God, and after all we have seen, known, tasted, felt, and handled—of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus—of His suitability, beauty, blessedness, grace, and glory—we should still find so much sin, carnality, unbelief, infidelity, and every other evil, alive and lively within! How it shows the depth of the Fall, and the incurable corruption of our nature, that neither time, nor advancing years, nor bodily infirmity, nor any other change of circumstances can alter this wretched heart, turn it into a right course, or make it obedient and fruitful—but that like the barren heath, no cultivation can bring out

of it either flower or fruit! But what an unspeakable mercy it is for us, that the Lord views us—not as standing in all our rags and ruin, all our filth and folly—but in the Person of His dear Son, in whom He is ever well pleased!

A smooth easy path

The way of the cross is hateful to flesh and blood, and therefore a smooth easy path securing, as they think—the benefits and blessings of salvation, without self-denial, mortification of the flesh, painful exercises, and many trials—is eagerly embraced and substituted for the straight and narrow way which leads unto life. And by this, or some other deceit of the flesh or delusion of the devil, all would perish in their sins—unless the Lord had chosen a peculiar people in the furnace of affliction and predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His dear Son—here in suffering, and hereafter in glory. They, like all the rest, would gladly, as far as the flesh is concerned, thus make a covenant with death and hell that they might be disturbed by fears of neither.

Will not this make ample amends for all?

Oh, what is this wretched world, and this poor vain life of ours, which every day is shortening and bringing to its appointed close! Surely, well has it been said of it, that it is all "vanity and vexation of spirit." But to be able, in sweet hope and confidence, to look beyond this wretched life to a state of eternal bliss, where there is neither sin—the greatest of all ills; nor sickness, nor sorrow, will not this make ample amends for all?

To learn our religion in such a painful way

My dear friend, I was sorry to learn from your last kind letter that the Lord had again laid upon you His afflicting hand. But it was your mercy to find profit from the furnace, and that the painful trial was sanctified to your spiritual good. We are such poor, stupid, cold, lifeless wretches when things are smooth and easy with us, that we seem to need trial and affliction to stir us up, and bring us out of carnality and death.

The Word of God is written for an afflicted and poor people—and they alone understand it, believe it, feel it, and realize it. How often you had read the word, and yet did not enter into its sweetness, suitability, and blessedness—as you did in your late affliction. Luther used to say that, before he was afflicted, he never understood the Word of God. This witness is true. There is no real place for it in our conscience or affections. And yet how hard it seems, and trying to the flesh, to learn our religion in such a painful way—but any way is better than to miss the prize at last. And if we are favored to reach the heavenly shore, we shall forget all the perils and sufferings of the voyage!

The sum & substance of the Scriptures

If we read the early chapters of Leviticus with an enlightened eye, how much there is in them to illustrate the one great sacrifice of our gracious Lord. In Him we see the burnt offering as offering Himself without spot to God—the sin offering as bearing our sins in His own body on the tree—the trespass offering as especially applicable to sins of commission—and the grain offering as representing Him to be the food of our souls. CHRIST is the sum and substance of the Scriptures! Without Him they are a dead letter, full of darkness and obscurity. But in and with Him they are full of light and blessedness. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly!"

Trials & afflictions

How various are the trials and afflictions of those who desire to fear God, and walk in His ways. But though they may differ in nature and degree, yet they are, for the most part—as much as they can well bear. The Lord indeed is very gracious in not laying upon them more than they can bear; but He will give them all enough to find and feel—that this world is full of sin and sorrow—that their own hearts are full of evil—that nothing but the pure, rich, superabounding, free grace of God can save or bless their souls!

A great lesson

"I am nothing." 2 Corinthians 12:11

It is a great lesson, and yet a painful one—to be made nothing—to feel one's self weaker than the weakest, and viler than the vilest—to be a pauper living upon daily alms—and to be made often to beg, and yet sensibly to get nothing. Where we err is, that we want to be something, when we are nothing. We want in some way to recommend ourselves to God, and do or be something that we can be pleased with, and which we think will therefore please Him. It is very hard to learn—the depth of our spiritual poverty—the greatness of our sin—our thoroughly lost, ruined, and helpless condition.

What a mercy it is to have any grace and divine life in the soul—to be made to see and feel—the emptiness of the world—the sinfulness of sin—the evils of the heart—and above all, to see and feel the preciousness of Christ in His bleeding, dying love!

If we were wholly left to ourselves

"My son, don't take lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him: For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." Hebrews 12:5, 6

Our afflictions and trials strip, as it were, the world and worldly things off our backs—as well as all our own wisdom, and strength, and righteousness. The Lord Himself disciplines His children! The nature, season, duration, and all attending circumstances of all their trials, are—determined for them—selected by infinite wisdom—decreed by unalterable purpose—guided by eternal love, and brought to pass by almighty power. To believe less than this is secret infidelity, and will always result in murmuring, rebellion, self-righteousness, worldly sorrow, and self-pity. But with faith in exercise, there will be submission and resignation to the will of God.

When the Lord is carrying into execution His secret counsels, they are so contrary to the will of the flesh, and so opposed to our thoughts and ways—that we can hardly see His hand in them. Our flesh murmurs and rebels under the heavy strokes. It wants ease, indulgence, and self-gratification—not to be mortified and crucified. Our coward flesh shrinks from the trial of affliction through which the blessing comes. If we were wholly left to ourselves—we would greedily and eagerly choose the way of destruction!

When we are in the furnace

"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." Isaiah 48:10

Trials, sufferings, afflictions, vexations, and disappointments are our appointed lot. And though grievous to the flesh, yet when they are sanctified to the soul's good—are made to be some of our choicest blessings! Levity, carelessness, and indifference, with a general hardness and deadness in the things of God, soon creep over the mind—unless it be well weighted with trials and afflictions.

But when we are in the furnace, we rarely see what benefit it is producing—or what profit is likely to arise to ourselves or to others out of it. Our coward flesh shrinks from the cross, and until submission and resignation are wrought in us by a divine power, and the peaceable fruits of the Spirit begin to show themselves, we cannot bless the Lord for the trial and affliction. Our trials vary as much as our outward circumstances or inward feelings, and each person perhaps, thinks his own trial the heaviest. But no doubt infinite wisdom appoints to each vessel of mercy, those peculiar trials in nature, or degree, which are required to work out God's hidden purposes.

Far better than living in this vain world

"For I am in a dilemma between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Philippians 1:23

The Lord, for the most part, will make His people thoroughly weary of this life, before He takes them out of it. Sickness of body, trials in providence, afflictions in the family, and above all, the wearing conflict under a body of sin and death, with a blessed view of a glorious immortality—sooner or later will make them willing to depart and be with Christ, as far better than living in this vain world!

The charms of the world & the pleasures of sin

My dear friend, I could wish that your path were more free from perplexity, anxiety, and care—but no doubt He who sees the end from the beginning, and all whose ways are ways of mercy and truth to those who fear His name—sees that these cares and perplexities are for your spiritual good. This world is proverbially a valley of tears. Thorns and briars spring up on every side, because the very ground on which we tread is under the curse. And as followers of the Lord the Lamb—we may expect our portion of sorrow.

And indeed, though our weak flesh often staggers and sinks under the load, yet as the blessing of God for the most part only comes in this way, we are made willing to endure the affliction—from the benefit connected with it. I have no doubt, the longer we live, the more we shall find of trouble, anxiety, and sorrow, both to body and soul—so as to be made willing at last to lay down our poor, worn-out frames in the dust—as being only full of sin and corruption. This seems to be the conclusion to which the Lord usually brings all His redeemed people—to be willing to depart and be with Christ, as far better than continuing in a body of sin and death.

We need something to wean us from life, and to deaden and mortify us to the charms of the world and the pleasures of sin, which are but for a moment. Christ is not to be found in the path of carnal ease and worldly joy. It is in tribulation and trouble alone—that He is really sought and really found. We cannot choose for ourselves what that trouble shall be—but its fruits and effects must be good, if they lead us up to the Lord Jesus Christ, or bring down any measure of blessing from Him.

Trials & afflictions

Trials and afflictions are the appointed lot of the family of God—and if we belong to that favored number, we shall certainly have our share of them. Some of these afflictions are of the body—others of the mind—some are connected with the family—others with our circumstances in life—some come from the temptations of Satan—and others from our own evil hearts.

Tender mercies

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." Psalm 51:1

As our sins in thought, word, and deed are a countless multitude, of which every one deserves hell—we need the multitude of His most tender mercies to blot them out. If we could shed an ocean of tears, it would not wash away one sin—but the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. We may see—the stars in the sky—the sands on the sea-shore—the drops of dew on the grass—the waves rolling in upon the beach—but both our sins, and God's tender mercies exceed them all! How He showed these tender mercies in giving His dear Son to suffer, bleed, and die for miserable sinners—and how we need all these tender mercies to pity and pardon us and our transgressions!

The special & unceasing grace of God

It is a most rich and unspeakable mercy, that those whom Jesus loves, He loves to the end, and that His sheep shall never perish, neither shall anyone

Volume 6

It was not the nails

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Mark 15:34

It was not the nails driven through His hands and feet—it was not the crown of thorns placed upon His brow—it was not the stripes which mangled His back—it was not the languor and faintness under which He suffered—that caused the Lord to die. It was not the mere bodily agony of the cross—it was not the mere pain, though most acute and severe, of the nails driven through His sacred hands and feet. It was not the being stretched upon the cross six hours, that constituted the chief part of the Redeemer's suffering.

But it was the almost intolerable load of imputed sin—the imputed sins of millions—it was the tremendous pouring of the wrath of God into His holy soul—it was the hiding of His Father's face, and the very pangs of hell that there caught hold of Him! Our suffering Savior drank the cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs—when our vile, dreadful, and horrible sins were laid upon Him! "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief: when You shall make His soul an offering for sin." Isaiah 53:10

Satan's tether!

"You have put all things in subjection under His feet." Hebrews 2:8

See the sovereign supremacy of Jesus! All temptations are also put under Jesus' feet. How sweet to see and feel this! Your path may at present be a path of great temptation—snares of the most dangerous and most deceitful kind may be laid for your feet in various directions—Satan may be allowed to assault your soul with all his infernal arts and weapons. You may have a sad conflict with the vile lusts of your depraved nature, and feel that you have as many sins alive in your heart as there are hairs upon your head!

But are not these things put in subjection under His feet? Would it be true that God has put all things under His feet if temptations were omitted? Can Satan tempt you a single point beyond the Lord's permission? How was it with Job, when Satan was allowed to tempt him? Did not God fix the exact length of Satan's tether when He said, "Touch not his life?" Satan was allowed to destroy all his property—to sweep off all his children at a stroke—to smite him with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. But he could not touch his life, either natural or spiritual, or drive him to blaspheme God, though he so far prevailed as to make him curse the day of his birth. "Here you may come, but no further," the Lord virtually said to Satan, "and here shall your proud waves be stayed." So with you. Whatever temptations you may have to endure, they can never touch your life—for that is hidden with Christ—safely lodged in the heart and hands of Him who reigns supreme in power and glory!

Love at first sight!

"I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you."
Jeremiah 31:3

There is no beginning to the love of Christ, for it existed when He existed—which was from eternity. Neither is there any end to that love. His love then, is as eternal as Himself. O what a mercy it is for those who have any gracious, experimental knowledge of the love of Christ, to believe it is from everlasting to everlasting—that no incidents of time—no storms of sin or Satan—can ever change or alter that eternal love—but that it remains now and will remain the same to all eternity! The love of Christ to His people is eternal, unchanging, unchangeable. And why? Because He loves as God.

This eternal, unchanging character of the love of Christ gives us something to stand upon—apart from our fluctuating feelings—our wavering frames—and the changes that ever take place in our thoughts, hearts and lives. The love of Christ to us is not changing and changeable like ours to Him—but like Himself abides forever. Jesus freely, fully, and unchangeably loves those who were given to Him by the Father in the councils of eternity—and presented to Him as His future spouse and bride.

Christ's love to His bride was love at first sight! For when she was presented to Him by the Father that she might be His spouse—as soon as He beheld His chosen bride He fell in love with her—for He saw her not sunk and fallen—but in all her beauty as clothed in the fullness of that glory in which she will one day shine forth—when she sits down with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb!

Nothing can quench or destroy the love of Christ! It will prevail over sin, death, and hell—yes, over every impediment and obstacle—until it achieves the final victory, and in all the blaze of full perfection and fruition—fill heaven with its eternal glory!

They are mere muckworms!

"Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things." Philippians 3:19

Paul here cuts off thousands of nominal Christians, as those "who mind earthly things." This means that they have no taste, no appetite or relish for divine things—no affections fixed on things above. Their mind is on earthly things. They are mere muckworms—ever groping and groveling after money and gain!

According to their various needs

"From His fullness we all received grace upon grace." John 1:16

Jesus is ever bestowing His grace to His people according to their various needs—grace for every burden we may have to carry—grace for every trial we may have to endure—grace for every affliction we may have to suffer—grace for every duty we may have to perform—grace to carry us through life—grace to be with us in, and carry us safely through, death itself!

When the Lord makes up His jewels

"As unknown, and yet well known." 2 Corinthians 6:9

God's people, as well as God's servants, are little known, and less esteemed in this world. It is God's purpose and a part of His infinite wisdom that it should be so. The Lord is training up heirs of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and preparing them for those mansions of holiness and bliss which He has prepared for them before the foundation of the world.

But while they are here below, they are in a state of obscurity. We may compare them to a large and valuable diamond, which is now undergoing the operations of cutting and polishing in some obscure court in the city, no one scarcely knowing of its existence or value, but its owner and the jeweler who is patiently cutting it into shape. But one day it may adorn a monarch's crown! So while God is cutting and polishing His diamonds by trials and temptations—sufferings and afflictions—they are hidden from the eyes of men. But when the Lord makes up His jewels, they will shine forth forever in His crown!

God has chosen the poor of this world, for the most part, to be rich in faith. Not many notable in the annals of learning, power, or rank—not many noble, not many rich, not many mighty, has He called by His grace to a knowledge of Himself. The Lord's people rarely possess any wealth, station, property, or worldly distinction. They are for the most part poor and despised, as their Lord and Master was before them—and such the world cares neither to know, nor notice. "They will be mine," says the Lord Almighty, "in the day when I make up My jewels!" Malachi 3:17

Giver & Maintainer

The Holy Spirit is not only the Giver, but the Maintainer of all life in the soul.

Offensive to the world?

Nothing is more offensive to the world than vital godliness!

A monster in the church of God!

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He who doesn't love his brother remains in death." 1 John 3:14

What would a Christian be without love? A monster indeed! We hear sometimes of monsters in nature—of a lamb born with two heads, or six legs, or two hearts. So a professing Christian, without any love to the people of God, would be a monster in the Church of God! Grace has many painful, many lingering births; but the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all, never brought forth a monster from her teeming womb. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." Galatians 5:22

Deaf & dumb?

"He who is of God hears the words of God. For this cause you don't hear, because you are not of God." John 8:47

Some are born, as it is called, deaf and dumb. They are not really speechless, though called so, for all their vocal organs are as perfect as ours. But they cannot use them so as to form intelligible language, for no sound has ever reached their mind—and what they have never heard they cannot imitate.

We have our deaf and dumb in the religious world as well. They cannot speak the language of Canaan, for they have never heard it spoken into their heart. And we also have those once deaf who now hear—and that by the power of an Almighty "Be opened!" "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27

Transformed into His likeness

"Leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." 1 Peter 2:21

"He who says he remains in Him ought himself also to walk as He walked." 1 John 2:6

The image of Jesus is reflected in the hearts of His people. A real Christian is one who is meek, humble, tender, broken, contrite—with a heart of faith, hope, and love—walking in the fear of God, desirous to know His will and do it—submissive under affliction—spiritually-minded—and adorning the doctrine by a godly life. But the 'mere professor of religion' lives contrary to the mind and the image of Christ. He is proud, obstinate, worldly, covetous, boasting, presumptuous—full of self-exaltation and self-conceit—light, trifling, carnal, earthly-minded.

The sovereignty of God

"All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: 'What have You done?'" Daniel 4:35

The verdict of God in His word is that He is Sovereign. The sovereignty of God, as exercised in all matters great or small, is often a hard thing for the people of God, especially when it touches them close. When it—takes away idols out of their bosom—blights their schemes—wither their prospects—disappoints their hopes—and stands before them as a mountain of brass and a gate of iron, which they can neither pass over nor pass through.

The wilderness

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her." Hosea 2:14

The children of God would not voluntarily go into the wilderness—it is a place too barren for them to enter, except as allured in a special manner by the grace of God—and led by the power of God. Nor do they for the most part know where the Lord is taking them. They follow His drawings—they are led by His allurings—they listen to His persuading voice, trusting to Him as to an unerring Guide. But they do not know the 'place of barrenness' into which He is bringing them—this the Lord usually conceals from their eyes. He allures and they follow—but He does not tell them what He is going to do with them, or where He intends to take them. He hides His gracious purposes, that He may afterwards bring them more clearly to light.

Look at the place where He brings His people—the wilderness. This is a type and figure much used by the Holy Spirit, and conveys to us much deep and profitable instruction. The wilderness is an isolated, solitary spot, far, far away from cities, and towns, and other busy haunts of men—a remote and often dreary abode, where there is no intruding eye to mark the wanderer's steps, where there is no listening ear to hear his sighs and cries. The Lord, when He puts forth His

sacred power upon the heart, to allure His people into the wilderness, brings them into a spot where in solitude and silence they may be separated from every one but Himself. The 'wilderness,' we take as an emblem of being alone with God—coming out of the world—away from sin and worldly company—out of everything carnal, sensual, and earthly—and being brought into that solemn spot where there are secret, sacred, and solitary dealings with God!

Only a huge clod of dust

"Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust." Isaiah 40:15

Everything upon earth, as viewed by the eyes of the Majesty of heaven—is worthless and paltry. Earth is after all, only a huge clod of dust! And as such, as insignificant in the eyes of its Maker as a drop in the bucket, or dust on the scales. What, then, are all earth's—highest objects—loftiest aims—grandest pursuits—noblest employments—in the sight of Him who inhabits eternity—but base and worthless?

No, even in our eyes there is one consideration that stamps vanity upon them all. That all earth's pursuits, whatever high attainments men may reach in this life, be it of wealth, rank, learning, power, or pleasure—they all end in death! The breath of God's displeasure soon lays low in the grave all that is rich and mighty, high and proud—for the Lord Almighty will punish the proud, bringing them down to the dust!

The effectual work of grace on the heart whereby the chosen vessels of mercy are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, calls them out of—those low, groveling pursuits—those earthly toys—those base and sensual lusts, in which the people of this world seek at once their happiness and their ruin!

To enjoy fellowship with God—to feel the mind drawn up to high and heavenly things—to have the heart weaned and separated from the poor, groveling, miserable cares of this world—to have the soul solemnly engaged with the realities of a never-ending eternity—to live a life of faith in the Son of God—to be spiritually-minded—to be dead to sin and the world—to seek happiness in knowing the will of God and doing it—and to be looking forward to the end of the race as giving a crown of glory—surely there is something in this vital experience of the child of God, which elevates his soul beyond this poor, wretched valley of tears—this miserable scene where everything is stamped with vexation and disappointment!

Many are called

"Many are called, but few are chosen." Matthew 22:14

There is a calling which is not effectual—which is not saving—which does not prove and evidence the reality of a person's being chosen according to God's eternal purpose unto eternal life. Family bereavements—bodily sickness, especially if the illness be dangerous or severe—advancing age and infirmities—heavy strokes in providence—strong convictions of conscience—desires to repent and turn to the Lord—fears of death and hell—sitting under the sound of truth—the counsel and example of godly parents—the terrors of the Lord in a broken Law—and the invitations of mercy in a preached Gospel—all these are so many calls wherein and whereby Wisdom, at the entrance to the city, at the city gates, cries aloud. But we well know that all these 'external calls' are ineffectual

until the Holy Spirit puts forth His secret and sacred power upon the heart!

He puts His hand in a mysterious way into the heart

Before we can receive Christ, there must be room made for Him, and this must be done by the power of God's grace—for sin and Satan are so strong that nothing else can overcome them. The usual way by which this room is made for Christ is by cutting convictions, distressing temptations, and alarming views of the majesty and purity of God—for it is by such dealings upon the conscience that we come experimentally to learn our own miserable sinfulness. The Blessed Spirit working in and by these convictions, and softening and melting the heart by a divine influence, thus breaks to pieces the pride, self-righteousness, prejudice, enmity, opposition—and all those obstacles that have so shut out the gospel—so blinded the eyes—stopped the ears—and hardened the heart against the voice of truth. It is not now whether we will turn to the Lord or not, and leave the ways of sin or not; for He makes us willing in the day of His power, and puts His hand in a mysterious way into the heart.

The Lord, by the secret power and influence of His grace, puts His hand into the heart—and by the secret movements of His Spirit in and upon the conscience—raises up not only a sense of the soul's ruin and misery, but, being poured out as a Spirit of grace and of supplication—communicates desires, breathings, sighs, cries and groans, lookings and longings for mercy, pardon, and peace. It is in this way that the Lord Jesus Christ makes His people willing to receive him—for He not only convinces them of their miserable state—but in a secret, mysterious way discovers, from time to time, so much of His suitability, beauty, blessedness, grace, and glory—as to make the heart willing to entertain Him, and to dread nothing so much as to live and die without the manifestation of His blood and love!

How do we receive Jesus?

"But as many as received Him." John 1:12

How do we receive Jesus? We receive Jesus as the eternal Son of God in all His blessed relationships. We receive Jesus as our atoning High Priest. We receive Jesus as our teaching Prophet, that He may lead us into all truth. We receive Jesus as our most gracious Sovereign, who is to sway His peaceful scepter over every faculty of the soul. We receive Jesus as our Lord and King. We receive Jesus as our Savior from the wrath to come. We receive Jesus as our Mediator between God and man. We receive Jesus as our Husband who has espoused us in eternal covenant ties. We receive Jesus as our Brother born for adversity. We receive Jesus as our Friend who loves at all times. We receive Jesus as our Substitute who has borne our sins in His own body. We receive Jesus as our Representative in the courts of heaven. We receive Jesus as our glorious Head, out of whom we receive all supplies to sanctify us, and make us fit for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Sin, Satan & the world

We often, through the power of sin—the subtlety of Satan—and the strength of temptation—get drawn aside from the simplicity that is in Christ.

1. When the Lord is pleased in any manner to manifest Himself to the soul, sin receives a paralyzing blow—it cannot lift up its head in the presence of Jesus. He puts His victorious feet

upon its neck, for He will not allow it to reign and rule in the believer's heart. Nor indeed can it do so when under the influence of His grace, according to the promise—"Sin shall not have dominion over you." But when He withdraws His gracious presence, sin that before lay dead, begins to revive. It is like the sleeping serpent—torpid in the winter, but revived by the warm beams of spring. So when sin once more comes forth out of its torpid state, and begins again to manifest itself in all its secret power and all its dreadful influence—the soul gets into worse confusion and trouble than ever—for fresh sin brings fresh guilt, and when guilt falls as a dark and gloomy cloud over the conscience, it hides and obscures all that God has done in the heart; it buries evidences, casts a mist of darkness over the throne of grace, shuts out access to God, and fills the whole mind with bondage, doubt, and fear.

2. Satan, too, who, when the Lord was pleased to manifest Himself, withdrew for a time—begins again to lay his secret snares—sometimes puffing up the heart with pride—sometimes secretly insinuating what a good and blessed experience the soul has been favored with, so as to lift it up with vain confidence and presumption, exalting itself and despising others—sometimes spreading a hidden trap for the feet, whereby he entangles it in some vile sin, or thrusts it down at once by some sudden slip or fall. If he does not succeed in this way, he will sometimes beguile the mind with some error—or work upon our reasoning powers—or raise up infidel thoughts—or whisper vile suggestions—or insinuate that all the soul has tasted, handled, and felt, was but delusion and deception—and that we have been guilty of hypocrisy in speaking of anything which we thought God had done for us.

3. The world, which seemed to have little influence when the soul was under the blessed teaching of the Lord, begins again to work with renewed power. The worldly spirit which exists in every believer's bosom is easily inflamed—for sin and Satan are ever at hand to pile up combustible material and set it on fire. Under this wretched influence a whole troop of worldly thoughts and desires begin again to take possession of the mind—and as these regain their former strength—they shut out union and communion with the Lord of life and glory—and produce inward darkness, deadness, coldness, hardness, barrenness, and a general stupor of mind—all which sad evils give great encouragement to the powers of hell to renew their attacks, and often with too much success.

By these and various other ways, the soul is drawn aside from the simplicity that is in Christ, and stripped of its enjoyments, its spirituality of mind, and its heavenly affections—and is thus no longer able to walk with God in the sweet fellowship which it had been favored with when Christ was made precious to the soul.

The hardest thing in the world!

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

Before we can come rightly to Jesus, we must be taught by the Holy Spirit to feel our need of Him. This may seem very simple, and indeed is so in doctrine and theory—but not so in experience—for to come to Jesus is the hardest thing in the world! No one really comes to Him until he has tried every other refuge, every other hope of salvation—until he has been driven out of house and home, made an outcast and ready to perish. John Newton justly says, "Few, if any, come to Jesus, until reduced to self-despair."

The first divine work upon the soul by the Holy Spirit, is chiefly to make us feel our need of Jesus. Our convictions—our distressing sensations of guilt, shame, and sorrow—our doubts and fears—our trials and temptations—our varied afflictions, from whatever source they come or of whatever nature they be, are all so many means in the hand of the Spirit to bring us near unto Jesus!

It was not the nails nor the spear

"Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." 1 Peter 2:24

In a sense we are all murderers of Jesus. It was not the nails nor the spear that killed the Son of God. Our sins—these were the nails! Our iniquity—this was the Roman spear!

Deity suffered, bled & died!

"For you were bought with a price." 1 Corinthians 6:20

It may be that some of you have seen and felt yourselves at various times, to be some of the foulest, filthiest, blackest, most polluted wretches that God allows to crawl upon His earth—for though your lives may have been free from outward spot, and you are made to walk in the fear of God—yet the shining in of divine teaching has discovered to you the depths of your fallen nature. You felt that—your debt was unpayable—your crimes were too great—your sins were too black—your iniquity was too foul.

Millions of sins of millions of sinners were all put away, blotted out, cancelled, removed, cast behind God's back, and drowned in the depths of the sea—as that precious blood fell from the hands and feet and side of Jesus upon Calvary's cruel tree! Deity suffered, bled and died! Jesus stood, as it were, between the wrath of God and His people—and it was as if by so doing He said, "Let the law discharge all its curses upon Me. Here is My head—let the lightning fall. I bare My brow. Let the wrath of God come upon Me—that My sheep may go free!"

We shall never properly value redeeming love, atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and the gift of the Son of God until we have known experimentally the slavery of sin—and groaned as poor captives under the dominion of Satan. Until the iron has entered our very soul—until the fetters have galled our feet and the manacles our wrists, and we can look up to God and point to our bleeding wounds as inflicted by sin, Satan, and the law—we can never truly feel our need of, or really value—the redemption that has been accomplished by the suffering Son of God.

But O, what a blessed change it is when the first ray of mercy breaks in upon the soul, and cheers the poor captive, who has been groaning for years, shut up in our dungeon cells, half starved, covered with filth and loathsome with vermin—the vermin of sin. But O to have the light of day breaking in through the prison doors, and to hear sounds from above of pardon and peace and blessed liberation—is not this enough to make the poor prisoner's heart leap for joy within him?

If you had a crippled child

"O Lord, You have searched me, and known me." Psalm 139:1

We may deceive ourselves, and we may deceive one another. But there is one whom we cannot deceive—a heart-searching God. The Lord Himself writes this truth with His own finger upon every

regenerate heart. He teaches two lessons to every soul in whom His powerful hand works—

1. That He cannot be deceived.
2. That He must not be mocked.

This teaching from above makes a man sincere before God. For if not sincere, what is he, or what is any man in a profession of religion? Nothing! Nothing, did I say? He is worse than nothing—because to be insincere before God is to add hypocrisy to our other sins—is to insult the Majesty of heaven—is to tie, if it were possible, a double millstone round our neck to sink us in the depths of hell. God, the all-seeing, the omniscient Jehovah, searches the hearts, and He searches them for good as well as for evil—for both lie equally naked before His penetrating eye. There is not—an evil thought—a licentious desire—a covetous wish—or an ungodly imagination framed in our mind—that does not lie open before the eyes of our heart-searching God!

Like the ostrich, you may bury your head in the sand, and think yourself unseen—but your whole body stands exposed to the bow of the unerring archer. God sees, then, all the evil which is in us—and well may that thought cover us with shame and confusion of face! You could not tell your nearest, dearest friend what daily and hourly takes place in the depths of your carnal mind—but all is open before God! This should make you watchful and prayerful, as living under the eye of an omniscient Being who reads every thought—hears every word—and spies out every action. This should make you fearful to offend, and desirous to please the Majesty of heaven.

But He who searches the heart searches not only for evil—but also for good. He is full of compassion, mercy, love, and truth. To His children, He is not a rigorous Judge, or a hard Master. But He is a kind, affectionate Father, and Friend. And as a parent looks with very tender eye upon the unavoidable infirmities of his children, and deals with them accordingly—so does the great Searcher of hearts in the case of His spiritual family. For He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. If you had a crippled child, would you harshly push him down, because he could not walk with a firm and vigorous step? Or if he were afflicted with any bodily or mental infirmity—would not that very affliction commend him all the more to your tenderest affection, and anxious care? How you would shield him to the utmost of your power from the rudeness and unkind treatment of others, and could scarcely bear him out of your sight, lest he meet with any injury. So our heavenly Father looks down with pity and compassion upon the infirmities of His children. He regards their woes with eyes of holy pity!

True prayer

True prayer is the inward breathing of the heart after God. There is often more depth, power, and prevalence in the inward sigh and groan of a broken heart and a contrite spirit—than in the vocal expression of the lips!

A sealed book

"Then He opened their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures." Luke 24:45

Thousands read the Scriptures to whom it is a sealed book. We must beg the Lord to illuminate the sacred page, to cast a divine light upon the Scriptures, and thence into our heart. And then we shall understand the Scriptures by the same inspiration under which that holy word was written.

"Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Your law."

The eye of God

"O Lord, You have searched me, and known me." Psalm 139:1

Men in general take no notice of 'heart sins.' If they can keep from sins in life—from open acts of immorality—they are satisfied. What passes in the chambers of imagery they neither see nor feel. Not so with the child of grace. He carries about with him the secret conviction that the eye of God reads every thought. Every inward movement of pride, self-righteousness, rebellion, discontent, peevishness, fretfulness, lust, and wantonness—he inwardly feels that the holy eye of God—reads all—marks all—hates and abhors all. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." Psalm 139:23, 24

A rough, rugged & thorny road

"Through many afflictions we must enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

The way to heaven is a way of trial, temptation, and tribulation. It is not a smooth and easy—but a rough, rugged, and thorny road. Events in providence, and trials in grace are continually springing up to teach us that lesson. Family afflictions—illness of body—painful bereavements—losses in property—and a path extremely rough and rugged in a variety of outward circumstances—are usually allotted to God's family. And to this rough path from without, there are generally added many painful trials from within. Jesus told His people that they would be hated and despised by the world—and would have to walk in a path of sorrow. Yet they find that all these things work together for their spiritual good—that none of these trials and afflictions do or can separate them from the love of God. They also discover that these sorrowful things are—all weighed out in due weight and measure—all appointed by sovereign wisdom—all timed by eternal love!

If I have learned anything

"Without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

I have been a preacher more than thirty years—and yet I feel now weaker than ever. I am all weakness! Though I have preached hundreds, I might almost say thousands, of sermons, I have no power to open up any part of God's truth with utterance, liberty, life, or feeling. I stand before you this morning as I stand before God—depending wholly upon His strength made perfect in my weakness. If I have learned anything—it is my sinfulness and weakness. And I know and feel that if I am anything—have anything—do anything—speak anything—write anything spiritual and acceptable to the church of God—it must be by the operation and influence of the Blessed Spirit upon my heart!

As, then, we learn our weakness—we begin to learn our strength. Despairing of all strength in self—we look to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only as we thus receive strength out of His fullness that we are made strong—to believe—to hope—to love—to fight against our besetting sins—to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts!

Look how sin has ruined your soul

Look how sin has ruined your soul—how it has brought you under the wrath of God. See how you have been entangled in sin. Look at the long catalogue of crimes which you have committed—if not in deed, in word or thought—since you lay in your mother's lap. Think only of the sins of a single day—what carnality—what unbelief—what pride—what covetousness—what selfishness! But I need not go through the catalogue. I could not stand up to read, nor could you sit to hear, article by article, the contents of that long dark scroll. The human heart is too deep an abyss of sin to be laid bare to open view! It is like the common sewer—it is best covered up by a culvert. There is stench enough at the mouth, without penetrating through the whole length of its hideous contents!

A root is hidden in the ground

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." 1 Timothy 6:10

The love of money, when at all inordinate, blinds the mind, and hardens and deadens the conscience to a fearful degree. Some sins, as, for instance, drunkenness, dishonesty or immorality—so carry with them their own condemnation—that they cannot well disguise their dreadful sinfulness—either from the guilty criminal himself or from the world around him. But covetousness is a sin of so subtle a nature—and so imperceptible a growth—that a man may be very far gone into it without his own conscience being alarmed—or its drawing down much observation or censure from professor or profane.

A root is hidden in the ground—and therefore the love of money does not attract much attention until the stem gets stout and tall—and shows flowers and fruit. This very circumstance, therefore, makes it all the more deceptive and dangerous. Did you ever know a covetous man who could see his own covetousness? Or did you ever know one to be convinced of it, to confess it, and forsake it? No! They go on in it, and the older they get the more are they hardened and confirmed in it. For, unlike other sins, covetousness is the special and growing besetting sin of advancing years. "Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness." Luke 12:15

The history of the Old Testament

The history of the Old Testament is little else but a record of the perverseness of man—and of the goodness and mercy of God. From the day that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt to the close of the canon of the Old Testament—their history is but one unmingled series of perverseness and rebellion. And all God's dealings with them from first to last were but repeated instances of His unparalleled patience—rich forbearance—and unspeakable goodness towards them.

But though the Lord thus displayed His goodness and mercy towards them, we must ever bear in mind that He hated their sins, and was justly provoked by their iniquities. He, therefore, from time to time, raised up prophets to testify against their sins, and to denounce His displeasure against them. And not only so, but He sent chastisement after chastisement, and sold them again and again into captivity, in order to bring them to repentance for their disobedience.

Three branches of divine truth

There are three branches of divine truth which seem to have been specially opened up in the experience of the Apostle Paul; and which he therefore, as an inspired writer in the New Testament, opened and enforced with corresponding fullness, clearness, and power—

1. The first branch of divine truth into which he was so deeply led is the Fall of man, with its attendant consequences of sin and death.
2. The second branch of divine truth into which he was so blessedly led is the Person, work, obedience, death, resurrection and glorification of the Son of God, viewed in relationship to His Church and bride.
3. The third great branch of divine truth in which the eminent Apostle so blessedly shines, is sovereign grace in its justifying, sanctifying, and saving effects upon the Church of God.

It never was the purpose of God to address the Scripture merely to man's intellect—but to his heart and conscience. As, then, these divine truths formed part and parcel of the Apostle's experience, and flowed into his soul out of the bosom of Christ, so they flowed out of his heart, and were written by his pen in the inspired record.

They only plunge themselves deeper in the ditch!

How many poor souls are struggling against the power of sin—and yet never get any victory over it! How many are daily led captive by the lusts of the flesh, the love of the world, and the pride of life—and never get any victory over them! How many fight and grapple with tears, vows, and strong resolutions against the besetting sins of temper, levity, or covetousness—who are still entangled and overcome by them again and again!

Now, why is this? Because they know not the secret of spiritual strength against—and spiritual victory over them. It is only by virtue of a living union with the Lord Jesus Christ, drinking into His sufferings and death, and receiving out of His fullness—that we can gain any victory over the world, sin, death, or hell. Sin is never really or effectually subdued in any other way!

It is not, then, by legal strivings and earnest resolutions—vows, and tears, which are but monkey at best—the vain struggle of religious flesh to subdue sinful flesh—which can overcome sin. But it is by a believing acquaintance with, and a spiritual entrance into the sufferings and sorrows of the Son of God—having a living faith in Him—and receiving out of His fullness, supplies of grace and strength—His strength made perfect in our weakness.

A sight of Him as a suffering God—or a view of Him as a risen Jesus—must be connected with every successful attempt to get the victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave. You may strive, vow, and repent—and what does it all amount to? You just sink deeper and deeper into sin than before! Pride, lust, and covetousness come in like a flood—and you are swamped and carried away almost before you are aware! But if you get a view of a suffering Christ, or of a risen Christ—if you get a taste of His dying love—a drop of His atoning blood—or any manifestation of His beauty and blessedness—there comes from this spiritual baptism into His death or His life a subduing power—and this gives a victory over temptation and sin which nothing else can or will give!

Yet I believe we are often many years learning this divine secret—striving to repent and reform, and cannot—trying to get better by dipping the Ethiopian into the washing tub—until at last by divine teaching we come to learn a little of what the apostle meant when he said, "The just shall live by faith." And when we can get into this life of faith, this hidden life—then our affections are set on things above. There is no use setting people to work by legal strivings—they only plunge themselves deeper in the ditch! You must get Christ into your soul by the power of God—and then He will subdue—by His smiles, blood, love, and presence—every internal foe!

Grace & glory

"The Lord will give grace and glory." Psalm 84:11

It is the peculiar glory of God to give out of the infinite fullness of His goodness and love. The more He gives—the more is He glorified. We should come to God's gracious footstool as to that of a free and bounteous Benefactor, saying before Him in the simplicity of a little child, "Lord, I am poor, enrich me! Lord, I am hungry, feed me! Lord, I am naked, clothe me! Lord, I am sinful, forgive me! Lord, I am helpless, take pity and compassion upon me! Lord, I am weak and wandering, ever stumbling and falling—hold me up, and I shall be safe! Lord, I have nothing, and am nothing—give me what seems good to You—and make me what You would have me to be."

The secret of superabounding grace

Those who know nothing—of their own heart—of their own infirmities—of their own frailties—of their own inward or outward slips and backslidings—know nothing of the secret of superabounding grace. We must be perpetually reminded that we have no strength of our own. And thus—our sins—our slips—our falls—our backslidings—our frailties—are mercifully overruled among the all things which work together for our good. They teach us our weakness—and by teaching us our weakness—lead us up to Christ's strength!

Fitted together perfectly

In the body of Christ, every spiritual part supplies its allotted portion of strength and activity to the rest. This should be exemplified in a gospel church, where love and union reign. The Spirit gives to each member that measure of grace which is sufficient not only for his own salvation and consolation—but that which contributes something to the welfare of the whole. Thus, some contribute their prayers, having little else to bestow, for the good of their brethren. Others, whom the Lord has blessed with a measure of this world's goods, give of their substance to those poor members to whom their liberality is often a timely help. Others supply the church with a godly example, setting before their eyes a godly life, a self-denying, upright, consistent walk and conduct. Others are free to speak, possess a pleasing gift in conversation and prayer, and out of the fullness of a believing heart can testify what God has done for their souls in humble, simple, yet savory language. Others are patterns of humility, holding forth a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Others manifest much tenderness of conscience, great circumspection of conduct, and exercise of much godly fear. Some are possessed of a great spirit of love and affection. Others of much zeal and boldness for the truth. Others of a sound judgment and keen discernment. Others manifest much patience under suffering, or meekness under persecution, or great spirituality of mind. Some have a deep acquaintance with trials and temptations, and much knowledge of the wiles of Satan, and the deceitfulness and depravity of the human heart.

Thus, in one way or another, every part supplies something to the well-being of the body. However poor or weak a member may feel itself to be in a church—still it is as much an integral part of the body as the strongest. My little finger is as much an integral part of my body as my hand or arm—to part with it would give me pain, and I suffer if the least injury is done to it. So, the weakest and feeblest member of the body of Christ is as much a member—has as much fitness in the body—is as much honored by the Spirit for what he does, under His gracious influences—as the strongest in faith, hope, and love. The whole body is fitted together perfectly. Every part, whether large or small, adds something to the welfare of the whole body—so that if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. The body is thus fitted, or, as it were—welded together into one united mass of firmness and strength—the indwelling Spirit working effectually in every part, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon it.

Loaded dice!

"That we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error." Ephesians 4:14

The word translated 'trickery' means literally, 'cheating at dice'—the allusion being to the practice of gamblers loading the dice to obtain a favorable throw. The dice are rightly marked and rightly thrown, but being loaded on one side, they always come up in favor of the cheat who throws them. Likewise, errors and heresies resemble loaded dice! They look all right—properly marked with texts and passages—and the minister or writer seems to throw them fully and fairly down before the people. And yet, like loaded dice, there is jugglery and deception at the bottom!

As in sleight of hand, things are made to appear what they are not—so jugglers and cheats in religion deceive people by a show of piety and holiness—under the cover of which they hide the most destructive errors! Simple souls are caught—and still the game goes on. Yet of all gamblers, religious gamblers are the worst, for the throw is for eternity, and the soul is at stake!

Whatever other form self may come

"Grow up into Him in all things." Ephesians 4:15

We have to grow up into Christ—and we cannot do this except we grow out of self. Self is a deadly enemy to growth in Christ. Where self-righteousness, self-indulgence, self-conceit, self-dependence—or in whatever other form self may come—it is a deadly enemy to growth in grace!

What is your heaviest trial?

What is your heaviest trial? We all have our peculiar trials that we have each to pass through—trials in body—trials in circumstances—trials in the family—trials in the mind. But are any of our trials equal to what we feel from indwelling sin? Is it not our daily experience to go groaning and sighing before the Lord on account of the working of sin in our carnal mind? Is it not our heaviest burden to have sin so striving for the mastery—that such base lusts are seeking perpetually to captivate our affections—that such evil desires are ever struggling for the victory in our bosom—that such pride and infidelity, and other abounding corruptions—are perpetually struggling, like a volcano in our bosom—to get full vent, and desolate our souls?

And what makes us feel this burden of sin? The fear of God in a tender conscience. To some men—sin is no burden. Their corruptions cause them no pain. Their pride, their presumption, their covetousness, their lewdness, all the workings of depraved nature never draw a tear from their eye, nor force a sob from their heart! Why? Because they lack the fear of God in a tender conscience. Just in proportion to the depth of godly fear, and to the tenderness of conscience before God, will sin be—inwardly perceived—inwardly felt—and inwardly mourned and groaned under!

This body of sin & death!

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Romans 7:24

What, then, was it that so pained this holy Apostle? It was the body of death that he carried in him! That moving mass of corruption—that Behemoth raising up his ponderous limbs in his soul, and trampling down all that was good and gracious in his heart!

The idea is taken from a practice of the Romans of tying a dead body to a living one. And O! what must have been the sickening sensation of ever feeling the cold corpse close to the warm flesh—to wake, say, in the night, and feel the dead body tied around the living one—and clasping it in its cold arms! What a sensation of horror and disgust must the living feel from such a punishment!

Now look at it spiritually. Your 'new man' is warm toward God. There are holy affections springing up—there are panting desires flowing forth—there are tender sighs, and longings and languishings after the Son of God in His beauty. And then, linked to it, there is a carnal, torpid, sensual, dead, earthly heart—perpetually surrounding it with its cold, clammy embrace—communicating its deathly torpidity to the soul. Would we pray—would we pour the heart forth in warm desires? The cold paw of this body of sin and death quenches that rising desire! Would we in the secret chambers of our heart earnestly seek His face? The cold, clammy embrace of the body of sin and death chills it all—continually impeding every upward movement of the spirit, and clogging and fettering every desire of the heavenly nature! Now, the inward conflict produced by these exercises and perplexities forces out this cry—"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

A few grains of error

No one can take even a few grains of error with impunity—it will stupefy—if it does not kill; it will weaken the soul—if it does not at once destroy life. It will and must affect his head or his heart—his hands or his feet—his faith or his walk. No man can drink down error and the spirit of error without being injured—his spiritual strength weakened—and his spiritual limbs paralyzed.

We are to beware of error as we would of poison! There is something in error alluring, as well as sweet to the carnal mind. Many a child has been allured by poisonous berries—first to taste, and, when tasted, their sweetness has drawn it on largely to eat. Let error once hang down its alluring berries from the pulpit—there are plenty in the congregation to pluck and eat. Therefore beware of error—and of erroneous men! I am jealous of error in proportion as I love and value the truth.

Whence comes this spiritual desire?

"My soul stays close to You." Psalm 63:8

Whence comes this spiritual desire? It arises from the quickening work of the Spirit in the soul. Until we are divinely enlightened to see—and spiritually quickened to feel our lost, ruined state—we are satisfied with the things of time and sense—our hearts are in the world—our affections are fixed on the poor perishing vanities that must quickly pass away—and there is not one spiritual longing or heavenly craving in the soul. But when the Lord sends light and life into the conscience—to show us to ourselves in our true colors—then spiritual desires immediately commence. The eyes of the understanding are spiritually enlightened to see God, and the heart is divinely quickened to feel that He alone can relieve the desires that the soul labors under—and thus there is set before the eyes of the mind, the Person who alone can give us that which the soul craves to enjoy!

When a man loathes himself

"You shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed." Ezekiel 20:43

When a man loathes himself, it is not merely that he hates himself. But that he looks upon himself as a vile, detestable wretch. Some loathe toads—some loathe spiders—some loathe filth. Loathing, then, not merely implies hating a thing—but hating it as a thing that we cannot bear to look upon!

Such a deceptive creature

Self must receive a death blow! But this self is such a deceptive creature—he can wear such masks—he can assume so many forms—he can rise to such heights—he can sink to such depths—he can creep into such holes and corners—that I must act the part of the police, so as to find out the felon, track him to his hiding-place, and drag him out into the light of day!

The strait & narrow path

"In the world you shall have tribulation." John 16:33

He who will walk in the path which God has chosen for him, will have to meet with every opposition to his walking therein—infidelity, unbelief, rebellion, peevishness, impatience—the assaults of Satan as an angel of darkness—the delusions of Satan as an angel of light—false friends—secret or open foes—the flattery of professors—often the frowns of God's children—the loss of worldly interests—the sacrifice of property—all these things are entailed upon those who will walk in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life. They are all connected with the cross of Christ—and cannot be escaped!

He will never let you have an earthly paradise

"I will satisfy her poor with bread." Psalm 132:15

What a sweetness there is in the word "satisfy!" The world cannot satisfy us! Have we not tried, and some of us perhaps for many years, to get some satisfaction from it? But can wife or husband "satisfy" us? Can children or relatives "satisfy" us? Can all that the world calls good or great "satisfy" us? Can the pleasures of sin "satisfy" us? Is there not in all an aching void? Do we not

reap dissatisfaction and disappointment from everything that is of the creature—and of the flesh? Do we not find that there is little else but sorrow to be reaped from everything in this world? I am sure I find, and have found for some years—that there is little else to be gathered from the world but disappointment, dissatisfaction, vanity, and vexation of spirit!

The poor soul looks around upon the world—upon all the occupations, amusements, and relations of life—and finds all one melancholy harvest—so that all it reaps is sorrow, perplexity, and dissatisfaction! Now when a man is brought here—to desire satisfaction—something to make him happy—something to fill up the aching void—something to bind up broken bones, bleeding wounds, and leprous sores—and after he has looked at everything—at doctrines, opinions, notions, speculations, forms, rites, and ceremonies in religion—at the world with all its charms—and at self with all its varied workings—and found nothing but bitterness of spirit, vexation and trouble in them all, and thus sinks down a miserable wretch—then it is that the Lord opens up to him something of the Bread of life—and he finds a satisfaction in that, which he never could gain from any other quarter!

And that is the reason, my friends, why the Lord afflicts His people so—why some carry about with them such weak, suffering bodies—why some have so many family troubles—why others are so deeply steeped in poverty—why others have such rebellious children—why others are so exercised with spiritual sorrows that they scarcely know what will be their end! It is all for one purpose—to make them miserable outside of Christ—dissatisfied except with gospel food—to render them so wretched and uncomfortable that God alone can make them happy—and alone can speak consolation to their troubled minds!

My friends, if there be any young people here whose heart God has touched with His Spirit, and you are yet seeking some satisfaction from the world—if your health and spirits are yet unbroken, and you are looking to reap a 'harvest of pleasure' from the creature—depend upon it, if you are a child of God—you will be disappointed! The Lord will pull up by the roots all your 'anticipated pleasure.' He will effectually mar your worldly happiness! He will never let you have an earthly paradise—and it is your mercy that He will not! If you are looking for happiness—from wife or husband—from business—from the world—from whatever your carnal heart is going out after—depend upon it, God will let you take no solid nor abiding pleasure in them—but He will cut up by the roots all your earthly enjoyments!

He will mar all your worldly plans, and bring you to this spot—to be a miserable wretch without Christ—to be a ruined creature without the manifestations of the Son of God to your soul. And when you can find no pleasure in the world, no happiness in the things of time and sense—but feel misery in your soul, and are fearing lest eternal misery be your portion in the world to come—you will then be the very one who God will comfort through the gospel—and give you a manifested interest in the promise made to Zion, "I will satisfy her poor with bread."

It is our mercy that we cannot take pleasure in the world! If we could—I know where and what I would be! I would be pursuing the vain imaginations of my carnal heart—and trying to reap pleasure where real happiness never can be found! And if any of you, my friends, are mourning, sighing and groaning—and sometimes heaving up with rebellion and fretful impatience because you cannot have what you wish naturally to enjoy—or because you cannot bring about your earthly schemes—and have little else but sorrow of heart and trouble of soul—you are far more favored

than if you could have all that heart could wish! God, who has made you wretched that you might find happiness in Him—will not leave you to live and die in your misery! He will bind up every bleeding wound, and pour the oil of joy into your troubled heart! "I will satisfy her poor with bread."

The river

"You feed them from the abundance of Your own house, letting them drink from Your rivers of delight." Psalm 36:8

God does not give grudgingly or niggardly, as though He ever regretted what He bestowed. But what He gives He bestows as a God—freely, bounteously, overflowing—worthy of an infinite, eternal, self-existent Jehovah!

To be truly saved

"Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling." 2 Timothy 1:9

To be truly saved, is to be saved—from wrath to come—from the power of sin—from an empty profession—from a form of godliness—from the flesh—from the delusions of Satan—from the blindness and ignorance of one's own heart.

How do you measure your knowledge of truth?

How do you measure your knowledge of truth? Is it by the number of texts that you have learned by heart? Is it by your being able to explain what you see in the Scriptures? Is it by the understanding that you have obtained by comparing passage with passage? If you have no better knowledge than this—it all stands in the flesh—and it is nothing else but 'dim letter speculation' which leaves the soul barren before God.

Measure your knowledge by this test—what feelings are produced by it—what exercises before God—what breathings in the presence of Him with whom you have to do—what drawings forth of heart—what solemn questionings of soul before Him in whose presence you from time to time stand. Now this test will apply to every degree and stage and state of spiritual life—so far as that spiritual life is in exercise.

Whatever notions or opinions we may previously have had about God—and they may be most clear and systematic, they may run most completely in the channel of letter truth—whatever outward notions, speculations, or imaginations we may have concerning the being of God, we only know Him spiritually so far as He is pleased immediately to manifest Himself to our consciences. All other knowledge stands in the flesh—it is the mere fruit of the creature—and falls utterly short of that knowledge which is spiritual wisdom and eternal life.

But whenever the Lord the Spirit brings home the truth of God with power to the soul—He raises up, by the application of that truth—spiritual feelings, spiritual breathings, and spiritual exercises upon that which He is pleased to communicate.

Behold, I am vile

"Behold, I am vile." Job 40:4

Sometimes the believer—gets entangled in some temptation—backslides from God—goes out after broken cisterns which hold no water—deserts the living fountain—and seeks pleasure from its idols. If the Christian is entangled in any sin, or caught in any snare of the flesh or temptation of Satan—a tender conscience brings him down to the Lord's feet to moan and sigh and groan; and to confess—what a vile wretch he is to be so entangled with evil—what a monster of iniquity to be so overcome by evil—what a foul, filthy, polluted beast, to have so much evil at work in his heart, and continually carrying him away captive!

We may easily measure men's religion

"He who says he remains in Him ought himself also to walk just like He walked." 1 John 2:6

We may easily measure men's religion by this test—not where they are in 'mere doctrine'—not where they are in 'empty notions'—not where they are in 'presumptuous confidence'—not where they are in 'towering speculation.' But where they are in—brokenness of heart—tenderness of conscience—contrition of spirit—meekness of soul—godly fear—filial awe—and trembling reverence. Where is the mind of Christ visible in them? Where is the image of a suffering Lord stamped upon them? It is 'vain confidence' to be always talking about Christ—and to know nothing of the Spirit of Christ. It is 'vain talking' to profess to know the cross of Christ—and never have any reflection of Christ's image in us. It is the worst of folly, and the height of presumption, to boast of ourselves as children of God, when there is nothing of the image of a broken-hearted Lord stamped upon our soul—or visible in our demeanor. Are you, then, a poor broken-hearted child of the living God? Is there any measure of the Spirit of Christ in you? Is there any faint resemblance of His meekness and holy image stamped upon you?

A God who will not be mocked nor trifled with

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6

If the Lord, then, has showed us any spiritual light, He has showed us light both with respect to Himself and with respect to ourselves. He has showed us, with respect to Himself, who HE is. He has stamped something of Himself upon our consciences. He has brought some testimony concerning Himself into our hearts. He has revealed something of His glorious character to our souls, and brought us, under the operations of the Holy Spirit, into His presence—there to receive communications of life out of Christ's inexhaustible fullness. Thus we see and feel that we have to do with a heart-searching God. We see and feel that we have to do with a sin-hating God. We see and feel that we have to do with a God who will not be mocked nor trifled with. As He is pleased to reveal it to us, we see and feel that every secret of our heart, every working of our mind is open before Him.

Also, so far as He is pleased to manifest it, we see what WE are in His holy and pure eyes—a mass of sin, filth, and corruption—without creature help—without creature strength—without creature wisdom—without creature righteousness—without creature loveliness—without anything of which we can say is spiritually good.

Also, so far as He is pleased to manifest it, He shows us the way of SALVATION through Jesus Christ. He has not only showed us what we are by nature, but He has in a measure condescended

to show us what we are by grace. Not merely brought into our hearts some acquaintance with Himself as a God of perfect justice—but He has also brought into our souls some acquaintance with Him as a God of mercy—and has thus brought us in some solemn measure to know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent.

Absolute dependence upon the Lord

"Our soul waits for the Lord: He is our help and our shield." Psalm 33:20

There seems to be one feature which is common to every believer in whatever stage of spiritual experience he may happen to be—and that is an absolute renunciation of self—and an absolute dependence upon the Lord to work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure. Let men talk about the wisdom of the creature—or boast of human righteousness—or human merit—or any other such vain figment of the imagination. You will never find any of the Biblical saints breathing forth any other language than a complete renunciation of the creature in all its bearings, and a simple hanging and dependence upon the Lord of life and glory—to manifest Himself to them—to bless them—to teach them—to lead them into all truth. Thus the experience of the saints stamps the lie upon the whole fiction of human merit, creature wisdom, and fleshly righteousness.

My grace is sufficient

"And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

Not your strength—not your wisdom—not your prayers—not your experience—but "My grace"—My free, My matchless grace, independent of all works and efforts, independent of everything in the creature—flowing wholly and solely, fully and freely, out of the bosom of Jesus, to the needy—the guilty—the destitute—the undone. You who are tried in worldly circumstances, who have to endure the hard lot of poverty—My grace is sufficient for you! You who are tempted, day by day, to say or do that which conscience testifies against—My grace is sufficient for you! You who are harassed with family troubles and afflictions, and are often drawn aside into peevishness and fretfulness—My grace is sufficient for you!

In whatever state, stage, trial, or circumstance of soul the child of God is, the promise still runs—My grace is sufficient for you! Our weakness, helplessness, and inability are the very things which draw forth the power, the strength, and the grace of Jesus. Believer, your case is never beyond the reach of the words—My grace is sufficient for you! The free, the matchless, sovereign grace of God, is sufficient for all His people—in whatever state, or stage, or trouble, or difficulty they may be in!

O, what opposition

O, what opposition there is to the life of faith! What difficulties, impediments, obstacles, and afflictions lie in a man's path when he sets out in faith! There is sin perpetually working—there is the devil tempting or harassing him—sometimes the world ensnaring or persecuting him—and often his own heart deceiving and entangling him.

Did ever a man see so filthy a sight?

As the veil is removed, the soul also begins to see and feel the workings of inward sin that it was previously ignorant of. The removal of the veil not merely shows us the glory of God, but everything contrary to that glory—the pride of our heart—the power of our unbelief—the en

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God's presence!

What solemn feelings are produced in the mind under a sense of God's presence! How the Lord's presence turns night into day—makes every crooked thing straight—and every rough place plain! How it banishes all the gloom, melancholy, and despondency which hang over the soul! How it clears up every difficulty—and like the shining sun, it drives away the damps and darkness of the night. If there is one thing to be coveted more than another, it is that the Lord's presence might be more felt in our hearts!

If I wash myself with snow

By nature, man knows nothing of the purity and perfection of God—or the deep sinfulness and corruption of the creature. There is a veil over man's heart—a veil of ignorance—of delusion—of unbelief—of self-deception as regards the nature of sin. No man is vitally and experimentally acquainted with—its hideous nature—its awful depths—its subtlety—its workings—its movements—its cravings—its lustings—the heights to which it rises—the depths to which it sinks.

But when the Lord the Spirit takes a man really and vitally in hand—and He truly begins His sovereign work of grace upon the soul—He commences by opening up to the astonished eyes of the sinner, something of the real nature of sin. He not only shows him the huge, high, wide-spreading branches of sin—but bids him look down and see how deeply-rooted sin is in his very being—that sin is not an accident—a faint blot that may soon be washed out—a something on the surface, like a skin disease that may be healed by a simple ointment. He shows him that sin is seated in his very bones—that this deep-rooted malady has taken possession of him—that he is a sinner to his very heart's core—that every thought, every word, every action of man's whole being—is one mass of sin, filth, and pollution.

And if he attempts, as most awakened sinners do attempt—to purify himself—to ease his guilt by lopping off a few external branches—if he attempts to wash himself clean from iniquity, the Spirit will teach him the meaning of Job's words, "If I wash myself with snow, and cleanse my hands with lye, yet You will plunge me in the ditch. My own clothes shall abhor me." (Job 9:30, 31). Until at last God brings him to this spot—that he is a sinner throughout—yes, that he is the chief of sinners—that every evil lodges in his heart—and the seed of every crime dwells in his fallen nature. When a man is brought here, he is brought to the place of the stopping of mouths—his own righteousness is effectually cut to pieces—his hopes of salvation by his works are completely removed from under him. Those rotten props are cut away by the hand of the Spirit from the sinking soul, that he may fall into himself one mass of confusion and ruin.

And until he is brought here, he really can know nothing—of a free-grace salvation—of the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin—of God's electing love—of Christ's substitution and suretyship—of His atoning blood—of His justifying righteousness—of His dying love. He can know nothing of the rich provisions of almighty power and eternal mercy that are

lodged in the fullness of Christ. He has—no eyes to see—no ears to hear—no heart to feel—no arms to embrace a whole Christ—a precious Christ, a Savior from the wrath to come—who has stood in the sinner's place and stead—made full atonement for sin—fulfilled the law—brought in everlasting righteousness—and justified the ungodly!

The unceasing conflict

"Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me?" Psalm 42:5

One thing that casts down the souls of God's family is the unceasing conflict which they have to maintain—between those desires to live under God's leading—and those desires to live after the course of this world. In other words, the conflict between nature and grace—between the spirit and the flesh—will always cast down the soul in proportion to the intensity of the struggle. To be baffled, as we are hourly baffled, in all our attempts to do good—to find the carnality of our hearts perpetually obstructing every desire that rises in our bosom to be heavenly-minded, spiritual, enjoy God's word, feel His presence, and live to His honor and glory—thus to have the tide of carnality and pollution perpetually bearing down every spiritual desire in the heart—must not that cast down the soul which covets nothing so much as to live under a sense of God's presence and favor?

And that this conflict should be a perpetual and unceasing one—that we should have so little respite from it—that it should not be merely now and then, but more or less, in proportion to the depth of godly fear—always be going on in our soul—must not this cast down the poor soul which is the subject of it? I am sure it cast me down day after day, and sometimes hour after hour—to feel such an unceasing and perpetual conflict between that in us which is spiritual, heavenly, and holy—and that in us which is earthly, carnal, sensual, and devilish!

The Lord sends afflictions for a special purpose

"Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me?" Psalm 42:5

The many afflictions that the Lord's people have to pass through, is one cause of their souls being cast down. And the Lord intends these things to cast them down. The Lord in sending afflictions means them to do a certain work. We are high—afflictions are sent to bring us low. We are proud—afflictions are meant to humble. We are worldly—afflictions are meant to purge out of us this worldly spirit. We are carnal—afflictions are sent to subdue this carnality. We are often straying from the Lord into bypaths—afflictions are meant to bring us into the strait and narrow path that leads to glory. Now the Lord sends afflictions for a special purpose—and this special purpose is to cast down the soul—that He Himself may have the honor of raising it up!

The greatest burden & trial

"Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me?" Psalm 42:5

One of the greatest, if not the greatest burden and trial to the child of God, is the daily, hourly, minutely, momentarily workings of sin. The adulterous eye—the roving heart—the defiled imagination—the constant stream of iniquity polluting every word and thought, every feeling and desire—is and must be a burden to the soul—just in proportion as the fear of God lives and works in a man's conscience. And whenever sin gets the mastery over us, though it be but for a short time, (I am not speaking here necessarily of gross sins, or of outward falls—for sin in some shape

or other is perpetually striving to rule within where it does not rule without), guilt will as surely follow it as the shadow does the sun.

But even where sin does not get the mastery, those whose consciences are tender in God's fear, continually feel the workings of pride, hypocrisy, presumption, self-righteousness, carnal desires, filthy lusts, worldly-mindedness—and of everything that is hateful and vile in the eyes of a holy God. Do we not continually find how, in spite of all our desires, and all the resolutions we make to the contrary, how instantaneously temptation sets fire to the combustible materials we carry within? And what a dreadful flame there is at times bursting forth in our carnal mind? These things, I am sure, will bring guilt, shame, and sorrow upon every conscience that is quickened to fear God. And just in proportion to the depth and working of godly fear in a man's soul will be the burden of sin from time to time upon his conscience.

Such a poor, blind, ignorant creature as I

He who knows himself by divine teaching, and has had a glimpse of future bliss and glory, will often reason with himself, "How is such a poor, blind, ignorant creature as I—surrounded by so many enemies—oppressed or beguiled by so many of Satan's temptations—beset by the workings of a depraved nature—how am I ever to enter the heavenly inheritance, and enjoy the promised rest?"

To get to heaven we must wade through difficulties, improbabilities, and impossibilities. We shall meet with hindrances, impediments, obstacles. And yet, for the Christian, grace superabounds over all the aboundings of sin, and lands him safe in glory!

A great deal of talk about religion

How many there are who are mistaking the 'form of religion' for the power of it—mistaking 'doctrines learned in the head' for the teachings of the Spirit in the soul! There is a great deal of talk about religion—but how few know anything of—what true religion is—the secret of vital godliness—the inward teachings and operations of the Spirit upon the heart! Many men speak fluently enough of doctrines, and of the blessed truths of the gospel. But what good can mere doctrines do for me—unless they are sealed on my heart, and applied with divine power to my conscience? Without this, the greatest truths can do me no good.

But when the Lord lays us low, puts us into the furnace, and drags us through the waters—He shows us that true religion, vital godliness, is something deeper, something more spiritual, something more supernatural, something that stands more in the teachings of God the Spirit and His operation on the heart, than ever we dreamt of before we entered upon the trial. We might have had the clearest views of doctrinal truth—and yet these were but 'dim notions floating in the head,' before we came into the furnace. But these things now are seen in a different light, and felt in a totally different manner. What before was but a doctrine—becomes now a most certain truth. And what before was but a sound sentiment—is now sealed as a living reality in experience.

As the Lord, then, brings us into the dust, He strips away our 'mere notional, doctrinal religion.' He begins to open up to our heart the real nature of vital godliness—that it is something deeper, something more spiritual, something more powerful, something more experimental than anything we have ever yet known—that it consists in the teachings and leadings of God the Spirit in the

conscience. As soon as this is felt, it strips a man of everything he has learned in the flesh—and brings him down to the dust of death. And when brought there, the blessed Spirit opens up the truths of the gospel in a way he had never known before. Many people know the truth in the letter—but how few by the teachings and operations of God the Spirit in the heart! They have sound views of the way of salvation—but it has never been wrought out with a mighty power into their soul. They have clear heads—but their hearts are not broken into contrition and godly sorrow. Their minds are well-instructed in the truths of the gospel—but these truths have not been communicated by an unction from the Holy One.

Until a man is made to see the emptiness of a mere profession—to have his free-will stripped and purged away—and to be brought out of that empty religion so generally current—and is broken down into humility at the footstool of divine mercy—he will not feel the power, the reality, the sweetness, and the blessedness of the overwhelming love of God displayed in the gospel. Until the soul is thus stripped—until the vessel is thus emptied—these things cannot be known—nor is it in a condition to receive the glorious riches of free grace. Until the dross and tin is removed from the heart—the pure metal cannot shine. Until this chaff is blown away—the wheat lies heaped up in one confused mass on the threshing floor. The Lord, therefore, will test His work on the heart—for He is a jealous God, and He will not give His glory to another—but reserves to Himself, His prerogative of sovereign mercy, and of saving to the uttermost.

This sacred teaching

All God's people are sooner or later brought to this point in their experience—they are all brought to know their own sinfulness, ignorance, and helplessness. And when their eyes are thus anointed with eye-salve to discover their own wretchedness, the same unction from the Holy One reveals to them what Christ has done to save them from it! They learn by this sacred teaching, their own iniquity—and His atoning blood; their misery—and the bliss and blessedness which is secured up in Him! And when these two extremes meet in the quickened soul, it is brought in one and the same moment—while it debases itself—to exalt the Lord of life and glory! And while it thus sinks down in the depth of creature wretchedness—it learns to glory in the Lord Jesus alone, as its all in all.

When the eye is spiritually opened

When the eye is spiritually opened to see the glory of Jesus, it follows Him as a suffering Mediator to Calvary—there to view Him as a crucified Jesus—as the Lamb of God bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. And as the child of God looks by faith to the bleeding Lamb, he desires to have a spiritual revelation and manifestation of the mystery of the cross to his heart. And by this dying love entering into his soul, he is able to understand how wide, how long, how high, and how deep the love of Jesus really is!

Only the dying love of Christ spiritually felt and realized, can wean the soul from the world, and make the things of time and sense to appear in their true light—as stamped with vanity and vexation of spirit. The dying love of Christ, also, revealed to the soul, is the only thing that can make us love Jesus, and cleave to Him with full purpose of heart. Nothing but the dying love of Jesus can make us willing to leave the world, and part with the things of time and sense, so that we may forever be with the Lord. As the Lord Jesus in His endearing relationships is presented to

the eyes of the spiritual understanding, faith flows out towards, hope anchors in, and love clasps firm hold of Him as thus revealed—and thus ardent desires and fervent longings are kindled in the soul to know Him experimentally in all these relations—and inwardly realize their sweetness and power!

Every other object of desire & affection faded away

"I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them nothing but refuse, that I may gain Christ." Philippians 3:8

God, by a secret and powerful work in Paul's conscience, not only—cast down all his fleshly confidence—stripped him entirely of his natural religion—showed him the emptiness of every hope in which he had so fondly trusted—but also, He manifested to his understanding, and revealed in his soul a precious Savior—and thus drew forth all the affections of his heart, fixing them wholly and solely upon Jesus. Paul then saw, by the eye of faith, such loveliness and preciousness in Christ, that every other object of desire and affection faded away—and those aims and pursuits which once seemed his richest gain, he could now rejoice in and pursue no longer—they utterly sank in his esteem—vanity and emptiness were stamped upon them—and he counted them as absolute loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

Holy longing & intense desires

"That I may know Him." Philippians 3:10

There can be no earnest desire to know Christ, nor any holy panting after a spiritual revelation of Him—while the heart is pursuing worldly objects. But he who is spiritually taught is at times panting with holy longing and intense desires to know Jesus—that He would come down in His heavenly power, in all His sweetness and suitability—and take up His abode in his soul, conforming it to His own image and likeness.

God will have all the glory!

"My glory will I not give to another." Isaiah 42:8

God will have all the glory to Himself! But you and I are such base wretches, that we would rob the Lord Himself of His glory—if He did not teach us otherwise. If He did not open up to us the depth of our corruption, and show us the depravity that lurks and works in our carnal minds—if He did not cover our faces with shame—if He did not put us in the furnace to burn out our pride—if He did not drag us through the water to drown our hypocrisy—if He did not humble us under a daily sense of our frailty and feebleness—we would soon want to sit down on the same throne with the Lord—and share the glory of salvation with Him!

Your greatest sweets

We often find that those very times when God's people think they are faring ill—are the seasons when they are really faring well. And again, at other times, when they think they are faring well—then they are really faring ill. For instance, when their souls are bowed down with trouble—it often seems to them that they are faring ill. God's hand appears gone out against them in trouble,

sorrow, and affliction. These troubles wean them from the world. If their heart and affections were going out after idols—these troubles instrumentally bring them back. If they were hewing out broken cisterns—these troubles dash them all to pieces. If they were setting up, and bowing down to idols in the chambers of imagery—affliction and trouble smite them to pieces before their eyes—take away their gods—and leave them no refuge but the Lord God almighty.

If you can only look back, you will often see that your greatest sweets have sprung out of your greatest bitters, and the greatest blessings have flowed from the greatest miseries, and what at the time you thought your greatest sorrows—you will find that the brightest light has sprung up in the blackest darkness, and that the Lord never made Himself so precious as at the time when you were sunk lowest—so as to be without human help, wisdom, or strength. So that when a child of God thinks he is faring very ill, because burdened with sorrows, temptations, and afflictions—he is never faring so well.

Such a mystery

True religion is such a mystery. When we think we are faring well—we are often faring ill. When we think we are faring ill—we are often faring well. When we think that now we have got into an easy, smooth, and comfortable path—it is then leading us wrong. When we say, 'The path is so rugged and intricate; we are so perplexed, and so little able to see the way that we fear we are out of the track altogether'—that is the very time when the Lord is leading us in the right way!

Sometimes we feel, 'We are so black and polluted—such awful sinners—such horrible creatures—that the Lord cannot look on us!' That is the very moment when He may smile into the heart! When we may think we are getting on at a rapid pace in spirituality and holiness, making wonderful advances in the divine life, and getting almost to the pinnacle of 'creature perfection'—we discover through some terrible inward slip, that we are on the wrong path, and have been drawn aside by self-righteousness and pharisaical pride.

So that at last we seem brought to this point—to have no wisdom of our own to see the way—and to have no strength to walk in the way when seen—but that we must be guided every step by the Lord Himself. And thus we sink down into creature nothingness and creature emptiness, and feel no more merit in our heart, lip, or life, why God should save us, than there is in Satan himself. And thus we sink so low—that none but God Himself can lift us up. And this is the very time when God usually appears—and most singularly displays His mercy, love, and grace!

Now, it is by walking in this trying path that we learn our utter ruin—and learn to prize God's salvation. The power of saving truth is only prized by those whom God is thus teaching. Others are satisfied with 'shadows'—but those that are deeply exercised in their mind, must have the 'substance.' Those who have had their false refuges destroyed—their lying hopes broken—and a thousand difficulties and perplexities surrounding them—as the Lord opens the eyes, and brings His truth before them—want the power and application of this truth to their heart. Nothing suits or satisfies them but the unction of the Spirit—and the dew of God's power and presence resting on and felt in their souls. They can no longer be satisfied with the mere form—no longer rest for salvation on a few notions—no longer hang their eternal all upon the good opinion of the creature.

And thus, by this painful work in their souls, they learn—that they have no more religion than God works in them—that they can only know what God teaches them—that they can only have what

He communicates to them—and that they are wholly and solely dependent upon Him to guide and keep them every moment of their lives!

Worldly men indeed despise them—mere professors hate them—the devil harasses them—their names are generally cast out as evil—and universal charity, which has a good opinion of all, has not a single, good word for them! That they are such a mystery to others is no wonder, when they are such a mystery to themselves. How they hold on they cannot tell—but they find they cannot move unless God moves them. How they pray is a mystery—yet at times they feel the spirit of prayer alive in their bosoms. How their souls are kept pleading and waiting for the Lord at the footstool of His mercy is a mystery—yet they cannot deny that this is the experience of their hearts. So that when they come to look at the way in which the Lord has led them, from first to last—it is all an unfathomable mystery!

Why God should have chosen them in Christ is a mystery. Why He should have quickened their souls when "dead in trespasses and sins," is a mystery. Why He should have wrought a sense of contrition in their hearts is a mystery. Why He should have given a sense of His love to them is a mystery. Why He should have preserved them from error, while thousands have been entangled in it, is a mystery. Why He should keep them day by day, and hour by hour—without allowing them to disgrace His cause, deny His truth, turn their back on Him, or go into the world, is a mystery. And yet they find that they have and are all these things—so that the greatest mystery of all is—that they are what they are!

Thus, do they fare well, because God takes care they shall fare well. He manages all their concerns—He watches over them by night and by day—He waters them continually—He guides and leads them until He brings them home to His heavenly kingdom!

Destitute of vital godliness

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power." 2 Timothy 3:5

There is nothing so deceitful as having "a form of godliness," while the "power" of it is denied—nothing so delusive as having a "name to live," while the soul is dead before God. If there is one hypocritical character more than another, whom the man of God should point out—it is he who, with a profession, is destitute of vital godliness—he who has the 'form of doctrinal truth in the judgment,' but who never has experienced 'the power of that truth in his soul'—humbling him in the dust, and raising him up to a spiritual knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Our lost, ruined state

"My soul stays close to You." Psalm 63:8

Grace only suits those who are altogether guilty and filthy. Until we are divinely enlightened to see, and spiritually quickened to feel our lost, ruined state, we are satisfied with the things of time and sense—our hearts are in the world—our affections are fixed on the poor perishing vanities that must quickly pass away—and there is not one spiritual longing or heavenly craving in the soul.

Inward ornaments

"Let your beauty be not just the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on fine clothing; but in the hidden person of the heart, in the incorruptible adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God very precious." 1 Peter 3:3, 4

O what wise instruction does the Apostle give to those wives and daughters that profess godliness! And how he warns them against attiring themselves like the daughters of Belial, and following the women of Canaan in their love of gay and fashionable apparel—while they slight the inward adornings of the Spirit, such as kindness, gentleness, meekness, and humility! But how far better are these inward ornaments which the Spirit of God puts into the heart! And how much more lovely do they look thus spiritually attired than if loaded with all the finery that the daughters of Belial array themselves in!

A precious, saving experience

A precious, saving experience springs out of the teaching of God in the soul, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. Every conviction of sin that springs from the Spirit's inward convincing operations is precious as being the handiwork of God. Every sigh, every cry, every groan, every tear, every honest, humble confession before God of what we have been and are, is precious—because it is wrought by a divine power in the soul and the result of it, is salvation. Every sweet manifestation of the Son of God to the soul—every glimpse, glance, gleam, or view of His glorious Person by faith—every shining in of the light of His countenance—every application of His Word with power—every whisper of His heavenly love—every drawing of His divine grace—every application of His precious truth to the heart is precious. It comes from God—it leads to God—it is the work of the Holy Spirit—it prepares the soul for eternity—it is a jewel of God's own gift.

Even the humblings that we experience under the hand of God—the breaking down of a hard heart—the softening of an obdurate spirit, the melting of soul under the breath of the Lord—with the going forth of supplication, confession, and desire unto the God of all our mercies to look upon us and bless us—is precious, because it is His gift and work. Everything which—brings out of self—draws to the Lord—makes sin hateful—makes Jesus precious—puts the world under our feet—gives us the victory over sin—weans us from the love of self—and makes the Lord Jesus precious, should be called a precious experience!

They will not & cannot give it up

Grace calls us out of the world—out of the love and spirit of it. But where there is no regenerating grace, the world cleaves so fast to men's hearts that they will not and cannot give it up—they rest in the world and the satisfaction that the world gives. Others are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Satan spreads his snares for their feet—some base lust—some vile scheme—some covetous plan—some secret plan which he has baited with a bait exactly suitable to their fallen nature—he spreads for their feet—they are entangled, overcome, and become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!

O visit me

"O visit me with Your salvation." Psalm 106:4

How is a man brought and taught to want to be "visited with" God's salvation? He must know something first of condemnation. Salvation only suits the condemned. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost," and therefore salvation only suits the lost. A man must be lost—utterly lost—before he can prize God's salvation. And how is he lost? By losing all his religion—losing all his righteousness—losing all his strength—losing all his confidence, losing all his hopes—losing all that is of the flesh—losing it by its being taken from him—and stripped away by the hand of God. A man who is brought into this state of utter beggary and complete bankruptcy—to be nothing—to have nothing—to know nothing—he is the man who in the midnight watches, in his lonely hours, by his fireside, and at times well-near night and day—is crying, groaning, begging, suing, seeking, and praying after the manifestation of God's salvation to his soul—O visit me with Your salvation!

He needs a visit from God! He wants God to—come and dwell with him—take up His abode in his heart—discover Himself to him—manifest and reveal Himself—sit down with him—eat with him—walk with him—and dwell in Him as his God. And a living soul can be satisfied with nothing short of this. He must have a visit. It profits him little to read in the Word of God what God did to His saints of old. He wants something for himself—something that shall do his soul good. He wants something that shall cheer, refresh, comfort, bless and profit him—remove his burdens—and settle his soul into peace. And therefore he wants a visitation—that the presence and power, the mercy and love of God should visit his soul.

The Word, in the hands of the Spirit

True and saving religion is the work of the Holy Spirit operating upon the heart through the Word—giving us faith by the application of the Word—raising up hope by the power of the Word—shedding abroad love by bringing the truth of the Word with power into the soul. The Word, in the hands of the Spirit, has—an enlightening power—a quickening influence—a penetrating energy—a divine force—an invincible power—which carries it into the inmost depths of the soul. This special and invincible power distinguishes the work of the Spirit from all and every work of the flesh. The work in those who merely believe for a time is superficial, shallow, external—there is no penetration with divine power, so as to change the man in the depths of his heart, to renew him in the spirit of his mind, and make him a new creature in Christ.

Free from its power & influence

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." John 8:32

We are by nature in bondage to the world. But a saving knowledge of the truth will bring a freedom from the world, and all its alluring charms—its vain attractions—its sensual pleasures—its carking cares—its toils and anxieties. It sets the soul free from being entangled in, overcome, and over-burdened by these things—as if they were our all. We still have to do with the world. We must be daily occupied with it. But the truth will give you sweet liberty from it. You will not—walk with the men of the world—love the company of the world—nor be entangled in the love of the world—because the truth in its purity and power applied to your heart, will make you free from its power and influence. There is no holy liberty but the freedom which springs from the blessed influence and operations of the Holy Spirit on the heart, applying the Word of God with power to the soul. This gives true freedom—brings into the soul real liberty—and relieves it from that

bondage in which we have so often to walk.

It is hard work to have our filth removed

"From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Ezekiel 36:25

It is hard work to have our filth removed, and often takes a long time to effect, and that, perhaps, amid much opposition and rebellion against such humbling dealings. But we shall be made, sooner or later, to pine after the Lord's sensible presence in our soul, and then we shall feel, that before we can realize it, there must be a solemn repenting and honest confession of sin—and that we must fall down before God as poor guilty sinners, condemned in our own conscience. We stand as long as we can upon our own legs—we rest as long as we can upon something in self.

But all this self-dependence and self-righteousness, sooner or later, must come down—must give way—though it may take years to do it—with trial upon trial—affliction after affliction—and temptation after temptation. The Lord brings us to fall flat before Him in the dust of self-abasement, having no hope but in Him. But when He has purged away the filth of pride, self-righteousness, creature strength, with all other evils—and there is nothing left in the soul but the ashes of self—we can fall flat before God, putting our mouth in the dust. Then He will come—gently and sweetly come over all the hills and mountains of our sin and shame—and manifest His sensible presence to our souls.

Your money

"You are not your own." 1 Corinthians 6:19

Your money is not your own. You may not spend it just as you please—without check of conscience—without restraint of godly fear—without putting to yourself any inquiry how far you are spending it aright. You should be like a miser who looks at every shilling before he parts with it. So should every shilling be looked at, carefully and narrowly, by a Christian, whether it is spent for the honor and glory of God or not. I grant that this may seem to tie us up very closely, and that is one reason, perhaps, why the people of God are kept, for the most part, so tight in hand, that they have very little loose money to spend as they like. But even if we have a competency, or perhaps more than a competency, if we are under divine influences and gospel obligations, although we may have the money, we cannot throw it here and there to please and gratify the flesh—adorning the body with costly clothing, either for ourselves or our children—and decorating the house with new and unnecessary furniture. This is not the obligation of gospel grace. Your money is not your own, if you are a Christian. You are but a steward. If you have much, the more responsible you are for the right use of it. If you have little, still you are a steward for that little.

A slavery too galling for our proud heart to bear!

"Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." John 8:34

Once we thought we were our own. We dreamed of liberty—when we really were in the hardest, cruelest bondage. We thought we had no master—when we were serving the hardest of all masters. We boasted of our freedom—that we could do what we liked, and say what we liked, without being called to account for it by anyone—that we could roam at will, like a bee, from flower to flower, sucking up the sweets of sin—and promising to ourselves as rich a feast on the morrow,

as we were enjoying today. We little dreamt that all the time sin held us fast in fetters which—though they seemed made of silk—yet really were of iron! It is the greatest delusion to think and call ourselves free—when we are slaves to pride and lust!

Now during all this time of 'imagined freedom'—but real servitude, it seemed as if we were our own lord and master. The idea of independence was sweet to us, and to be dependent upon anyone, even upon the God who made us, was a slavery too galling for our proud heart to bear! But now assume that grace has made us free from this 'imagined independence'—but real slavery—that the gospel has been made the word of salvation to our souls—that we have been brought under new obligations—live under fresh constraints—are influenced by different motives—are led by another spirit—and are brought into a childlike dependence upon God, both in providence and in grace. We can now feel the force of the apostle's words—Ye are not your own.

Now you can look back upon a time when you served hard masters, and yet loved their service. The world had possession of your affections—sin domineered, rioted, and raged in your carnal heart. SELF was uppermost in all your thoughts and desires, and whatever line of conduct it prompted, or rather, 'commanded,' you willingly obeyed. Now when you were under these hard masters, though their servitude was sweet to you as long as you thought you were your own, you could do, to a certain extent, as you pleased with yourself. Your jailer, though he watched you narrowly as being able to pounce upon you at any moment, like a cat on a wounded mouse, yet gave you a certain latitude, as knowing thereby you would do more effectually his work and bind his chains more strongly round your neck. In this way, therefore, your time, your talents, your money, the members of your body, the faculties of your mind were your own. You could spend your time as you pleased—use your abilities as you thought most conducive to your worldly interests—do with your money as your inclination best prompted—and use the members of your body to minister to your natural desires. And in all this there was no one to check you, no one to call you to account for what you had said or done.

You did not, indeed, see that all this time sin was your master, and the love of the world deeply rooted in your heart ruled and governed you. Nor did you see what ignorance and blindness held your eyes in the grossest darkness. Thus you imagined you were free—when you were the greatest slave of sin and Satan! But now you have been brought out of all this miserable bondage, and having been convinced of sin by the law, and been brought in guilty, have found peace and pardon through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now what is the effect of this blessing from on high? Has it not liberated you from that miserable bondage to sin, Satan, the world, and self—which I have described? Has it not set your feet, as it were, into a new track, opened before you a new field, laid upon you new obligations, and to crown all, in one word, brought you under the easy yoke of a new Master?

Romantic expectations of a little earthly paradise?

"You looked for much, and, behold, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away."
Haggai 1:9

Have you found your airy dreams and cherished projects realized? Have your ambitious projects been crowned with success? Have you not had repeated disappointments—and have not others, who seemed inferior to you in ability or in promise, outstripped you in the race? Your fleshly

projects—your carnal hopes—your airy castles—your dreams of happiness—your romantic expectations of a little earthly paradise—have all been cruelly—as you have thought in the bitterness of your soul, disappointed—the buds dropped off just when they began to promise flower, and a blight fell upon your whole life, so that you could not reap the harvest you had been indulging anticipations of.

God will take care to lay cross after cross, and trial after trial upon His people—until He brings them to submission. O how soon He can give this sweet and heavenly grace! How, in a moment, He can pour oil upon the troubled waves! How He can break to pieces that stubborn obstinacy and rebelliousness of which the heart is full—and give submission to His will! How He can humble and bend the proud spirit—fill the heart with humility and love—enable us to kiss the rod—and to fall prostrate before His dispensations—however severe they may be to the flesh!

Satisfaction?

Have we not tried the world? For how many years did we labor to glut our fleshly appetites with the dust and dirt that the world offered us. But did we ever reap any solid satisfaction from it? Have we not endeavored to satisfy ourselves with the pleasures of sin? And did they ever leave anything but pain and sorrow behind them? Have we not attempted to satisfy ourselves with a form of godliness, a name to live, a self-righteous religion? And was there not always something lacking? Have we not tried to satisfy ourselves with 'doctrines floating in the judgment,' and yet reaped no satisfaction—for there was always an aching void? Guilt was not purged away—sin was not pardoned—Christ not revealed—the love of God not shed abroad—salvation not known.

We have found that there was no satisfaction in anything—all was a blank—all is vanity and vexation of spirit—except the goodness of God to our souls. But when the Lord has fixed His choice upon a vessel of mercy, and when, in pursuance of that choice, cutting him off from the world, He causes him, by the internal teachings and drawing of His Spirit, to approach unto Himself, and shows him something of the beauty and glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—that satisfies him—and there is no satisfaction until that is made known.

And what are we to be satisfied with? With a mere apprehension of Gospel truth? There is no satisfaction there. With our experience? Why, if we look at it, there are so many flaws and failings, so many ins and outs, so many things that stagger us, that we cannot be fully satisfied with all of that. Can we take the opinions of men concerning us? O, we think, they may all be deceived. Can we take our own opinion of ourselves? That is worse than the opinion of others—for he who trusts his own heart is a fool. With what, then, are we to be satisfied? In the goodness manifested in the Person of Christ. What grace and mercy, what favor and love are manifested in the Person of Jesus! And when we see and feel how good and kind, how gracious, favorable, and merciful He is—that brings satisfaction. There is in Him a righteousness and atoning blood to satisfy all the demands of the law, and all the cravings of a guilty conscience. There is a power that satisfies—a love that satisfies—a salvation that satisfies—and nothing else but these will satisfy.

The first step in the divine life

"They shall come with weeping." Jeremiah 31:9

Wherever God begins a gracious work in the soul, He takes away the heart of stone and gives the heart of flesh. Repentance, true repentance, is the first step in the divine life. True religion begins with a sorrowful heart and weeping eyes. Wherever there is a spiritual conviction of sin, there will be penitential grief and godly sorrow on account of it. And it is by—this godly sorrow—this brokenness of heart—this contrition of spirit—this penitential grief—that the true convictions wrought by the blessed Spirit are distinguished from those mere natural convictions under which the heart is as hard as adamant, and as full of rebellion as Satan himself. It is in this broken heart—broken up with the plough of convictions, that the seed of the word takes root; and the deeper, for the most part, the convictions, and the more pungent the grief and sorrow for sin—the deeper root will the word of grace strike into the soul.

The Christian's conscience

"Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." Hebrews 10:22

Christ dwells in the Christian's conscience. He makes the conscience tender in His fear. He, when He has convinced it of the evil of sin, purges and cleanses it from guilt, filth, and dead works to serve the living God. He moves in it, and acts upon it, reveals to it His precious blood, bids it open to receive His word, and bids it close itself against all error. He makes it move in accordance with His precepts—softens it into contrition and godly sorrow for sin—heals it when wounded—binds it up when broken—comforts it when cast down—soothes it when, like a crying child, it would lie weeping in His arms, or upon His lap. Thus by making the conscience tender, and applying His precious blood to remove guilt and filth from it, He softens and conforms it to His own suffering image.

They were out of their minds!

Men often accuse those who profess the doctrines of grace of enthusiasm, of fanaticism, of embracing wild doctrines, and being led aside by visionary delusions. But the real fanatics and enthusiasts are those who dream of serving at the same time sin and God—who are looking for heaven as the reward of their works, when all those works are evil. And as to true sobriety of mind, and calm collectedness of judgment, I believe that none are so sober-minded as the real partakers of grace. Before the light of God's teaching illuminated their understanding, before the grace of God in its regenerating influence took possession of their hearts, they were out of their minds! There was no real sanity in them, for, like insane people, they were madly bent upon their own destruction! They spent their lives in insane hopes—in wild and visionary dreams of happiness—ever stretching forth their hands to grasp what always eluded their reach, and, like madmen, alternately laughed and wept, danced and sang as on the brink of a precipice, or the deck of a sinking ship.

But when grace came to illuminate their mind, regenerate their soul, and begin that work which should fit and prepare them for eternity, they became sober. They were awakened from that state of intoxication in which they had spent their former life—they were sobered out of that drunkenness, so to speak, in the indulgence of which they had drunk down large draughts of intoxicating pleasure—and became for the first time morally and spiritually sober.

How different might it have been with us!

"For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 5:9

This is meant for our encouragement—to strengthen our faith and hope—and keep us sober and vigilant. How different might it have been with us! How just and righteous would God have been if His thoughts towards us had not been thoughts of peace—but of evil. And O, where might we even now have been if God had appointed us to wrath? Even now, instead of being in the house of prayer, we might have been lifting up our eyes in hell, being in torment. Thus a child of God sees what a mercy it is that God did not cut him down, as he deserved, when he was an open foe, and daily adding to the catalogue of his sins—nor abandoned him to utter impenitence, unbelief, and carelessness!

Some of the most amiable people

Some of the most amiable people in the world, have no grace at all.

Day by day

It seems as if we needed day by day to be taught over and over again our own sinfulness, weakness, and helplessness—and that none but Jesus can do us any real good. True religion is not like any art or science which, when once learned, is learned forever—but is a thing which we are ever forgetting—and ever learning over and over again.

Man's ways & God's ways

Man's ways and God's ways differ in well near every respect. Man's ways are hastily planned, and for the most part imperfectly executed. God's ways are designed with infinite wisdom, and performed with infinite power.

Man's aim is the aggrandizement of self in some shape or form. Pleasure or profit, of some kind or other, is the mainspring of all his actions. The aim of God is His own eternal glory.

Man, when bent upon any particular object, leaps hastily towards it, and cannot brook the slightest obstacle. God slowly brings about His own eternal purposes, in the face of every obstacle, and in spite of all opposition or contradiction from earth or hell. Man's purpose is to bring things to a rapid conclusion—no sooner does he scatter the seed, than he wants to reap the harvest. God's plans are carried out through a series of years; and, as they are planned with infinite wisdom, so they are brought to pass by a succession of apparently opposing and contradictory events.

A desperately wicked old man

"The old man, that grows corrupt after the lusts of deceit." Ephesians 4:22

O how deceitful is lust in every shape and form! Whether it be of the flesh, or of the eyes, or a lusting after money, worldly advantage, prosperous circumstances, rising in life, doing well for ourselves or our families—whatever shape it takes—for indeed it wears a thousand forms—how deceitful it is! How gradually, if indulged, will it lead us into everything which is vile. How it—blinds the eyes, hardens the conscience—perverts the judgment—entangles the affections—draws the feet aside from the strait and narrow path—suffocates the life of God in the soul, until one scarcely knows what he is, or where he is—and only knows that he is full of confusion, and burdened with

guilt and fear and bondage.

How deceitful, too, lust is in ever promising what it never can perform! How it promises happiness and pleasure if we will but indulge and gratify it, and paints all sorts of pleasant pictures and charming prospects to entangle the thoughts and allure the affections! But if listened to and obeyed, what does lust give us in the end? Alas! we find that as we sow so we reap—and that if we sow to the flesh we shall of the flesh reap corruption.

Nor are these lusts few or small, for this old man of ours is full of them. There is—not a passion—nor an inclination—nor a desire—nor a craving after any earthly or sensual enjoyment—there is not a sin that ever has broken out in word or action in man or woman that is not deeply seated in our old man—for he is according to, in the measure of, and in proportion to our deceitful lusts.

You need not wonder, then, that whether—old or young—male or female—rich or poor—educated or uneducated—morally trained or immorally brought up—deceitful lusts are ever moving in your bosom. They were born with you—your family inheritance—and all that you can strictly call your own. You need not wonder, then, if the vilest thoughts, the basest ideas find a harbor, a resting place, and a nest in your corrupt bosom. I say this not to encourage you to cherish what should be your plague and torment—but as a word that may be suitable to some who are deeply exercised at finding in themselves such monstrous sins—and think that theirs is an unusual or exceptional case.

If the 'old man' is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts—if he is incurably depraved—and never can be anything else but a desperately wicked old man—need you wonder if he is continually manifesting his real character—showing his ugly face—and is to you a continual grief—a plague and a torment?

This 'old man' is the greatest plague a child of God has or can have! All our trials, afflictions, bereavements, and sorrows are not worthy to be compared with the trouble, sorrow and anguish, which have been caused by the plotting, the contriving, and the working of this wicked old man in the various deceitful lusts by means of which he has at various times, more or less, drawn us off the path of holiness and obedience—into some of his crooked ways.

It is your mercy if this depraved old man's presence is your grief—his temptations your trial—and his movements and workings your sorrow and your burden. He will never do you any real harm so long as he is your plague and torment. Mortify him, bind him, set your foot upon him, keep him down, and gag his mouth when he would vent his blasphemies and try to stir up deceitful lusts. He is to be put off. He is not to be cuddled, indulged, put in the best chair, fed with the best food, kept close and warm by the fireside, handsomely dressed, nor made the pet of the whole house!

Five particular points connected with sin

There are five particular points connected with sin, from all of which we need redemption. These are—the guilt of sin—the filth of sin, the power of sin—the love of sin—the practice of sin.

The guilt of sin we must be delivered from by the application of atoning blood to the conscience. The filth of sin we must be washed from by the sanctifying operations and influences of the Spirit. The power of sin we must have broken in us by the power of Christ's resurrection. The love of sin

overcome by the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. The practice of sin destroyed and broken up by the fear of God planted deep in the soul.

We can never understand what redemption is

Without a knowledge of man's state by nature and practice—without a living experience of the state of ruin, misery, and wretchedness, to which sin has personally reduced us—we can never understand what redemption is, either in doctrine or in experience.

You can do yourself more harm in five minutes

You can do yourself more harm in five minutes than all your foes in fifty years. One incautious word—one heedless footstep—one wrong action—may lay you crippled and wounded!

A snare, a mockery & a delusion

Doctrine is good, and sound doctrine the very foundation of faith, hope, and love. But the doctrine which does not lead to holiness of heart and life is a snare, a mockery and a delusion.

Bosom idols

"From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Ezekiel 36:25

We would greatly err if we think that idolatry is confined to setting up and bowing down to such idols as made by human hands—and as formed heathen worship. There are heart idols—bosom idols—and though not made of wood and stone, yet, if we pay them the secret worship of devotion and affection, and inflame ourselves secretly with them—they are as much idols in the sight of God who searches the heart, as if we bowed our knee to an image made with the fingers of men.

A mother sin

Unbelief is a mother sin—a breeding sin. It does not remain in the heart alone, but gives birth to thousands of sins, all springing up out of its prolific womb—like the fabled sea monsters. We see in the wilderness how all through all their journeyings the crying sin of the people of Israel was unbelief. It was the parent of all their fretfulness, murmuring, and rebellion—it lay at the root of everything done by them displeasing to God—gave birth to all their idolatry and all their other sins—and eventually shut out all but Caleb and Joshua from the promised land. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness through unbelief.

Believing a few doctrines

In the present day, many think that true religion consists in believing a few doctrines, and adopting a few set phrases—without any vital operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart.

Reading the word under divine influence

Never, perhaps, was the Bible more read, and never, perhaps less understood—less felt—less tasted—less handled—less enjoyed—and above all—less acted on—than in our day. But if reading the word under divine influence is so blessed, how much more is it when the Holy Spirit applies it to the heart—when there is some sweet breaking up of the word of truth in some gracious promise—or the application of some part that speaks of Jesus—or that holds forth some

encouragement to our languid faith.

He will turn again

"He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Micah 7:19

This turning again implies that He has for a time turned away, turned His back upon us—withdrawn Himself on account of the cruel and unkind way in which we have neglected Him, basely and shamefully treated Him—wickedly and wantonly wandered from Him, and, in the dreadful idolatry of our vile hearts, hewn out to ourselves cisterns which hold no water—and forsaken Him, the fountain of living waters.

But He turns again—He delights in mercy—He cannot bear to see His people afflicted, grieving, groaning, sighing, crying under their sins on account of His absence. And, therefore, moved and softened by His own mercy, influenced by the grace of His own heart—He turns again, as the Lord turned to Peter to give him a look to break, melt, soften his heart into repentance and love.

For a small moment He may hide His face from His people, as vexed and displeased with their sins and backslidings—but in the display of His infinite, sovereign, and superabounding grace, He will turn again to give them—one more look of love—one more discovery of the freeness of His grace—one more breaking in of the light of His countenance—one more softening touch of His gracious hand—one more whisper of His peace-speaking voice. If He did not thus turn again, our heart would grow harder and harder, colder and colder. Either sin would get stronger and stronger until it gained entire dominion, or despondency and despair would set in to leave us without hope.

Strangers & pilgrims

"Confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Hebrews 11:13

True religion is not a burdensome, painful, melancholy, wearisome, toilsome task—as many think. It has indeed its trials, temptations, afflictions, cutting griefs, and depressing sorrows. But it also has its sweetness, its peace, its delights, and its enjoyments. And it is the sweetness that we feel—the enjoyment that we have—and the delighting ourselves in the things of God—which encourage us still to persevere and travel on through the wilderness.

It is not all bondage—nor distress of mind—nor sorrow of heart—nor perplexity of soul—which the heirs of promise feel. There are—sips and tastes—drops and crumbs—and momentary enjoyments, if not long nor lasting, yet sweet when they come, sweet while they last, and sweet in the recollection when they are gone. The Lord gives that which encourages, strengthens, comforts, and delights, and enables us to see that there is that beauty, blessedness, and glory in Him which we have tasted, felt, and handled, and which we would not part with for a thousand worlds!

Now this is what they sought in desiring a heavenly country. They wanted something heavenly, something that tasted of God, savored of God, smelled of God, and was given by God—a heavenly religion, a spiritual faith—a gracious hope, and a love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit—something which came from heaven and led to heaven—something which gave heavenly feelings—heavenly sensations—heavenly delights—and heavenly joys—whereby the

heart was purified from the love of sin, carnality, and worldliness—by having something sweeter to taste, better to love, and more holy to enjoy. It is these heavenly visitations, droppings in of the favor, goodness, and mercy of God, which keep the soul alive in its many deaths—sweeten it amid its many bitters—hold it up amid its many sinkings.

A carnal mind has—no taste for heavenly things—no sweet delight in the word of God—no delight in the Lord Jesus—no delight in secret meditation. There must be a heavenly element in the soul to understand, realize, enjoy, and delight in heavenly things. The Holy Spirit must have wrought in us a new heart, a new nature, capable of understanding, enjoying, and delighting in heavenly realities—as containing in them that which is sweet and precious to the soul.

Our religious works

All the works which a man may do before he experimentally knows the grace of God, are dead works. He may work hard and long, and by his strenuous exertions work himself out of breath. But when he has done all that he can do in his own strength, wisdom, and righteousness—it is all but a dead work. His prayers are dead prayers—his services are dead services—his readings are dead readings—his duties are dead duties. Thus all that he does in the name of God, and as he thinks for the honor of God, are but dead works.

Now as spiritual light and life are communicated to our souls, our conscience gets loaded with dead works, and they become doubly burdensome; for there will always be in these dead works not only inherent imperfection, but actual sin mingled with them. Thus our works, our best works—what I may call our religious works—are not only dead in themselves, but they are so polluted by the dark and turbid stream of sin ever running over and through them, that they defile the conscience with guilt. It thus has to bear not only a heavy burden—but a guilty burden.

All these slips & falls

"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience." Hebrews 9:14

How many of the dear family of God are troubled nearly all their days with a guilty conscience. And generally speaking, the more tender their conscience, the more they feel the burden of guilt for—the backsliding—the wandering eye—the roving mind—the foolish heart—the indifference—the coldness—the rebellion—the ingratitude—the worldliness—the carnality—the unbelief—the infidelity—the pride—the self-seeking. All these slips and falls—each mourning heart recollects—and each guilty conscience testifies against.

Where the conscience is tender and alive in the fear of God, guilt is very soon contracted; and when contracted it lies as a load which cannot be thrown off, for there it remains until taken away. It is this continually fresh contracted guilt which causes so much dejection on the part of the family of God—tries their mind and casts them down. Let them walk with the uttermost tenderness and carefulness, yet through the entanglements produced by the snares of sin and Satan—the workings of corruption in their carnal mind—the constant ooze of a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked—they feel their conscience to be an evil conscience—under which they mourn and sigh, being burdened.

Until they get an application of the atoning blood—a manifestation of the pardoning love of God—and a sweet sense of reconciliation through the finished work of the Son of God experimentally enjoyed within—their conscience gets no real ease nor peace. Having obtained eternal redemption for us, His blood will never lose its efficacy, but will ever purge the conscience, until He presents all His ransomed saints faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy!

A tender, gracious, humble & godly spirit

It is the possession of a tender, gracious, humble and godly spirit which so particularly distinguishes the true children of God. That meek and lowly spirit of Christ in them, draws our heart towards them in admiration and affection, creating and cementing a love and union which cannot be explained, and yet is one of the firmest, strongest ties which can knit soul to soul. And do we not see in most others, a worldly, carnal, selfish, proud, unhumiliated spirit?

A Pharisaical, self-righteous spirit

There are those, who, from natural temperament, general strictness of life and conduct, absence of powerful temptations, and having been shielded by various restraints from the commission of open evil, are secretly imbued with a strong spirit of self-righteousness.

These having been preserved from the corruptions of the world and the open sins of the flesh, frequently manifest in their religious profession a Pharisaical, self-righteous spirit, which is dangerous, and casts contempt upon salvation by grace.

What a dreadful explosion there would be!

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death." James 1:14, 15

Now what does temptation meet with in my bosom—but everything which is suitable to its nature? I am a heap of combustible material—I have everything in my nature alive to sin, yes, in itself nothing but sin. Temptation is the spark to the gunpowder—temptation is the torch to the dry sheaf—temptation is the midnight adulterer that enters into close embrace with the evils of my heart, and by their adulterous union, sin is begotten, conceived, and brought forth.

I am only speaking of the natural tendency of temptation, as meeting the evils of our heart. I am not saying that a child of God complies with, gives way to it, or is overcome by it. But he is tempted, which is more his misery, than his sin. Temptation would have no effect or influence, unless I had that in my bosom to which temptation was fully suitable. If I had—no pride—no unbelief—no infidelity—no covetousness—no lust—no presumption—no despondency; temptation to pride, to unbelief, to infidelity, to covetousness, to lust, to presumption, to despair—could have no influence upon my mind—and would not deserve the name of temptation. But my nature being a mass of combustible material, ready to go off with the faintest spark when temptation comes—unless God interposes, the spark and the gunpowder meet together, and what a dreadful explosion there would be unless the showers of heaven wet the powder, and prevent the catastrophe!

There may be true grace in the heart

There may be true grace in the heart, real faith and hope and love, even where there is much ignorance in the understanding. I have no doubt that there are now many people whose judgments are extremely weak and whose minds are on many points much uninstructed, who yet possess the fear of God and believe in His dear Son.

Felt helplessness & utter ruin

We have to be effectually stripped of all our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, that Christ may be experimentally and feelingly our all in all. But O what stripping do we need to pull away the rags of self-righteousness which cleave so closely to us! What hard labor to wear us out of all our own strength, and exhaust us of our own wisdom! What discovery after discovery of our wretched and miserable inability is needed to bring us down to that spot of felt helplessness and utter ruin, in which Christ becomes our all in all.

A paradox & an apparent contradiction

A Christian is a paradox and an apparent contradiction both to himself and to others.

Volume 8

The great strength of sin

The great strength of sin consists in its subtle and secret influence pervading and permeating every thread and fiber of the human mind, and acting in a way that must be felt to be known. It is like a river, deep and rapid, but flowing along so quietly and noiselessly that, looking down upon it, you could scarcely believe there was any strength in the stream. Try it—get into it. As long as you let yourself float with it you will not perceive its force—but turn and swim or row against it—then you will soon find what strength there is in the stream that seemed to glide so quietly along.

So it is with the power of sin. As long as a man floats down the stream of sin, he is unconscious of the power that it is exercising over him. He gives way to it, and is therefore ignorant of its strength, though it is sweeping him along into an abyss of eternal woe. Let him oppose it. Or let a dam be made across the river that seemed to flow along so placidly. See how the stream begins to rise! See how it begins to rage and roar! And see how soon its force will sweep over or carry away the barrier that was thrown across it! So with the strength of sin. Serve sin—obey it—it seems to have no strength. Resist it—then you find its secret power, so that but for the strength of God, you would be utterly carried away by it.

A sound mind

"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7

What a mercy it is naturally to have a sound mind! It is one of the greatest temporal blessings that God can bestow upon a man. It is far better than intellect, imagination, poetical gift, or reasoning power. And how wretched it is to have an unsound mind! a mind in the least degree diseased, eccentric, or in any way tainted with those delusive fancies which mar all comfort and often lead to the worst of consequences. But however great be the blessing of a healthy body, a healthy mind as much exceeds it in value as it is superior to it in nature. How you see men ruining themselves every day for lack of a sound mind! What extravagance, what folly are they daily committing! What disorder they bring upon their families, upon their property, and upon others also. What havoc and ruin from being crazed with some fancy or wild delusion!

To possess, then, the spirit of a sound mind is to have a sound judgment in the things of God—not to be drawn aside by every passing opinion—not to be allured by every novel doctrine—not to be charmed by every fresh device of the wicked one—not to be caught by every one of his flesh-pleasing snares—but to have that sobriety of judgment and holy wisdom in the things of God, with that fixedness of heart upon the Lord Jesus, and that solid experience of His Spirit and grace, as shall keep us from errors and delusions on the right hand and on the left.

Unless we have this spiritual sobriety—this ripe and matured judgment—and this firm establishment in the truth of God—we are almost sure to be drawn aside into some error or other.

Satan will somehow deceive us as an angel of light. He will puff us up with pride and presumption—he will entangle us in a maze of confusion and error—he will beguile our minds with some of his subtle deceits. But where there is a sound mind, there will be a sound faith—a sound hope—a sound love—a sound repentance—and a sound work of grace upon the heart from first to last. To have a sound mind is to have a mind deeply imbued and vitally impregnated with the truth of God. And as that truth is the only really solid and enduring substance under the sun, it follows that those who know it experimentally for themselves are the only people really possessed of soundness of mind—for they only take right and sound views of all things and all events, natural and spiritual, and have, as the apostle says, "the mind of Christ."

The soul melts at the sight!

"We love Him, because He first loved us." 1 John 4:19

Our affections never flow unto Jesus, until we have had some divine discovery of Him to our heart and conscience. We may try to love Him—we may think it our duty to do so—we may be secretly ashamed of our miserable coldness, and may lament our barrenness in love to Jesus. But no power of our own can raise up true love to Jesus. We cannot love the Lord until we know that the Lord loves us—nor can we love Him with all our heart and soul, until He tells us that He loves us with all His. When He says "I have loved you with an everlasting love," and sheds abroad His love in the soul—this gives power to love Him. When, too, He sets Himself before our eyes in His divine beauty and blessedness—this makes us fall in love with Him. For beauty kindles love. It is so often in natural love—and always so in divine love. Jesus has but to touch the heart and it softens. He has but to appear—and the soul melts at the sight!

Our best works?

"What is man, that he should be clean? He who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones; Yes, the heavens are not clean in His sight. How much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks iniquity like water?" Job 15:14-16

What are our works—our best works? Imperfect—tainted and defiled with sin. Has ever a good thought, a good word, or a good work, passed from you which sin has not, in the conception or in the execution, more or less defiled? Any man who knows the movements of sin in his own heart will bear me witness that he has never conceived a thought, spoken a word, or done an action, in which sin has not in some degree intermingled itself, and, by intermingling itself, has defiled and polluted that thought, word, or work.

Seducers & corrupters

"They have corrupted themselves. . . .they are a perverse and crooked generation." Deuteronomy 32:5

The Scripture does not spare the creature, or human pride, or self-righteousness—but boldly declares the corruption of man, and thus lays the axe to the very root of the tree. This doctrine—of human corruption—of the total fall of man—of the innate wickedness and perverseness of his heart—will always be acceptable to the child of God, because he has in his conscience an inward witness to its truth. He knows that he has corrupted himself—he feels that not only unclean thoughts lodge within him—but that he has given way to and indulged in them. Ever since he had

light to see, life to feel, and a conscience to bear witness, he knows that in many flagrant instances he has corrupted himself. We speak of seducers and corrupters with just abhorrence—but a man's worst corrupter is his own heart! There is no greater source of inward condemnation and guilt, than when a man is obliged to confess he has corrupted himself—made his own heart worse than it really is, by pandering to its lusts and heaping fuel upon its smouldering flame!

Up from the wilderness

"Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Song of Solomon 8:5

He is one made alive unto God by regenerating grace—one who knows something of the entrance of the word into his conscience, laying bare the secrets of his heart, and discovering the guilt, the filth, the evil, and the miserable consequences of sin. He is one who knows something of the deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and wickedness of his own fallen nature. He is one who is separated from the world, whether dead in sin or dead in a profession, by a sovereign work of grace upon his heart. He is one who has been led to see the emptiness of a mere 'notional knowledge' of the truth, without knowing experimentally, the healing power of Jesus' love and blood. He is one who has been stripped of creature wisdom, human strength, and a fig-leaf righteousness—and been made to see that unless he has a vital saving interest in the blood and obedience of Jesus, he must perish in his sins.

He is one whom God the Spirit has blessed with a living faith that works by love—purifies the heart—separates from the world—delivers from the power and practice of sin—overcomes the wicked one—receives grace and strength, life and power out of the fullness of Christ—and the end of which is the salvation of the soul. He is one who is blessed also with a good hope through grace—who has had some discovery of the Lord Jesus to his soul, so as to raise up in his heart a hope in His mercy, enabling him to cast forth that anchor which is both sure and steadfast, into that within the veil, where he rides secure from death and hell, and where, through upholding grace, he will outlive every storm. He is one who is blessed with a vital union with the Lord Jesus—for he is said in the text to lean upon Him—which implies that he has such a union with Jesus as enables him to rest wholly and solely upon Him, and upon what He is made unto him.

He is one who is also blessed and favored at times with a measure of sweet and sacred communion with the Lord of life and glory—for to lean upon Jesus implies that he is favored with some such holy nearness as John had when he lay in His bosom. He is one, too, who is not ignorant of trial or temptation, for the wilderness finds him enough of both. Nor is he one who is ignorant of sufferings, afflictions, and sorrows—for this is the distinctive character of the present wilderness condition. He is not unacquainted with spiritual hungering and thirsting—for the wilderness in itself affords neither food nor water. Nor is he a stranger to the fiery flying serpents that haunt the wilderness—nor to the perils and dangers that encompass the traveler therein from the pestilential wind, the roving Arab, and the moving columns of sand.

Who is this?

"Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Song of Solomon 8:5

A saved sinner is a spectacle for angels to contemplate! That a sinful man who deserves nothing but the eternal wrath of God, should be lifted out of justly merited perdition, into salvation to which

he can have no claim—must indeed ever be a holy wonder! And that you or I should ever have been fixed on in the electing love of God—ever have been given to Jesus to redeem—ever quickened by the Spirit to feel our lost, ruined state—ever blessed with any discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ and of His saving grace—this is and ever must be a matter of holy astonishment here—and will be a theme for endless praise hereafter!

To see a man altogether so different from what he once was—once so careless, carnal, ignorant, unconcerned about his soul—to see that man now upon his knees begging for mercy, the tears streaming down his face, his bosom heaving with convulsive sighs, his eyes looking upward that pardon may reach him in his desperate state—is not that a man to be looked at with wonder and admiration? To see another who might have pushed his way in the busy, bustling scenes of life, who might have had honors, riches, and everything the world had to bestow heaped upon his head—abandon all for Jesus' sake, and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt—is not that man a wonder?

To live while here on earth in union and communion with an invisible God—to talk to Jesus, whom the eye of sense has never seen, and whose voice the ear of sense has never heard—and yet to see Him as sensibly by the eye of faith as though the natural eye rested upon His glorious Person, and to hear His voice speaking into the inmost heart, as plainly and clearly as though the sound of His lips met the natural ear—is not that a wonder also? To see a man preferring one smile from the face of Jesus and one word from His peace-speaking lips—above all the titles, honors, pleasures, and power that the world can bestow—why surely if there be a wonder upon earth, that man is one!

May we not, then, say with admiring as well as wondering eyes, "Who is this? Why, this man I knew—worldly, proud, ambitious, self-seeking. That man I knew—given up to vanity and pride. Another man I knew—buried in politics, swallowed up in pleasure and gaiety, abandoned to everything vile and sensual. But he has now become prayerful, watchful, tender-hearted, choosing the company of God's people—giving up everything that his carnal mind once approved of and delighted in—and manifesting in his walk, conversation, and whole deportment that he is altogether a new creature."

Whenever we see any of those near and dear to us—touched by the finger of this all-conquering Lord—subdued by His grace—and wrought upon by His Spirit—then not only do we look upon such with holy wonder, but with the tenderest affection, mingled with the tears of thankful praise to the God of all our mercies. "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?"

Heavenly wisdom

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding. For the gaining of it is better than the gaining of silver, and the profit of it better than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies. None of the things you can desire are to be compared to her." Proverbs 3:13-15

Few, however, seem to know, few to prize this heavenly wisdom—this divine teaching—this unction or anointing from the Holy One which teaches all things. Forms and ceremonies content some—a name to live satisfies others—a sound creed, with a tolerably consistent life, is enough for this professor—the approbation of men, the flattery of his own heart, are sufficient for others.

But O the insufficiency, the emptiness, the deceptiveness of all these forms and shadows, when we are made to see and feel who and what we are—when our spiritual poverty comes upon us like an armed man—when our miserable destitution, nakedness, beggary, and thorough insolvency, with all their attendant needs and woes, stare us in the face—when we stand before the throne of the Most High without a rag to cover us, a refuge to hide us, or a plea to avail us!

It is this view of ourselves within and without—this sinking down before God as the great Searcher of hearts—this deep and feeling sense of the pitiable state into which sin, original and actual, has brought us—which, in the hands of the blessed Spirit, opens our eyes to see what alone can profit us. One beam of divine light shining into the soul is enough to show us not only what we are—but what alone can do us any good. One drop of the unction from the Holy One falling upon the lids is enough to open the eyes to see in whom all salvation is, and from whom all salvation comes—and thus forever to chase away those idle dreams, those vain delusions, those deceptive hopes in which thousands trust.

We may have a sound creed

We may have a sound creed, a form of words perfectly consistent with the truth in the Scriptures—but this will neither sanctify nor save. Truth in the bare letter brings no deliverance from the guilt, filth, love, power, and practice of sin. It does not bring the soul near unto God—nor repel Satan—nor set up the kingdom of God with power in the heart. We need a better teaching than this! We need "the Spirit of truth," whose especial office is to take the truth of God, and to open up, reveal, make known, apply, and seal it with His own gracious operation, divine influence, and holy power, upon the heart and conscience.

Through rich and unspeakable mercy, there are times and seasons when a spiritual light seems to shine upon the sacred page. You read the Bible with enlightened eyes. Power and sweetness seem to stream, as it were, in rich unction through the Word of truth—and as you read it with softened heart and tearful eyes, the truth of God shines from it into your understanding as brightly and as clearly as the sun in the noonday sky. And why? Because the Spirit of truth is opening it up to your understanding and applying it with power to your heart! He is illuminating your mind—radiating light from the Scriptures into your soul—and opening up the truth of God with divine power to your heart!

They love to be deceived

We are surrounded with error—the carnal heart is full of it. For wherever truth is not—there error must be. A veil of ignorance is by nature spread thickly over the mind, through which not one ray of divine light penetrates. Men love error—religious error—for God's own testimony is that they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. They love to be deceived—they hate the hand which would tear the delusion away. While then they are encompassed with the mists of error, how can they find the way to truth? The Spirit alone can dissipate these clouds, disperse these mists, and take away this veil of unbelief and ignorance spread over the heart—and this it is His sacred office to perform, for He is the "Spirit of truth."

Opened up in all its filth & gore

"And when He has come, He will convict the world in respect to sin." John 16:8

Under the Spirit's sacred and spiritual influence, there are times and seasons when your conscience seems in an especial manner wrought upon. The evil of sin is set before you as perhaps you have never seen it before. Your conscience bleeds with the guilt and weight of it. You see what a dreadful and an evil thing sin is—how loathsome—how detestable! You could almost weep tears of blood that you have been such a sinner. Your backslidings rise up to view as so many mountains of iniquity. The wickedness of your heart is laid bare, and you feel that there cannot be such another wretch on earth. Your corrupt nature is opened up in all its filth and gore—you wonder how the patience of God could have borne with you so many years. And not only so, but tears flow down your cheek—sobs of contrition heave from your bosom—you could almost weep your life away, because you have sinned so deeply against such redeeming love!

The infirmities of Christian brethren

"Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults in love." Ephesians 4:2

Learn to be patient, meekly bearing with the infirmities of Christian brethren. There is a time in our Christian life when we desire to set everybody right and make everything square. But we begin to find after a while that we cannot set our own selves right, nor make our own spirit and conduct square with the word of truth. This conviction, forced increasingly upon us, makes us less keen to see the mote in the eyes of others, and more willing to take out the beam out of our own eye—less desirous to condemn others, more willing to condemn ourselves—less sure of the sins of our friends, more certain of our own.

We sooner or later learn that it is one thing to wink at our brethren's sins—another to bear with our brethren's infirmities. We see that we naturally differ from one another, and that though grace changes the heart, the 'natural disposition' is rather subdued by grace, than radically altered. Thus our natural tempers, stations and occupations, education, and bringing up—modes of thought and feeling, views of men and things—family and business connections, prejudices and prepossessions—besetting sins and infirmities—our very knowledge and experience of the truth of God—our various stages in the divine life—our afflictions, trials, and temptations, and many other circumstances which we cannot now enumerate—all so widely differ that you can scarcely find two Christians alike—each having his own peculiar infirmities. As, then, we expect others to bear with our infirmities—let us learn to bear with theirs—loving them for the grace that we see in them.

Anticipate no easy road

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

Expect a path of increasing, rather than diminishing tribulation. Don't be surprised at your daily cross within or without—with bodily afflictions, sharp trials, and painful conflicts. Anticipate no easy road in providence or in grace—in the church or in the world—in the family or in the business—in your dealings with sinners or in your dealings with saints.

God means to make us thoroughly sick of this world and of everything in it, that, wearied and worn out with trials, temptations, and conflicts—we may find all our rest in Himself. And thus, as through much tribulation we enter into His kingdom of grace—so through much tribulation we may enter into His kingdom of glory.

Our only preservation

Our only preservation against the winds of error which are blowing on every side—our only safety amid the perils and evils which daily beset us from without or from within—is a personal, experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus!

Afflictions, crosses, losses, bereavements

If our afflictions, crosses, losses, bereavements, family troubles, and church trials have been a means of humbling our proud hearts—bringing us to honest confession of, and godly sorrow for our sins and backslidings—if they have instrumentally separated us more effectually from the world, its company, its ways, its maxims, and its spirit—if they have, in the good hand of God, stirred up prayer in our hearts—led us into portions of the word of truth before hidden from view—laid us more feelingly and continually at the footstool of mercy—made mercy more dear and grace more sweet—these trials and afflictions have been neither unprofitable or unseasonable.

The influence of worldly professors

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 2 Timothy 3:5

Nothing is more dangerous than a profession of the truth without an experience of its power—for nothing more hardens the heart and sears the conscience, than a wanton handling of sacred things. Let us dread the influence of worldly professors. The more we are in their company the more they rob us of every tender, humble, gracious, and spiritual feeling.

Dying men & women in a dying world

We are all poor dying men and women in a dying world, and in a few years at best, the praise or censure of men will be no more to us, than the sun which shines upon our tomb, or the storm that sweeps over our grave!

They must exert a daily & visible influence

Many hold to the inspiration of the Bible—more from tradition than any experience of its power. The mere fact of its inspiration may be held—and still be in the heart as a stone lies in a field. The Bible is widely read—but the veil remains over the heart of thousands of its readers. Religion was never more talked about—but was never less known as an inward spiritual reality. Profession was never greater—and practice never less. Bible knowledge was never more spread—and faith, and hope, and love less manifested.

But when Jesus comes with power into a sinner's heart, He cannot be hidden. His superabounding grace, His constraining love, His matchless beauty and blessedness, His heavenly glory—when experimentally seen and known—must be made manifest in the believing lip and life. When merely seen in the Word of God—when merely held as a creed—the most blessed truths are powerless and fruitless—as unhappily there are continual instances everywhere before our eyes. But as experimentally known and felt, they must exert a daily and visible influence.

Only Jesus can

"Without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Only Jesus can—support us under our trials—comfort us in our afflictions—deliver us out of our temptations—subdue our sins, smile away our fears—cheer us in life—bless us in death—and present us in eternity before His Father's throne, holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight!

We are all in the hospital

A sight and sense of the evils in ourselves and others, should teach us mutual forbearance. We are all in the hospital—and shall we quarrel with our fellow patients? Should we not rather sympathize with each other's infirmities—and be looking out for the arrival of the Physician who alone can cure each and all? But if we cannot keep out of contention, and desire a matter of strife with the brethren, let this be our ground of dispute—Who is the greater sinner? Who owes most to the Savior? Who shall live most to His glory?

When the children of God meet

When the children of God meet there is little real spiritual conversation. Worldly subjects, the mere trifles of the day, the weather, the markets, and the crops, politics and gossip—thrust out the things of God. When religion is talked of, it is all at a distance—spiritual experience is lost in a cloud of generalities. The gifts and abilities, texts and sermons, changes and movements of ministers are a prevailing topic. Some controversial point is broached, on which the combatants fall tooth and nail—the contending parties lose their tempers—one harsh word produces another, until the whole degenerates into a squabble—and poor religion is as much trampled down in the vestry, as sobriety is in the bar-room!

The creature

All true religion flows out of the life of God in the soul. Wherever this divine life does not exist, there may be 'the name of religion'—but it will be—a shadow without substance—a form without power—an imitation without reality. Probe all false religion to the bottom—look into its heart and center—strip off its garments and trappings—and what will you find? SELF! False religion may assume a thousand shapes. It may run through all shades of profession. But hunt it down through all its turnings and windings, and you will find the creature at the end of the chase!

Our base ingratitude

Our base ingratitude is one of our most crying sins. What mercies and favors we have enjoyed! And what base returns have we rendered! Did we but see and feel how much we owe to the ever-watchful eye and ever-bountiful hand of Him in whom we live, move, and have our being—and did we compare His favors with our returns—we would be overwhelmed with shame and confusion of face!

Where sin abounded

"Where sin abounded, grace did abound much more exceedingly." Romans 5:20

Sin has abounded—fearfully abounded in thought, word, and deed—but grace does much more abound! Take your sins, then, with all their horrid and dreadful aggravations—sins against light, conscience, love, mercy, and blood. Examine them well—search thoroughly, as far as you

can—their height, depth, length, and breadth—until your knees tremble, and your heart sinks with fear and dread. Must you perish? Must you sink to rise no more? Is all hope gone? Is hell your destined unavoidable place? Look, look, see this view of the gospel declaration concerning grace. Only get this brought by the Spirit into your heart, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound"—and your debts are at once liquidated.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin! "All sin!" How comprehensive! What sin does this not embrace? And take with it, too, this word from the Lord's own lips, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Then all vile, infidel, blasphemous thoughts and suggestions—all the pride, unbelief, infidelity, obscenity, and filth of a depraved, desperately depraved nature—all the dregs of that foul sewer which floods the imagination—all the hard, rebellious uprisings of a carnal mind at enmity with God—all the heavings and tossings of a heart bottomless as hell—with all the boilings-up, fermentings, and workings to and fro of an abyss of iniquity—all, all evil from within and from without—shall be forgiven—and is already forgiven to the repenting, believing children of God!

This secret anointing oil

"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know the truth." 1 John 2:20

The anointing of the Holy One—the internal teaching and operation of the Spirit—penetrates into every heart to which it comes. It does not merely lie on the surface. It does not merely change the creed. It does not merely alter the life. It goes deeper than creed, lip, or life. The religion of God consists in the anointing of the Holy One which goes beneath the shell and the skin—which works down to the very bottom of man's heart and opens it up and lays it bare before the eyes of Him with whom he has to do.

It is by virtue of this anointing that our secret motives are discovered—and the pride, presumption, self-righteousness, self-seeking—and all that depravity which ferments in a man's heart, are laid open. It is by the penetrating effects of this divine light and life in a man's soul, that all the secret workings and inward movement of his heart are discovered and laid bare. A man can never loathe himself in dust and ashes—never abhor himself as the vilest of the vile—until this secret anointing oil touches his heart! He will be satisfied with a name to live—with an empty profession—until this teaching of the Spirit goes through every cloak and veil—and searches into the very vitals—so as to sink into the secret depths of a man's spirit before God!

The sins of devils

"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord." Proverbs 16:5

There are sins which men commit, that devils cannot. Unbelief, infidelity, and atheism, are not sins of devils—for they believe and tremble, and feel too much of the wrath of God to doubt His threatenings or deny His existence. The love of money is a sin from which they are exempt—for gold and silver are confined to earth, and the men who live on it. The lusts of the flesh in all their bearings—whether gluttony, drunkenness, or sensuality, belong only to those who inhabit tabernacles of clay. But pride, malignity, falsehood, enmity, murder, deceitfulness, and all those sins of which spirits are capable in these crimes—devils as much exceed men as an angelic nature exceeds in depth, power, and capacity a human one.

The eye of man sees, for the most part, only the grosser offences against morality—it takes little or no cognisance of internal sins. Thus a man may be admired as a pattern of consistency, because free from the outbreaks of fleshly and more human sins—while his heart, as open to God's heart-searching eye, may be full of pride, malignity, enmity, and murder—the sins of devils. Such were the scribes and pharisees of old—models of correctness outwardly—but fiends of malice inwardly. So fearful were these 'holy men' of outward defilement, that they would not enter into Pilate's judgment-hall—when at the same moment their hearts were plotting the greatest crime that earth ever witnessed—the crucifixion of the Son of God!

The exceeding greatness of His power

"The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might." Ephesians 1:19

Consider, first, the difficulties which grace has to encounter in the quickening of a dead soul into spiritual life. View the depths of the fall. See the death of the soul in trespasses and sins—its thorough alienation from the life of God, through the darkness, blindness and ignorance of the understanding—the perverseness of the will—the hardness of the conscience—and the depravity of the affections.

View the obduracy, stubbornness and obstinacy of the soul—its pride, unbelief, infidelity and self-righteousness—its passionate love to, habitual practice of, and long inurement in sin. Consider the strong prejudices of the soul against everything godly and holy—the desperate, implacable enmity of the carnal mind against God Himself. Consider the soul's firm and deep-rooted love to the world in all its varied shapes and forms. Remember also how all its hopes, happiness and prospects are bound up in the things of time and sense. O what a complicated mass of difficulties do all these foes form in their firm combination—like a compact, well-armed, thoroughly trained army—against any power which would dislodge them from their position!

Consider, also, the sacrifices which must often be made by one who is to live godly in Christ Jesus—the tenderest ties, perhaps, to be broken—the lucrative or advantageous prospects which have to be abandoned—old friends to be renounced—family connections to be given up—position in life to be lost—and often the shame and contempt to be entailed on one's family and oneself! All, indeed, are not so hedged about with these peculiar difficulties which we have just named—but few are wholly free from them—and I have had much personal experience of them in my first setting my face Zionward.

Consider, also, the mighty power of God in maintaining divine life in our soul. See and feel what mountains of difficulty—what seas of temptation—what winds and storms of error—what assaults and snares of Satan, and the latter more dangerous than the former—what floods of vileness and ungodliness without and within—what strong lusts and passions—what secret slips and falls, backslidings and departures from the living God—what long seasons of darkness, barrenness and death—what opposition of the flesh to the strait and narrow way—what crafty hypocrites, pretended friends, but actual foes—false professors and erroneous characters, all striving to throw down or entangle our steps, we had to grapple with—what helplessness, inability and miserable impotency in ourselves to all that is good—what headlong proneness to all that is evil. All these things we have to pass in solemn review.

We have also to ponder over what we have been, and what we still are, since we professed to fear God—and how when left to ourselves, we have done nothing but sin against and provoke Him to His face from first to last—and yet still have divine life maintained within. And thus as we hold in our hands and read over article by article this long dark catalogue—still to have a sweet persuasion that the life of God is in our soul, and that because Jesus lives, we shall live also. Thus to realize, believe and feel, and bless God for His surpassing, superabounding grace—is to know the exceeding greatness of the power of God to us who believe—in maintaining divine life after it had been first communicated!

What a creature man is!

"I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid My face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways." Isaiah 57:17

What a creature man is! What an obstinate, perverse, rebellious wretch—that wrath and judgments will not mend him! The Lord tells us here why He smote His people. It was for the iniquity of their covetousness—the word "covetousness" pointing out what the human heart is chiefly engaged upon. For we must not limit the expression merely to avarice after money—but consider it as embracing the going out of the heart of man after the things of time and sense—the insatiable desire of the carnal mind after earthly and sensual gratification. This covetousness God speaks of as iniquity lies in this—that man loves everything earthly and sensual better than God—that he seeks pleasure from every object but the Lord—that he willfully and greedily runs into every base lust—making carnal things his delight and happiness.

Now the Lord, provoked by the iniquity of his covetousness, smote him—with stroke upon stroke—with disappointment upon disappointment—with affliction upon affliction—with trouble upon trouble. But His corrective measures were all thrown away! They did not raise up in him a spiritual work—nor bring him to the Lord's feet—nor change his will—nor renew him in the spirit of his mind. They left him as they found him—earthly, sensual, and dead. Or rather, they left him worse than they found him—for his heart became more hardened, and his conscience more stupefied than before!

So obstinate, rebellious, wayward, perverse a wretch is man, that no step which the Lord could take in a way of judgment or anger, (independent of the Spirit's operations, for that is the point I am endeavoring to enforce)—could ever have the least effect upon him. Now do not you parents often see this very thing in your children naturally? You sometimes cannot make anything of them—there is such a frowardness and perversity of disposition in them—that all your chastisements and every means you employ to make them better—only seem to make them worse. You cannot, with all the pains you take with them, make them one whit better!

Now what froward children often are to their parents, such are we toward God—His stripes—His frowns—His hiding Himself—His sharp afflictions—do not produce in us any spiritual good. But we go right on sinning—muttering perverseness, full of rebellion, peevishness, and discontent. And though we may feel the rod of God upon us, yet there is—no breaking down of heart—no submission of soul—no contrition of spirit before Him!

They make him mourn

"To all who mourn in Israel, He will give beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning, praise instead of despair. For the Lord has planted them like strong and graceful oaks for His own glory." Isaiah 61:3

The child of God will be more or less a spiritual mourner on account of the evil that dwells in him. The more that he knows of his heart—the longer he walks in the divine life—and the more that sin is opened up to him as seen in the light of God's countenance—the more will he be a spiritual mourner. Sometimes he will mourn over the evils of his heart—that his lusts and corruptions are so strong—and he so weak against them. Sometimes over the temptations that Satan has laid for his feet, in which he has been entangled, and by which he has been cast down. Sometimes over the absence of God, and that he finds so little access to His blessed Majesty. Sometimes he will mourn as feeling how little grace he has. Sometimes he will mourn over his backslidings—how he has been entangled in, and given way to his lusts—how he has been overcome by his temper—how he has murmured and fretted against God's dealings with him, so as at times to have been almost ready to break forth into cursing, or do something desperate.

As these and a thousand other evils are felt in a man's heart, they make him mourn, and as the text speaks, have ashes for his covering. He mourns also over his lack of fruitfulness—and that he cannot be, do, or say what he would. He has strong desires to adorn the doctrine of God in all things—to have spirituality of mind and a tender conscience—and to lead a life of faith, prayer, and watchfulness. But he is obliged to confess with the apostle—"For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do." For his mind is often, very often, doing the exact contrary. All these things, combined with Satan's powerful temptations—and his many misgivings on account of the hidings of God's face from him on account of his sins—with his thorough inability to cast off the burdens that press him down—sink him very low.

In addition to all this, he may have also to experience persecution for the truth's sake from those, perhaps, near and dear to him. So that it is not one, but many sorrows, that he has to wade through, so as at times to make him, in his feelings, of all men most miserable!

I am full of confusion!

"I am full of confusion!" Job 10:15

God is the great Ruler, Director, and Controller of all things! We must not look on the varied events that are ever taking place in this world, as a mere matter of 'chance'—a confused medley—as though these multitudinous circumstances were all thrown like marbles into a bag, and thrown out without any order or arrangement. God is a God of order. In the natural world, the world of creation—all is in order. In the spiritual world, the world of grace—all is in order. And in the providential world, the world of providence—all is order also. To our mind, indeed, all often seems disorder. But this arises from our ignorance, and not seeing the whole as one definitely arranged plan.

If you were to see a weaver working at a loom, and saw nothing but the threads and needles jumping up in continual motion—you would see nothing but confusion—nor could you form the slightest conception of the pattern which was being worked. But when the whole was completed, and the silk taken off the roller, then you would see a pattern arranged in beautiful order—every thread concurring to form one harmonious design. But all this was known beforehand by the artist

who designed the pattern, and every arrangement was made in strict subserviency to it.

But if this is the case as to God's appointments in providence, how much more is it true of His glorious designs in grace. Every trial, temptation, affliction, sorrow—are but the result of a definite plan in the eternal mind. Yet to us how often all seems confusion! This confusion is not so much in the things themselves—as in our mind. Job surrounded by trouble cried out, "I am full of confusion!" Yet we can see in reading his history that all his trials were working toward an appointed end. So every trial, sorrow, temptation or affliction, which has ever lain, or ever will lie, in your path—has been marked out by infinite, unerring wisdom!

Is not the commonest road laid out according to a definite plan, and does not the surveyor, when he lays it out, put every mile-stone in its proper place? So, does not the Lord lay out beforehand the road in which His people should walk? And does He not put a trial here and a sorrow there—an affliction at this turning, and a trouble at that corner? All is definitely planned in His infinite wisdom, to bring the traveler safely home to Zion!

My inward diabolism

"I have a daily cross, a daily burden, a daily affliction. It is my dreadful heart, my carnal mind, my corrupt nature—sin dwells in me—my unbelief, my infidelity, my worldly mindedness, my backsliding, my deceptive, adulterous, idolatrous heart—the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. My inward diabolism, with which I am filled, daily makes me deeply groan, draws forth many a sigh, and makes me mourn before God—that I have such a wicked hard heart. My sins, my backslidings afflict me, and deeply grieve me."

The afflictions the Lord sends on His people

"You have afflicted me with all Your waves." Psalm 88:7

Jesus was a man of sufferings—a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And His people, in their measure, must have the same. The Lord has appointed it should be so. He has chosen His Zion in the furnace of affliction. There is no escape. The afflictions the Lord sends on His people are of varied kinds. The Lord sees necessary to send afflictions suitable to the case, state and condition of each. What might be an affliction to one, might not be so to another. Each must carry his own affliction. Each must bear his own load—and each endure his own appointed lot.

Our wise God sees exactly what affliction to lay on each and all—when it shall come—where it shall come—why it shall come—how it shall come—how it shall work—what it shall work—how long it shall endure—when it shall be put on—and when taken off. In these matters, the Lord acts as a sovereign. We did not choose of what parents we would be born—nor our situation in life—nor had we any choice of our stature or skin color.

The Lord appointed all our afflictions for us—and when He puts them on—no human arm can take them off. He knows our constitution and troubles—our characteristics and the minutest things relating to our situation in life. The Lord knows all our concerns. Therefore He lays on each individual the very affliction He sees that individual needs—no greater, no less—exactly the very affliction which shall bring about the very appointed purpose intended by God to be brought about—which shall be for the soul's good and God's own glory!

Who are these men?

"To Him shall men come." Isaiah 45:24

Who are these men? Are they not regenerated men and women—redeemed of the Lord, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and made alive to God, by His special teaching in the conscience? These men belong to God's own blessed, redeemed, regenerated family. It is God's solemn, unalterable declaration, that "to Him shall men come." It does not rest, therefore, in the will of the creature—it hangs wholly and solely on the sovereign determination of God Himself. How does He bring it about? By a special work of grace in the heart. How do these men come? Under the teaching, drawing, and leading of the blessed Spirit of God in their soul. Where does the blessed Spirit find them? Does He find them willing to come, willing to leave all those things that men, by nature, love, and to which they cleave? No! It must be the special work of God Himself in the heart and conscience. He brings it about by showing us plainly, that in ourselves, we are lost.

Until a man feels in himself lost and undone, he will never come to Jesus Christ, for He is the Savior of the lost. Until we feel lost, He is no Savior to us. When we feel lost, all our righteousness opened up as filthy rags, see no way of escape from the horrible pit—and the Lord is pleased to open up to us the person of the Lord Jesus Christ—His atoning blood—His perfect obedience—His justifying righteousness, and dying love—laying these things with some degree of sweetness and power on the soul—we come. Why do we come? Because the blessed Spirit works in us to will and do of His good pleasure—He enables us to come, under His blessed teachings, leadings, and actings.

Self-esteem & self-exaltation?

"That no flesh should boast before God. . . .He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:29, 31

In order that we should glory in the Lord, it is absolutely necessary that we should cease to glory in SELF. By nature, we are all prone to glory in self through those cursed principles of self-esteem and self-exaltation. Nothing but the mighty power of God can put down these cursed principles. We are prone to this pride, and it is strengthened and matured in a fallen sinner's heart.

It is the work of the Spirit in the sinner's conscience—to pour contempt on all the pride of man—to open up the depth of the fall—to bring to light all his hidden corruptions—to unbosom and lay bare all the evils of his heart—to upturn the deep corruptions of his fallen nature before his astonished eyes—that he may learn with true humility of soul, brokenness of heart, and contrition of spirit before God—to loathe and abhor himself in dust and ashes, as a monster of iniquity.

If a man has not been taught by the strong hand of God in his soul to abhor, loathe, and cry out against himself as one of the vilest wretches that crawls on God's earth—he has never learned to glory in the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord Jesus Christ reveals to his soul a sense of His love, and unfolds a sight of His glory before his astonished eyes, he is brought to look out of himself, and from all he has—to the Lord Jesus Christ!

The highest privilege

The highest privilege, the greatest blessing, the richest favor that God can bestow upon any person is to make him His own dearly beloved child. For in so doing he not only advances him to the noblest dignity, but to the highest summit of glory and happiness that can be enjoyed in His own eternal, blissful presence. Our heavenly Father bestows upon us His children all those needful mercies and favors which—His wisdom can devise—His love prompt—and His power perform. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." What is it to be an heir of God? It is to have God for our eternal possession—for all the love, glory, bliss, and blessedness of the self-existent Jehovah to be given to us for our everlasting enjoyment. Whatever the love of God can give—whatever the grace of God bestow—whatever the glory of God reveal—whatever fullness of bliss there is in the eternal presence of the great and glorious Jehovah—all that is ours if we are the children of God!

A pilgrim & a stranger

The child of God is separated from the world as a pilgrim and a stranger—and is pressing onward through a thousand foes and fears, to a heavenly country.

They have done you good

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

Have your trials humbled you? Have they made you meek and lowly? If so, they have done you good. Have they stirred up a spirit of prayer in your bosom—and made you sigh, cry, and groan for the Lord to appear, visit, or bless your soul? Then they have done you good. Have they opened up those parts of God's word which are full of mercy and comfort to His afflicted people? Then they have done you good. Have they made you more sincere, more earnest, more spiritual, more heavenly-minded, more convinced that the Lord Jesus can alone bless and comfort your soul? Then they have done you good. Have they made the Bible more precious to you, the promises more sweet, the dealings of God with your soul more prized? Then they have done you good.

Now this is the way that "all things work together for good." Not by puffing you up with pride—but by filling your heart with humility. Not by encouraging presumption—but by raising your affections to where Jesus sits at the right hand of God. Not by carrying us into the world—but by bringing us out of it. Not by covering us with a veil of ignorance and arrogance—but by stripping this veil off, and bringing light, life, and power into the soul!

God's divine appointment

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

"All things!" Look at that! All that concerns our body and soul—everything in providence—everything in grace—everything you have passed through—everything you are passing through—everything you shall pass through. "All things!" What! is there not a single thing, however minute, however comparatively unimportant, that is not for my good, if I love God? No! Not one! If there were a single thing which befalls me, which is not working together for my good, if I am a child of God, I say it with reverence—that this verse would be a lie in God's book. And yet, when we consider the variety of things that affect us—to believe that all of them are working

together for our good—how must we admire the wonderful wisdom, and power, and government of God!

Are we tried in our circumstances? This is according to God's divine appointment. Is it the Lord's will and pleasure to bring us down in the world, by sorrows and adversities in providence? This is still according to God's divine appointment. Have we afflictions in the family? It is still according to God's divine appointment. It comes from Him. Nothing can happen in body—in property—in family—that does not spring from God's divine appointment. Are children taken away? They are taken by the hand of God! The Lord gives—and the Lord takes away! Is wife or husband afflicted? The hand of God is in it. Is the body brought down with sickness? It comes from God. Is the mind tried with a thousand perplexities, anxieties, and cares? It is still the hand of God. All these matters spring from His divine appointment! Nothing can take place, either in providence or in grace—except as God in His infinite wisdom has decreed to perform—or decreed to allow!

Saved!

"He will come and save you." Isaiah 35:3

To be saved! Who can fathom the depth of that word? Only in eternity will it be known what is implied in the word saved! For the glorified spirit must look down from the battlements of heaven into the dreadful pit of hell, before it can comprehend a millionth part of what is contained in the word saved. Saved from hell—saved from the pouring out of God's terrible wrath through countless ages—saved from eternal punishment with devils and lost spirits—and saved into that heaven which knows no end, but is ever opening up with richer manifestations of glory and bliss!

Merit?

Merit? I know of only one merit that we have—hell. If salvation were of human merit—not a soul could be saved!

Applied with a divine power to the heart

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up." Acts 20:32

We are not built up—by fleshly holiness—by creature piety—by long and loud prayers—by the doings and duties of the flesh—nor even by sound doctrines floating in our brain. But we are built up by 'the word of God's grace,' applied with a divine power to the heart. In other words, by the sweet manifestation—unctuous application—and divine revelation of the gospel of the grace of God.

Have you suffered from temptation—and been delivered out of it? It was 'the word of God's grace' that built you up. Have you been in severe trial—and the Lord has blessed you in it, and brought you out of it? It was 'the word of God's grace' that built you up. Have you been entangled in some error—and the Lord snatched you out of that error by applying some portion of His truth to your soul? It was 'the word of God's grace' that built you up. Have you been entangled in the lusts of the flesh—or cast down by some snare of the devil—and the Lord has delivered you out of it? It was 'the word of His grace' that built you up.

If we deny Him

"If we deny Him, He also will deny us." 2 Timothy 2:12

Sometimes we deny Jesus our affections. The world gets hold of us; those whom we love entwine themselves around our hearts—the things of time and sense begin to be pleasant and sweet to us—we gradually get carnal, cold, and dead. Then He will deny us—that is, He will not drop His love into a soul that is preoccupied with an idol. If we are cold to Him, He will be shy with us—and if we are negligent of His favor and His grace, He will requite us by withholding them.

A continual snare to us

We feel the world, with all its charms—its attractions—its habits—its temptations—to be a continual snare to us. Our eyes are caught with every passing vanity. The glare and blaze of the things of time and sense attract our eyes. And as the moth flits around the candle until it burns its wings—so are we continually flitting around the glare and blaze of the world—and get often sadly singed!

We ask the Lord, then, that He would—separate us from the world, deliver us from these snares—lead us up into some sweet communion with Himself—bring us out of this carnal frame—and favor us with some blessed enlargement of soul. We ask the Lord that He would enable us to—look to Him—embrace Him in our affections—and love Him with a pure heart fervently. The Lord condescends to answer the prayer—but in a way that we little dream of.

Instead of answering it by bringing in some sweet manifestation of Christ—He lays guilt upon our consciences. Fresh temptations bring us into a state of conflict, until we are forced to cast ourselves at the foot of the cross—as guilty, filthy rebels. Now, when the Lord has brought the soul there, and enables it by faith to get sight of a crucified Savior—there is a power communicated which separates the heart from this world and all its vanities! And getting separated in affection from the world—there is a new and inexpressible pleasure, sweetness, and blessedness felt, in pouring out the heart before Him—which the world with all its vain charms never can produce within. When he is, in any measure, indulged with a sight of a dying Lord—when he gets, by faith, a view of Christ's cross—and faith, hope, and love, tenderness, sorrow, and contrition begin to rise up in his bosom—sin becomes hated—temptation is weakened—spirituality of mind produced—and the carnal mind for a while is deadened to those base desires which before were uppermost!

The heavenly runner

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Hebrews 12:1, 2

The heavenly runner looks wholly to the incarnate Son of God. Jesus draws him onward with His invincible grace—and as he runs and looks—and looks and runs—every fresh look gives renewed strength! And every time we view His beauty and glory we see more to believe, to admire, and to love Him. Every glance at His beauteous Person renews the flame of holy love! And every touch of His sacred finger melts the heart into conformity to His suffering image. This is the life of a Christian—daily to be running a race for eternity—and, as speeding onward to a heavenly goal, by

continually breathing forth the yearnings of his soul after divine realities, and to be pressing forward more and more toward the Lord Jesus Christ as giving him a heavenly crown when he has finished his course with joy.

But as he runs he is bowed down with weights—many trials and sorrows—many cares and wearying anxieties—many powerful temptations—many bosom sins—many inward idols—many doubts and fears—many sinkings and tremblings—many hindrances from his felt coldness and darkness—hang upon him and press him down—so that at times he is utterly unable to move a single foot forward. But in spite of hindrances from without and within, every now and then he sees Jesus at the end of the race holding out the crown—and seeing Him, he is encouraged and enabled once more to run looking unto Him—that he may derive strength and virtue out of His fullness.

He cannot run the race with any hope of success but as he looks unto Jesus—and derives supplies of strength and power out of His fullness. Though faint, be still pursuing. Run on and run through every difficulty. The blessed Jesus, who is drawing you on by looks of love, will never let you go—nor cease His gracious work upon your heart! He will maintain the faith and hope He has given to you—and will never allow you to fall out of the race—but will certainly bring you off a winner, and crown you with eternal victory!

Comfort your hearts

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, who has loved us, and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts." 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17

Let this be ever borne in mind—that whatever affliction befalls the children of God, it is laid upon them by the hand of God—and that for the express purpose of putting them into a situation and making them capable of receiving those comforts which God only can bestow. All our trials and afflictions, whether temporal or spiritual, pave the way for what the apostle prays for so earnestly in our text—that the Lord Himself would comfort your hearts.

Observe that Paul makes no mention of earthly comfort. "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father. . . .comfort your hearts." O none but Jesus Himself and the Father can comfort a truly afflicted heart! But He can and does from time to time comfort His dear people—by a sense of His presence—by a word of power from His gracious lips—by the light of His countenance—by the balm of His atoning blood and dying love—by the work and witness of the Spirit within. And as they receive this consolation from the mouth of God—their hearts are comforted.

The hypocrite's hope

"The hypocrite's hope shall perish." Job 8:13

The hope of the hypocrite is any hope based upon self—whatever shape or form self may assume. The hope of the hypocrite is—any expectation that God will reward you for your good works—any hope that He will be merciful to you because you have not been so bad as others—any hope that by the exertion of your own strength and wisdom you may some day be in a better position to die than you are now—any hope based upon a mere profession of truth without a feeling experience of its power—any hope that stands upon the good opinion of others, and does not rest upon the

testimony of the Spirit of God within. In a word, every hope which is not lodged by the breath of God in the heart, is the hope of the hypocrite.

Going to heaven?

"That those who don't see may see; and that those who see may become blind." John 9:39

Many who think themselves going to heaven—are going to hell. And many who fear they are going to hell—are going to heaven. Many who think themselves wise and in the light—are in ignorance and darkness; while many who feel themselves ignorant and foolish—have true knowledge and wisdom.

It was sovereign grace

The sovereignty of God is a great mystery—a mystery so profound as to be absolutely unfathomable by the human intellect. Unable, therefore, or unwilling to believe what they cannot comprehend—men have denied the sovereignty of God, and sought, with feeble hands, to wrest the scepter of omnipotence out of the grasp of the mighty Lord of heaven and earth—the great and glorious Arbiter of all events, and Disposer of all circumstances. But the child of grace, who is under divine teaching, whatever may have been his strong prejudices against, or his violent opposition to scripture truth in the days of his ignorance—is brought sooner or later to see and acknowledge the sovereignty of God. And when he is led into the mystery, he receives it as a most blessed truth.

As his eye is opened to see the sovereign hand of God in fixing and determining the circumstances of his earthly being—he sees how all was arranged by infinite wisdom and executed by infinite power. And when he comes to the department of grace, and can with believing eye trace out the dealings of God with his soul, then, in a more conspicuous manner still, does the sovereignty of God beam upon his heart. For well he knows that 'free will' had no place there—and that it was not of him who wills, or of him who runs—but of God who shows mercy. How plainly he sees and feels that it was sovereign grace—which first arrested him on his downward course—which made him feel the burden of sin—which put a cry and a sigh into his soul—which brought him to the footstool of mercy—which revealed the Savior—and applied the message of mercy and peace to his heart. Thus what some deny and others dispute—he is brought to receive in the simplicity of faith, as most glorifying to God and suitable to man—and as he receives it, he admires it, adores it, and submits to it!

Planted by Satan

"The tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil." Matthew 13:38, 39

The Church is overrun with nominal professors, who are destitute of the fear of God, and who have nothing of the grace of God in their souls. They have been planted by Satan into the Church with a 'profession of religion,' while their hearts are utterly devoid of the power of vital godliness. This high, towering, lofty, soaring, presumptuous professor has his head thoroughly stored with the doctrines of grace, but he is destitute of the feeling power of vital godliness in his soul. He has never felt the powerful hand of God upon him to crush him into the dust—he has never fallen down before the throne of God's majesty and mercy as a ruined wretch without hope or help—he has

never been brought in guilty before the Lord—he has never been reduced to complete beggary, poverty, and insolvency in self. He is but a 'natural man in a profession of religion,' and has experienced nothing of the sovereign teachings and Divine operations of God the Holy Spirit in his conscience.

Know nothing, have nothing, be nothing

In the beginning of my experience in the things of God, which is now more than twenty-nine years ago, I had this truth impressed upon my conscience, as I have reason to believe, very powerfully and very distinctly, by the finger of God—that I could know nothing—but by divine teaching; have nothing—but by divine giving; and be nothing—but by divine making.

There are many idols in the heart

There are many idols in the heart—many earthly joys, bosom toys, vile lusts, and creature things—all which take great hold upon our affections. These have to be torn asunder, and nothing short of the power of God can do it effectually.

With hell are we at agreement

"Because you have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." Isaiah 28:15

How the Lord here lays bare the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of a religion which stands in creature righteousness, putting as it were into the mouths of its professo

Volume 9

This internal warfare

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

The believer is heavily burdened with a daily conflict. This conflict between a body of sin and the holy, pure, and divine nature of which God's people are made partakers—lasts during the whole of our mortal span upon earth. Lasts, did I say? It increases in intensity. This internal warfare is more or less experienced by all God's family. But what a burden it is to have such a daily conflict with a body of sin! It is the greatest burden that we have on earth. We all have our trials—heavy trials. But of all the burdens that I am acquainted with—the daily conflict with the workings of my corrupt heart—my fallen and depraved nature perpetually lusting to evil entangling my eye, catching my affections, ensnaring my soul, dragging me, or drawing me into everything that is foul and filthy, base and vile, not externally, through mercy, but internally—forms the heaviest burden I have to carry. The conflict I daily and sometimes hourly feel with my wretched heart has been my trouble and grief continually.

Now when we are so laden with a body of sin and death—when we feel such vile sins perpetually struggling for the mastery—and such a depraved heart pouring forth its polluted streams—when we feel this common sewer of our depraved nature pouring forth this polluted stream—must it not make us grieve and groan? Yes, daily make a living soul grieve and groan—draw at times scalding tears from his eye—and force convulsive sobs from his burdened bosom—to feel that he is such a monster of depravity and iniquity—that though God keeps his feet so that he does not fall outwardly and manifestly—yet there is such a tide of iniquity flowing in his heart, polluting his conscience continually.

Jesus fixes His penetrating gaze, His sympathizing eye upon, and opens the tenderness and compassion of His loving bosom unto those who are weary and carry heavy burdens—to His poor, suffering, sorrowing, groaning, and mourning family—to those who have no one else to look to—those who are burdened in their consciences, troubled in their minds, and distressed in their souls. He says to such, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."

Where else can I hide?

"For in the time of trouble He will hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle will He hide me; He will set me up upon a rock." Psalm 27:5

We have no refuge but Jesus where we can hide our guilty heads. Where else can I hide? In the law? That curses. In self? That is treacherous. In the world? That is under the curse of God. In my own righteousness? That is filthy rags. In my own strength? All is weakness. In my own resolutions of amendment? They will all issue in my falling more foully than before.

Take the lid off the boiling pot

All true sight and knowledge of our sinfulness flows from the teachings of the Spirit. As, therefore, we obtain light from on high, and feel spiritual life in our bosom, there is a deeper discovery of our own miserable state, until we are brought to see and feel, that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwells no good thing. Now this will ever be in a proportionate degree to the manifestation of the purity and holiness of the character of God, to the soul. This will effectually dispel all dreams of human purity and creature perfection. Let one ray of divine light shine into the soul out of the holiness of God—how it discovers and lays bare the hypocrisy and wickedness of the human heart! How it seems to take the lid off the boiling pot, and shows us human nature heaving, bubbling, boiling up with pride, unbelief, infidelity, enmity against God, peevishness, discontent—every hateful, foul, unclean lust—every base propensity and filthy desire. To know yourself, you must look below the lid to see how it steams, and hisses, and throws up its thick and filthy scum from the bottom of the cauldron. A calm may be on the face, but a boiling sea within.

It is this laying bare of our deep-seated malady that makes a soul under the first teachings of the Spirit feel itself lost. And oh, what a word! Lost! utterly lost! The purity of the divine image lost—and with it, utter loss of power to return to God. What a condition to be in! Without power, without will—an enemy and a rebel—by nature hating God and godliness—when we would do good, to find evil, horrid evil, present with us—to feel sin thrusting its hateful head into every thought, word, and action, so that when we would settle down and find rest in self, "all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean" Isaiah 28:8.

Where this is opened up in a man's soul, and a corresponding sense of the purity and holiness of God is manifested, he will see and feel himself too the vilest of the vile—and he will be glad to put his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. Now in this melancholy state, what can such a poor lost wretch do? Condemned by the law—hunted by Satan—pursued by conscience—alarmed by fear of death—troubled with a dread of eternal perdition—what can he do to save himself? When, in the depth of his soul, he knows himself "lost, lost, lost!" and feels the inability of the creature to save—this is the man, this is the spot, unto whom and into which the Savior and salvation comes—and he, and he alone, will welcome and drink in with greedy ears the joyful sound of salvation by grace.

But oh, the tender mercy, heavenly grace, and sympathizing compassion of the Triune Jehovah! When man was sunk in the lowest depths of the fall—ruined and alienated from the life of God—that the Son of God should become the Son of Man, to suffer, bleed, and die for such wretches—and thus be a Mediator able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him!

The greatest attainment in religion

"But we glory in tribulations." Romans 5:3

What would you say was the greatest attainment in religion? If this question were put to different people, the answer might be different. One might say, "It is to be well established in the doctrines of the gospel—to be no longer a child tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine—but to be rooted and grounded in the truth as it is in Jesus." Another might answer, "It is to have much enjoyment of the Spirit, grace and presence of God in the soul—to have clear and blessed views of our interest in Jesus—and to experience a continual sense of that perfect love which casts out fear, and of that peace which passes all understanding." Another might reply, "It is to have a

conscience very tender and alive to the evil of sin—to walk very humbly with God—to be kept very close at His footstool—and to be watchful and prayerful all the day long." Another might say, "It consists in having the mind and will of Christ stamped on the soul—in walking with the strictest regard to all the precepts of the gospel—and in having heart, lip and life perfectly conformed to the image and example of the Lord Jesus."

Now I do not say that all or any of these answers would be wrong—but I do say that none of them would precisely hit the mark. "Well, then," it may be asked, "what do you think to be the greatest attainment in religion?" I answer, "to glory in tribulations." That was certainly the mind of the Apostle Paul. "But we glory in tribulations."

Sail down the stream of a dead profession

Now here a living soul differs from all others, whether dead in sin, or dead in a religious profession—the persuasion that in God alone is true happiness. The feeling of misery and dissatisfaction with everything else but the Lord, and everything short of His manifested presence—is that which stamps the reality of the life of God in a man's soul. Mere 'professors of religion' feel no misery, dissatisfaction, or wretchedness, if God does not shine upon them. So long as the world smiles, and they have all that heart can wish, so long as they are buoyed up by the hypocrite's hope, and lulled asleep by the soft breezes of flattery—they are well satisfied to sail down the stream of a dead profession.

But it is not so with the living soul—he is at times panting after the smiles of God—he is thirsting after His manifested presence—he feels dissatisfied with the world, and all that it presents—if he cannot find the Lord, and does not enjoy the light of His countenance. Where this is experienced, it stamps a man as having the grace of God in his heart.

Have you ever felt the love of God in your souls?

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." Romans 5:5

Have you ever felt the love of God in your souls? If you have felt it shed abroad there, I will tell you what it has done for you. It has made your soul burn with love to Him in return. It has drawn forth the affections of your heart to embrace Jesus as your all in all. It has deadened the world, and all that the world can offer, in your estimation. It has made you earnestly long to be with Christ, that you may bathe in His love, see Him as He is, and enjoy Him forever!

That eternal line which separates

The true believer can never be satisfied with 'doctrine in the mere letter'—nor can he ever rest until he has the manifestation and discovery of it with power to his heart by the Holy Spirit. And here is that eternal line which separates the living from the dead—here is that narrow, narrow path which distinguishes the heaven-born children, from those who are wrapped up in a nominal profession. The living family must have the power of the truth in their hearts—while others are satisfied with the mere form of truth in their heads. The living family must have heavenly teaching, while those who are dead in sin can be contented with seeing truth in the Scriptures—without a feeling application of it with dew and savor to their hearts.

Dipped in love

"Blessed is the man whom You discipline, O Lord." Psalm 94:12

Until we are chastened, we make this present world our home—and a very pleasant paradise it is. Our children, friendships, pursuits, worldly ease, the many airy castles that we build up—are all very pleasant to us, until strokes of chastisement come, and the Lord begins to afflict us in body, in family, or in soul. Yet how kind it is, and all the kinder for being painful—for the Lord to chasten us back to our true home! He will not let us lie down in the green fields and flowery meadows, and sleep under the trees. His strokes are strokes dipped in love—and, however cutting to the flesh, if blessed by the Spirit, they are made instrumental in driving us home, bringing us to our right mind, and showing us where true rest is only to be found—in Christ, in His love, grace, and suitability—in all that He is and all that He has. What a wise and kind parent, then, He is to chasten us—though painful at the time!

The difference between a believer & an unbeliever

"Blessed is the man whom You discipline, O Lord." Psalm 94:12

Nothing comes to a child of God as a matter of accident or chance. It all proceeds from God—and all is dealt out in measure and for certain purposes. If the Lord touches our bodies—it is for our spiritual good. If He brings affliction through our children—it is for our spiritual good. If He afflicts us in our circumstances—it is for our spiritual good. When the eye is opened to see—the ear to hear—the heart to believe—and the conscience made tender to feel—we know and confess that these things are sent from God.

Here is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. The unbeliever says, 'it is chance!' for unbelief sees the hand of God in nothing. The believer says, 'it is the Lord!' for faith sees the hand of God in everything. There are many afflicted—but only few chastened. Many have abundance of worldly trouble—but only God's people are really chastened, so as to see and feel the hand of God in the rod, and submit to it as such. Here is all the difference between a believer and an unbeliever—between a child of God and an infidel.

Rods of different sizes

"Blessed is the man whom You discipline, O Lord." Psalm 94:12

The Lord has various ways of chastising His people. But He generally selects such chastisement as is peculiarly adapted to the individual whom He chastens. What would be a very great chastisement for you—might not be so to me. And what on the other hand might be a very severe stroke to me—might not be so to you. Our dispositions, our constitutions, and our experiences may all differ—and therefore that chastening is selected which is suitable to the individual. It is as though the Lord has suspended in His heavenly closet, a number of rods of different sizes. And He takes out that very rod which is just adapted to the very child whom He intends to chastise—inflicting it in such a measure—at the precise time—and in such a way as is exactly fitted to the individual to be chastised. And here is the wisdom of God signally displayed.

The Lord, for instance, sees fit to chasten some in body. It is in sickness and affliction, oftentimes, that the Lord is pleased to—manifest Himself to our souls—bless us with His presence—and stir up in us a spirit of prayer. I myself am a living witness of it. The greatest blessings I have ever had—the sweetest manifestations of the Lord to my soul—have been upon a sick bed. Illness is

often very profitable. When the Lord is pleased to manifest Himself in them, bodily afflictions—separate us from the world—set our hearts upon heavenly things—and draw our affections from the things of time and sense!

Fleeting, fluctuating opinions of worms

"Blessed is the man whom You discipline, O Lord." Psalm 94:12

What a different estimate men form of blessedness and happiness—from that which God has declared in His word to be such! If we listen to the opinions of men about happiness, would not their language be something like this, "Happiness consists in health and strength—in an abundance of the comforts, luxuries, and pleasures of life—in an amiable and affectionate partner—in children healthy, obedient, and well-provided for in the world—in a long and successful life, closed by an easy and tranquil death." I think a unsaved man would, if he did not use the very words, express his ideas of happiness pretty much in the substance of what I have just sketched out.

But when we come to what the Lord God Almighty has declared to be happiness—when we turn aside from the opinions of men, to the expressed words and revealed ways of the Lord, what do we find 'blessedness' to consist in? Who are the people that the unerring God of truth has pronounced to be blessed? "Blessed are—the poor in spirit—those who mourn—the meek—those who hunger and thirst after righteousness—the merciful—the pure in heart." And again, in the words of our text, "Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord." These are the unerring words of God—and by His words man will be tried. It is not the fleeting, fluctuating opinions of worms of the earth—but it is the unerring declaration of the only true God by which these matters are to be decided!

The two characters in the temple

Look at the two characters in the temple. See the proud Pharisee buoyed up with his own righteousness! Was that man, as he thought, near to God? But what set him so far from the Lord? His self-righteousness—it was that which set him far from God—the pride which he took in his doings and duties! Now, look at the tax collector, who in his own feelings was indeed far from God, for he dared not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven. But which was nearer to God—the broken-hearted tax collector—or the self-righteous Pharisee?

So when a man may think himself nearest to God by his doings and duties, by his obedience and consistency—by this very self-righteousness he thrusts himself away from God—for he secretly despises the gospel of Christ, makes himself his own savior—and, therefore, pours contempt on the blood and obedience of the Son of God. Thus, a poor guilty sinner, who in his own feelings is ready to perish, and but a miserable outcast, is brought near to God by the righteousness of the gospel—while the Pharisee is kept far from God by the wall of self-righteousness, which his own hands have built and plastered.

It is to the perishing and the outcast that the gospel makes such sweet melody. And why? Because it tells them the work of Christ is a finished work—that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin—because it assures them that His righteousness is upon all who believe—because it proclaims mercy for the miserable—pardon for the guilty—salvation for the lost—and that where

sin has abounded, there grace does much more abound!

The road to heaven

"But the gateway to life is small, and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it." Matthew 7:14

Man cannot obtain eternal life by any wisdom, any strength, any righteousness, or any goodness of his own. We are very slow learners in this school. The pride of our heart, our ignorance, and our unbelief—all conspire to make us diminish the difficulties of the way. But the Lord has to teach us by painful experience that the road to heaven is so difficult that a man can only walk in it as he is put in and kept in it by an almighty hand.

Think for a moment

"A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." Matthew 12:20

When you think for a moment—how filthy and abominable your corruptions are—how strong and powerful your lusts and passions—how many and grievous your slips and falls—how carnal your mind—how cold and lifeless too often your frame—how wandering your prayers—how worldly your inclinations—how earthly and sensual your desires—is it not sometimes a wonder to you, that the Almighty God does not in righteous wrath put His foot upon you and crush you into hell, as we crush a spider? We deserve it every day that we live. I might almost say, that with well near every breath that we draw we deserve, deeply deserve—to be stamped out of life—and crushed into a never-ending hell.

But herein is manifested the tender condescending mercy and grace of the compassionate Redeemer—that He will not quench the smoking flax—but will keep the flame alive which He Himself so mercifully in the first instance kindled. The hand that brought the spark must keep alive the flame—for as no man can quicken, so no man can keep alive his own soul. How it is kept alive is indeed most mysterious—but kept alive it is.

Does it not sometimes seem to you as though you had no life of God in your soul—not a spark of grace in your heart? Where is your religion? Where is your faith and hope and love? Where your spirituality and tenderness of heart, conscience, and affections? Where your breathings after God? Gone, gone, gone! And all would be utterly, irrecoverably gone—if it were in your own hands—and consigned to your own keeping. But it is in better hands and better keeping than yours! Christ's sheep shall never perish—and none shall pluck them out of His hand! And thus it comes to pass, that the "smoking flax" is never quenched.

O how quickly would Satan throw water upon it! He would soon, if permitted, pour forth the flood of his temptations, to extinguish the holy flame that smoulders within. How sin, also, again and again pours forth a whole flood of corruption to overcome and extinguish the life of God in the soul! The world without, and the worse world within—would soon drown it in his destruction and perdition—were the Lord to keep back His protecting hand! Have you not wondered sometimes, that when you have been so cold, so dead, so stupid, so hardened—as if you had not one spark of true religion or one grain of real grace—yet all of a sudden you have found your heart softened, melted, moved, stirred, watered, blessed—and you have felt an inward persuasion that in spite of all your corruptions and sins and sorrows—there is the life of God within?

It is thus that the blessed Lord keeps alive the holy flame which He Himself has kindled. Otherwise, it would soon go out—no, it must go out—unless He keeps it alive! O how Satan would triumph if any saint ever fell out of the embraces of the good Shepherd—if he could point his derisive finger up to heaven's gate and to its risen King, and say, 'Your blood was shed in vain for this wretch—he is mine—he is mine!' Such a boast would fill hell with a yell of triumph. But no, no! it never will be so! The blood which cleanses from all sin never was, never can be shed in vain! Though the flax "smokes," it will never be extinguished!

Temptation

Is there one temptation that you can master? Is there any one sin that you can, without divine help, crucify? Is there one lust that you can, without special grace, subdue? We are total weakness in this matter!

There is nothing which makes us feel our weakness so much as an acquaintance with temptation. Temptation brings to light the evils of the heart. These are, for the most part, unnoticed and unknown until temptation discovers them. David's adulterous, murderous heart—Hezekiah's pride—Job's peevishness—Jonah's rebellion—Peter's cowardice—all lay hidden and concealed in their bosoms until temptation drew them forth. Temptation did not put them there—but found them there. Two effects are produced by temptations—

1. Pride, strength, and self-righteousness are more or less crushed.
2. The heart is bruised and made tender.

You perhaps get entangled in a sinful snare—you are overtaken by some stratagem of Satan—or some besetment from within. And what is the consequence? Guilt lies hard and heavy upon your conscience. This bruises it—makes it tender and sore—and often cuts deeply into it until it bleeds at well-near every pore!

When I am weak

"When I am weak, then am I strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10

A child of God in himself is all weakness. Others may boast of their strength—but he has none—and he feels he has none. But it is one thing to subscribe to this truth as a matter of doctrine—and another to be acquainted with it as a matter of inward, personal experience. It must be learned—painfully for the most part—inwardly learned under the teachings of the Spirit. Now it is this weakness—experimentally known and felt—that opens the way for a personal experience of the strength of Christ. For when Paul was groaning under the buffetings of Satan and the festering throbs of the thorn in the flesh, the Lord Himself said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." If, therefore, we do not experimentally know what weakness is—we cannot know experimentally what it is to have the strength of Christ made perfect in that weakness!

A time to weep

"A time to weep." Ecclesiastes 3:4

Does a man only weep once in his life? Does not the time of weeping run, more or less, throughout a Christian's life? Does not mourning run parallel with his existence in this tabernacle of clay? For man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards. True Christians will know many times to weep—they will have often to sigh and cry over their base hearts—to mourn with tears of godly sorrow their backslidings from God—to weep over their broken idols, faded hopes, and marred prospects—to weep at having so grieved the Spirit of God by their disobedience, carnality, and worldliness.

But above all things will they have to weep over the inward idolatries of their filthy nature—to weep that they ever should have treated with such insult that God whom they desire to love and adore—that they should so neglect and turn their backs upon that Savior who crowns them with loving-kindness and tender mercies—and that they bear so little in mind, the instruction that has been communicated to them by the Holy Spirit.

Oh, how different is the weeping, chastened spirit of a living soul from the hardened, seared presumption of a proud professor! How different are the feelings of a broken-hearted child of God from the lightness, the frivolity, the emptiness, and the worldliness—of hundreds who stand in a profession of religion! How different is a mourning saint, weeping in his solitary corner over his base backslidings—from a reckless professor who justifies himself in every action, who thinks sin a light thing, and who, however inconsistently he acts—never feels conscience wounded thereby.

A time to mourn

"A time to mourn." Ecclesiastes 3:4

We need indeed to mourn over our wretched hearts—that we are so carnal, so stupid, and so earthly—that we have so little power to resist our evil passions. We need to mourn over our lightness—our frivolity—our emptiness—the things that drop from our lips—the unsteadiness of our walk in the strait and narrow path—our many declensions, backslidings, and secret departures from the Lord. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

The flesh

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh." John 3:6

There is no promise made that in this life, we shall be set free from the indwelling and the in-working of sin. Many think that their flesh is to become "progressively holier and holier"—that sin after sin is to be removed gradually out of the heart—until at last they are almost made perfect in the flesh. But this is an idle dream, and one which, sooner or later will be crudely and roughly broken to pieces.

The flesh will ever remain the same—and we shall ever find that the flesh will lust against the Spirit. Our fleshly nature is corrupt to the very core. It cannot be mended. It cannot be sanctified. It is the same at the last, as it was at the first—inherently evil, and as such will never cease to be corrupt until we put off mortality—and with it the body of sin and death.

All we can hope for, long after, expect, and pray for—is that this evil fleshly nature may be subdued, kept down, mortified, crucified, and held in subjection under the power of grace. But as to any such change passing upon the flesh—or taking place in the flesh as to make it holy—it is

but a pharisaic delusion, which, promising a holiness in the flesh, leaves us still under the power of sin.

The true sanctification of the new man of grace—which is wrought by a divine power—is utterly distinct from any imagined holiness in the flesh—or any vain dream of its progressive sanctification.

Bought with a price

"For you are bought with a price." 1 Corinthians 6:20

How deep—how dreadful—of what dreadful magnitude—of how black a dye—of how ingrained a stamp must sin be—to need such an atonement—no less than the blood of the Son of God—to take it away! What a slave to sin and Satan—what a captive to the power of lust—how deeply sunk, how awfully degraded—how utterly lost and undone must guilty man be—to need a sacrifice like this!

Have you ever felt your bondage to sin, Satan, and the world? Have you ever groaned, cried, grieved, sorrowed, and lamented under your miserable captivity to the power of sin? Has the iron ever entered into your soul? Have you ever clanked your fetters, and as you did so, and tried to burst them, they seemed to bind round about you with a weight scarcely endurable?

You were slaves of sin and Satan—you were shut up in the dark cell, where all was gloom and despondency—there was little hope in your soul of ever being saved. But there was an entrance of gospel light into your dungeon—there was a coming out of the house of bondage—there was a being brought into the light of God's countenance, shining forth in His dear Son. Now, this is not only being bought with a price, but experiencing the blessed effects of it.

Laboring under temptations

Some of the Lord's family are laboring under temptations. And these temptations are so suitable to their fallen nature—and they are so unable in their own strength to overcome them—that they are afraid lest one day they should be awfully carried away by them. The lusts of their flesh—the evils and corruptions of their wicked heart—the daily, hourly snares that Satan spreads for their feet—their own thorough helplessness—their own proneness to fall into these very snares—all contribute to distress their souls. And thus, sometimes, in an agony of soul, the tears rolling down their cheeks, and heaving sobs gushing from their bosom—they are importunate with the Lord—to deliver them from this temptation—to break this snare—to set their soul free from this besetting sin in which they are so cruelly and grievously entangled.

What does God see in you?

Has it not sometimes surprised you that God ever heard your prayers? And what has been the reason of this surprise? Has it not been this? "My prayers are so polluted—my thoughts so wandering—my mind so carnal—my lusts so strong—my corruptions so powerful—my backslidings so innumerable! O, when I view these things I wonder that God can hear my prayers!" And well you may wonder—if you look at the matter in that way.

God does not hear your prayers because there is anything good in you! How could it be? What does God see in you? A mass of filth and folly! There is in you nothing else. Then why does God hear prayer—and answer it too? Only through Jesus. Prayer ascends through Jesus—and answers descend through Jesus. Groans through Jesus enter the ear of God Almighty—and through the same open gate of bleeding mercy, do answers drop into the soul.

Our poor self-righteous hearts can hardly comprehend this—and we think we must have a good frame, or bring a good deed, or a good heart to make our prayers acceptable to God. Perish the thought! This is nothing but the spawn of self-righteousness!

He cannot find real pleasure in the world

The human heart must be engaged upon something—its affections must be fixed upon some object—its thoughts and desires must be occupied with one thing or other. If his heart, then, is not set Godwards, if his affections are not fixed upon Christ, if his soul is not engaged on heavenly things—he may have the greatest profession of religion, but his heart is still worldly, his affections still earthly, and his soul still going out after idols.

But where the Lord has really touched the conscience with His finger, and made Himself precious to the soul—however a man may seem for a time to be buried in the world, and his affections going out after forbidden objects—however he may be hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns which can hold no water—however he may secretly backslide from the Lord—still he cannot break the hold that eternal things have upon his heart—he cannot find real pleasure in the world, though he may often seek it. Nor can he bury himself contentedly in its pursuits. There will be a restless dissatisfaction with the things of time and sense—an aching void—and a turning again to the stronghold—a seeking the Lord, who alone can really satisfy the soul, and make it happy for time and eternity!

Natural conviction for sin

Godly sorrow for sin differs much from natural conviction for sin. Powerful natural convictions, I believe, for the most part are not felt more than once or twice in a man's life—and when they have passed away—the conscience is more seared than it was before—the world more eagerly grasped—and sin more impetuously plunged into.

But 'godly sorrow' is produced by a supernatural work of grace on the heart. The eye of faith sees sin in the light of God's countenance—and thus the soul becomes alive to its dreadful evil and horrible character. The heart too is melted down into godly sorrow by beholding the Savior's sufferings—and viewing the Lord of life and glory as stooping and agonizing under the weight of sin—not only as imputed to Him—but as pressing Him down into anguish and distress. And thus, godly sorrow for sin is not a thing which a man feels once or twice in his life—but from time to time, as the Spirit works it in his heart, godly sorrow flows forth. If he has been—entangled in sin—overcome by temptation—slidden back into the world—or his heart has gone after idols—a living soul will not pass it by as a thing of no consequence. But, sooner or later, the Spirit touches his heart—godly sorrow flows out—and his soul is melted and moved by feeling what a base wretch he is in the sight of a holy God.

Objects of undeserved love

"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Romans 9:15

God sooner or later brings every elect soul to this conclusion—that those who are saved are saved, because God will save them—that He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and on them alone—that He saves them not for any foreseen goodness in them, but of His own discriminating, sovereign grace—that He loves them freely, eternally and unchangeably—and that they are redeemed, justified, quickened, sanctified, preserved, and glorified—only because they are the objects of the undeserved love of a Triune Jehovah!

Humility

Humility springs from a knowledge of God and a knowledge of one's self. It consists—in a spiritual acquaintance with the deceit and wickedness of the heart—in esteeming others better than ourselves—in feeling how little grace and real religion we possess—in confessions to God and man of our vileness—in sitting at Jesus' feet to be taught by Him—in taking the lowest room among the children of God—in feeling our helplessness, weakness, foolishness and nothingness!

Godly fear

Godly fear—realizes God's heart-searching presence—trembles at His frown—dreads His displeasure—is afraid of His judgments—feels His chastening hand—and seeks above all things His favor and the light of His countenance!

Conversion

Conversion consists in—a change of heart—a change of affections—a change of feelings—a turning from formality to spirituality—from free-will to free-grace—from self-righteousness to self-abhorrence—from hypocrisy to honesty—from self-justification to self-condemnation—from profession to power!

Found in hypocrites, apostates & reprobates

If, then, we are asked what it is which saves a soul, we answer that it is not works of righteousness which we have done or can do—nor the use of our free-will, which is only free to choose and love evil—nor watchfulness, prayer and fasting—nor self-denial, austerity and outward sanctification—nor any duties and forms—nor, in a word, any one thing singly, or multitude of things collectively, which depend on the natural wisdom and strength of man. Nor, again, is it head-knowledge—nor firm conviction of truth in the judgment—nor such workings of natural conscience as compel us to assent to a free grace salvation—nor a life outwardly consistent with the gospel—nor membership in a gospel church—nor natural attachment to the children and to the ministers of God—nor zeal for experimental religion—nor sacrifices made to support truth.

Nor, again, does salvation consist in doubts and fears, tribulations, temptations, workings of inward corruption, legal terrors, fits of gloomy despondency and heart-rending despair. All these things "accompany salvation," and are to be found in all the heirs of glory—but some of them or all may equally be found in hypocrites, apostates and reprobates. Neither does salvation consist in outward gifts, as preaching and praying, as a man may taste of the heavenly gift—and yet his end be to be burned. Saul prophesied—Judas preached—and the sons of Sceva cast out demons by

the name of Jesus.

Salvation consists of three parts

Salvation consists of three parts—salvation past—salvation present—and salvation future. Salvation past consists in having our names written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world. Salvation present consists in the manifestation of Jesus to the soul, whereby He betroths it to Himself. Salvation future consists in the eternal enjoyment of Christ, when the elect shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and be forever with the Lord.

Now, as none will ever enjoy salvation future who have no interest in salvation past—in other words, as none will ever be with Christ in eternal glory whose names were not written in the book of life from all eternity—so none will enjoy salvation future who live and die without enjoying salvation present. In other words, none will live forever with Christ in glory, who are not betrothed to Him in this life by the manifestations of Himself to their soul.

Salvation as an internal reality

All doctrines, notions, forms, creeds, ordinances and ceremonies—short of experiential salvation—are as the dust in the balance, and as the driven stubble before the wind. What, for instance, is election—except it be revealed to my soul that I was elected before the foundation of the world? What is redemption to me—except the atoning blood of the Lamb be sprinkled on my conscience? What is the everlasting love of a Triune Jehovah—unless that eternal love be shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit? What is the final perseverance of the saints—unless there is a blessed enjoyment of it in the conscience as a personal reality? To see these things revealed in the Bible is nothing. To hear them preached by one of God's ministers is nothing. To receive the truth of these into our judgment, and to yield to them an unwavering assent is nothing. Thousands have done all this, who are blaspheming God in hell.

But to have eternal election, personal redemption, imputed righteousness, unfailing love, and all the other blessed links of the golden chain let down into the soul from the throne of God—to have the beauty, glory and blessedness of salvation revealed to the heart and sealed upon the conscience—this is all in all. A man's soul must be damned or saved. And a man must have salvation as an internal reality—as a known, enjoyed, tasted, felt and handled possession—or he will never enter the kingdom of heaven. He may be Churchman or Dissenter, Calvinist or Arminian, Baptist or Independent, anything or everything—and yet all his profession is no more towards his salvation than the cut of his clothes, the height of his stature, or the color of his complexion. And thus all a man's—consistency of life—soundness of creed—walking in the ordinances—long and steady profession—and everything on which thousands are resting for salvation, of a merely external nature—can no more put away sin, satisfy the justice of God, and give the soul a title for heaven, than the lewd conversation of a harlot!

Man's religion

Man would teach religion as he teaches arithmetic or mathematics. This rule is to be learned—this sum is to be done—this problem is to be understood—this difficulty is to be overcome—and thus progress is to be made. Religion, according to the received creed—is something which a man must be urged into. He must be made religious somehow or other. He must either be—driven or

drawn—wheeled or threatened—enticed or whipped into it—by human arguments or human persuasions. Religion is set before him as a river between his soul and heaven. Into this river he is persuaded, invited, exhorted, entreated to jump. He must leap in, or be pushed in. His feelings are wrought upon, and he takes the prescribed spring. He becomes a professor. He hears—he reads—he prays—he supports the cause—he attends the Sunday School—he models his garb according to the regimentals of the party to which he belongs—he furnishes his mind with the creed of the sect which he has joined. He talks as it talks—believes as it believes—and acts as it acts. And all this is called "conversion" and "decided piety," when all this time there is not—an atom of grace—a grain of spiritual faith—or a spark of divine life in the poor wretch's soul.

Man's religion is to put a stick here—and place a stone there—to fill up this corner with a brick and the other corner with a tile—and in this progressive way to build a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven!

This ceaseless conflict

Temptations are a source of spiritual affliction to God's people. They often, in passing through temptations, think themselves different from all others. They can scarcely believe that any other children of God are as tempted as they are—that such vile thoughts—such base desires—such carnal imaginations—such wicked lusts—should work in the minds of others, who appear to them to be holy and spiritual. They often write bitter things against themselves in consequence of these temptations—to infidelity—to blasphemy—to renounce the cause of God and truth—to commit the vilest sins painted in the imagination—to pride—to hypocrisy—to presumption—and despair. These various temptations lie heavy on a tender conscience, and cut deep just in proportion to the depth of godly fear within.

The daily conflict that we have to maintain in our souls against the world, the flesh, and the devil—the struggle of grace against nature, and of nature against grace—the sinkings of the one, and the risings of the other, that are perpetually going on in the souls of God's people—this ceaseless conflict is an affliction that the Lord's people are all called on to pass through.

What mysterious arithmetic!

"Count it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." James 1:2

See the transmuting effect of grace enabling the tried and tempted family of God to count it pure joy, whenever they face trials of many kinds. We have here a problem in arithmetic. Take all your trials and mark them down. Now add them up, and what is the sum total? "Joy!" What mysterious arithmetic! How unlike the addition taught in schools! How different from the sums and problems in the lesson books! How different, also, a result does the Lord bring out from your own calculations when you looked at them one by one, without adding up the whole sum! Then "count it pure joy" whenever you face trials of many kinds, knowing that their effect is—to wean you from the world—to endear Christ—to render His truth precious—and to make you fit for your eternal inheritance. Are you satisfied with the solution of the problem? Can you write down your own name at the bottom of the sum and say, "It is proved—I carry the proof in my own bosom?"

The height of Christian maturity

What is the greatest height of grace to which the soul can arrive? To submit wholly to the will of God, and be lost and swallowed up in conformity to it—is the height of Christian maturity here below. There is more manifested grace in the heart of a child of God who, under trial, can say, "May Your will be done," and submit himself to the chastening rod of his Heavenly Father!

Our coward flesh shrinks from the flame

When the Lord puts us in the furnace, we go in kicking and rebelling. Our coward flesh shrinks from the flame! But when we have been some time in the furnace and find that we cannot kick ourselves out, and that our very struggling only makes the coals burn more fiercely—at last, by the grace of God working in us, we begin to lie still. It was so with Job. How he fought against God! How his carnal mind was stirred up in self-justification and rebellion until the Lord Himself appeared and spoke to his heart from heaven. Then he came to this point, "I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You."

Weighed, measured & timed by infinite love

"The Lord tries the righteous." Psalm 11:5

The Lord appoints to every one of His children the peculiar path which he has to tread—and the number and weight of the burdens which he has to carry. Whatever trial, therefore, comes, it is of the Lord. The trials with which God Himself tries His people are not only numerous and various—but for the most part of a very painful and perplexing nature—yet all precisely adapted to the nature of the case and exactly suited to the state of the person tried, as being planned by unerring wisdom—and weighed, measured and timed by infinite love!

Thus, as the God of providence—as the Maker of our bodies as well as the Creator of our souls—as the God of our families who gives and takes at will the fruit of the womb—some of His children He tries with poverty—others with sickness—others with taking away the desire of their eyes at a stroke—or cutting off the tender olive plants which have sprung up round about their table and entwined round every fiber of their heart.

How sudden also, how unexpected the trials! Heavy losses in business, a sweeping away of the little savings of a life—by some fraud or failure, trick or treachery, riches making themselves wings and flying away, and poverty and need coming in as an armed man to plunder the wreck! How suddenly do such strokes come! Sickness, also, and disease—how swift their attack! The saints of God are not exempt from their share in these afflictions—many are either themselves stretched on beds of languishing and pain—or are watching by the side of afflicted relatives and dying children. How suddenly, also, trials of various kinds come! In one day Job, "the greatest of all the men of the east," lost all the substance which God had given—and the father in the morning of ten living children sat in the evening in his lonely house childless and desolate! How labor pangs fell suddenly on Rachel, and the impatient mother who had cried out "Give me children or else I die," expired under the load of her coveted burden!

The discovery of what we are

"When He has tried me, I shall come forth like gold." Job 23:10

The Lord tries the righteous by laying bare, and thus discovering to them the secret iniquities of the heart. So the Lord—to strip us of our own pride—to crush our vain confidence—to show us that all our strength is weakness, and that grace must freely sanctify as well as fully save, subdue sin as well as pardon it—often leaves us to the discovery of what we are. As, then, sin after sin becomes discovered—and the teaching of the Spirit making the heart soft and the conscience tender—the soul is painfully and acutely tried by seeing and feeling these inward abominations.

How markedly we see this in Job! In the furnace what a discovery was made of the corruptions of his heart—which before were to himself unsuspected and unknown! They had not escaped the searching eye of Omniscience—but they had much escaped the eye of the most perfect and upright man who then dwelt upon the earth. When, however this eminent saint of God was tried by afflictions and desertions—pain of body and agony of mind—then the deep and foul corruptions of his heart become manifest—and the most rebellious and unfitting expressions found vent through his lips. You may think harshly of Job—but the greatest saint, the most highly favored Christian put into the same furnace—would behave no better than he. If the Lord withdraws His presence, and leaves us to the workings of our corrupt heart—what can be the outcome but fretfulness, rebellion, murmuring thoughts, unbelief, and self-pity?

They shall walk and not faint

"They shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

Walking implies—a steady, progressive pace—a calm, steady progression in the things of God—a sober persuasion of the truth as it is in Jesus—a calm movement in the ways of the Lord—a living in peace with God, and in peace with His people—a walking in the commandments of the Lord blameless—a going onward in that humility, integrity, godly fear, tenderness of conscience, wariness, and uprightness of heart which befit the true believer.

Wait

"But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

The very word wait implies perseverance and fixed determination in the soul—that to God alone will we look. The Lord by His mysterious dealings cuts us off from resting upon an arm of flesh. He will not allow us to lean upon any friend, however near or dear. He will not let us look to any one but Himself, for He is a jealous God—and therefore He keeps cutting off link after link, tie after tie, bond after bond—that not having any human comfort, we may seek consolation only in Him.

The soaring soul

"They shall mount up with wings as eagles." Isaiah 40:31

Sometimes we are so fastened down to this earth—this valley of tears—this waste-howling wilderness. We are so chained down to it, that we are like a bird with a broken wing, and cannot soar. We are swallowed up in the world—forgetting God and godliness. But are there not times and seasons when the soul is delivered from these chains and fetters—when earthly cares drop off from the mind—when the world and its temptations—sin and its snares—are left behind—and there is a sweet soaring up in the feelings of heavenly affection? The soaring soul never ceases to

soar until it comes into the very presence of God!

The religion of a dead professor

How different the religion of a living soul is—from the religion of a dead professor! The religion of a dead professor begins in self—and ends in self; begins in his own wisdom—and ends in his own folly; begins in his own strength—and ends in his own weakness; begins in his own righteousness—and ends in his own damnation!

But the true child of God—though he is often faint, weary, and exhausted with many difficulties, burdens, and sorrows—yet when the Lord does show Himself, and renews his strength, he soars aloft, and never ceases to mount up on the wings of faith and love until he penetrates into the very sanctuary of the Most High!

All the things of time and sense leave a child of God unsatisfied. Nothing but vital union and communion with the Lord of life and glory, to—feel His presence—taste His love—enjoy His favor—see His glory—nothing but this will ever satisfy the desires of ransomed and regenerated souls!

He knows what is best for you!

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Isaiah 40:27

The path in which the family of God were then walking was exceedingly perplexing. Their "way"—that is, the path they were taking—the mode of the Lord's dealing with their soul—was so perplexing and obscure—that they could not believe it was a right way. The Lord had hidden His face from them, and did not show them the nature or reason of His dealings with them. With respect to this intricate path in which you are walking, He adds, "there is no searching of his understanding."

He knows what is best for you! And though your present path is dark and obscure in your eyes, it is bright and clear in His. He would, therefore, urge this upon the conscience of His exercised and complaining child, 'Your part is to sit still, and wait until the deliverance appear. In due time, I will explain to you the nature and reason of these mysterious dealings.'

Great barriers to receiving Christ

Self-righteousness and fleshly-holiness are as great barriers to receiving Christ into the heart—as sin and profanity.

The cause of all our misery

Now sin, horrible sin—this dreadful and damnable sin of ours—is the cause of all our misery! We not only inherited it from our first parents—but we have sinned ever since we came into being. Yes, we were conceived in sin and shaped in iniquity, and so ever since we came forth into this world until the present time, we have sinned in every thought, word and deed. Now when the Lord the Spirit begins His gracious work upon a sinner's heart and conscience, one of the first things He makes him to feel is that he is a captive to sin. He feels in a position from which he cannot extricate himself. He is tied and bound with the chain of his sins. Sin has cast around him a chain,

from which he cannot extricate himself—and under the sense of sin he feels bound in captivity and bondage. How he hails the first gleam of light that shows him the way of escape out of his dungeon!

The authors of our own misery

Ever since the fall, sorrow and disappointment have been the decreed lot of man—for on that sad and evil day when Adam sinned and fell, God cursed the ground for his sake, and declared that in sorrow he would eat of it all the days of his life. Thorns also and thistles—emblems of vexation and disappointment—the ground was to bring forth to him, and in the sweat of his face he was to eat bread, until he returned unto the ground from whence he was taken. Dust you are—and to the dust you will return! Therefore, by God's decree, sorrow and disappointment are the determined lot of man. No exertion of human skill—or subtle contrivance of earthly wisdom—can possibly avert them.

It will be our wisdom, however fair may be our present sky—to anticipate stormy winds and rough seas before we reach our destined harbor. But of all sorrows, the most cutting is that which we bring upon ourselves. And of all disappointments, the most keen is that of which we feel ourselves to be the main and miserable authors. There is not a more true nor a more stinging reproof from the mouth of God to one under His chastening hand than this, "Have you not procured this to yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord your God?" Jeremiah 2:17. There is no sorrow so keen—no disappointment so cutting—as to reflect that whatever we may suffer under God's chastening strokes—we ourselves have been the authors of our own misery!

If we are travelers Zionward

If we are travelers Zionward, we shall have our various evidences that mark us as children of God—the fear of God in a tender conscience—the spirit of grace and of supplications in their bosom—the cleaving to the people of God in warm affection—the love for the truth in its purity and power—the earnest desires—the budding hopes—the separation from the world—the humility, meekness, quietness—the general consistency of life.

The religious professor

You may take away almost anything from a man but his religion! To pronounce his faith a delusion—his hope a falsehood—and to sift his profession until nothing is left but presumption or hypocrisy—to withstand his false confidence, and declare it to be worse than the faith of devils—to analyze his religion, beginning, middle, and end, as thoroughly and unreservedly as a chemist analyzes a case of suspected poisoning—and declare the whole rotten, root and branch—can this be done without giving deadly offence? To faithfully discriminate between taking the 'mere lamp of profession' in the hand—and the vital necessity of possessing the 'oil of God's grace in the heart' if ever we are to enter heaven—will make one especially obnoxious to the professing religious world.

The religious professor receives doctrines because he sees them in the Bible. The true believer not only sees them in the Book—but he feels them in his heart—put there by the Holy Spirit. He comes to the cross because he is guilty and there is nowhere else to go. Thus the religionist and the believer (however they may resemble one another) have an eternal distinction which the hand

of God has drawn between the living and the dead.

We do not know what is to come

"As your days, so shall your strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25

The year before our eyes may hold in its bosom events which may deeply concern us and affect us. We do not know what is to come. What personal trials—what family trials—what providential trials may await us—we do not know. Sickness may attack our bodies—death enter our families—difficulties beset our circumstances—trials and temptations exercise our minds—snares entangle our feet—and many dark and gloomy clouds, make our path one of heaviness and sorrow. Every year hitherto has brought its trials in its train—and how can we expect the coming year to be exempt? If, indeed, we are His, whatever our trials may be—His grace will be sufficient for us. He who has delivered—can and will deliver. And He who has brought us thus far on the road, who has so borne with our crooked manners in the wilderness, and never yet forsaken us, though we have so often forsaken Him—will still lead us along—will still guide and guard us, and be our God, our Father and our Friend—not only to the end of the next year, if spared to see it—but the end of our life.

Blessed with His presence—we need fear no evil. Favored with His smile—we need dread no foe. Upheld by His power—we need shrink from no trial. Strengthened by His grace—we need panic at no suffering. Knowing what we are and have been when left to ourselves—the slips that we have made—the snares that we have been entangled in—the shame and sorrow that we have procured to ourselves—well may we dread to go forth in the coming year alone. Well may we say—"If Your presence doesn't go with me, don't carry us up from here!"

The only true commentator

"Temptation, prayer, and meditation," says Luther, "make a minister." These, also, we may add, make the only true Commentary upon the Word of God. By temptation and conflict, the experience of the Bible saints is entered into and realized. By prayer, and in answer to it, its spiritual meaning is opened up. And by meditation it is turned into sweet and solid nutriment. The heavenly wisdom—the unspeakable majesty and beauty—the divine savor and power—the richness and fullness—the certainty and faithfulness—the suitability and blessedness—that are stamped upon the Scripture—these prints of the hand of God can only be felt and recognized as the Holy Spirit shines upon the sacred page! He is the only true Commentator—for He alone can reach and melt the heart. And He is the only true Preacher—because He alone can seal the truth upon the soul.

We may see so much evil in ourselves

We may see so much evil in ourselves as to see nothing else. We have our eyes so fixed and riveted on the malady as to lose all view of the remedy. We dwell so much and so long on Zion's sickness as to forget there is balm still in Gilead and a mighty Physician there!

A line chalked out by a worm!

"But our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He pleases." Psalm 115:3

Jehovah does not move in a line chalked out by a worm!

The secret of all preaching

Many ministers preach gospel truths, but are not blessed. Why not? Because they have not preached them under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Their thunders are mimic thunders—their preaching is rather 'acting' than preaching. The secret of all preaching is the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. If that is denied, the tongue is merely that of the actor on the stage!

Life is fast passing away

We see and feel how life is fast passing away—the things of time and sense slipping from under our feet—the world a scene of vanity and trouble—sin everywhere running down the streets like water—and, alas! what is worse, running through our own heart, ever grieving and defiling our conscience!

What a debt of gratitude

Take the Word of God out of our hands and heart, and we wander in shades of thickest night. What a debt of gratitude do we owe to the God of all grace for the gift of His holy Word—to be to us our light and guide! And how do we best show our appreciation of, our gratitude for, this divine gift? By binding it close to our heart—by searching it daily, as for hidden treasure—by studying it, and seeking to penetrate into its inmost mind and meaning, pith and marrow, spirit and power—not scuffling over it as a schoolboy over his task, or some drudge over her work—not reading it with a listless eye and wandering mind, glad enough to close its pages and put it back on the shelf. But feeding upon the milk and honey—the meat and marrow—and sipping the cheering wine with which the Lord of the house has furnished His table. The Word of God is written for a spiritually afflicted and poor people—and they alone understand it, believe it, feel it and realize it.

Allow it to embrace you

Entanglement in worldly matters beyond what is absolutely necessary, is one of the surest hindrances to the life of God in the soul. Some of the family of God are so circumstanced in business or in their daily employment that they must necessarily have much to do with the world. But this will be neither their temptation nor their sin, if they are not entangled in nor overcome by its spirit. Joseph in the court of Pharaoh, and Daniel who ruled over an empire, maintained not only their worldly position, but their divine grace. It is not then being IN the world, but OF the world in which the danger lies. Keep the world at arms length, and it will not hurt you. But if you allow it to embrace you—you will soon yield to its seductive influence!

One of the worst spots

"You have left your first love." Revelation 2:4

We leave our first love when—our heart grows cold and dead in the things of God—sin revives and begins again to manifest its hideous power—the world attracts and allures—our feet get entangled in the snares spread for them by Satan on every side—we wander from the Lord, leaving the fountain of living waters, and hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, which hold no water. This is one of the most dangerous and one of the worst spots into which a child of God can fall.

What a mine of heavenly instruction!

O what treasures of mercy and grace are lodged in the Scriptures! What a mine of heavenly instruction! What a storehouse of precious promises, encouraging invitations, glorious truths, holy precepts, tender admonitions, wise counsels and loving directions! What a lamp to our feet and a light to our path! But O, how little we know, understand, believe, realize, feel and enjoy of the Word of life! For years have we read, studied, meditated and sought by faith to enter into the treasures of truth contained in the inspired Word. But O, how little do we understand it! How less do we believe and enjoy the heavenly mysteries—the treasures of grace and truth revealed in it! Only as our heart is brought not only unto, but into the Word of life, and only as faith feeds on the heavenly food there lodged by the infinite wisdom and goodness of God—can we be made fruitful in any good word or work.

We should seek, by the help and blessing of God—to drink more into the spirit of truth—to enter more deeply and vitally into the mind of Christ—to read the Word more under that same inspiration whereby it was written—to submit our heart more to its instruction—that it may drop like the rain and distill like the dew into the inmost depths of our soul, and thus, as it were, nourish the roots of our faith, and hope, and love.

True prayer

True prayer is something very different from—a custom of prayer—a form of prayer—or even a gift of prayer. These are merely the fleshly imitations of the interceding breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the saints of God and, therefore, may and do exist without it. But that secret lifting up of the heart unto the Lord—that panting after Him as the deer pants after the water-brooks—that pouring out of the soul before Him—that sighing and groaning for—a word of His grace—a look of His eye—a touch of His hand—a smile of His face—that sweet and heavenly communion with Him on the mercy-seat which marks the Spirit's inward intercession—all this cannot be counterfeited. Such a close, private, inward, experimental work and walk is out of the reach and out of the taste of the most gifted professor. But in this path the Holy Spirit leads the living family of God—and as they walk in it under His teachings and anointings—they feel its sweetness and blessedness.

Throw it into the river!

As to a religion that knows nothing of sighs, nor cries, nor breathings, nor groans, nor longings, nor languishings, nor meltings, nor softenings—that feels no contrition, no tenderness, no godly sorrow, no desire to please God, no fear to offend Him—away with it! Throw it into the river! Bury it in the first ash-heap you come to! The sooner it is got rid of, the better!

Religion—without heavenly teaching—without the Spirit's secret operations—without a conscience made tender in the fear of the Lord

Volume 10

The path may be rough

"And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." Psalm 107:7

When the Lord leads, we can follow. The path may be rough, but if the Lord upholds us, we can walk in it without stumbling. Whatever the Lord bids, we can do—if we have but His presence. Whatever He calls upon us to suffer, we can bear—if we have but His approving smile. Oh, the wonders of sovereign grace! The cross is no cross—if the Lord gives strength to bear it. Affliction is no affliction—if the Lord supports under it. Trial is no trial—if sweetened by His smile. Sorrow no grief—if lightened by His love.

It is our fretfulness, unbelief, carnal reasoning, rebellion, and self-pity which make the rough way, a wrong way. But grace in its all-conquering power, not only subdues every difficulty without, but what is its greater triumph, subdues every difficulty within. God's right way is to lead us forth—out of the world—out of sin—out of self—out of pride—out of self-righteousness—out of evil in every form—into everything which is good, holy, gracious, acceptable, saving, and sanctifying—into everything that can conform us to the image of Christ.

And what is the end of all this leading and guiding? That they might go to that glorious city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. There we will dwell as citizens of that blessed city which is all of pure gold, like unto clear glass—a city which has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. The Lord is leading forth each and all of His wilderness wanderers by the right way—that He may bring them into His eternal presence, and to the enjoyment of those pleasures which are at His right hand for evermore!

It has made him love sin & hate God

As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no tongue can adequately express—the state of wretchedness and ruin into which sin has cast guilty, miserable man! In separating him from God, sin severed him from the only source of all happiness and holiness. Sin has ruined him body and soul. It has filled the body with sickness and disease! It has defaced and destroyed the image of God in the soul. It has made him love sin and hate God.

Indispensably necessary

The following things are indispensably necessary to true salvation. A spiritual sense of our lost, ruined condition. A knowledge of Christ by a gracious discovery of His suitability, beauty, and blessedness. A faith in Him which—works by love—purifies the heart—overcomes the world—and delivers from death and hell.

The least religion of their own

They are the wisest—in whom creature wisdom has most ceased. They are the strongest—who have learned most experimentally their own weakness. They are the holiest—who have known most of their own filthiness. They are the most spiritual in a true sense—who have the least religion of their own.

What vain toys

Compared with spiritual and eternal blessings, we see how vain and empty are all earthly things—what vain toys—what idle dreams—what passing shadows! We wonder at the folly of men in hunting after such vain shows, and spending time, health, money, life itself, in a pursuit of nothing but misery and destruction. We care little for the opinion of men as to what is good or great—but much for what God has stamped His own approbation upon—such as—a tender conscience—a broken heart—a contrite spirit—a humble mind—a separation from the world and everything worldly—a submission to His holy will—a meek endurance of the cross—a conformity to Christ's suffering image—and a living to God's glory.

The evils of their heart

The Lord is pleased sometimes to show His dear people the evils of their heart—to remove that veil of pride and self-righteousness which hides so much of sinful SELF from our eyes—and to discover what is really in us—the deep corruptions which lurk in our depraved nature—the filth and folly which is part and parcel of ourselves—the unutterable baseness and vileness so involved in our very being.

Doctrines floating in the brain?

"He would have given you living water." John 4:10

How blessed a thing is vital godliness! That is the thing I always wish to contend for. Not for forms and ceremonies, or doctrines floating in the brain—but for the life of God in the soul. That is the only thing worth knowing—the only thing to live by—and the only thing to die by. How different is vital godliness received into the heart and conscience, by the operation of God the Spirit! How different is this fountain of living water from the 'stagnant, dead water' of lip service, formality, and hypocrisy! We cannot now be satisfied with lip religion, pharisaical religion, doctrinal religion, a name to live while dead, the form of godliness without the power. A living soul can no more satisfy his thirst with mere forms and ceremonies—than a man naturally thirsty can drink out of a pond of sand. He must have living water—something given by the Lord Himself, springing up in his soul.

True religion

True religion consists in the teachings and operations of the Holy Spirit upon the heart.

The race!

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Hebrews 12:1

None can run this race but the children of God, for the ground itself is holy ground—of which we read that no unclean beast is to be found there. None but the redeemed walk there—and none have ever won the prize but those who have run this heavenly race. Now no sooner do we see by

faith the race set before us, than we begin to run from the City of Destruction—our steps being winged with fear and apprehension. All this, especially in the outset, implies energy, movement, activity, pressing forward—running, as it were, for our life—escaping, as Lot, to the mountain—or as the manslayer fled to the city of refuge from the avenger of blood.

As, then, the runner stretches forward hands, and feet, and head, intent only on being first to reach the goal—so in the spiritual race there is a stretching forth of the faculties of the newborn soul to win the heavenly prize. There is a stretching forth of the understanding to become possessed of clear views of heavenly truth. There is a stretching forth of the affections of the heart after Jesus. So that when you look at the word "race" as emblematic of a Christian's path—you see that it is an inward movement of the soul—or rather of the grace that God has lodged in your bosom—and to which are communicated spiritual faculties—whereby it moves forward in the ways of God, under the influences of the blessed Spirit.

A divine power in my soul?

Has the Holy Spirit wrought anything with a divine power in my soul? The faith I profess—is it of God? The hope I enjoy—do I believe it came from the Lord Himself to support my soul in the trying storm? My repentance—is it genuine? My profession—is it sincere? My walk—is it consistent? My conscience—is it tender? My desires—are they spiritual? My prayers—are they fervent? My heart—is it honest? My soul—is it right before God? Do I hang all my hopes upon Christ as the Rock? Do I hang all my religion upon the work of the Holy Spirit in my heart?

Often sinking, often shaken, often cast down

"Confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many afflictions we must enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

If there were—no temptations to try—no sharp sorrows to grieve—no painful afflictions to distress them; or if, on the other hand, there were—no sensible weakness of soul—no sinking of heart—no despondency of spirit—no giving way of faith and hope—no doubt or fear in the mind—how could the souls of the disciples be strengthened? The souls of God's people are not made of cast iron, against which arrow after arrow may be discharged and leave no dent, make no impression. The Lord's people, who carry in their bosom broken hearts and contrite spirits, are—often sinking—often shaken—often cast down through the many trials they have to encounter. It is for this reason that they need confirming, supporting, strengthening—and that the Lord Himself—would lay His everlasting arms underneath them—lift them into His bosom—and make His strength perfect in their weakness.

He showers them in rich profusion

"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever." Psalm 89:1

We are surrounded with mercies. Mercies for the body—and mercies for the soul. There are indeed times and seasons when all the mercies of God, both in providence and grace, seem hidden from our eyes, when—with the workings of sin, rebellion, and unbelief—with a thorny path in the world—and a rough, trying road in the soul—we see little of the mercies of God, though surrounded by them. We cannot see them—and at the very moment when God is already showering mercies upon us. We are filled, perhaps, with murmuring and rebellion, and cry, "Is His

mercy clean gone forever, will He be favorable no more?" This is our infirmity, our weakness—but it no more arrests the shower of God's mercies than the parched field arrests the falling rain.

The mercies of God, like Himself, are infinite—and He showers them in rich profusion upon His people. They come freely—as the beams of the sun shining in the sky—as the breezes of the air we breathe—as the river that never ceases to flow. Everything testifies of the mercy of God—to those whose eyes are anointed to see it, and are interested in it. To them all things in nature, in providence, and in grace, proclaim with one united harmonious voice—The mercies of the Lord endure forever!

Now, as these mercies of God are sensibly felt in the soul—they soften, meeken, and subdue the spirit—melt it into the obedience of faith—and raise up in it the tenderness of love. Only let my soul be favored with a sweet discovery of the mercies of God—let them reach my heart—soften and subdue my spirit—then there is no cross too heavy to be taken up—no trial too hard to be endured—no path of suffering and sorrow in which we cannot patiently, if not gladly, walk.

What shall she know?

The Church, speaking thus in the person of Ephraim, says, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Hosea 6:3 What shall she know? She shall know—that the Lord's hand supported her through all her temptations—that none of the devices of Satan against her have prospered—that all her temporal trials have worked together for her good—that God has made use of the things that seemed most against her that they might be most for her—that He has overruled every dispensation so as to make it a dispensation of mercy—that He held her up when she must otherwise have utterly fallen—that God was the Author and the Finisher of her faith, the source of her hope, and the fountain of her love. She shall know—that she has not had one trial too heavy—nor shed one tear too much—nor put up one groan too many. She shall know that all these things have in a most mysterious and inexplicable manner worked together for her spiritual good.

Now, friends, until we know something experimentally of the Lord—we cannot know all this. Until we know more or less of Jesus by His own sweet manifestations—the cloud is not taken up from our religion. But when the Lord brings the soul into some sweet communion with Jesus, and He is made experimentally known—then it sees that the Lord has led it all these years in the wilderness—then it knows how kindly, and gently, and mercifully, and wisely He has dealt with it—then it feels as a matter of personal, individual, practical experience, that all things work together for good to those who love God!

Those who followed Him

One noticeable feature in the Lord's ministry, is that He never sought to make proselytes by alluring the rich, the noble, or the learned to become His disciples—while concealing the difficulties of the way. He invariably set before all who professed any wish to follow Him, that it was a path of tribulation, self-denial, and crucifixion in which He walked—and that they, as His followers, must tread in the same footsteps. The Lord never allowed any to deceive themselves into a belief that they were His whole-hearted followers, when His all-seeing eye penetrated into the insincerity which reigned in them. Those who followed Him must take up the cross, and deny themselves.

That one sin

"Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12

What an amount of sorrow and misery beyond all calculation, and indeed beyond all conception, there is in this wretched world—this valley of tears, in which our present earthly lot is cast! Sin is the source of all the evil which, is now, or ever has been in the world, for that one sin introduced every other sin with it. Sin brought in its train every iniquity that has ever been—conceived by the imagination—uttered by the lips—or perpetrated by the hands of man. In a moment man's whole nature underwent a change—stricken down by sin as by palsy or leprosy. His understanding became darkened—his judgment corrupted—his conscience deadened—his affections alienated—and all that warm current of purity and innocency which once flowed in a clear stream towards God, became thickened and fouled with the sin that was poured into it from the mouth of Satan—and was thus diverted from its course of light, love, and life—to run into a channel of darkness, enmity, and death!

Thus the fountain was corrupted at its very source—and from this spring-head have all the streams of evil flowed which have made the world a very Aceldama—a field of blood. This is the fountain—whence have issued all that misery and wretchedness which in all ages and in all climates have pursued man from the cradle to the grave—which have wrung millions of hot tears from human eyes—which have broken, literally broken, thousands of human hearts—which have desolated home after home—and struck grief and sadness into countless breasts!

But, Oh! this fountain of sin in the heart of man has done worse than this! It has peopled hell! It has swept and is still sweeping thousands and tens of thousands into eternal perdition!

What!

What human heart could have conceived such a thought—or what human tongue, if such a thought had been conceived, could have breathed the word up to the courts of bliss—"Let the Son of God come down and bleed for us vile polluted sinners!"

What! that God's equal and eternal Son—the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His Person—that He in whom the Father eternally delighted—He who was worshiped and adored by myriads of angels—that He should leave this glory, come down to earth, be treated as the vilest malefactor, have nails driven through His hands and feet—and expire on the cross in ignominy and shame! Could such a thought have entered angelic or human hearts?

When God looks upon His elect

When we look upon ourselves, we often see ourselves—the most stupid—the most ignorant—the most vile—the most unworthy—the most earthly and sensual wretches that God can permit to live! At least, that is the view we take of ourselves when we are really humbled in our own eyes. But when God looks upon His elect, He does not look upon them as they often look upon themselves—but as they stand in Christ—accepted in the beloved—without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing! He does not see His people as they often see themselves—full of wounds, and bruises and putrefying sores; but clothed in the perfection, beauty, and loveliness of their Head and Husband.

We love a smooth path

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." Isaiah 40:4

We all want ease. We love a smooth path. We would like—to be carried to heaven in a flowery bed of ease—to enjoy every comfort that earth can give or heart desire—and then, dying without a pang of body or mind, find ourselves safe in heaven! But that is not God's way. If in your road heavenward, no valley ever sank before you—if no mountain and hill ever rose up in sight—if you encountered no crooked path through the dense forest, and no rough places, with many large stones and many a thorny brier in the tangled forest—it would not seem that you were treading the way which the saints of God have ever trod—nor would it appear as if you needed special help from the Lord—or any peculiar power to be put forth for your help and deliverance.

But being in this path, and that by God's own appointment, and finding right before your eyes—valleys of deep depression which you cannot raise up—mountains and hills of difficulty that you cannot lay low—crooked things which you cannot straighten—and rough places which you cannot make smooth—you are compelled, from felt necessity, to look for help from God. These perplexing difficulties, then, are the very things that make yours a case that the gospel of grace is thoroughly adapted. If you could at the present moment view these trials with spiritual eyes—and feel that they were all appointed by unerring wisdom and eternal love—and were designed for the good of your soul—you would rather bless God that your pathway was so planned, that you had—now a valley—now a mountain—now a crook—and now a thorn. These very difficulties in the road are all productive of so many errands to the throne of grace. They all called upon you, as with so many speaking voices, to beg of the Lord that He would manifest Himself in love to your heart!

God's purpose

"That no flesh should glory in His presence." 1 Corinthians 1:29

Man may glory in himself—but God has forever trampled man's glory under foot. God's purpose is to stain the pride of human glory. When Adam fell to the very depths of creature depravity, all his glory was forever lost—the pride of the creature was forever stained. No creature shall ever, in the sight of God, glory in itself! We must take the crown off of human pride—and set it upon the head of Him who alone is worthy to wear it!

Not a grain! Not an atom!

What am I? What are you? Are we not filthy, polluted, and defiled? Do not we, more or less, daily feel altogether as an unclean thing? Is not every thought of our heart altogether vile? Am I not an unholy, depraved, filthy wretch? Does not corruption work in my heart? Am I not a poor captive, entangled—by Satan—by the world—and by my own evil heart?

Does any holiness—any spirituality—any heavenly-mindedness—any purity—any resemblance to the divine image—dwell in our hearts by nature? Have I one grain of holiness in myself? Not one! Not a grain! not an atom! How then can I, a polluted sinner, ever see the face of a holy God? How can I, a worm of earth, corrupted within and without by indwelling and committed sin—ever hope to see a holy God without shrinking into destruction? When we view the pure and spotless holiness

of Jesus imputed to His people, and view them—holy in Him—pure in Him—without spot in Him—how it does away with all the wrinkles of the creature, and makes them stand holy and spotless before God. I must see what I am. I must see what Christ is. I must feel that Christ is all this to me!

When, where & to whom it shall come

"Who covers the sky with clouds, who prepares the rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains." Psalm 147:8

How powerless we are—as regards the rain that falls from the sky! Who can go forth when the sun is shining in its brightness and bid the rain to fall? Or when rain is falling, who can go forth and restrain the bottles of heaven? He who gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness, also turns a fruitful land into barrenness.

Equally sovereign is the blessing that God gives to the preached gospel. He holds the blessing in His own hand—it is His to give, and His to withhold. If He blesses, it is because He has promised it—but when, where and to whom it shall come—is at His own sovereign disposal.

Painful vicissitudes & changes

The children of God need strong consolation. Their afflictions are great—their trials heavy—their temptations numerous—their foes strong—and their fears often stronger than their foes. They have also, for the most part many painful vicissitudes and changes—reverses in providence—bereavements in family—afflictions in circumstances—trials of body—trials in the church—trials in the world. God often hides His face from them—Satan harasses them with his fiery darts—fears of death often bring them into bondage—besides all the guilt, which they bring upon their own consciences through their backslidings—and all the chastening strokes, which they procure for their own backs through their folly. Thus they need strong consolation that there may be—balm for their wounds—cordials to cheer their fainting spirits—wine to strengthen their heart—and oil to make them cheerful. God not only knows best what we are—but knows best also what we need, for His wisdom and His goodness are alike infinite.

Upheld by the sustaining grace of God

The one who feels the strength of his internal corruptions—and the overwhelming power of his lust, pride and covetousness—can only be upheld by the sustaining grace of God.

The soundest doctrines in his head

A man may have the soundest doctrines in his head—yet his life be worldly, inconsistent, and ungodly.

A thousand different shapes & colors

False religion takes on a thousand different shapes and colors. All false religion, just in proportion as it seizes hold of the mind—blinds it to the truth—fills it with prejudice—sears the conscience—hardens the heart—inflames it with party zeal—and makes every faculty boil over with hatred, fury and bigotry against all who don't see as it sees!

Brain religion

There is a brain religion, or head knowledge, or tongue work, or that miserable, dry, barren, marrowless, moonlight acquaintance with the doctrines of grace, which—hardens the heart—sears the conscience—and lifts up the soul with presumption, to dash it down into the blackness of darkness forever.

The road to heaven

The road to heaven may be compared to a narrow path that lies between two hedges. On the outer side of each hedge is a bottomless ditch. One of these ditches is 'despair,' and the other is 'presumption.' The hedge that keeps the soul from falling into the pit of despair is that of the promises. And the hedge that keeps the soul from sinking into the abyss of presumption is that of warnings, precepts and threatenings. Without the spiritual application of the promises—the soul would lie down in despair. And without the spiritual application of the precepts and warnings—it would be swollen with arrogance, puffed up with pride, and ready to burst with presumption.

Until we view eternal purity

The true child of God knows the inward feeling of guilt—and the sense of his exceeding vileness which always accompanies it. The same ray of divine light which manifests Jehovah to the soul, and raises up a spiritual fear of Him within—discovers to us also our inward depravity. Until we see heavenly light—we know not what darkness is. Until we view eternal purity—we are ignorant of our own vileness. Until we hear the voice of inflexible Justice—we feel no guilt. Until we behold a heart-searching God—we do not groan beneath our inward deceitfulness. Until we feel that He abhors evil—we do not abhor ourselves.

A constant clog to the soul

The body is slow and sluggish—a constant clog to the soul—chained down to the dull clods of clay among which it toils and labors—wearied with a few miles walk to chapel, or with sitting an hour on the same seat—with eyes, ears, mouth, all inlets and outlets to evil—tempting and tempted—galloping to evil—and crawling to good—with its shattered nerves, aching joints, panting lungs, throbbing head, and all the countless ills that flesh is heir to. What is this poor earthly body fit for—but to drop into the grave, and be buried out of sight until the glorious resurrection morn?

Your paradise

You were looking for happiness in the things of time and sense. Some bosom idol—some bright prospect—some well-planned scheme—some dream of love or ambition—was to be your paradise. You looked with eager delight upon the scene of happiness that you imagined lay outstretched before you, promising yourself days of health, and wealth, and comfort in this world. "You looked for much, and, behold, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away." Haggai 1:9

A poor bruised reed

"A bruised reed shall He not break." Matthew 12:20

Here, then, is a bruised reed, a poor child of God, ready to give up all hope, to sink beneath the wave no more to rise, expecting that the next blow will sever the stem, or suffocate and bury him in his native mire and mud. But O how graciously, how tenderly and gently does the Redeemer deal with this timid, tried member of His mystical body! He deals with him neither according to his merits nor his fears. The bruised reed deserves to be broken again and again—and it fears it because it deserves it. But the gracious, tender-hearted Redeemer, so far from breaking—gently binds. And how He can in a moment bind up the bruised reed! By one word, one look, one touch, one smile, He can in a moment raise up the drooping head. This is His blessed office. His holiness, His purity, His hatred of sin, His zeal for the glory of His Father, would indeed all lead Him to break. But His mercy, grace, compassion, and love, all lead Him to bind.

You may perhaps feel yourself a poor bruised reed, bruised—by afflictions—by temptations—by guilt—by Satan—ready to perish—ready to give up all hope—and droop away and die! O remember that this blessed Man of Sorrows, being touched with the feeling of our infirmities, can sympathize and support, and therefore will never, no, never break a bruised reed. If our poor soul is bruised—by affliction—by temptation—by doubt and fear—by Satan's suggestions—be it known for our comfort and encouragement, that the condescending and tender-hearted Redeemer will never, no, never break that bruised reed—but will most graciously, in His own time and way, bind it up.

Moab at ease

"Moab has been at ease from his youth." Jeremiah 48:11

Moab represents a professor in the church of God destitute of divine grace. Moab was always at ease—and that from his very youth. Nothing troubled him. Easy circumstances—good health—plenty of friends—and abundant prosperity—made him as happy as the day was long. Sin never troubled him—the world never opposed or persecuted him—and Satan never thrust hurtfully at him. He had, therefore everything to make him easy. He had no fears of God—no dread of hell—no trembling apprehensions of the wrath to come—no sense of the Majesty of the Almighty, against whom and before whom he had sinned—no tormenting, chilling convictions—no anxious thoughts. These Moabites are the very characters represented as proper and usual members of churches. They have got their religion they can scarcely tell how, scarcely tell when, scarcely tell where, and scarcely tell why.

In the sweetest cup of the ungodly

Natural human joy can never rise very high—nor last very long. It is of the earth, earthly—and therefore can never rise high, nor long endure. It is always marred by some check or disappointment. In the sweetest cup of the ungodly there is something secret that embitters all. All their mirth is madness—for even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. God frowns upon all the worldling's pleasure—conscience condemns it—and the weary heart is often sick of it, even unto death. It cannot bear inspection or reflection. It has perpetual disappointment stamped upon it here—and eternal sorrow hereafter.

A solitary way

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Psalm 107:4

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way"—in a path in which each has to walk alone—a road where no company cheers him—and without landmarks to direct his course. This is a mark peculiar to the child of God—that the path by which he travels is a solitary way. His perplexities are such as he cannot believe any living soul is exercised with. The fiery darts which are cast into his mind by the wicked one are such as he thinks no child of God has ever experienced—the darkness of his soul—the unbelief and infidelity of his heart—and the workings of his powerful corruptions—are such as he supposes none ever knew but himself. To be without any comfort except what God gives—without any guidance but what the Lord affords—without any support but what springs from the everlasting arms laid underneath—in a word, to be in that state where the Lord alone must appear, and where He alone can deliver—is very painful.

But it is the very painful nature of the path that makes it so profitable. We need to be cut off from resting upon an arm of flesh—to be completely divorced from all props to support our souls—except that Almighty prop which cannot fail. And the Lord will take care that His people shall deal only with Himself—that they shall have no real comfort but that which springs from His presence. His object is—to draw us away from the creature—to take us off from leaning on human pity and compassion—and to bring us to trust implicitly on Himself—to lean wholly and solely upon Him, who is full of pity, and of tender mercy.

Hopeless, helpless, houseless, refugeless

"I will cry out to God Most High; to God who accomplishes my requests for me." Psalm 57:2

It is to "God most high" that prayers go up from broken hearts—in all parts of the world where the Lord has a saved people. "Unto God most high"—every eye is pointed—every heart is fixed—and every breath of living prayer flows. Jesus sits in glory as "God most high," hearing the sighs and cries of His broken-hearted family, where they dwell in the utmost corners of the earth. And He is not only sitting on high to hear their cries—but also to bestow upon them the blessings which He sees suitable to their case and state.

Now when shall we thus come "unto God most high?" When we are pleased and satisfied in SELF? When the world smiles? When all things are easy without and within? When we are in circumstances for which our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness are amply sufficient? We may, under such circumstances, appease our conscience by prayer, or rather its 'form'—but there is no "CRY unto God most high." Before there is a real, spiritual cry raised up, we must be brought to that spot, "Refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul." Here all the saints of old were brought—Job upon his ash-heap—Hezekiah upon his sick bed—Hannah by the temple gate. All were hopeless, helpless, houseless, refugeless—before they cried "unto God most high." And we must be equally refugeless and houseless before we can utter the same cry—and our prayers find entrance into the ears of the Lord Almighty. "Unto God who performs all things for me." If God did not perform some things for us; no, more—if God did not perform all things for us, it would be a mockery, a delusion to pray to Him at all. "The hope of Israel" would then be to us a dumb idol, like Ashtaroath or Baal, who could not hear the cries of His lancet-cutting worshipers—because He was asleep, and needed to be awakened. But the God of Israel is not like these dumb idols—these ash-heap gods—the work of men's hands—the figments of superstition and ignorance. The eternal Jehovah ever lives to hear and answer the prayers that His people offer up.

The prospect of eternal glory

"Father, I desire that they also whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may see My glory." John 17:24

It is the prospect of eternal glory which animates the Christian in all his battles against sin—and encourages him never to abandon the battle until victory crowns the strife. It nerves his heart in all the troubles and trials of this mortal state, still to press forward to win this immortal prize—that he may safely reach that land where tears are wiped from off all faces—and where the glory of God will be seen and enjoyed through the glorified humanity of Jesus without a cloud to dim its rays, or intercept its eternal luster.

Sufferings & sorrows of an incarnate God!

"Therefore He was obligated in all things to be made like His brothers, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest." Hebrews 2:17

What heart can conceive or tongue express, the infinite depths of the Redeemer's condescension in thus being made like unto His brethren—that the Son of God should assume a finite nature—that He should leave the bosom of His Father in which He had lain before all worlds—and should consent to become an inhabitant of this world of tears—to breathe earthly air—to share in human sorrows—to have before His eyes the daily spectacle of human sins—to be banished so long from His native home—to endure hunger, weariness, and thirst—to be subject to the persecutions of men, and the flight of all His disciples—not to hide His face from shame and spitting—but to be mocked, struck, buffeted, and scourged—and at last to die an agonizing death between two malefactors, amid scorn and infamy, and covered with disgrace! O what infinite condescension and mercy are displayed in these sufferings and sorrows of an incarnate God! The Lord give us faith to look to Him as suffering them for our sake!

The eye of God

"For His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his goings." Job 34:21

Nothing escapes the eye of a just and holy God. He lays bare every secret thought—searches every hidden purpose—and scrutinizes every desire and every movement of the mind. He discovers and brings to light all the secret sins of the heart. Men in general take no notice of heart sins. If they can keep from overt sins in life—from open acts of immorality—they are satisfied. What passes in the secret chambers of imagery they neither see nor feel. Not so with the child of grace. He carries about with him the secret conviction that the eye of God reads every thought. Every inward movement of pride, self-righteousness, rebellion, discontent, peevishness, fretfulness lust, and extravagance, he inwardly feels that the eye of God reads all, marks all, condemns all—and because He is so intrinsically pure—hates and abhors all. He is indeed aware that many may have sinned more deeply and grossly as regards outward acts—but he feels that no one can have sinned inwardly more foully and continually than he—and this makes him say with Job, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees You. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5, 6

A perfect saint

"O wretched man that I am!" Romans 7:24

These feelings which the Apostle groaned under are experienced by all the quickened family. Blessed then be the name of God Almighty, that He inspired Paul to trace out and leave upon record his experience, that we might derive comfort and relief from it. What would we otherwise have thought? We would have reasoned thus—'Here is an apostle perfectly holy—perpetually heavenly-minded—having nothing but the image of Christ in him—continually living to the Lord's glory—and unceasingly enjoying communion with Him!' We would have viewed Paul as a perfect saint—if he had not told us what he was. And then, having viewed him as a perfect saint, we would have turned our desponding eyes into our own bosom, and seen such a dreadful contrast, that we would despair of ever being saved at all! But seeing the soul conflict which the Apostle passed through—and feeling a measure of the same in our own bosom—it encourages, supports, and leads the soul on to believe that this is the way in which the saints are called to travel—however rough, rugged, and perplexing it may be to them.

Scanderbeg's sword

"The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Ephesians 6:17

There is only one weapon whereby we can fight Satan to any purpose—and that is the word of God. But observe, that it must not be merely the 'letter of the word.' It must be the sword of the Spirit—and therefore a spiritual sword—which can only be taken in hand when the word of God is applied with a divine power to your heart—and it is made 'life and spirit' to your soul. It is of no use my bringing forward a text to resist a temptation of Satan—unless I can make that text my own. In other words, unless I can handle that sword as one who knows how to wield it. To take up a text and not know the sweetness and power of it, would be like a child taking up a warrior's sword—without having the warrior's arm. He might play with the sword, but what is the sword of a giant in the hand of a child?

The sword of Scanderbeg, a famous Albanian warrior against the Turks, used to be shown at Vienna. A man who once looked at and handled it said, "Is this the sword which won so many victories? I see nothing in it—it is but a common sword." The answer was, "You should have seen the arm that wielded it!" So it is not merely taking a text—adopting scripture language—and quoting passages—which will beat back the fiery assaults of Satan. This is having Scanderbeg's sword—without having Scanderbeg's arm. But it is having the word of truth brought into our heart by the power of God—faith raised up to believe that God Himself speaks it to our heart—being thus enabled to wield it in the strength of the Spirit—and by the power of faith in living exercise, to resist every hellish thrust!

Love to Christ

Love to Christ can only spring from the teachings and operations of God upon the heart. Our carnal mind is enmity against God—nothing but implacable, irreconcilable enmity. But when the Lord is pleased to make Himself, in some measure, known to the soul—when He is pleased, in some degree, to unveil His lovely face, and to give a discovery of His grace and glory—immediately divine love springs up! He is so lovely an Object! As the Bride says, "He is altogether lovely." His beauty is so surpassing—His grace so rich—His mercy so free—all that He is and has is so unspeakably glorious—that no sooner does He unveil His lovely face, than

He—wins over all the love of the heart—takes possession of the bosom—and draws every affection of the soul to center wholly and solely in Himself!

Behold Him

When, by faith, we can accompany the Man of Sorrows into the gloomy garden of Gethsemane—or behold Him groaning, bleeding, and dying on the cross—an object of ignominy and shame—O, what a view it gives us of the demerit and dreadful nature of SIN, that nothing short of the incarnation of God's only begotten Son—nothing short of such a tremendous sacrifice could put away sin—and bring the elect back unto God! Thus a believing sight of the Lord Jesus hanging upon Calvary's tree, not only shows us the dreadful nature of sin—but, also, how full, how complete, how glorious, and how effectual must that salvation be, of which the expiring Son of God could say—It is finished!

A living Savior

The children of God need a living Savior, one who can—hear and answer prayer—deliver out of soul trouble—speak a word with power to the heart when bowed down with grief and sorrow—sympathize with them under powerful temptations—support them under the trials and afflictions of the way—maintain under a thousand discouragements His own life in their soul—sustain under bereavements the mourning widow, and be a father to her fatherless children—appear again and again in providence as a Friend that loves at all times and a Brother born for adversity—smile upon them in death—and comforting them with His rod and staff as they walk through the valley of its dark shadow, land them at last safely in a happy eternity!

Slaves

We by nature and practice are slaves to sin and Satan. We are the sport of the prince of the power of the air, who takes us captive at his will. We are held down also by many hurtful lusts. Or, if free from gross sin, are slaves to pride, covetousness, or self-righteousness. Perhaps some idol is set up in the chambers of imagery which defiles all the inner man. Or some snare of Satan entangles our feet, and we are slaves, without power to liberate ourselves from this cruel slavery. We groan under it, as the children of Israel under their burdens, but, like them, cannot deliver ourselves. "But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life."

He abhors that cruel tyrant

Every sincere child of God most earnestly longs to embrace Jesus—and be embraced by Him in the arms of love and affection. He hates sin, though it daily, hourly, momentarily works in him—and is ever seeking to regain its former mastery. He abhors that cruel tyrant who—set him to do his vilest drudgery—deceived and deluded him by a thousand lying promises—dragged him again and again into captivity—and but for sovereign grace would have sealed his eternal destruction!

Subdued by the scepter of mercy, he longs for the dominion of grace over every faculty of his soul and every member of his body. Thus, he who truly fears God looks to grace, and to grace alone—not merely to save, but to sanctify—not only to pardon sin, but to subdue it—not only to secure him an eternal inheritance, but to make him fit for it.

It is a mercy to be in the furnace

"And I will bring the third part through the fire and make them pure, just as gold and silver are refined and purified by fire." Zechariah 13:9

It is a mercy to be in the furnace. Some metals indeed are so stubborn, and the dross is so deeply ingrained into them—that they seem to require a hotter fire than others. It may be a furnace of trial, temptation, sickness, family affliction—straits in providence—persecution—deep discoveries of sin—or the hidings of the Lord's face—which seem to make up that trial. By these trials there is—a gradual weaning from the world—a humility, meekness, and brokenness of spirit—a greater simplicity and godly sincerity—a more willing obedience to the precepts of the gospel—a greater desire to know the will of God and do it.

What a wonder of wonders!

As the Spirit unfolds the mystery of the glorious Person of Christ, and reveals His beauty—the more does He become the object of the soul's admiration and adoration. That the Son of God, who lay in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, should condescend to take upon Him our nature—that He might groan, suffer, bleed, and die for guilty wretches—who, if permitted, would have ruined their souls a thousand times a day—what a wonder of wonders!

Has the Lord made sin your burden?

Has the Lord made sin your burden? Has He ever made you feel guilty before Him? Has He ever pressed down your conscience with a sight and sense of—your iniquities—your sins—your backslidings? And does the Lord draw, from time to time, honest, sincere, unreserved confession of those sins out of your lips? What does the Holy Spirit say to you? What has the blessed Spirit recorded for your instruction, and for your consolation? "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God pardons, forgives, and sweetly blots out every iniquity and every transgression of a confessing penitent!

Heaven will make amends for all!

"For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" 2 Corinthians 4:17

O suffering saints of God! Are you tried, tempted, afflicted? It is your mercy! God does not deal so with everyone. It is because you are His children, that He lays on you His chastening hand. He means to conform you to the image of His Son in glory—and therefore He now conforms you to the image of His Son in suffering. All will end well with the people of God. Their life here is a life of temptation, of suffering and trial. But heaven will make amends for all!

Time of trouble

"O Lord, be gracious to us; we have waited for You: be our arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble." Isaiah 33:2

This time of trouble is when sin is laid as a heavy burden upon a man's conscience—when guilt presses him down into the dust of death—when his iniquities stare him in the face, and seem more in number than the hairs of his head—when he fears he shall be cast forever into the bottomless

pit of hell, and have his portion with the hypocrites.

The only wise God deals out various measures of affliction to His people. All do not sink to the same depth—as all do not rise to the same height. All do not drink equally deep of the cup. Yet all, each in their measure, pass through this time of trouble, wherein—their fleshly religion is pulled to pieces—their self-righteousness marred—their presumptuous hopes crushed—and they brought into the state of the leper, to cry—Unclean, unclean! Until a man has passed through this time of trouble—until he has experienced more or less of these exercises of soul, and known guilt and condemnation in his conscience—until he has had his 'rags of creature righteousness' torn away from him—he can know nothing experimentally of the efficacy of Jesus' atoning blood.

Mere 'professors' of religion

The persuasion that in God alone is true happiness—the feeling of dissatisfaction with everything else but the Lord, and everything short of His manifested presence—is that which stamps the reality of the life of God in a man's soul. Mere 'professors' of religion feel no misery, dissatisfaction, or wretchedness—if God does not shine upon them. So long as the world smiles, and they have all that heart can wish—so long as they are buoyed up by the hypocrite's hope, and lulled asleep by the soft breezes of flattery—they are well satisfied to sail down the stream of a dead profession.

When He removes our rotten props

Are there not seasons in our experience when we can lay down our souls before God, and say, "Let Christ be precious to my soul—let Him come with power to my heart—let Him set up His throne as Lord and King—and let self be nothing before Him!" We utter these prayers in sincerity and simplicity—we desire their fulfillment. But oh, the struggle! the conflict!—when God answers these petitions! When our plans are frustrated—what a rebellion works up in the carnal mind! Self is a rebel, who has set up an idolatrous temple. When self is cast down—what a rising up of the fretful, peevish impatience of the creature! When the Lord does answer our prayers—when He strips off all false confidence—when He removes our rotten props—when He dashes to pieces our broken cisterns—what a storm!—what a conflict then takes place in the soul!

My fear

"I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." Jeremiah 32:40

If we examine the movements of godly fear in our hearts, we shall see that all its tendencies are—toward hatred of sin and love of holiness—toward a desire after the enjoyment of heavenly realities—toward a deadness to the things of time and sense—toward a knowledge of Christ in the manifestation of Himself—toward a longing to live more to His praise, to walk more in His footsteps, and to be more conformed to His suffering image.

Obedied & lived

The gospel must be obeyed and lived—as well as received and believed. There is a constraining power in the love of Christ under which we experience a holy and sacred pleasure in no longer living unto ourselves—but unto Him who died and rose again for us.

Pilgrims & strangers on this earthly ball

"Pass the time of your living as strangers here in reverent fear." 1 Peter 1:17

Our life here is but a vapor. We are but pilgrims and strangers on this earthly ball—mere sojourners, without fixed or settled habitation—and passing through this world as not our home or resting place. Peter, therefore, bids us pass this time, whether long or short, of our earthly sojourn, under the influence and in the exercise of godly fear. We are surrounded with enemies, all seeking, as it were, our life—and therefore we are called upon to move with great caution—knowing how soon we may slip and fall, and thus bring upon ourselves a cloud of darkness which may long hover over our souls.

Our life here below is not one of ease and quiet—but a warfare—a conflict—a race—a wrestling not with flesh and blood alone—but with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. We have to dread ourselves more than anything or anybody else—and to view our flesh as our greatest enemy! How needful, then, is it to pass the time of our sojourning here in the exercise of this godly, reverential fear!

The same Jesus

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8

The eye of our faith must be ever fixed on Jesus. Is He not the same Jesus now in heaven—which He was when He was on earth? He is exalted, it is true, to an inconceivable height of glory. But He is the same Jesus now—as when He was the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as He wears the same human body—so He has the same tender, compassionate heart. All that He was upon earth as Jesus—He is in heaven still. All that tenderness and gentleness—all that pity to poor sensitive sinners—all that compassion on the ignorant and on those who are out of the way—all that grace and truth—all that bleeding, dying love—all that sympathy with the afflicted and tempted—all that power to heal—all that surpassing beauty and blessedness as the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely One—He retains in the highest heavens!

One drop of solid joy

If ever, as we pass through this wilderness, we feel one drop of solid joy—of true happiness—it must flow, it can flow only from one source—the manifestation of Christ to our souls. We can find true joy and peace in Him alone. Sin, the world, the things of time and sense, business, amusement, pleasure so-called—afford no lasting joy. There is an aching void—a feeling of dreariness and misery connected with them. One smile from the Lord—one word from His lips—one gracious breaking in of the light of His countenance—does, while it lasts, communicate joy. And from no other quarter, from no other source can a moment's real joy be drawn.

Laid upon them by the hand of God

"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." Isaiah 48:10

According to God's own testimony, it is through much tribulation that we are to enter into the kingdom—and therefore there is no entering into the kingdom of grace here, or the kingdom of glory hereafter, without it. But let this be ever borne in mind, that whatever affliction befalls the saints—it is laid upon them by the hand of God—and that for the express purpose of putting them

into a situation and of making them capable of receiving those comforts which God alone can bestow. None but Jesus Himself can comfort a truly afflicted heart. And He can and does from time to time comfort His dear people—by a sense of His presence—by a word of power from His gracious lips—by the light of His countenance—by the balm of His atoning blood and dying love—and by the work and witness of the Spirit within. And as they receive this consolation from the mouth of God—their hearts are comforted. How good the Lord is of His own free grace to bestow such blessings upon His redeemed family! May He comfort our hearts as we journey through this valley of tears—and may our consolations be neither few nor small.

Until our eyes are divinely opened

"And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." Luke 24:31

What we know savingly, experimentally, feelingly—we know only by divine teaching. We cannot see Jesus until our eyes are divinely opened. The sun may shine in all its glory—does that communicate light to the eyes of the blind? or warm the corpse lying in the coffin? The blind see not—the dead hear not. The living, the living alone see and know the Son of God.

When I am weak

"When I am weak, then am I strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10

The more wise and spiritual God's people become—the more foolish and carnal they appear in their own eyes. The stronger they are in the Lord and in the power of His might—the more sensibly do they feel the weakness of their flesh. The more they are enabled to walk closely with the Lord—the more they discover the wretched wanderings of their base and sinful hearts!

What we were

"At that time you were without Christ. . . .having no hope, and without God in the world." Ephesians 2:12

Let us never forget what we were, before we were called by grace. Let the remembrance of our sins and of the whole bent and current of our lives be bitter to us—that we may all the more prize and admire the riches of that sovereign grace which stooped to us in our low and lost estate. The remembrance of 'Egyptian bondage' should ever accompany the enjoyment of gospel liberty.

The ultimatum of gospel obedience

The ultimatum of gospel obedience is, "to lie passive in His hand, and know no will but His." Only then can we fully enter into the beauty and blessedness of gospel truth; here alone can we—submit to the weight of a daily cross—glory in tribulation—patiently endure afflictions—feel the sweetness of the promises—walk in obedience to the precepts—and tread the path that leads to endless glory!

A remedy for every disease

"He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities." Micah 7:19

How does God heal the soul-diseases of His people? He heals them chiefly by subduing them—for in this life they are never thoroughly healed. To subdue them is to restrain their power.

Thus He sees one suffering under the power of unbelief—He gives him faith, and this subdues his unbelief. Here is another poor languid patient, dying of exhaustion—He gives him strength. Here is a third mourning under his corruptions—He gives a drop of His blood to purge his conscience, and a taste of His love to warm his heart. He sees a fourth crying under the strong assaults of Satan—with one look from Him, Satan flies and the soul is set free. Thus with infinite wisdom blended with infinite love and power—He passes on from bed to bed of every sick patient—administering health wherever He goes.

This blessed Physician has a remedy for every disease—and the remedy is always felt to be exactly suitable to the exigency of the case. It goes, so to speak—at once to the right spot. It heals the malady—wherever it is—and whatever it is—just in the right way—and just at the right time! O then how good it is to bring all our soul-diseases before the Lord! In a case of bodily sickness or painful illness, we uncover freely our malady to a physician whom we can trust—we tell him every circumstance and disclose every symptom. So should we go to the Lord with all our soul-diseases—tell Him all our complaints—unfold to Him all our sorrows—and fully and freely lay before Him everything that—burdens the conscience—pains the mind—and distresses the soul—looking and waiting until He speaks the word, and every malady is healed.

To starve them in a waste-howling wilderness

"God is faithful, by whom you were called to the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:9

When God calls His people by His grace—it is to make them partakers of the highest bliss and the greatest glory. When the Lord calls His people out of earthly pleasures—is it for no other purpose than to lead them into paths of affliction and sorrow? Does He make them leave the fleshpots of Egypt—to starve them in a waste-howling wilderness? Does He take them from earthly delights—to abandon them to misery and despair? O no! He calls them to the greatest privilege and highest favor that His everlasting love could confer upon them—which is no less than "the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"—that they may have union and communion with the Son of God by grace here—and be partakers of His glory hereafter!

Whatever you may have in this world

"To an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance, and that doesn't fade away, reserved in heaven for you." 1 Peter 1:4

Whatever you may have in this world, be it much or little—you must leave! And if you have no other inheritance than earth gives—where will be your portion in death and to all eternity? We imagine sometimes how happy we would be—if we had this man's fine estate—or that man's large property. But do you think that these men are happy with all their possessions—and that you would be happier or better if you had them? These rich men have a canker which eats up all their happiness. With 'possession' come all the anxieties and cares connected with it.

But our eternal inheritance does not fade away! The sweetest flowers fade and are thrown away as they become nauseous to sight and smell. But there is—an abiding freshness—a constant verdure—a perpetual bloom—an unceasing fragrance—a permanent sweetness—in this eternal inheritance—so that it is never insipid or stale—but remains ever the same, or rather is ever

increasing in beauty and blessedness—as it is more known, believed in, hoped unto, and loved.

How shall they reach the heavenly shore?

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:30

Consider what heavenly blessings there are for those who have a living union with the Son of God. Everything is provided for them, that shall be for their salvation and their sanctification. Not a single blessing has God withheld that shall be for their eternal good. View them as foolish and ignorant—unable to see the way—puzzled and perplexed by a thousand difficulties—harassed by sin—tempted by Satan—far off upon the sea. How shall they reach the heavenly shore?

God, by an infinite act of sovereign love, has made His dear Son to be their "wisdom," so that none shall err so as to err fatally—none shall miss the road for lack of heavenly direction to find it or walk in it. Their glorious Head will bring them to their heavenly inheritance. He opens up His word to their heart—He sends down a ray of light into their bosom, illuminating the sacred page and guiding their feet into the way of truth and peace. If they wander—He brings them back. If they stumble—He raises them up. And whatever be the difficulties that beset their path, sooner or later some kind direction or heavenly admonition comes from His gracious Majesty. Thus his gracious Lord leads him safely along through every difficulty—until He sets him before His face in glory!

Then they have done you good

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

Have your trials humbled you, and made you meek and lowly? Then they have done you good. Have they stirred up a spirit of prayer in your bosom, and made you sigh, cry, and groan for the Lord to appear, visit, or bless your soul? Then they have done you good. Have they opened up those parts of God's word which are full of mercy and comfort to His afflicted people? Have they made you more sincere, more earnest, more spiritual, more heavenly-minded—more convinced that the Lord Jesus can alone bless and comfort your soul? Then they have done you good. Have they made the Bible more precious to you—the promises more sweet—the dealings of God with your soul more prized? Then they have done you good.

Divinely communicated

"Then He opened their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures." Luke 24:45

All our talk has been but vain babbling; our prayers—but lip service; our preaching—but wind and vanity; our profession—but hypocrisy; our knowledge—the worst kind of ignorance; and all our religion—but carnality or delusion—if they have not been divinely communicated.

God does not argue

The Gospel of God's grace is not a thing to be proved—but truth to be believed. It is not submitted to our reasoning powers as a subject for critical examination. The gospel is a message from God—addressed to the conscience, feelings, and affections. For this reason, men fond of argument and proving everything by strictly logical deduction generally make very poor preachers.

In the Scriptures, God does not argue—He proclaims!

His effectual instrument

It is by the power of God's Word upon our heart, that the whole work of grace upon our soul is carried on from first to last—by its promises we are drawn—by its precepts we are guided—by its warnings we are admonished—by its reproofs we are rebuked—by its rod we are chastened—by its support we are upheld—in its light we walk—by its teachings are made wise—by its revivings are renewed—and by its truth are sanctified. Under circumstances the most trying to flesh and blood, where nature stands aghast and reason fails—there the Word of God will come in as a counselor to drop in friendly advice—as a companion to cheer and support the mind by its tender sympathy—and as a friend to speak to the heart with a loving, affectionate voice.

We need not wonder, then, how the Word of God has been prized in all ages by the family of God. For it is written with such infinite wisdom, that it—meets every case—suits every circumstance—fills up every aching void—and is adapted to every condition of life, and every state both of body and soul. Not that the Word of God can of itself do all—or any—of these things in us and for us. But in the hands of the Spirit, who works in and by it as His effectual instrument—all these gracious operations are carried on in the soul.

O my soul

"Why are you in despair, O my soul? and why are you disturbed within me?" Psalm 42:11

Observe the tender and familiar way in which David converses with his own soul—as a tender and sympathizing 'bosom companion.' But how few, speaking comparatively, know that they have a soul which they can thus talk to? Indeed, I may say, that it is really a very great discovery when a man discovers, for the first time, that he has a soul in his bosom. The great bulk of mankind, all who are destitute of divine life—do not really and truly know that they have a soul. This may seem harsh doctrine—but at any rate they act as if they had none. We must judge men from their actions—and if they act as if they had no soul to be saved or lost—and as if there were no God who would bring them into judgment—we must conclude that they do not really believe they have a soul—though they may not boldly and positively deny it in lip.

But a man never knows really and truly that he has a soul until there is spiritual life put into it—for a dead soul makes no movement in his bosom—and is therefore not known to be there. We never know really that we have a soul until it is made alive unto God and cries unto Him. Then we begin find for the first time, that we have a soul—by the cry of life. And then our soul becomes a matter of the deepest interest to us—for we find that, according to the word of God—it must either be eternally saved or lost. This becomes to us the most important thing that we have ever had to deal with.

His omnipotent power can execute

"Having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will." Ephesians 1:11

Next to a believing view of the purposes of God's grace, and a sweet persuasion of our interest in them—nothing is more stren

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