WRITINGS OF JOHN NEWTON - VOLUME 1

by John Newton

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by John Newton (Volume 1), compiled for study and devotional reading.

100 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 00.00. Newton, John - Library
2. 01.01. A Christian library
3. 01.01. A Christian's attainments in the present life
4. 01.01. A Christian's present blessedness
5. 01.01. A Guide to Godly Disputation
6. 01.01. A plan of pastoral training
7. 01.01. A sketch of the Christian's temper
8. 01.01. A visitor from heaven!
9. 01.01. Addressing the Unconverted
10. 01.01. Advantages of a state of poverty
11. 01.01. All our concerns are in His hands
12. 01.01. All things work together for good
13. 01.01. An essay on the character of the apostle Paul,
14. 01.01. Assurance of salvation
15. 01.01. Blemishes in Christian character
16. 01.01. Blinded by Satan
17. 01.01. By the grace of God I am what I am!
18. 01.01. Causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace
19. 01.01. Christian Liberty
20. 01.01. Christian experience
21. 01.01. Combating worldliness
22. 01.01. Decline in the Spiritual Life
23. 01.01. Desires Unrealized
24. 01.01. Difference between acquired and experimental
25. 01.01. Difficulties and snares
26. 01.01. Divine guidance
27. 01.01. Divine revelation
28. 01.01. Eight letters to a Christian friend
29. 01.01. Eight letters to a pastor
30. 01.01. Emptiness of the creature
31. 01.01. Extract of a letter to a student in divinity
32. 01.01. Five letters to a Christian friend
33. 01.01. Four letters to a Christian friend
34. 01.01. God rules all!
35. 01.01. How to walk with God
36. 01.01. Imminent Danger and the Only Sure Resource of this Nation
37. 01.01. Indwelling Sin and the Believer
38. 01.01. Lead us not into temptation
39. 01.01. Letter to Church in London

40. 01.01. Letter to Church in Olney
41. 01.01. Letters to William Bull, from 1773 to 1805.
42. 01.01. Letters to William Bull, from 1773 to 1805. contd
43. 01.01. Little trials
44. 01.01. O for a warmer heart
45. 01.01. On eating and drinking
46. 01.01. Our common mercies
47. 01.01. Our divine Shepherd
48. 01.01. Our imperfect knowledge of Christ's love
49. 01.01. Our life is a warfare
50. 01.01. Questions on salvation
51. 01.01. Reading the Bible
52. 01.01. Saving knowledge
53. 01.01. Separated from the ungodly world
54. 01.01. Seriously engaged about trifles
55. 01.01. Seven letters to a Pastor
56. 01.01. Six letters to friends
57. 01.01. Soldiers of Christ
58. 01.01. Sun Going Down While Yet Day, the
59. 01.01. That bitter root, indwelling sin!
60. 01.01. The Benefits of affliction
61. 01.01. The Call to the ministry
62. 01.01. The Christian and the world
63. 01.01. The Christian's creed
64. 01.01. The City was pure gold
65. 01.01. The Duke of Sully
66. 01.01. The Furnace of affliction
67. 01.01. The Great Shepherd
68. 01.01. The Heart of man
69. 01.01. The Heavenly Builder
70. 01.01. The Heavenly gardener
71. 01.01. The History of mankind
72. 01.01. The Impatient patient
73. 01.01. The Lord Reigns!
74. 01.01. The Lord only afflicts for our good
75. 01.01. The Plan of salvation
76. 01.01. The Work of grace
77. 01.01. Theological Systems
78. 01.01. Thought on the ice-palace
79. 01.01. Thoughts from the sick room
80. 01.01. Three letters to a Christian friend
81. 01.01. True patriotism!

82. 01.01. Trust in the providence of God, and benovolence to his poor
83. 01.01. Views of Divine truth
84. 01.01. What a Christian ought to be
85. 01.01. When we see the world in flames!
86. 01.01. Without Me you can do nothing
87. 02.01. CHOICE EXCERPTS
88. 02.02. CHOICE EXCERPTS contd
89. 02.03. CHOICE EXCERPTS contd1
90. 02.04. Choice Quotes
91. 02.05. Choice Quotes contd
92. 03.0001. The Works of John Newton Vol 01
93. 03.0002. Vol 01 - PREFACE
94. 03.0003. Vol 01 - MEMOIRS
95. 03.0004. Vol 01 - MEMOIRS CONTINUED
96. 03.0005. Vol 01 - MEMOIRS CONTINUED
97. 03.0006. Vol 01 - REVIEW OF MR. NEWTON'S CHARACTER
98. 03.0007. Vol 01 - REMARKS MADE BY MR. NEWTON, IN FAMILIAR CONVERSATION
99. 03.0008. Vol 01 - GENERAL OBSERVATIONS
100. 03.0009. Vol 01 - I. Unhappyness with an evil heart of unbelief.

Chapter 1

00.00. Newton, John - Library

Newton, John - Library Newton, John - The Letters of John Newton Newton, John - Treasures of John Newton Newton, John - Works of John Newton (6 Volumes) S. Hymns on The Christian Life S. More Than a Calvinist S. Public Prayer S. Spiritual Blindness S. The Believer’s Inability on Account of Remaining Sin S. The Doctrines of Election and Final Perseverance S. The Right Use of the Law S. The Vanity of the World S. What the Believer Can Attain to in This Life

01.01. A Christian library

A Christian library "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." Ecclesiastes 12:12

Dear Sir, An eager desire of reading many books, though it is often supposed to be the effect of a taste for knowledge, is perhaps a principal cause of detaining multitudes in ignorance and perplexity. When an inexperienced person thus ventures into the uncertain tide of opinions, he is liable to be hurried hither and thither with the changing stream; to fall in with every new proposal, and to be continually perplexed with the difficulty of distinguishing between probability and truth. Or if, at last, he happily finds a clue to lead him through the labyrinth wherein so many have been lost, he will acknowledge, upon a review, that from what he remembers to have read (for perhaps the greater part he has wholly forgotten), he has gained little more than a discovery of what mistakes, uncertainty, insignificance, acrimony, and presumption, are often obtruded on the world under the disguise of a plausible title-page.

It is far from my intention to depreciate the value or deny the usefulness of books, without exception. A few well-chosen treatises, carefully perused and thoroughly digested, will deserve and reward our pains; but a multiplicity of reading is seldom attended with a good effect. Besides the confusion it often brings upon the judgment and memory, it occasions a vast expense of time, indisposes for close thinking, and keeps us poor, in the midst of seeming plenty, by reducing us to live upon the thoughts of others, instead of laboring to improve and increase the stock of our own reflections.

Every branch of knowledge is attended with this inconvenience; but it is in no one more sensibly felt than when the inquiry is directed to the subject of religion. Perhaps no country has abounded so much with religious books as our own: many of them are truly excellent; but a very great number of those which are usually met with, as they stand recommended by great names, and the general taste of the public, are more likely to mislead an inquirer, than to direct him into the paths of true peace and wisdom. And even in those books which are in the main agreeable to the word of God, there is often so great a mixture of human infirmity, so much of the spirit of controversy and party, such manifest defects in some, and so many unwarrantable additions to the simple truth of the Gospel in others, that, unless a person’s judgment is already formed, or he has a prudent friend to direct his choice, he will be probably led into error or prejudice before he is aware, by his attachment to a favorite author.

Allowing, therefore, the advantage of a discreet and seasonable use of human writings, I would point out a still more excellent way for the acquisition of true knowledge: a method which, if wholly neglected, the utmost diligence in the use of every other means will prove ineffectual; but which, if faithfully pursued, in an humble dependence upon the Divine blessing, will not only of itself lead us by the straightest path to wisdom, but will also give a double efficacy to every subordinate assistance.

If I may be allowed to use the term "book" in a metaphorical sense, I may say, that the Most High God, in condescension to the weakness of our faculties, the brevity of our lives, and our many avocations, has comprised all the knowledge conducive to our real happiness in four comprehensive volumes. The first, which may be considered as the text, is cheap, portable, and compendious, so that hardly any person in our favored land, who is apprised of its worth, need be without it; and the other three, which are the best and fullest commentaries upon this, are always at hand for our perusal, and pressing upon our attention in every place and circumstance of our lives.

It will be easily apprehended, that by the first book or volume, I mean that perfect and infallible system of truth, the BIBLE. The internal character of this book, arising from its comprehensiveness, simplicity, majesty, and authority, sufficiently prove, to every enlightened mind, that it is given by inspiration of God. They who are competent judges of this evidence, are no more disturbed by the suggestions of some men reputed wise, that it is of human composition, than if they were told that men had invented the sun and placed it in the sky. Its fullness speaks its Author. No case has yet occurred, or ever will, for which there is not a sufficient provision made in this invaluable treasury. Here we may seek (and we shall not seek in vain) wherewith to combat and vanquish every error, to illustrate and confirm every spiritual truth. Here are promises suited to every need, directions adapted to every doubt, which can possibly arise. Here is milk for babes, meat for strong men, medicines for the wounded, refreshment for the weary. The general history of all nations and ages, and the particular experience of each private believer, from the beginning to the end of time—are wonderfully comprised in this single volume; so that whoever reads and improves it aright, may discover his state, his progress, his temptations, his danger, and his duty—as distinctly and minutely marked out, as if the whole had been written for him alone. In this respect, as well as in many others, great is the mystery of godliness. The simplicity, as well as the subject-matter, of the Bible, evinces its Divine original. Though it has depths sufficient to perplex and confound the proudest efforts of unsanctified reason, it does not, as to its general import, require an elevated genius to understand it, but is equally addressed to the level of every capacity. As its contents are of universal concern, they are proposed in such a manner as to engage and satisfy the inquiries of all; and the learned, with respect to their own personal interest, have no advantage above the ignorant. That it is in fact read by many who receive no instruction or benefit from it, is wholly owing to their inattention or vanity. This event may rather excite grief, than wonder. The Bible teaches us to expect it. It forewarns us, that the natural man cannot receive the things of God; they can neither understand nor approve them. It points out to us the necessity of a heavenly teacher, the Holy Spirit, who has promised to guide those who seek him by prayer, into all necessary truth. Those who implore his assistance, find the seals opened, the veil taken away, and the way of salvation made plain before them. The language of the Bible is likewise clothed with inimitable majesty and authority. God speaks in it, and reveals the glory of his perfections—his sovereignty, holiness, justice, goodness, and grace—in a manner worthy of himself, though at the same time admirably adapted to our weakness. The most labored efforts of human genius are flat and languid, in comparison with those parts of the Bible which are designed to give us due apprehensions of that God with whom we have to do. Where shall we find such instances of the true, the sublime, the great, the marvelous, the beautiful, the heart-stirring, as in the Holy Scriptures?

Again: the effects which it performs demonstrate it to be the word of God. With a powerful and penetrating energy, it alarms and pierces the conscience, discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, convinces the most obstinate, and makes the most careless tremble. With equal authority and efficacy, it speaks peace to the troubled mind, heals the wounded spirit, and can impart a joy unspeakable and full of glory, in the midst of the deepest distress. It teaches, persuades, comforts, and reproves, with an authority that can neither be disputed nor evaded; and often communicates more light, motives, and influence, by a single sentence, to a plain unlettered believer, than he could derive from the voluminous commentaries of the learned. In a word, the Bible answers the character the Apostle gives it: "It is able to make us wise unto salvation; it is completely and alone sufficient to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work." The doctrines, histories, prophecies, promises, precepts, exhortations, examples, and warnings, contained in the Bible, form a perfect WHOLE, a complete summary of the will of God concerning us, in which nothing is lacking, nothing is superfluous. The second volume which deserves our study, is the book of CREATION. "The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship." Nor can we cast our eyes anywhere, without meeting innumerable proofs of his wisdom, power, goodness, and presence. God is revealed in the least, as well as in the greatest of his works. The sun and the glow-worm, the stars and each single blade of grass—are equally the effects of Divine power. The lines of this book, though very beautiful and expressive in themselves, are not immediately legible by fallen man. The works of creation may be compared to a beautiful, but unknown language—of which the Bible is the key; and without this key they cannot be understood. This book was always open to the heathens; but they could not read it, nor discern the proofs of his eternal power and Godhead which it affords. "They became vain in their own imaginations, and worshiped the creature more than the Creator." The case is much the same at this day with many reputed wise, whose hearts are not subjected to the authority of the Bible. The study of the works of God, independent of his word, though dignified with the names of science and philosophy, is no better than an elaborate trifling and waste of time. It is to be feared none are more remote from the true knowledge of God, than many of those who value themselves most upon their supposed knowledge of his creatures. They may speak in general terms of his wisdom; but they live without him in the world; and their philosophy cannot teach them either to love or serve, to fear or trust him.

Those who know God in his word, may find both pleasure and profit in tracing his wisdom in his works, if their inquiries are kept within due bounds, and in a proper subservience to things of greater importance; but comparatively few have leisure, capacity, or opportunity for these inquiries. But the book of creation is designed for the instruction of all believers. If they are not qualified to be astronomers or anatomists, yet from a view of the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, the moon and the stars, which he has created, they learn to conceive of his condescension, power, and faithfulness. Though they are unacquainted with the theory of light and colors, they can see in the rainbow a token of God’s covenant love. Perhaps they have no idea of the magnitude or distance of the sun; but it reminds them of Jesus the Sun of Righteousness, the source of light and life to their souls. The Lord has established a wonderful analogy between the natural and the spiritual world. This is a secret only known to those who fear him; but they contemplate it with pleasure; and almost every object they see, when they are in a right frame of mind, either leads their thoughts to Jesus, or tends to illustrate some scriptural truth or promise. This is the best method of studying the book of Nature; and for this purpose it is always open and

plain to those who love the Bible, so that he who runs may read. The book of PROVIDENCE is the third volume, by which those who fear the Lord are instructed. This likewise is inextricable and unintelligible to the wisest of men who are not governed by the word of God. But when the principles of Scripture are admitted and understood, they throw a pleasing light upon the study of Divine Providence, and at the same time are confirmed and illustrated by it. What we read in the Bible, of the sovereignty, wisdom, power, omniscience, and omnipresence of God, of his over-ruling all events to the accomplishment of his counsels and the manifestation of his glory, of the care he maintains of his church and people, and of his attention to their prayers—is exemplified by the history of nations and families, and the daily occurrences of private life. The believer receives hourly and indubitable proofs that the Lord reigns; that truly there is a God who judges the earth. Hence arises a solid confidence: he sees that his concerns are in safe hands; and he needs not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; while others live at an uncertainty, exposed to the impression of every new appearance, and, like a ship in a storm, without rudder or pilot, abandoned to the power of the winds and waves. In the history of Joseph, and in the book of Esther, and indeed throughout the Bible, we have specimens of the wise unerring providence of God: what important consequences depend, under his management, upon the smallest events; and with what certainty seeming contingencies are directed to the outcome which he has appointed! By these authentic specimens we learn to judge of the whole; and with still greater advantage by the light of the New Testament, which shows us, that the administration of all power in heaven and earth is in the hands of Jesus. The government is upon his shoulders: the King of saints is King of nations, King of kings, and Lord of lords: not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor a hair from our heads, without his cognizance. And though his ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts; though his agency is veiled from the eye of sense by the intervention of second causes; yet faith perceives, acknowledges, admires, and trusts his management. This study, like the former, does not require superior natural abilities, but is obvious to the weakest and lowest of his people, so far as their own duty and peace are concerned. The fourth volume is the book of the HEART, or of Human Nature, comprehending the experience of what passes within our own breasts, and the observations we make upon the principles and conduct of others, compared with what we read in the word of God. The heart of man is deep; but all its principles and workings, in every possible situation, and the various ways in which it is affected by sin, by Satan, by worldly objects, and by grace—in solitude and in company, in prosperity and in affliction—are disclosed and unfolded in the Scripture. Many, who are proud of their knowledge of what they might be safely ignorant of, are utter strangers to themselves. Having no acquaintance with the Scripture, they have neither skill nor inclination to look into their own hearts, nor any certain criterion whereby to judge of the conduct of human life. But the Bible which teaches us to read this mysterious book, also shows us the source, nature, and tendency of our hopes, fears, desires, pursuits, and perplexities; the reasons why we cannot be happy in ourselves, and the vanity and insufficiency of everything around us to help us. The rest and happiness proposed in the Gospel, is likewise found to be exactly suitable to the desires and necessities of the awakened heart. And the conduct of those who reject this salvation, as well as the gracious effects produced in those who receive it, prove to a demonstration, that the word of God is indeed a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. My limits will admit but of a few hints upon these extensive subjects. I shall only observe, that whoever is well read in these four books, is a wise person, how little whatever he may know of what the men of the world call

science. On the other hand, though a man should be master of the whole circle of classical, scientific, and philosophical knowledge, if he has no taste for the Bible, and has no ability to apply it to the works of creation and providence, and his own experience—he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. I have pointed out a treasure of more worth than all the volumes in the Vatican.

Chapter 3

01.01. A Christian's attainments in the present life

A Christian’s attainments in the present life

February, 1772

Dear sir,

I have been sitting perhaps a quarter of an hour with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter. A detail of the confused incoherent thoughts which have successively passed through my mind, would have more than filled the sheet; but your patience, and even your charity for the writer, would have been tried to the uttermost, if I could have penned them all down. At length my suspense reminded me of the Apostle’s words, Galatians 5:17, "You cannot do the things that you would." This is a humbling but a just account of a Christian’s attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given his people a desire and will aiming at great things; without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians. But they cannot do as they would—their best desires are weak and ineffectual; not absolutely so (for he who works in them to will, enables them in a measure to do likewise)—but in comparison with the mark at which they aim. So that, while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire he has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavors. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could—but in which, from first to last, he finds a humiliating inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in prayer. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in His judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honor and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things which are in heaven, that he should stoop so much lower, to afford his gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth! The Christian can bid others to expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind and greater in degree than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say—You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him who cares for you. By one hour’s intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him—you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week’s converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many books! And in this light, he would consider prayer, and improve it for himself. But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad to omit with a just excuse? The chief pleasure he derives from the performance, is to think that his task is finished! He has been drawing near to God with his lips, while his heart was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief. The like may be said of

reading the Scripture. He believes it to be the Word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet, while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day—he cannot do as he would! It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged, than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his privilege frequently dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad he is, indeed—of those occasions which recall the Savior to his mind; and with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon the ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would! Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting him out of our thoughts, of whom we say, He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could, we would set him always before us; his love would be the delightful theme of our hearts, from morn to noon—from noon to dewy eve. But though we aim at this good—evil is present with us! We find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, To take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Divine Providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God—and the good of those who fear him. He does not doubt that the hairs of his head are all numbered; that the blessings of every kind which he possesses, were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him, by the bounty and special favor of the Lord whom he serves—that afflictions spring not out of the ground—but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts; that there is a need-be, whenever for a season, he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt, than of what he sees with his eyes! And there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often, when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress—he cannot do what he would! He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond! Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! how much weakness and inconsistency even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! and what reason have we to confess, that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God, we are not under the law—but under grace. And even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin, are over-ruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned more from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on him, who is appointed as our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. The more vile we are in our own eyes—the more precious Christ will be to us! A deep repeated sense of the evil of our hearts, is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation to Christ—where it is due.

Again, a sense of these evils will (when hardly anything else can do it) reconcile us to the thoughts of death; yes, make us desirous to depart, that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep-rooted in our nature, that (like the leprous house) the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not until then—we shall be able to do the thing that we would! When we see Jesus, we shall be transformed into his image, and be done with sin and sorrow forever! forever!

LETTER 5

March, 1772

Dear sir, My last letter turned upon the Apostle's thought, Galatians 5:17, "You cannot do the things that you would." In the parallel place, Romans 7:19, there is another clause subjoined, "The evil evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." This, added to the former, would complete the dark side of my experience. Permit me to tell you a little part (for some things must not, cannot be told), not of what I have read—but of what I have felt, in illustration of this passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and evil imaginations, but this evil is present with me. My heart is like a highway, like a city without walls or gates! Nothing is so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid—but it can obtain access to my heart—at any time, or in any place! Neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table, exempt me from their intrusion! I sometimes compare my words to the treble of an instrument, which my thoughts accompany with a kind of bass, or rather anti-bass, in which every rule of harmony is broken, every possible combination of discord and confusion is introduced, utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the intended melody. Ah! what music would my praying and preaching often make in the ears of the Lord Almighty, if he listened to them as they are mine only! By men, the upper part only (if I may so speak) is heard; and small cause there is for self-gratulation, if they should happen to commend, when conscience tells me that they would be struck with astonishment and abhorrence could they but hear the whole! But if this awful effect of heart depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature. Yet, at least, I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment, and best wishes, I find something within me which nourishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to startle and flee, as I would if a loathsome toad or a serpent was put in my food, or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart (at least my heart) be—which can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency! Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, with out the least affectation of humility, (however fair his outward conduct appears) subscribe himself less than the least of all saints—the very chief of sinners!

I would not be influenced by a principle of SELF on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such a conduct, as clearly as I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought ten feet tall, and I know that a desire of being thought wise or good, is equally contrary to reason and truth. I would be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures supposed I had such a desire; and therefore I fear the very principle of SELF, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The pride of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own; because their good opinion of me depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this dead fly taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than gilded sins!

I would not indulge vain reasoning concerning the counsels, ways, and providences of God; yet I am prone to do it. That the Judge of all the earth will do right—is to me as evident and necessary as that two plus two make four. I believe that he has a sovereign right to do what he will with his own, and that this sovereignty is but another name for the unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness. But my reasoning are often such, as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formally renounced them! I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit, that would account for everything, and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend. What an evil is this—for a potsherd of the earth, to contend with its Maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible—yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty with God—when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable!

I would not cleave to a covenant of works; it should seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I have reasons enough to deter me from this. Yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord. I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—and it is the main pleasure and business of my life, to set forth the necessity and all-sufficiency of the Mediator between God and man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his alone. But here, as in everything else, I find a vast difference between my judgment and my experience. I am invited to take the water of life freely—yet often discouraged, because I have nothing with which to pay for it.

If I am at times favored with some liberty from the above-mentioned evils, it rather gives me a more favorable opinion of myself, than increases my admiration of the Lord’s goodness to so unworthy a creature! And when the returning tide of my corruptions convinces me that I am still the same, an unbelieving legal spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed! At least, I feel a weariness of being indebted to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness; and I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my desires after an increase of sanctification, arises from a secret wish that I might not be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him. This is only a faint sketch of my heart—it would require a volume, rather than a letter, to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I choose to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible Physician! I shall not die—but live, and declare the works of the Lord!

Chapter 4

01.01. A Christian's present blessedness

A Christian’s present blessedness

Dear sir, The Apostle speaks of a blessedness, which it is the design of the Gospel to impart to those who receive it. The Galatians once had it, and spoke of it. The Apostle reminds them of their loss, which is left upon record as a warning to us. His expression has led me sometimes to consider wherein a Christian’s present blessedness consists: I mean that which is attainable in this state of trial, and the sense and exercise of which may be, and too often is, suspended and taken from us. It is a blessedness which, if we speak of man in a natural state, his eye has not seen, nor his ear heard so as to understand it, nor can the idea of it arise in his heart. It is no way dependent upon outward circumstances. Prosperity cannot impart it, preserve, or supply the lack of it; nor can adversity put it out of our reach. The wise cannot acquire it by dint of superior abilities; nor shall the simple miss it for lack of capacity. The state of true believers, compared with that of others, is always blessed. If they are born from above, and united to Jesus, they are delivered from condemnation, and are heirs of eternal life, and may therefore well be accounted happy. But I consider now, not their harvest—but their first-fruits; not their portion in reversion—but the portion attainable in this life; not what they shall be in heaven—but what, in an humble attendance upon the Lord, they may be while upon earth.

There is even at present, a prize of our high calling set before us. It is much to be desired, that we had such a sense of its value as might prompt us so to run that we might obtain. I have thought this blessedness may be comprised in five particulars; though, in order to take a succinct view of the subject, some of these might be branched out into several others; but I would not, by too many subdivisions, give my letter the air of a sermon. In the first place, a clear, well-grounded, habitual persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved, is attainable; and though we may be safe, we cannot be said to enjoy blessedness without it. To be in a state of suspense and uncertainty in a point of so great importance, is painful; and the Lord has accordingly provided that his people may have strong consolation on this head. They are blessed, therefore, who have such views of the power, grace, and suitableness of Jesus, and the certainty and security of redemption in him, together with such a consciousness that they have anchored their hopes, and ventured their all, upon his person, work, and promise—as furnishes them with a ready answer to all the cavils of unbelief and Satan, in the Apostle’s manner, Romans 8:31-37. That Paul could thus challenge and triumph over all charges and enemies, was not an appendage of His office as an apostle—but a part of his experience as a believer; and it lies equally open to us. For we have the same Gospel and the same promises as he had; nor is the efficacy of the Holy Spirit’s teaching a whit weakened by length of time. But many stop short of this. They have a hope—but it rather springs from their frames and feelings, than from a spiritual apprehension of the Redeemer’s engagements and fullness, and therefore fluctuates and changes like the weather. Could they be persuaded to pray with earnestness and importunity, as the Apostle prays for them, Ephesians 1:17-18, and Ephesians 3:16-19, they would find a blessedness which they have not yet known; for it is said, "Ask—and you shall receive;" and it is said likewise, "You receive not—because you ask not."

Could this privilege be enjoyed singly, the natural man would have no objection to it. He would (as he thinks) be pleased to know he would be saved at last—provided that while here he might live in his sins. But the believer will not, cannot think himself blessed, unless he has likewise a conscience void of offense. This was the Apostle's daily exercise, though no one was farther from a legal spirit, or more dependent upon Jesus for acceptance. But if we live in any known sin, or allow ourselves in the customary omission of any known duty, supposing it possible in such a case to preserve a sense of our acceptance (which can hardly be supposed, for if the Spirit is grieved, our evidences decline of course)—yet we could not be easy.

If a traveler was absolutely sure of reaching his journey's end in safety; yet if he walked with a thorn in his foot, he must take every step in pain. Such a thorn will be felt in the conscience, until we are favored with a simplicity of heart, and made willing in all things, great or small, to yield obedience to the authority of the Lord's precepts, and make them the standing rule of our conduct, without willfully admitting a single exception. At the best, we shall be conscious of innumerable short-comings, and shameful defilement; but these things will not break our peace, if our hearts are upright. But if we trifle with God's Word, and connive at what we know to be wrong, we shall be weak, restless, and uncomfortable. How many, who we would hope are the children of the King, are lean from day to day, because some right-hand or right-eye evil, which they cannot persuade themselves to part with—keeps them halting between two opinions! and they are as distant from happiness, as they are from the possibility of reconciling the incompatible services of God and the world. But happy indeed is he who condemns not himself, in his conduct.

Real communion with the Lord, in his appointed means of grace, is likewise an important branch of this blessedness. They were instituted for this end, and are sufficient, by virtue of his power and Spirit, to answer it. I do not believe this enjoyment will be always equal; but I believe a comfortable sense of it, in some measure, is generally attainable. To read the Scripture, not as an attorney may read a will, merely to know the sense—but as the heir reads it, as a description and proof of his interest; to hear the Gospel as the voice of our Beloved, so as to have little leisure either for admiring the abilities or censuring the defects of the preacher; and, in prayer, to feel a liberty of pouring out our hearts before the Lord, to behold some glances of his goodness passing before us, and to breathe forth before him the temper of a child, the spirit of adoption; and thus, by beholding his glory, to be conformed more and more to his image, and to renew our strength by drawing water out of the wells of salvation— herein is blessedness! Those who have tasted it can say, It is good for me to draw near to God! The soul thus refreshed by the water of life, is preserved from thirsting after the vanities of the world; thus instructed in the sanctuary, comes down from the mount filled with heavenly wisdom, anointed with a holy unction, and thereby qualified to judge, speak, and act in character, in all the relations and occasions of secular life. In this way, a spiritual taste is acquired, something analogous to the meaning of the word taste when applied to music or good-breeding; by which discords and improprieties are observed and avoided, as it were by instinct; and what is right is felt and followed, not so much by the force of rules, as by a habit insensibly acquired, and in which the substance of all necessary rules are, if I may so say, digested. O that I knew more of this blessedness, and more of its effects!

Another branch of blessedness, is a power of reposing ourselves and all our concerns upon the Lord's faithfulness and care; and may be considered in two respects—a reliance upon him that he will surely provide for us, guide us, protect us; be our help in trouble, our shield in danger; so that,

however poor, weak, and defenseless in ourselves, we may rejoice in his all-sufficiency as our own. And farther, in consequence of this, a peaceful, humble submission to his will, under all events which, upon their first impression, are contrary to our own views and desires. Surely, in a world like this, where everything is uncertain, where we are exposed to trials on every hand, and know not but a single hour may bring forth something painful, yes dreadful, to our natural sensations, there can be no blessedness—but so far as we are thus enabled to entrust and resign all to the direction and faithfulness of the Lord our Shepherd. For lack of more of this spirit, multitudes of professing Christians perplex and wound themselves, and dishonor their high calling, by continual anxieties, alarms, and complaints. They think nothing safe under the Lord's keeping, unless their own eye is likewise upon it; and are seldom satisfied with any of his dispensations. For though he gratifies their desires in nine instances, a refusal in the tenth spoils the relish of all, and they show the truths of the Gospel can afford them little comfort—if self is crossed. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings—he shall be kept in perfect peace, though the earth is moved, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea! The paper admonishes me it is time to end—and I have not room to detain you long upon the fifth particular. It belongs to a believer's blessedness, to feel his spirit cheerful and active for the Lord's service in the world. For to what other end should he wish to live? If he thought of himself only—it would be better to depart and be with Jesus immediately. But he is a debtor to his grace and love; and though, strictly, he can make no returns—yet he longs to show his thankfulness. And if the Lord gives him a heart to redeem his time, to devote his strength and influence, and lay himself out for his service, that he may be instrumental in promoting his cause, in comforting his people; or enable him to let his light shine before men, that his God and Father may be honored; he will account it blessedness. This is indeed the great end of life, and he knows it will evidently appear so at the approach of death; and therefore, while others are cumbered about many things—he esteems this the one thing needful.

Chapter 5

01.01. A Guide to Godly Disputation

A Guide to Godly Disputation by John Newton

Dear Sir, As you are likely to be engaged in controversy, and your love of truth is joined with natural warmth of temper, my friendship makes me solicitous on your behalf. You are of the strongest side; for truth is great, and must prevail; so that a person of abilities inferior to yours might take the field with a confidence of victory. I am not therefore anxious for the outcome of the battle; but I would have you more than a conqueror, and to triumph, not only over your adversary, but also over yourself. If you cannot be vanquished, you may be wounded. To preserve you from such wounds as might give you cause of weeping over your conquests, I would present you with some considerations, which, if duly attended to, will do you the service of a great coat of armor; such armor, that you need not complain, as David did of Saul's, that it will be more cumbersome than useful; for you will easily perceive that it is taken from that great armory provided for the Christian soldier—the Word of God. I take it for granted that you will not expect any apology for my freedom, and therefore I shall not offer one. For methods sake, I may reduce my advice to three heads, respecting your opponent, the public, and yourself.

1. As to your opponent, I wish that before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord's teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write.

If you account him as a BELIEVER, though greatly mistaken in the subject of debate between you, the words of David to Joab concerning Absalom, are very applicable: "Deal gently with him for my sake." The Lord loves him and bears with him; therefore you must not despise him, or treat him harshly! The Lord bears with you likewise, and expects that you should show tenderness to others—from a sense of the much forgiveness you need yourself. In a little while you will meet in heaven—he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now! Anticipate that period in your thoughts, and though you may find it necessary to oppose his errors, view him personally as a kindred soul, with whom you are to be happy in Christ forever. But if you look upon him as an UNCONVERTED person, in a state of enmity against God and his grace (a supposition which, without good evidence, you should be very unwilling to admit), he is a more proper object of your compassion than of your anger! Alas! "He knows not what he does!" But you know who has made you to differ from him. If God, in his sovereign pleasure, had so appointed, you might have been as he is now; and he, instead of you, might have been set for the defense of the gospel! You were both equally blind by nature. If you attend to this, you will not reproach or hate him, because the Lord has been pleased to open your eyes—and not his! Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles, to the exercise of gentleness and compassion. If, indeed, those who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts—then we might with less inconsistency be offended at their obstinacy! But if we believe the

very contrary to this, our part is not to argue, but in meekness to "gently teach those who oppose the truth—if perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

If you write with a desire of being an instrument of correcting mistakes, you will of course be cautious of laying stumbling blocks in the way of the blind, or of using any expressions which may exasperate their passions, or confirm them in their false principles, (humanly speaking).

2. By PRINTING your article, you will appeal to the PUBLIC—where your readers may be ranged under three divisions:

First, such as differ from you in principle. Concerning these I may refer you to what I have already said. Though you have your eye upon one person chiefly—there are many like-minded with him; and the same reasoning will hold, whether as to one or to a million.

There will be likewise many who pay too little regard to true religion, who have no settled system of their own, and yet are biased in favor of those sentiments which are at least repugnant to the good opinion they naturally have of themselves. These are very incompetent judges of doctrine; but they can form a tolerable judgment of a writer's spirit. They know that meekness, humility and love are the characteristics of a Christian temper. And though they treat the doctrines of grace as mere notions and speculations, which, supposing they adopted them, would have no beneficial influence upon their conduct; yet from us, who profess these principles, they always expect such attitudes and dispositions as correspond with the precepts of the gospel. They are quick-sighted to discern when we deviate from such a spirit, and avail themselves of it to justify their contempt of our arguments. The Scriptural maxim that "man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires," is verified by daily observation. If our zeal is embittered by expressions of anger, invective, or scorn—we may think we are doing service of the cause of truth, when in reality we shall only bring it into discredit! The weapons of our warfare, and which alone are powerful to break down the strongholds of error, are not carnal, but spiritual. They are arguments fairly drawn from Scripture and experience, and enforced by such a mild address, as may persuade our readers, that, whether we can convince them or not—we wish well to their souls, and contend only for the truth's sake. If we can satisfy them that we act upon these motives, our point is half gained; they will be more disposed to consider calmly what we offer; and if they should still dissent from our opinions, they will be constrained to approve our intentions.

You will have a third class of readers, who being of your own sentiments, will readily approve of what you advance, and may be further established and confirmed in their views of the Scripture doctrines, by a clear and masterly elucidation of your subject. You may be instrumental to their edification, if the law of kindness as well as of truth regulates your pen; otherwise you may do them harm.

There is a principle of SELF, which disposes us to despise those who differ from us; and we are often under its influence, when we think we are only showing a fitting zeal in the cause of God.

I readily believe that the leading points of Arminianism spring from and are nourished by the pride of the human heart! But I would be glad if the reverse were always true; and that to embrace what are called the Calvinistic doctrines was an infallible token of a humble mind! I think I have known some Arminians, that is, people who for lack of a clearer light, have been afraid of receiving the doctrines of free grace, who yet have given evidence that their hearts were in a degree humbled

before the Lord. And I am afraid there are Calvinists, who, while they account it a proof of their humility, that they are willing in words to debase the creature and to give all the glory of salvation to the Lord—yet are of a prideful, harsh and bitter spirit. Whatever it is that makes us trust in ourselves, that we are comparatively wise or good, so as to treat those with contempt who do not subscribe to our doctrines, or follow our party—is a proof and fruit of a self-righteous spirit!

Self-righteousness can feed upon doctrines—as well as upon works! A man may have the heart of a Pharisee, while his head is stored with orthodox notions of the unworthiness of the creature, and the riches of free grace!

Yes, I would add—the best of men are not wholly free from this leaven; and therefore are too apt to be pleased with such caricatures as hold up our adversaries to ridicule—and by consequence flatter our own superior judgments. Controversies, for the most part, are so managed as to indulge—rather than to repress this sinful disposition; and therefore, generally speaking, they are productive of little good. They provoke those whom they should convince—and puff up those whom they should edify!

I hope your article will savor of a spirit of true humility, and be a means of promoting it in others.

3. This leads me, in the last place, to consider your own concern in your present undertaking. It seems a laudable service to defend the faith once delivered to the saints; we are commanded to contend earnestly for it, and to convince gainsayers. If ever such defenses were seasonable and expedient, they appear to be so in our own day, when errors abound on all sides—and every truth of the gospel is either directly denied or grossly misrepresented. And yet we find but very few writers of controversy who have not been manifestly hurt by it. Either they grow in a sense of their own importance; or imbibe an angry, contentious spirit; or they insensibly withdraw their attention from those spiritual truths which are the food and immediate support of the life of faith—and spend their time and strength upon matters that are at most but of a secondary value! This shows, that if the service is honorable, it is also dangerous. What will it profit a man if he gains his cause and silences his adversary—if at the same time he loses that humble, tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made? Your aim, I doubt not, is good, but you have need to watch and pray—for you will find Satan at your right hand to entice you. He will try to pollute your piety; and though you set out in defense of the cause of God, if you are not continually looking to the Lord to keep you—it may become your own cause, and awaken in you those tempers which are inconsistent with true peace of mind, and will surely obstruct your communion with God! Be upon your guard against admitting anything personal into the debate. If you think you have been ill treated—this will give you an opportunity of showing that you are a disciple of Jesus, who "when reviled—He did not revile in return; when suffering—He did not threaten, but committed Himself to the One who judges justly." This is our pattern, thus we are to speak and write for God, and "not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult—but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this." The wisdom that is from above, is not only pure, but also peaceable and gentle; and the lack of these qualifications, like the dead fly in the jar of ointment, will spoil the fragrance and efficacy of our labors. If we act in a wrong spirit—we shall bring little glory to God; do little good to our fellow creatures; and procure neither honor nor comfort to ourselves! If you can be content with showing your wit, and gaining the laugh on your side—you have an easy task! But I hope you have a far nobler aim; and that, sensible of the

solemn importance of gospel truths, and the compassion due to the souls of men, you would rather be a means of removing prejudices in a single instance, than obtain the empty applause of thousands! Go forth, therefore, in the name and strength of the Lord Almighty, speaking the truth in love; and may he give you a witness in many hearts that you are taught of God, and favored with the unction of his Holy Spirit!

Chapter 6

01.01. A plan of pastoral training

A plan of pastoral training by John Newton

March 1, 1784

Dear sir,

I am not the son of a prophet, nor was I bred up among the prophets. I am quite a stranger to what passes within the walls of colleges and academies. I was as one born out of due time, and led, under the secret guidance of the Lord, by very unusual steps, to preach the faith which I once labored to destroy. Since you know all this, how could you think of applying to me for the plan of an academic institution? Yet, I confess, the design you mentioned to me, in which some of your friends have thoughts of engaging, is so important in my view, that I am willing to come as near to your wishes as I can. I must not pretend to dictate a plan for the business which is now in contemplation. But, if you will allow me to indulge a sort of reverie, and suppose myself a person of some consequence in Utopia, where I could have the modeling of everything to my own mind; and that I was about to form an academy there, for the sole purpose of educating young men for the ministry of the Gospel—in this way I am willing to offer you my thoughts upon the subject with great simplicity and freedom. And, if any of the regulations of my imaginary academy should be judged applicable to your design, you and your friends will be heartily welcome to them.

I should then, in the first place lay down two or three important MAXIMS which I would hope never to lose sight of in the conduct of the affair; excepting that, if I should begin without them, I must stumble at the very threshold; and that, whenever I should neglect them afterwards, all my care, and labor, and expense, would be from that time thrown away. My first maxim is, That none but He who made the world—can make a minister of the Gospel. If a young man has capacity—then culture and application may make him a scholar, a philosopher, or an orator; but a true minister must have certain principles, motives, feelings, and aims, which no industry or endeavors of men can either acquire or communicate. They must be given from above, or they cannot be received.

I adopt, as a second maxim, That the Holy Scriptures are, both comprehensively and exclusively, the grand treasury of all that knowledge which is requisite and sufficient to make the minister the man of God, thoroughly furnished for every branch of his office. If, indeed, no other studies were of subordinate importance, in order to a right understanding of the Scriptures, and especially to those who are not only to know for themselves—but are appointed to teach others also; then academic instruction would be needless, and I might supply my young men with everything at once, by putting the Bible into their hands, and directing them to read it continually with attention and prayer. But my meaning is, that though there is such a connection in knowledge, that every branch of science may, by a judicious application, be rendered subservient to a minister’s great design; yet no attainments in philology, philosophy, or in any or all the particulars which constitute the aggregate of what we call learning, can, in the least, contribute to make a minister of the Gospel, any farther than he is taught of God to refer them to, and to regulate them by, the Scripture as a

standard. On the contrary, the more a man is furnished with this kind of apparatus, unless the leading truths of Scripture reign and flourish in his heart, he will be but the more qualified to perplex himself, and to mislead his hearers! My third maxim is an inference from the two former. That the true gospel minister who possesses these secondary advantages, though he may know the same things, and acquire his knowledge by the like methods as other scholars do, yet he must know and possess them in a manner peculiar to himself. His criticisms, if he is a critic, will discover something which the greatest skill in grammatical niceties cannot of itself reach. If he is an orator, he will not speak in the artificial self-applauding language of man's wisdom—but in simplicity and with authority, like one who feels the ground he stands upon, and knows to whom he belongs, and whom he serves. If he mentions a passage of history, it will not be to show off his knowledge—but to illustrate or prove his point; and it will be evident, from his manner of speaking, that, though he may have taken the facts from human writings, his knowledge of the springs of human action, and of the superintendency of a Divine Providence, is derived from the Word of God. And so of other instances. In a word, if a young man was to consult me how he might be wise and learned in the usual sense of the words, I might advise him to repair to Oxford or Cambridge, or to twenty other places which I could name. But, if I thought him really desirous of becoming wise to win souls, I would invite him to my New College in Utopia. From these general observations, I proceed more directly to my subject. You are then to suppose that I have taken my determination and counted the cost, and am now sitting down to contrive my plan. As a little attention to method may not be amiss, I shall endeavor to range my thoughts under four principal heads, concerning,

1. The Place.

2. The Tutor.

3. The Choice of Pupils.

4. The Course of Education.

1. The Place. If the metropolis of Utopia should be anything like ours, there are obvious reasons to forbid my fixing upon a spot very near it. I think not nearer than a moderate day's journey. Nor would I wish it much farther distant. Occasional visits to a great city, where there are many considerable ministers and Christians, should not be rendered impracticable; as they might furnish my young men with opportunities of forming connections, and making observations, that might contribute to their usefulness in future life. I would not only fear lest they should be contaminated by the vices which too generally prevail where men live in a throng: if they escaped these, I would still have apprehensions, lest the notice that might be taken of them, and the respect shown them by well meaning friends, should imperceptibly seduce them into a spirit of self-importance, give them a turn for dress and company, and spoil that simplicity and dependence, without which I could have little hope of their success. I would wish it may be their grand aim to please the Lord, and under him, and for his sake, to please their tutor. They have, as yet, no business with other people. As for their tutor, they must love, reverence, and obey, and accurately watch his looks and every intimation of his will. But the difference between a rural and a town situation is so striking at first view, that I suppose it quite needless to say more upon this head. I therefore proceed,

2. To the choice of my tutor. Whoever he may be, when I have found him, and fixed him, I will take the liberty to tell him, that he is called to the most honorable and important office that man, in the

present state of things, is capable of. The skillful and faithful tutor is not only useful to his pupils, considered as individuals—but he is remotely the instrument of all the blessings and benefits which the Lord is pleased to communicate by their ministry, in the course of their stated and occasional labors, to the end of life. On the other hand, the errors and prejudices of an incompetent tutor, adopted and perpetuated by his disciples, may produce a long progression of evil consequences, which may continue to operate and multiply when he and they are dead and forgotten. For, if the streams which are to spread far and wide throughout a land, are poisoned in the very source, who can foresee how far the mischief may be diffused. Unless, therefore, I can procure a proper tutor, I must give up my design. It is better the youth should remain untaught—than that they should be taught to do wrong. And I seem not easily satisfied on this head. My idea of the person to whom I could cheerfully in trust the care of my academy, is not of an ordinary size.

However, since we are upon Utopian ground, where we may imagine as largely as we please, I will attempt to delineate him. And, were I to recommend a tutor to your friends, it should be the man who I thought came the nearest to the character I am about to describe. For his first essential, indispensable qualification—I require a mind deeply penetrated with a sense of the grace, glory, and efficacy of the Gospel. However learned and able in other respects, he shall not have a single pupil from me, unless I have reason to believe that his heart is attached to the person of the Redeemer, as God-man; that, as a sinner, his whole dependence is upon the Redeemer's work of love, his obedience unto death, his intercession and mediatorial fullness. His sentiments must be clear and explicit respecting the depravity of human nature, and the necessity and reality of the agency of the Holy Spirit—to quicken, enlighten, sanctify, and seal those who, under his influence, are led to Jesus for salvation. With respect to the different schemes or systems of divinity which obtain among those who are united in the acknowledgment of the above fundamental truths, I would look for my tutor among those who are called Calvinists; but he must not be of a curious, metaphysical, disputatious turn, a mere system-monger, or party-zealot. I seek for one who, having been himself taught the deep things of God by the Holy Spirit, in a gradual experimental manner; while he is charmed with the beautiful harmony and divinity of all the doctrines of grace, is at the same time aware of the mysterious depths of the divine counsels, and the impossibility of their being fully comprehended by our feeble understandings.

Such a man will be patient and temperate in explaining the peculiarities of the Gospel to his pupils, and will wisely adapt himself to their several states, attainments, and capacities. After the example of the Great Teacher, he will consider what they can bear, and aim to lead them forward step by step, in such a manner, that the sentiments he instills into them may be their own, and not taken up merely upon his authority. He will propose the Scripture to them as a consistent whole; and guard them against the extremes into which controversial writers have forced themselves and each other, in support of a favorite hypothesis, so as, under a pretense of honoring some parts of the Word of God, to overlook, if not to contradict, what is taught with equal clearness in other parts.

I wish my pupils to be well versed in useful learning, and therefore my tutor must be a learned man. He must not only be able to teach them whatever is needful for them to learn—but should be possessed of such a fund, as that the most forward and most promising among them may feel he has a decided superiority over them in every branch of their studies. Besides an accurate skill in

the school classics, he should be well acquainted with books at large, and possessed of a general knowledge of the state of literature and religion, and the memorable events of history in the successive ages of mankind. Particularly, he should be well versed in church history; for, though it is true, that the bulk of it is little worth knowing, for its own sake, yet a man of genius and wisdom will draw from the whole mass—a variety of observations suited to assist young minds in forming a right judgment of human nature, of true religion, of its counterfeits, and of the abuses to which the name of religion is capable of being perverted. And he will likewise be able to select for their use, such authors and subjects as deserve their notice, from the surrounding rubbish in which they are almost buried. My tutor should likewise be competently acquainted with the lighter accomplishments, which are usually understood by the term Belles Lettres; and a proper judge of them with respect both to their intrinsic and relative value. Their intrinsic value (to creatures who are posting to eternity) is not great; and a wise man, if he has not been tinctured with them in early life, will seldom think it worth his while to attend much to them afterwards. Yet in such an age as ours, it is some disadvantage to a man in public life, if he is quite a stranger to them. To a tutor they are in a manner necessary.

It is farther desirable that he should have a lively imagination, under the direction of a sound judgment, and a correct and cultivated taste. Otherwise, how can he assist and form the taste and judgment of his pupils, or direct or criticize their compositions?

Natural science is not only a noble study—but one which offers the most interesting and profitable relaxations from the weight of severer studies. If the tutor is not possessed of this, he will lose a thousand opportunities of pointing out to his pupils the signatures of wisdom, power, and goodness, which the wonder-working God has impressed upon every part of the visible creation. But, at the same time, he should know where to stop, and what bounds to set to their inquiries. It is not necessary that either he or they should be numbered among the first astronomers or virtuosi of the age. A life devoted to the service of God and souls, will not afford leisure for this diminutive preeminence. A general knowledge will suffice, even in the tutor. And, while he lectures upon these subjects, he will caution them against spending too much time and thought upon those branches of philosophy which have but a very remote tendency to qualify them for preaching the Gospel. They are sent into the world, and into the academy, not to collect shells, and fossils, and butterflies, or to surprise each other with feats of electricity—but to win souls for Christ!

Perhaps I have said enough of my tutor’s knowledge; and may now consider him with regard to his SPIRIT, his methods of communicating what he knows to his pupils, and his manner of living with them as a father with his children.

He must be apt to teach. A man may know much, yet not have a facility of imparting his ideas. Ability to teach is a talent and a gift of God, and therefore will always be found, in some good degree, in the person who is called of God to the tutor’s office.

He will consider himself as a teacher, not only in the lecture-room—but in all places, and at all times, whether sitting in the house, or walking by the way, if any of his pupils are with him. And he will love to have them always about him, so far as their studies and his own necessary avocations will admit.

Two things he will aim to secure from them—reverence and affection. Without maintaining a steady authority he can do nothing. Likewise, unless they love him, everything will go on heavily. But, if the pupils are properly chosen, such a man as I have described will be both loved and feared. His spiritual and exemplary deportment, his wisdom and abilities—will command their respect. His condescension and gentleness, his tenderness for their personal concerns, his assiduity in promoting their comfort, and doing them every friendly service in his power—will engage their love. These happy effects will be farther promoted by their frequent mutual fellowship in prayer, by his expository lectures, and by his public ministry, if he is a preacher. Having his eye unto the Lord, and his heart in his work, a blessing from on high shall descend upon him and upon his house. As human nature is the same in all places, it is probable that the Christians in our Utopia may be divided among themselves with respect to rituals and modes of worship, in some such manner as we see and feel among us. Now here, as in everything else, I would have my tutor to be a man of a generous enlarged spirit, a real friend of that liberty with which Jesus has made his people free from the shackles and impositions of men; one who uniformly judges and acts upon that grand principle of the New Testament, which is likewise a plain and obvious maxim of common sense; I mean, that Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, is the sole Lord and Judge of conscience.

I suppose my tutor has already taken his side; that he is either in the establishment, (if there is one in Utopia,) or, of course, a dissenter from it. And really, as to my scheme, I am indifferent which side he has taken; we shall not have a minute's debate about it, provided he acts consistently with the principles which I have assigned him. But, as I myself, living in England, am of the Established Church, that you may not suspect me of partiality, I will suppose, and am ready to take it for granted, that he will be found to be an Utopian Dissenter. On this supposition my imagination takes a flight, hastens into the midst of things, and anticipates as present what is yet future. Methinks I see the tutor indulging his scholars (as at proper seasons he often will) with an hour of free conversation; and from some question proposed to him concerning the comparative excellence or authority of different forms of church government, taking occasion to open his mind to them, something in the following manner.

"My dear friends, you may have observed, that when, in the course of our lectures, I have been led to touch upon this subject, it has not been my custom to speak in a dogmatic style. I have sometimes intimated to you, that, though every part of the Levitical worship was of positive divine institution, yet, when the people rested and trusted in their external forms, the Lord speaks as abhorring his own appointments. I have told you, upon the apostle's authority, that the kingdom of God consists not in foods and drinks, in names and forms—but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

"Amidst the many divisions and subdivisions which are in the visible church, there are, in reality—but two sorts of people, the children of God, and the children of the world. The former sort, though partakers in one life and in one hope, yet living in successive ages, in various countries, under very different modes of government, education, and customs—it seems morally impossible that they should all agree, as by instinct, in one certain mode of church worship. It is indeed said, that there is a plan prescribed in the New Testament, to which all ought to conform as nearly as possible. All parties say this in favor of their own plans; and men, eminent for wisdom and holiness, are to be found among the advocates for each. But is it not strange, that, if the Lord has

appointed such a standard, the wisest and holiest of his people should differ so widely in their views of it, and deviate so far from each other when they attempt to reduce it to practice?

"Let others dispute; but, as for you, my friends, and I, let us rather adore the wisdom and goodness of our Lord. He who knew the heart of man, the almost invincible power of early prejudices, and what innumerable circumstances in different periods and places, would render it impracticable for his people to tread exactly in the same line, has provided accordingly. The rules and lights he has afforded us respecting the outward administration of his church, are recorded with such a latitude, that his true worshipers may conscientiously hope they are acceptable to him, though the plans which they believe to be consistent with his revealed will, are far from corresponding with each other. It is sufficient that the apostolical canons, 'Let all things be done decently and in order,' 'to edification and in love,' are universally binding; and, were these on all sides attended to, smaller differences would be very supportable.

"I have often pointed out to you the wonderful analogy which the Lord has established in many instances, between his works in the outward creation, and in his kingdom of grace. Perhaps the variety observable in the former, may be one instance of this kind. When you see every vegetable arrayed in green, exactly of the same shade, or all tulips variegated in the same manner, as if painted from one common pattern, then, and not before, expect to find true believers agreed in their views and practice respecting the modes of religion.

"Study therefore the Scriptures, my friends, with humble prayer, that the Lord may give you such views of these concerns as may fit you for the stations and services to which his providence may lead you. See with your own eyes, and judge for yourselves. This is your right. One is your Master, even Christ; and you need not, you ought not, to call any man master upon earth. But be content with this. Do not arrogate to yourselves the power of judging for others. Be willing that they should see with their own eyes likewise. The Papists, upon the ground of the assumed infallibility of their church, are, at least, consistent with themselves in condemning all who differ from them. Protestants confess themselves fallible, yet speak the same peremptory language.

"As to myself, if I had thought it preferable, upon the whole, to be a minister in our established church, I might probably have been one; but, I trust, I am where the Lord would have me be, and I am satisfied. My desire for you is to see you able ministers of the New Testament. As to the part of the vineyard in which you are to labor, wait simply upon the Lord, and he in his good time will point it out to you. If Scripture and conscience lead you to prefer the dissenting line, I shall say, it is well, provided you embrace it with a liberal spirit, and have a better warrant for your choice, than merely the example of your tutor. Should you determine otherwise, I shall still say, it is well, provided I see you unselfish, humble, and faithful. Your being educated under my roof is a circumstance not likely to facilitate your admission into the established church; but if the Lord, in his providence, should open to any of you a door on that side, and incline you to enter, I shall not dissuade you from it, as though I thought it were sinful. I shall only wish you to attend to that advice which cannot mislead you, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your path.'"

Thus far my tutor.—Or, since I am in a supposing humor, if you will give me leave to make one supposition more, that it is possible there may be Methodists and Itinerants in Utopia, as we have in England; he would then, perhaps, continue his discourse a little longer, as follows:

"Though the pastoral care of a single congregation is the service which the Lord has allotted me, and I have not seen it my duty to engage in anything which might lead me long or far from the people to whom I serve, I am no enemy to itinerant preaching. My Lord and Savior himself, his apostles and first servants, were all itinerants; and I believe that houses and ships, hills and plains, the side of a river or the sea-shore, are all fit places for preaching the Gospel, and sufficiently authorized as such by the highest precedents. I cannot therefore censure, much less condemn, a practice which the Scripture warrants, and to which, I doubt not, the Lord has given abundant testimony in our own times, by making the Word thus dispensed effectual to the conversion and consolation of many souls.

"I believe, indeed, that some people, not duly acquainted with their own hearts, nor with what is requisite to constitute a preacher, have too hastily supposed themselves called to preach the Gospel, when the event has proved that the Lord has neither called them to his service, nor furnished them for it. And I think, if it should generally be allowed that young men are proper judges in their own cause, and have a right to commence to be preachers, when, or where, or how they please, without the advice or approbation of ministers more experienced than themselves, many inconveniences may and must follow. I could wish every young man to be so impressed with the force of the apostle's question, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' that he should rather need invitation and encouragement to preach, 'than be disposed to run hastily into the work, as the horse rushes into the battle.' But I must not expect everything to be managed according to my wish. I have mourned over the miscarriages of some itinerant preachers; but I have been much comforted by the good conduct and success of others. It is neither my business nor my intention to persuade you to this course; but if, when you are properly instructed and qualified for the ministry, I should see any of you disposed to go forth in the itinerant way; should I be satisfied of your principles and motives, and have reason to hope your zeal was tempered with humility; I know not that I dared refuse my consent. For, as I have often told you, the honor of my Lord and Savior, and the welfare of precious souls, are far dearer to me than the detached interests of any church party; and, if Christ be faithfully and successfully preached, in whatever way, and by whatever instruments, he is pleased to work, I do rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

I think what I have said of the tutor, and what he has just now said for himself, may suffice to give you an idea of the person I would choose; and that it is now time to consider.

3. The choice of pupils. I would have them all resident with the tutor, and therefore their number can be but small; especially as I would wish him to undertake every branch of their education. He might have an assistant to teach the rudiments of the languages, a service that would otherwise take up much of the time which he could better employ; but he must do all the rest himself. I suppose therefore that ten, or at the most twelve, pupils will be a sufficient number to be under his care at once. The man I have described would not be mercenary—but the laborer is worthy of his reward. As I shall find him work enough to take up his whole time, his pay ought to be competent and liberal; and, as I have supposed myself rich enough to execute my plan in whatever manner I please, I hope I shall not starve my tutor, nor put his economical talents on the stretch, to contrive how to squeeze and save a pittance out of the sum allotted for their board. I would fix the boarding upon equitable and moderate terms, distinct from his salary, which should be handsome, and always the same, whether he had one pupil with him, or ten or twelve. It would be my part to keep the number up; but, if I neglect it, he would be no loser; nor ought he to be dependent upon my

caprice or negligence; but he should stand upon an easy, settled footing, so as to be free, not only from poverty—but from anxious care, that he might be able to attend his business without distraction. And now my house is ready, where shall I find young men to fill it? I must look around me, and request my friends to look out for me. When I have found two, I will send them, and the rest as they offer. Perhaps it would be one of the chief difficulties attending my scheme, to collect ten or twelve youths worthy of such a tutor.

They must be serious. I mean, they must have an awakened experimental sense of the truth and goodness of the Gospel. This is a point not easily ascertained, especially in young people. There is often a something that resembles it, which, upon trial, does not prove satisfactory. However, my part will be to look to the Lord for guidance, and then judge as well as I can. But I hope no persuasion or recommendation, no desire of pleasing or obliging a friend, would prevail on me to admit one who I did not truly believe was a subject of the grace of God. Who would undertake to teach a parrot algebra? Yet this would be as practicable as to make those able and faithful preachers, whom the Lord has not first made Christians!

They must likewise have capacity. It is not necessary that their abilities should be of the first-rate, (perhaps but few of such are called,) but some tolerable measure of natural abilities, capable of being opened and improved by education, seems almost necessary in the person who aims to be a minister of the Gospel. At least it will be necessary upon my plan; for, as my tutor cannot take many, I must give the preference to such as may both do him credit by their proficiency under his care, and be qualified to profit others when they leave him.

If the heart be changed and sanctified by grace—a person of the weakest natural understanding will acquire, under divine teaching, all that is necessary to enable him to fill up his station in private life with propriety, to overcome the world, and to make his own calling and election sure. But a preacher must have gifts as well as grace, to be able to divide the Word of truth as a workman that needs not to be ashamed. And, therefore, though the Lord was once pleased by a dumb donkey to rebuke the foolishness of a prophet, I am not forward to acknowledge those as ambassadors sent by him, (however well-meaning they may be,) who seem either to have no message to deliver—or no ability to deliver it.

I would likewise be satisfied, as much as possible, concerning the views and motives which make them desirous of devoting themselves to the ministry. Some desires of this kind are very frequently found in young converts. When a sense of eternal things is new and lively upon their minds, and they look round upon a world lying in wickedness, they are much affected. The obligations they feel to the Redeemer, a grief that he should be so little known, so little loved, and a compassion for their fellow-sinners, whom they see liable to perish for lack of knowledge, make them often long to be employed, and sometimes constrain them to run before they are sent.

But, if they are not really designed by the Lord for this service, either their desires towards it gradually subside, and they yield themselves to his appointment in other paths of life. Or, if they unadvisedly venture upon it, they are seldom either comfortable or useful. They soon feel themselves unequal to the work; or, if self-conceit prevents them from feeling it, their hearers are very sensible of it. They often mistake errors for truth; they retail scraps and shreds of sentiments which they pick up from others, and for lack of judgment, misapply them. Thus hypocrites are encouraged, and those whom the Lord would have comforted, are made sad. They think that

preaching with power consists in vociferation and novel views; and that to utter everything that comes upon their minds, without any regard to text, context, occasion, or connection, is to preach extempore.

Too often Satan gains open advantage over them. They are puffed up with pride, taken in snares, and perhaps fall into such woeful miscarriages, as at length ruin their characters, and stop their mouths.

It is, therefore, of great importance to be workers together with the Lord in his business; to choose those whom he chooses, to bring forward those whom he is preparing, and, if possible, none but these. We cannot indeed know the heart—but we may be wary and circumspect in judging by such evidences as we can procure; and we ought to be so. Perhaps, after all, we may be mistaken in some instances; but, if we have done our best, we have done well, and shall not be blameable for such consequences as we could not possibly foresee or prevent. If a candidate for the academy appears to be of a sincere and humble spirit, to have some acquaintance with his own heart, a tolerable capacity, hard-working, and an unblamable character as to his personal conduct, I shall be disposed to admit him. But I would leave the final decision of his fitness to the tutor; for which purpose it may be proper that he should be under the tutor's eye, for a limited time, as a probationer.

4. The next point I am to consider is, the course of STUDIES they should pursue; though I am rather inclined to give this up, absolutely and without reserve, to the tutor, who, if he answers my description, must be the most proper person to institute a plan for himself, and would have no need of my assistance. But, if his humility and his good opinion of me should lead him to desire my advice, he should have it. I do not mean as to little secondary issues—but I would submit to him, in a general and miscellaneous way, such hints as may occur to me upon the subject. And I submit them to you beforehand. A few thing may be previously noticed, which, though they do not properly belong to their academic studies, are well worthy of attention.

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus!" 2 Timothy 2:3. A minister is a soldier of Jesus Christ, and, as such, is to expect and endure hardship. It is well to have this in your eye in the education of young men. They are not called to be loafers—but soldiers; not to live delicately—but to prepare for hardship. They should therefore be advised and accustomed to prefer a plain and frugal manner of life, and to avoid multiplying those expenses which luxury and folly would prompt us to multiply almost infinitely. A propensity to indulgence either in the quantity or quality of food, is a baseness unworthy of a man, still more unsuitable to the character of a Christian, and scandalous in a minister! I am no advocate for a monkish austerity, or a scrupulous, superstitious self-denial, which will almost starve the body—to feed the pride of the heart. It is, however, very desirable to possess, in early life, a habit of temperance, a mastery over appetite, and a resolute guard against everything that has a tendency to blunt the activity of the mind and heart. And youth is the proper season for gaining this mastery, which, if the golden opportunity is then lost, is seldom thoroughly acquired afterwards. A propriety in dress should also be consulted. Neatness is commendable; but a student in divinity should keep at a distance from being a devotee to fashion. A finical disposition in this article not only occasions a waste of time and expense—but is an evidence of a trifling turn of mind, and exposes the fine self-admiring youth, to the contempt or pity of the wise and godly.

Farther, a habit of rising early should be resolutely formed. It redeems much time, and chiefly of those hours which are most favorable to study or devotion. It likewise cuts off the temptation to sitting up late, a hurtful and preposterous custom, which many students unwarily give into, and which they cannot so easily break, when the bad effects of it upon their health, convince them too late of their imprudence.

Let them be guarded against the snares attending a large acquaintance, and unnecessary visiting. The tutor will, doubtless, maintain authority and good discipline in his house, and not allow any of his pupils to be absent from family worship, nor abroad after a fixed hour, without his express permission, which should not be given but for solid and just reasons. And he cannot be too careful, both by advice and vigilance, to prevent them from forming any female connections while under his roof, however honorable the views, or deserving the person may be. Love and courtship are by no means favorable to study, nor indeed to devotion, at a time when their present engagements, and the uncertainty of their prospects in future life, render a settlement by marriage improper, if not impracticable.

Much study is weariness to the flesh; and the body and the mind are so nearly connected, that what affects the one, will have an influence upon the other. Relaxation and exercise are therefore necessary at proper seasons, for those who wish to preserve cheerfulness and strength for service, and not to become old and disabled, through lowness of spirits, infirmities, and pains, before old age actually overtakes them. Riding is a manly, unexceptionable exercise, where it can be conveniently practiced. But walking is, I suppose, equally healthful, and requires neither expense nor preparation. That the students may have an object in view when they go from home, the tutor will probably point out to them some of the Lord’s poor, who live at convenient distances, whom they may visit, and comfort with their sympathy, advice, and prayers, as well as administer to the relief of their necessities, according to their ability. Thus, while they are consulting their own health, they may, at the same time, imitate Him, "who went about doing good." And in such visits they may meet with many hints from poor believers, concerning the Lord’s wisdom and faithfulness in his dealings with them, and of the power of true religion—to confirm what they read upon these subjects, and probably some hints which their books will not supply them with. Farther, if when they are abroad together, they will attempt such conversation as warmed the hearts of the disciples when walking to Emmaus; and if, when alone, they adopt the pattern of Isaac, who went out into the field to meditate; then all the time they can thus employ may be set down to the account of their studies, for few of their hours can be more profitably improved. But what, and how, are they to study? The answer to this question depends upon another. What is the object of their studies? It is to make them not merely scholars—but ministers thoroughly furnished for their office. The particulars I aim at in placing them with my tutor are such as follow:

1. An orderly, connected, and comprehensive knowledge of the common places and topics of divinity, considered as a whole; a system of truth, of which the holy Scripture is the sole fountain, treasury, and standard.

2. A competent acquaintance with sacred literature; by which I mean such writings, ancient and modern, as are helpful to explain or elucidate difficulties in Scripture, arising from phraseology, from allusion to customs and events not generally known, and from similar causes, and which therefore cannot be well understood without such assistance.

3. Such a general knowledge of philosophy, history, and other branches of literature, as may increase the stock of their ideas, afford them just conceptions of the state of things around them, furnish them with a fund for variety, enlargement, and illustration, that they may be able to enliven and diversify their discourses, which, without such a fund, will be soon apt to run in a beaten track, and to contain little more than a repetition of the same leading thoughts, without originality or spirit.

4. An ability to methodize, combine, distinguish, and distribute the ideas thus collected by study, so as readily to know what is properly adapted to the several subjects to be treated of, and to the several parts of the same subject. When the pupils are thus far accomplished, then I shall hope,

5. That they will in good time be able to preach extemporaneously. I do not mean without forethought or plan—but without lengthy notes, and without the excessive labor of committing their discourses to memory. This ability of speaking to an auditory in a pertinent and collected manner, with freedom and decorum, with fidelity and tenderness, looking at them instead of looking at a paper, gives a preacher a considerable advantage, and has a peculiar tendency to command and engage the attention. It likewise saves much time, which might be usefully employed in visiting his people. It is undoubtedly a gift of God—but, like many other gifts, to be sought not only by prayer—but in the use of means. The first essays will ordinarily be weak and imperfect; but the facility increases, until at length a habit is formed by diligence and perseverance. I would not think my academy complete, unless my tutor was attentive to form his pupils to the character of public speakers.

General rules admit of exceptions. I have myself known people, who, with plain sense, true humility, and a spirit devoted to the Lord, and dependent upon him, have, with little or no assistance from men, proved solid, exemplary, and useful ministers. Such instances convince me, that, however expedient learning may be—it is not indispensably necessary for a minister, especially for one who is to labor in a retired situation, and among plain, uneducated hearers. I would not, therefore, preclude my tutor from all opportunity of being useful to people of this description, who would be glad of such helps from him as they might receive, when the time of life, or particular circumstances, might render the study of languages and science inconvenient. And in general, as the capacities, dispositions, and prospects of a number of pupils would, of course, be different; I would leave it to his discretion to conduct them to the same grand ends of service, by such difference of method as he should judge most suitable to each; so as not to discourage or overburden the truly deserving, nor to permit (if it can be prevented) the more studious and successful, to set too high a value upon their superior accomplishments. For, after all, it must be owned, and ought to be remembered, that grace and divine wisdom are of unspeakably greater importance than scholastic attainments without them. We are sure, that, though a man had the knowledge of all mysteries, the gifts of tongues and miracles, and the powers of an angel—if he has not likewise humility, spirituality, and love, he is in the sight of God but as sounding brass or a noisy cymbal. He may answer the purpose of a church bell, to call a congregation together—but has little prospect of doing them good when they are assembled. But to return to my professed students:

I. As to the study of theology. How far it may be expedient to adopt some system or body of divinity as a ground whereon to proceed, I am not quite determined; and which of these learned summaries is the best, I shall not attempt to decide until I have read them all. My tutor will have

more of this knowledge; I shall therefore refer the choice, if it is necessary to choose one, to him. Calvin, Turretin, Witsius, and Ridgeley, are those with which I have formerly been most acquainted. But indeed, of these, at present, I can remember little more than that I have read them, or the greatest part of them. I recollect just enough to say, that, though I approve and admire them all, I have at the same time my particular objections to them all, as to this use of them. The Bible is my body of divinity; and, were I a tutor myself, I believe I would prefer the Epistles of Paul, as a summary, to any human systems I have seen, especially his Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, the Hebrews, and Timothy. There are few uninspired writings, however excellent in the main—but bear some marks of the infirmities, attachments, and biases, which, in a greater or less degree, are inseparable from the present state of human nature. I would have my pupils draw their knowledge as immediately from the fountain-head as possible. I care not how extensive and various their reading of good authors may be under their tutor's eye; the more so the better. He will improve the differences they will find among learned and spiritual men, into an argument to engage them to study the Scripture more closely, and to bring every debated sentiment to be tried, and finally determined, by that unerring standard. He will teach them to collect the detached portions of truth wherever they meet with them; to borrow from all—but to give themselves up implicitly to the dictates of none. For I know no author who is worthy of the honor of being followed absolutely and without reserve.

I am told (for I know nothing of academies but from hearsay) that it is customary for pupils to write out their lectures. If I should adopt this custom, I would not confine myself to it. Such written lectures, if well executed, must be good patterns to form the students to closeness in method and style. But I would likewise wish the tutor to give them unpremeditated lectures. Great masters of music (it is said) frequently feel an impetus in extempore playing, which enables them to execute off the cuff, such strains as they wish to repeat—but cannot; their taste assuring them that they are superior in kind to what they can ordinarily attain when they study and compose by rule. Thus a tutor who thoroughly understands his subject, and speaks from the fullness of his heart, will, now and then, at least, feel a happy moment, when he will seem to possess new powers. His thoughts and expressions at such a time will have a peculiar precision and force, and will possibly illuminate and affect his hearers more than His regular and written lectures. When he is done speaking, let the pupils retire and commit to writing what they can recollect of such discourses, keeping to his method—but using their own expressions. These exercises would engage their attention, employ their invention and ingenuity, accustom them to consider the subjects in different lights, and contribute to make the knowledge they derive from him more their own, than by being always confined to transcribe, line by line, what was read to them.

I would not have the pupils put upon the needless and hurtful attempt of proving first principles. May not a man read lectures upon optics without previously proving the existence of the sun? My tutor will not coldly lay before his students the arguments pro and con, and then leave them to decide, as evidence to them appears, whether there is a God, or whether the Scripture is of divine inspiration or not. So likewise with respect to the different sentiments on the primary points of Scripture, as whether the Savior is man or angel, or God manifest in the flesh; or concerning the different acceptations of the words, depravity, guilt, faith, grace, atonement, and the like; he will speak with a becoming confidence and certainty on which side the truth lies. He will, indeed, furnish them with solid confutations of error, from Scripture and experience; but he will take care to

let them know that these things are already settled, and proposed to them, not as candidates for their good opinion—but as truths, which demand and deserve their attention. My tutor will not dogmatize, and expect them to adopt his opinions without any better reason than because they are his. He will endeavor to throw every light he is master of, upon the subject; but, at the same time, he will speak as a teacher, not as an inquirer; as one who speaks that which he has known, and testifies that which he has seen. He will not attempt to fill their head with a detail of all the cavils which pride and sophistry have started against the truths of God; nor so far flatter his pupils, as to suppose them competent judges when they have weighed and compared the several argumentations. But he will rather warn them of their natural bias to the erroneous side, and guard them against the arts of those who, with fair words and fine speeches, beguile the unprincipled and unwary. A tutor is a guide, and, if worthy of his office, must be able to say, without hesitation, "This is the way—walk in it." Should he be seduced, by the specious sounds of candor and freedom of inquiry, to take the opposite method, and think it his duty to puzzle his scholars with all the waking dreams, objections, and evasions, by which men, reputed wise, have opposed the simplicity of the faith once delivered to the saints; I fear that they would be more likely to turn out skeptics, than ministers of the Gospel. Nor should he, with my consent, lay down a scheme of what is commonly called natural religion, as a foundation whereon to build a religion of divine revelation. It is needful that he should give his pupils a just idea of the religion of fallen nature; but he will remind them, that the few valuable sentiments occasionally found in the writings of the Heathen philosophers and moralists were not their own. They are all represented as having traveled for their knowledge, and all in the same route, into Phoenicia or Egypt, into the neighborhood of the only people, who, at that time, were favored with the oracles of God; and may therefore be justly supposed to have derived the detached particles of truth they acquired from that people, either by immediate converse with them, or from their inspired books, especially from the time they were translated into the Greek language. He will point out to them the strong probability that the later philosophers were equally, or more, indebted to the Christians and the New Testament. With respect to the skeptical moralists and reasoners of modern times, the proof will be still clearer and stronger, that their best notions are borrowed from the religion they attempt to depreciate. My tutor, in order to satisfy them how far the powers of unassisted fallen nature can proceed in the investigation of religious and moral truths, will set before them the progress which has actually been made in this way by the Negroes in Africa, or the American Indians. With such a picture of natural religion in their view, I should hope they would be led most cordially to praise God for the inestimable gift of his Holy Word; without the help of which, the boasted light of nature is darkness that may be felt. In my academy, I would have no formal disputations upon points of divinity. If it is necessary to sharpen or exercise their wits by disputing, (to which, under proper regulations, I would not object,) there are topics in abundance at hand. Let them dispute, if they please, for or against the motion of the earth. Let them determine whether Caesar or Pompey was the better man; or, in what respects Cato, who chose to die rather than venture to look Caesar in the face, discovered more fortitude or true greatness of mind, than the slave who elopes from his master for fear of the lash. Let them contend whether learning has, upon the whole, been productive of most good, or of most mischief, to mankind. My tutor can supply them with a thousand questions of this kind. But, to set a young man to put his ingenuity to the stretch, either to maintain a gross error, or to oppose a known and important truth, is, in my view, not only dangerous—but little less than a species of profaneness! What must the holy angels, who, with

humble admiration, contemplate the wisdom and glory of God displayed in the Gospel; what must they think of the arrogance of sinful worms, who presume so far to trifle with the doctrines and mysteries he has revealed, as to degrade them into subjects for school exercise and logical prize-fighting? Can it be possible to maintain a spirit of reverence and dependence on God, amidst the noise of such profane discussions? And, if the youth to whom the wrong side of the question is committed, should, by superior address, baffle and silence his antagonist, my heart would be in pain for him, lest he should, from that moment, be prejudiced against the truth which he had insulted with success, and think it really indefensible, because the other was not able to defend it.l Having been so long on the first article, I must endeavor to be more brief on those which follow.

II. By sacred literature, I chiefly mean linguistics, criticism, and antiquities, so far as they are employed in the illustration of Scripture. In these studies, if there is a proper application in the pupils, little more will be needful on the tutor's part, than to put suitable books into their hands, to superintend their progress, and to obviate difficulties they may meet with. I would wish them not only to read the Scriptures in the Hebrew and Greek originals—but to be tolerable masters of the construction in both languages. This attainment is certainly not necessary to a minister; but they who apply themselves to the study of divinity in early life, will have time enough to acquire it, and the acquisition will be well worth their labor. If not necessary, it will be found very expedient and useful, and, when the difficulties of the first entrance and rudiments are surmounted, will be very pleasant. The mind is capable of too many acquisitions: life is short, and more important business awaits them, in subservience to which everything else must be conducted.

III. Much time cannot be allowed in our academy for the pursuit of polite literature. But an entrance may be made, and a relish for it acquired, under the direction and restraint of the tutor, which may provide the students with a profitable amusement for leisure hours in future life; for in this knowledge they may advance from year to year.

Other books will occasionally come in their way; for the tutor should have a well chosen library, for the accommodation of his pupils; but he will guard them against spending too much time, in this line of reading. For, though it has its subordinate advantages, it may, if too much indulged, divert them from the main point. And they should be taught to refer everything they read to the principles of Scripture, to the knowledge of the heart of man, and the works, the ways, the wisdom, and providence of God; otherwise reading will only tend to make them wise in their own conceit. I make short work with this article, and hasten to consider,

IV. What may be helpful (by the divine blessing) to enable the pupils to communicate the fruits of their knowledge to advantage in the public ministry, that they may appear workmen that need not be ashamed. For this, as I have formerly intimated, their chief and immediate dependence must be on the Lord. He alone can give them a mouth and wisdom for his service; and, without the unction from on high, the study of divinity and everything relative to it, will be but like learning the art of navigation on shore, which is very different from the knowledge necessary to the mariner who is actually called to traverse the ocean. But dependence upon the Lord should be no discouragement to the use of means.

I would have my students good logicians. The logic of the schools is, in a great measure, a cramped, forced, and formal affair, and may possibly have made almost as many scholastics and sophists, as good reasoners. But Dr. Watts has furnished us with a system of logic in a more

intelligible and amiable form, and divested it of the solemn impertinences with which it was encumbered. As the rules of grammar are themselves drawn from the language they are designed to regulate, so good logic is no more than the result of observations upon the powers of the human mind: and thus we see, that many people of plain sense are passable logicians, though they never saw a book upon the subject, and, perhaps, do not understand the meaning of the term. But they may be much assisted in the habits of thinking, judging, and reasoning, and in disposing their thoughts in an advantageous method, by rules judiciously formed and arranged. In this view I judge Dr. Watts's Logic, with his subsequent treatise on the Improvement of the Mind, to be very valuable. Unless a man can conceive and define his subject clearly, distinguish and enumerate the several parts, and know how to cast them into a convenient order and dependence, he cannot be a masterly preached. And though a good understanding may supersede the necessity of logical rules, it will likewise derive advantage from them. It remains to inquire,

5. How the pupils are to be assisted and directed that they may be able to preach extempore: an ability which, I suppose, to be ordinarily attainable by all who are called of God to preach the Gospel, if they will diligently apply themselves to attain it, in the use of proper means. I do not expect they will succeed in this way to my wish, without prayer, study, effort, and practice. For, as I have already hinted, I mean something more by it than speaking at random. A well known observation of Lord Bacon is much to my present purpose. It is to this effect: That reading makes a full man, writing an exact man, and speaking makes a ready man. The approved extempore preacher must have a fund of knowledge collected from various reading; and it would not be improper to read some books, with the immediate design of comparing his style and manner with approved models. It might be wished that the best divines were always the best writers; but the style of many of them is quaint, difficult, and obscure. Some books that are well written have little else to recommend them, yet may be useful for this purpose; and the periodical writings of Addison and Johnson abound with judicious observations on men and manners, besides being specimens of easy and elegant composition.

Among writers in divinity, I would recommend Dr. Watts and Dr. Witherspoon as good models. By perusing such authors with attention, I hope the pupils will acquire a taste for good writing, and be judges of a good style. Perspicuity, closeness, energy, and ease, are the chief properties of such a style. On the contrary, a style that is either obscure, redundant, heavy, or affected, cannot be a good one. But I cannot advise them to copy the late Mr. Hervey. His dress, though it fits him, and he does not look amiss in it, is rather too gaudy and ornamented for a divine. He had a fine imagination, an elegant taste, and shows much precision and judgment in his choice of words: but, though his luxuriant manner of writing has many of the excellencies both of good poetry and good prose, it is in reality neither the one nor the other. An injudicious imitation of him has spoiled some people for writers, who, if they could have been content with a plain and natural mode of expression, might have succeeded tolerably well. The pupil likewise must write as well as read; and he should write frequently. Let him fill one common-place book after another, with extracts from good authors. This method, while it tends to fix the passages, or their import, in his mind, will also lead him to make such observations respecting the order, and construction, and force of words, as will not so readily occur to his notice by reading only. Then let him try his own hand, and accustom himself to write his thoughts; sometimes in notes and observations on the books he reads; sometimes in the form of essays or sermons. He will do well likewise to cultivate a

correspondence with a few select friends; for letter writing seems nearest to that easiness of manner which a public speaker should aim at.

I would not have his first attempts to speak publicly be in the preaching way, or even upon spiritual subjects. It might probably abate the reverence due to divine truth, to employ it in efforts of ingenuity. Suppose the tutor should read to them a passage of history, and require them to repeat the relation to him the next day, in their own manner. He would then remark to them if they had omitted any essential part, or used improper expressions. Or they might be put upon making speeches or declamations on such occasions or incidents as he should propose. By degrees, such of them as are judged to be truly spiritual and humble, might begin to speak upon a text of Scripture, in the presence of the tutor and pupils; and I should hope this might, in due time, become a part of the morning or evening devotions in the family. But let them be especially cautioned not to trifle with holy things, nor profane the great subjects of Scripture, by making them mere exhibitions and trials of skill.

Thus, by combining much reading and writing with their attempts to speak, and all under the direction of a judicious tutor, I shall have a cheerful hope, that the pupils will gradually attain a readiness and propriety of speech; and, when actually sent out to preach, will approve themselves scribes well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom, qualified to bring forth from the treasury of their knowledge and experience, things new and old, for the edification of their hearers. And now I may draw towards a close. There are some branches of science, or what is so called, on which I lay but little stress. I have no great opinion of metaphysical studies. For morality and ethics I would confine my pupils to the Bible. The researches of wise men in this way, which have not been governed by the ord of God, have produced little but uncertainty, futility, or falsehood. My tutor will, I hope, think it sufficient to show the pupils how successfully these wise and learned reasoners reciprocally refute each other’s hypothesis. And, if he informs them more in detail of the extravagancies which have been started concerning the nature and foundation of moral virtue; or of the dreams of philosophers, some of whom would exclude matter, and others would exclude mind, out of the universe; He will inform them likewise that he does not thereby mean properly to add to their stock of knowledge, (for we should, in reality, have been fully as wise if these subtitles had never been heard of,) but only to guard them against being led into the mazes of error and folly, by depending too much on the reveries of philosophers.

After this delineation of my plan, it will be needless to inform you, that I do not propose my academy to be a spiritual hot-bed, in which the pupils shall be raised, and ripened into teachers, almost immediately upon their admission. I have allowed for a few excepted cases; but, in general, it is my design, that their education shall be comprehensive and exact. I would have them learn before they undertake to teach; and their sufficiency to be evidenced by a better testimonial than their own good opinion of themselves. "A scribe well instructed," "a workman that needs not to be ashamed," "an able minister of the New Testament," are Scriptural expressions, intimating what ought to be the qualifications of those who undertake the office of a preacher or pastor. The apostle expressly forbids a novice to be employed in these services. And, though in the present day this caution is very much disregarded by people who undoubtedly mean well, yet, I believe, the neglect of Scriptural rules (which are not arbitrary—but founded in a perfect knowledge of human nature) will always produce great inconveniences. I shall think a young man of tolerable abilities makes a very good improvement of his time, if the tutor finds him fit for actual service,

after three or four years' close attention to his studies. But what have I done? In compliance with your request, I have been led to give such an undisguised view of my sentiments on this interesting subject, that, though I feel myself a cordial friend to all sides and parties who hold the head, and agree in the grand principles of our common faith, I fear lest some of every party will be displeased with me. I rely on your friendship, and your knowledge of me, to bear witness for me, that I would not willingly offend or grieve a single person. And you can likewise testify, that I did not set myself to work; that I was much surprised when you proposed it to me; and that you have reason to believe my regard for you, and for the design you informed me of, were the only motives of my venturing upon the task you assigned me.

I have by no means exhausted the subject, though I hope I have not omitted anything that very materially relates to it. If I was really in Utopia, and to carry my plan into execution, other regulations would probably occur which have at present escaped me.

What I have written I submit to the candor of you and your friends; adding my prayers, that the Great Head of the Church, the Fountain of Grace, and Author of Salvation, may direct your deliberations, and bless you with wisdom, unanimity, and success, in whatever you may attempt for the honor of his name, and the good of souls.

I am, dear sir, your sincere friend and servant,

John Newton, May 14, 1782

Chapter 7

01.01. A sketch of the Christian's temper

A sketch of the Christian’s temper

September, 1776

Dear sir,

Without any preamble, I purpose now to give you a few thoughts on the meaning of that name which first obtained at Antioch—in other words, what it is to be a Christian? What are the effects, which (making allowance for the unavoidable infirmities attending upon the present state of mortality) may be expected from a real experimental knowledge of the Gospel? I would not insinuate that none are Christians, who do not come up to the character I would describe; for then I fear I should unchristian myself. I only will consider what the Scripture encourages us to aim at—as the prize of our high calling in this life. It is generally allowed and lamented, that we are too apt to live below our privileges, and to stop short of what the Spirit and the promises of the Gospel point out to us as attainable.

Mr. Pope’s admired line, "An honest man—is the noblest work of God," may be admitted as a truth, when rightly explained. A Christian is the noblest work of God in this visible world, and bears a much brighter impression of his glory and goodness—than the sun in the skies; and none but a Christian can be strictly and properly honest—all others are too much under the power of self, to do universally to others—as they would like others would do unto them; and nothing but an uniform conduct upon this principle deserves the name of honesty. The Christian is a new creature, born and taught from above. He has been convinced of his guilt and misery as a sinner, has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, has seen the Son and believed on him. His natural prejudices against the glory and grace of God’s salvation, have been subdued and silenced by Almighty power. He has accepted the Beloved, and is made acceptable in him; he now knows the Lord; has renounced the confused, distant, uncomfortable notions he once formed of God; and beholds him in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, the only door by which we can enter to any true satisfying knowledge of God, or communion with him. He now sees God in Christ, reconciled, a Father, a Savior, and a Friend, who has freely forgiven him all his sins, and given him the Spirit of adoption. He is now no longer a servant, much less a stranger—but a son; and because a son, an heir already savingly interested in all gospel promises, admitted to the throne of grace, and an assured expectant of eternal glory! The Gospel is designed to give us not only a perhaps, or a probability—but a certainty both of our acceptance and our perseverance, until death shall be swallowed up in life. And though many are sadly fluctuating and perplexed upon this head, and perhaps all are so for a season; yet there are those who can say, we know that we are of God; and therefore they are steadfast and unmovable in his way; because they are confident that their labor shall not be in vain—but that, when they shall be absent from the body, they shall be present with their Lord. This is the state of the advanced, experienced Christian, who, being enabled to make his profession the chief business of his life, is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Everyone who has this hope in Christ, purifies himself, even as he is pure. I would

now attempt a sketch of the Christian's temper, formed upon these principles and hopes, under the leading branches of its exercise, respecting God, himself, and his fellow-creatures. The Christian's temper God-ward is evidenced by humility. He has received from Gethsemane and Golgotha, such a sense of the evil of sin, and of the holiness of God, combined with his matchless love to sinners, as has deeply penetrated his heart. He has an affecting remembrance of the state of rebellion and enmity in which he once lived against this holy and good God. And he has a quick perception of the defilements and defects which still debase his best services. His mouth is therefore stopped as to boasting—he is vile in his own eyes, and is filled with wonder that the Lord should visit such a sinner, with such a salvation! He sees so vast a disproportion between the obligations he is under to grace—and the returns he makes, that he is disposed, yes constrained, to adopt the Apostle's words without affectation, and to account himself less than the least of all saints! Knowing his own heart, while he sees only the outside of others—he is not easily persuaded there can be a believer upon earth—so faint, so unfruitful, so unworthy as himself.

Yet, though abased, he is not discouraged, for he enjoys peace. The dignity, offices, blood, righteousness, faithfulness, and compassion of the Redeemer—in whom he rests, trusts, and lives—for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—are adequate to all his wants and wishes—and provide him with an answer to every objection, and give him no less confidence in God, than if he were as sinless as an angel! For he sees, that, though sin has abounded in him—grace has much more abounded in Jesus! With respect to the past, all things are become new. With respect to the present and future—he leans upon an Almighty arm, and relies upon the word and power which made and upholds the heavens and the earth. Though he feels himself unworthy of the smallest mercies—he claims and expects the greatest blessings which God can bestow; and, being rooted and grounded in the knowledge and love of Christ, his peace abides, and is not greatly affected, either by the variation of his own emotional frames, or the changes of God's dispensations towards him while here. With such a sense of himself, such a heart-felt peace and heavenly hope—how can his spirit but breathe love to his God and Savior?

It is indeed the perfection of his character and happiness, that his soul is united by love to the chief good. The love of Christ is the joy of his heart, and the spring of his obedience. With his Savior's presence, He finds a heaven begun upon earth; and without it, all the other glories of the heavenly state would not content him. He realizes the excellence of Christ; his love to sinners, especially his dying love; Christ's love to himself, in seeking and saving him when lost, and saving him to the uttermost! But I must stop. You can better conceive—than I can describe—how and why Jesus is dear to the heart that knows him. That part of the Christian's life which is not employed in the active service of his Lord, is chiefly spent in seeking and maintaining communion with him. For this he plies the throne, and studies the Word of grace, and frequents the ordinances, where the Lord has promised to meet with his people. These are his golden hours; and when thus employed, how poor and trivial does all that the world calls great and important appear in his eyes! Yes, he is solicitous to keep up a fellowship of heart with his Beloved in his busiest scenes; and so far as he can succeed, it alleviates all his labors, and sweetens all his troubles. And when he is neither communing with his Lord, nor acting for him—he accounts his time lost, and is ashamed and grieved. The truth of his love for Jesus—is manifested by submission. This is twofold, and absolute and without reserve in each. He submits to his revealed will, as made known to him by precept, and by Christ's own example. He aims to tread in his Savior's footsteps, and makes conscience of

all his commandments, without exception and without hesitation. Again, he submits to his providential will—he yields to his sovereignty, acquiesces in his wisdom; he knows that he has no right to complain of anything, because he is a hell-deserving sinner; and he has no reason to complain, because he is sure that the Lord does all things well. Therefore this submission is not forced—but is an act of trust. He knows he is not more unworthy than he is unable to choose for himself, and therefore rejoices that the Lord has undertaken to manage for him! And were he compelled to make his own choice, he could only choose that all his concerns should remain in that hand to which he has already committed them. And thus he judges of public as well as of his personal affairs. He cannot be an unaffected spectator of national sins, nor without apprehension of their deserved consequences; he feels, and almost trembles, for others—but he himself dwells under the shadow of the Almighty, in a sanctuary which cannot be forced into; and therefore, should he see the earth shaken, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea—his heart would not be greatly moved, for God is his refuge; the Lord reigns! He sees his Savior's hand directing every dark appearance, and over-ruling all—to the accomplishment of his own great purposes. This satisfies him; and though the winds and waves should be high, he can venture his own little bark in the storm, for he has an infallible and almighty Pilot on board with him!

And, indeed, why should he fear, when he has nothing to lose? His best concerns are safe; and other things he holds as gifts from his Lord, to whose call he is ready to resign them, in whatever way he pleases; well knowing, that creatures and instruments cannot of themselves touch a hair of His head without the Lord's permission; and that if he does permit them, it must be for the best.

I might enlarge farther. But I shall proceed to consider the Christian's temper respecting himself. He lives godly and soberly. By sobriety we mean more than that he is not a drunkard; his tempers toward God, of course, form him to a moderation in all temporal things. He is not scrupulous or superstitious; he understands the liberty of the Gospel, that every creature of God is good, if it is received with thanksgiving: he does not aim at being needlessly singular, nor practice self-devised austerities. The Christian is neither a Stoic nor a Cynic—yet he finds daily cause for watchfulness and restraint.

Satan will not often tempt a believer to gross crimes—our greatest snares and sorest conflicts are usually found in things lawful in themselves—but hurtful to us by their abuse, engrossing too much of our time, or of our hearts, or somehow indisposing us for communion with the Lord. The Christian will be jealous of anything which might entangle his affections, dampen his zeal, or straiten him in his opportunities of serving his Savior.

He is likewise content with his situation, because the Lord chooses it for him. He is not eager for additions and alterations in his circumstances. If Divine Providence points out and leads to a change—he is ready to follow, though it should be what the world would call from a better to a worse; for he is a pilgrim and a stranger here, and a citizen of heaven. As wealthy people sometimes, in traveling, submit cheerfully to inconvenient accommodations, very different from their homes, and comfort themselves with thinking they are not always to live so—so the Christian is not greatly solicitous about external circumstances. If he has them, he will use them moderately. If he has but little of them, he can make a good shift without them. He is but upon a journey—and will soon be at home! If he is rich, experience confirms our Lord's words, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his

possessions." Luke 12:15. This satisfies him. He know that a large room, a crowd of servants, and twenty dishes upon his table, add nothing to the real happiness of life—therefore he will not have his heart set upon such things.

If he is in a poorer state, he is more disposed to pity than to envy these above him; for he knows that they must have many encumbrances from which he is freed. However, the will of God, and the light of his countenance, are the chief things the Christian, whether rich or poor, regards; and therefore his moderation is made known unto all men. A third branch of the Christian's temper respects his fellow-creatures. And here, methinks, if I had not filled a sheet already, I could enlarge with pleasure. We have, in this degenerate day, among those who claim and are allowed the name of Christian, too many of a narrow, selfish, mercenary spirit—but in the beginning it was not so. The Gospel is designed to cure such a spirit—but gives no indulgence to it. A Christian has the mind of Christ, who went about doing good, who makes his sun to shine upon the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. His Lord's example forms him to the habit of diffusive benevolence. He breathes a spirit of goodwill to mankind, and rejoices in every opportunity of being useful to the souls and bodies of others, without respect to parties or interests. He commiserates, and would if possible alleviate, the miseries of all around him. And if his actual services are restrained by lack of ability—yet all share in his sympathy and prayers.

Acting in the spirit of his Master, he frequently meets with a measure of the like treatment; but if his good is requited with evil—he labors to overcome evil with good. He feels himself to be a sinner—who needs much forgiveness; this makes him ready to forgive. He is not haughty, faultfinding, easily offended, or hard to be reconciled; for at the feet of Jesus he has learned meekness. When he meets with unkindness or injustice, he considers, that, though he has not deserved such things from men—that they are instruments employed by his Heavenly Father (from whom he has deserved to suffer much more), for his humiliation and chastisement; and is therefore more concerned for their welfare, than for his own sufferings, and prays, after the pattern of his Savior, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" He knows he is fallible; therefore cannot be dogmatic. He knows he is frail; and therefore dares not be censorious. As a member of society, he is just, and punctual in the discharge of every relative duty, faithful to his engagements and promises, rendering to all their dues, obedient to lawful authority, and acting to all men according to the golden rule, of doing to others—as he would like to treated by them. His conduct is simple, devoid of artifice, and consistent, attending to every branch of duty. In the closet, the family, the church, and in the transactions of common life, he is the same man; for in every circumstance he serves the Lord, and aims to maintain a conscience void of offense in his sight. A great part of the beauty of his profession in the sight of men, consists in the due government of his tongue. The law of truth, and kindness, and purity, is upon his lips. He abhors lying; and is so far from inventing a slander, that he will not repeat a report to the disadvantage of his neighbor, however true, without a necessary reason. His converse is cheerful—but inoffensive; and he will no more wound another with his wit (if he has a talent that way), than with a knife. His speech is with grace, seasoned with salt, and suited to promote the peace and edification of all around him.

Such is the Christian in civil life. But though he loves all mankind, he stands in a nearer relation, and bears an especial brotherly love, to all who are partakers of the faith and hope of the Gospel. This regard is not confined within the pale of a denomination—but extended to all who love the

Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He calls no man master himself; nor does he wish to impose a Shibboleth of His own upon others. He rejoices in the image of God, wherever he sees it, and in the work of God, wherever it is carried on. Though tenacious of the truths which the Lord has taught him, his heart is open to those who differ from him in less essential points, and allows to others that right of private judgment which he claims for himself, and is disposed to hold communion in love, with all who hold the Head.

He cannot indeed countenance those who set aside the one foundation which God has laid in Zion, and maintain errors derogatory to the honor of his Savior, or subversive of the faith and experience of his people; yet he wishes well to them, pities and prays for them, and is ready in meekness to instruct those who oppose. But there is no bitterness in his zeal, being sensible that raillery and invective are dishonorable to the cause of truth, and quite unsuitable in the mouth of a sinner, who owes all that distinguishes him from the vilest of men to the free grace of God! In a word, he is influenced by the wisdom from above, which, as it is pure, is likewise peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I must just recur to my first head, and observe, that, with this spirit and deportment, the Christian, while he is enabled to maintain a conscience void of offense towards God and man, is still sensible and mindful of indwelling sin. He has his eye more upon his rule than upon his attainments; and therefore finds and confesses that in everything he comes exceedingly short, and that his best services are not only defective—but defiled. He accounts himself an unprofitable servant; and is abased in his own eyes. He derives all his hope and comfort, as well as his strength—from Jesus, whom he has known, received and loved, and to whom he has committed his soul. He renounces all confidence in the flesh, and esteems all things as loss—compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ his Lord, for whose sake he has lost all things—considering them rubbish, that he may gain Christ!

I beg a remembrance in your prayers, that He who has given me to will and desire, may work in me to be and to do according to his own good pleasure.

Chapter 8

01.01. A visitor from heaven!

A visitor from heaven!

August, 1775

Dear sir,

I have no apt preface or introduction at hand, and as I have made it almost a rule not to study for what I would write to you, I therefore beg permission to begin abruptly.

It is the future promised privilege of believers in Jesus, that they shall be as the angels; and there is a sense in which we should endeavor to be as the angels now. This is intimated to us where we are taught to pray, "May Your will be done on earth—as it is in heaven." I have sometimes amused myself with supposing that an angel should be appointed to reside awhile upon earth in a human body; not in sinful flesh like ours—but in a body free from infirmity, and still preserving an unabated sense of his own happiness in the favor of God, and of his unspeakable obligation to his goodness. And then I have tried to judge, as well as I could, how such an angel would conduct himself in such a situation. I know not that I ever enlarged upon the thought, either in preaching or writing. Permit me to follow it a little in this paper. Were I acquainted with this heavenly visitant, I am willing to hope I should greatly reverence him; and, if permitted, be glad, in some cases, to consult him. In some—but not in all; for I think my fear would be equal to my love. Methinks I could never venture to open my heart freely to him, and unfold to him my numberless complaints and infirmities; for, as he could have no experience of the like things himself, I would suppose he would not know how fully to pity me, indeed, hardly how to bear with me—if I told him all. Alas! what a preposterous, strange, vile creature should I appear to an angel, if he knew me as I am!

It is well for me that Jesus was made lower than the angels, and that the human nature he assumed was not distinct from the common nature of mankind, though secured from the common depravity; and because he submitted to be under the law in our name and stead, though he was free from sin himself—yet, sin and its consequences being (for our sakes) charged upon him, he acquired, in the days of his humiliation, an experimental sympathy with his poor people. He knows the effects of sin and temptation upon us, by that knowledge whereby he knows all things; but he knows them likewise in a way more suitable for our comfort and relief, by the sufferings and exercises he passed through for us! Hence arises our encouragement. We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities—but was in all points tempted even as we are. When I add to this, the consideration of his power, promises, and grace, and that he is exalted on purpose to pity, relieve, and save—I gather courage. With him I dare be free; and am not sorry—but glad, that he knows me perfectly, that not a thought of my heart is hidden from him. For, without this infinite and exact knowledge of my disease—how could he effectually administer to my cure? Where am I rambling? I seem to have lost sight of the angel already! I am now coming back, that, if he cannot effectually pity me, he may at least animate and teach me. In the first place, I take it for granted this angel would think himself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. He would not

forget that his home was in heaven. Surely he would look upon all the bustle of human life (farther than the design of his mission might connect him with it) with more indifference than we look upon the play of little children, or the amusements of idiots and lunatics, which give us an uneasiness, rather than excite a desire of joining in them. He would judge of everything around him, by the reference and tendency it had to promote the will of him who sent him; and the most splendid appearances, considered in any other view, would make no impression upon him.

Consequently, as to his own concernment, all his aim and desire would be to fulfill the will of God. All situations would be alike to him; whether he was commanded, as in the case of Sennacherib, to destroy a mighty army with a stroke; or, as in the case of Hagar, to attend upon a woman, as a servant. Both services would be to him equally honorable and important, because he was in both equally pleasing his Lord, which would be his element and his joy, whether he was appointed to guide the reins of empire—or to sweep the streets!

Again—the angel would doubtless exhibit a striking example of benevolence; for, being free from selfish bias, filled with a sense of the love of God, and a knowledge of his adorable perfections, his whole heart and soul and strength would be engaged and exerted, both from duty and inclination, to relieve the miseries and advance the happiness of all around him. In this, he would follow the pattern of Him who does good to all, commanding his sun to rise and his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust; though, from the same pattern, he would show an especial regard to the household of faith. An angel would take but little part in the controversies, contentions, and broils, which might happen in the time of his sojourning here—but would be a friend to all, so far as consistent with the general good. The will and glory of God being the angel's great purpose, and having a more lively sense of the realities of an unseen world than we can at present conceive—he would certainty, in the first and chief place, have the success and spread of the glorious Gospel at heart. Angels, though not redeemed with blood—yet feel themselves nearly concerned in the work of redemption. They admire its mysteries. We may suppose them well informed in the works of creation and providence; but (unlike too many men, who are satisfied with the knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, or history) they search and pry into the counsels of redeeming love, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, and think themselves well employed to be ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation. It would therefore be his chief delight to espouse and promote their cause, and to employ all his talents and influence in spreading the savor and knowledge of the name of Jesus—which is the only and effectual means, of bringing sinners out of bondage and darkness—into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Lastly—though his zeal for the glory of his Lord would make him willing to continue here until he had finished the work given him to do—he would, I am persuaded, look forward with desire to the appointed moment of his recall back to heaven—that he might be freed from beholding and mixing with the sin and vanity of those who know not God, render his account with joy, and be welcomed to heaven with a "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Surely he would long for this, as a laborer for the setting sun; and would not form any connection with the things of time, which should prompt him to wish his removal protracted for a single hour beyond the period of his prescribed service.

Alas! why am not I more like an angel? My views, in my better judgment, are the same. My motives and obligations are even stronger—an angel is not so deeply indebted to the grace of

God, as a believing sinner, who was once upon the brink of destruction, has been redeemed with blood, and might justly have been, before now, shut up with the powers of darkness without hope! Yet the merest trifles are sufficient to debase my views, damp my activity, and impede my endeavors in the Lord’s service, though I profess to have no other end or desire which can make a continuance in life worthy my wish!

Chapter 9

01.01. Addressing the Unconverted

Addressing the Unconverted

Dear sir, In a late conversation you desired my thoughts concerning a Scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are not a little divided; and it therefore befits me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any, from whom, in general, I would be glad to learn.

Some think that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the Word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive, in a due measure, the doctrines of either the Law or the Gospel. And they apprehend that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of a carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such persons to perform any spiritual acts; and that, therefore, the preachers who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do, notwithstanding, plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their application, what they had labored to establish in the course of their sermon.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the least degree encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power; yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents; and as such, besides declaring the counsel of God in a doctrinal way, to warn them, by His tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God in a preached Gospel in vain. Nor can it be denied but that some of them, when deeply affected with the worth of souls, and the awful importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to exception.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the discernible effects of each, it will, perhaps, appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honored with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally been led to adopt the more popular way of exhortation or address; while those who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labors have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than adding to their number.

Now, as "he who wins souls is wise," and as every faithful laborer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in favor of those who, besides stating the doctrines of the Gospel, endeavor, by earnest

persuasions and expostulations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and entreat and warn them to consider "How they shall escape, if they neglect so great salvation." For it is not easy to conceive that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favor of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the Truth, and with itself. But not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the Scriptures, which, as they furnish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the subject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of His authorized ministers, the Apostles, are both our rule and our warrant. The Lord Jesus was the great Preacher of free grace, "who spoke as never man spoke"; and His ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared that none would come unto Him, unless drawn and taught of God—John 6:44-46. And yet He often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be His, might perhaps, be censured as inconsistent and legal—John 6:27, Luke 13:24-27, John 12:35. It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken not of His disciples—but to the multitude. The Apostles copied from their Lord—they taught that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that "it is not of him that wills or of him that runs—but of God who shows mercy"; yet they plainly call upon sinners (and that before they had given evident signs that they were pricked in the heart as Acts 2:21) to "repent" and turn from their vanities to the living God—Acts 3:19, Acts 14:15, Acts 17:30.

Peter’s advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point—for though he perceived him to be "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," he exhorted him "to repent, and to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven." It may be presumed that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our readers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the Apostle’s example.

You have been told that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary; and that therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered that we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out of their graves, if we had the command and promise to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect His power would accompany our word. The vision of Ezekiel 37:1-28, may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a Gospel ministry. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord’s question to the Prophet, "Can these dry bones live?" Our response, like that of the Prophet’s is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord, "O Lord, You know, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for You to raise them unto life; therefore we renounce our own reasonings, and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at Your bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O you dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord! The means is our part, the work is Yours, and to You be all the praise." The dry bones could not hear the Prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived—but the word was spoken to them considered as dry and dead.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope He often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly to them, only the truths of the Gospel being declared in

their hearing; but He who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave them condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which He often effects the purposes of His grace; though none of the means of grace by which He ordinarily works, can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of His Spirit. Should we admit that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, extend too far, even to prove the impropriety of all exhortation universally—for when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Christ, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, "to repent and do their first works"; yes, when we exhort believers "to walk worthy of God, who has called them to His kingdom and glory"—in each of these cases we press them to acts for which they have no inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the Word to their hearts, we do but speak to the air; and our endeavors can have no more effect in these instances than if we were to say to a dead body "arise, and walk." For an exertion of Divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than the breaking of a hard heart; and only He who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways; they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for lack of power—but for lack of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning until night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes.

They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord alone can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the Gospel-promises, to seek to Him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do for them that which they cannot do for themselves, and who has said "him who comes unto Me, I will never cast out."

Perhaps it will not be easily proved that entreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner’s salvation from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavor to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of Scriptures constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of "consistency" may fetter our sentiments, and greatly preclude our usefulness. We need not wish to be more "consistent" than the inspired writers, nor be afraid of speaking as they have spoken before us! We may easily perplex ourselves and our hearers by nice reasonings on the nature of human liberty, and the Divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions are better

avoided. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects until we arrive in the world of Light. In the meantime, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favors you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with His constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amuse you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your affections yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, John Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners, the running title to which is, "Exhortations unto believing." It is in his Exposition of Psalms 130:1-8, which I recommend to your attentive consideration.

John Newton, 1770

N.B. We heartily commend the above to the thoughtful and prayerful perusal of those of our ministerial brethren who are inclined to be hyper-Calvinistic. The above was written by one who was a marvelous trophy of sovereign grace, deeply taught in Divine things, wondrously helped in maintaining the balance of truth, and mightily used in the blessing of souls. Personally, we have often lamented the fact that Mr. Gadsby, and later, Mr. Philpot, followed what we believe was the error of William Huntington, instead of adhering to that path which had been almost uniformly trodden by the Reformers and Puritans. Had they done so, we believe that the Strict and Particular Baptist churches would be in a far healthier and livelier spiritual state than they are now in.

Arthur Pink

Chapter 10

01.01. Advantages of a state of poverty

The advantages of a state of poverty My dear Friend,

I confess myself almost ashamed to write to you. You are pinched by poverty, suffer the lack of many things; and your faith is often sharply tried, when you look at your family, and perhaps can hardly conceive how you shall be able to supply them with bread to the end of the week. The Lord has appointed me a different lot. I am favored, not only with the necessities but with the comforts of life. Now I could easily give you plenty of good advice: I could tell you, it is your duty to be patient, and even thankful, in the lower state; that if you have bread and water, it is more than you deserve at the Lord's hands; and that, as you are out of hell, and made a partaker of the hope of the Gospel, you ought not to think anything hard that you meet with on the way to heaven. If I should say thus, and say no more, you would not dispute the truth of my assertions. But as coming from me, who lives at ease, to you, who are beset with difficulties, you might question their propriety, and think that I know but little of my own heart, and could feel but little for your distress. You would probably compare me to one who would think himself a mariner because he had studied the art of navigation by the fire-side, though he had never seen the sea. Yet I hope, by my frequent converse with the Lord's poor (for I live in the midst of an afflicted and poor people), I have made some observations, which, though not strictly the fruit of my own experience, may not be wholly unseasonable or unacceptable to you.

Whether the rich or the poor, who live without God in the world, are most to be pitied, is not easy to determine. It is a dreadful case to be miserable in both worlds; but yet the parade and seeming prosperity in which some live for a few years will be no abatement, but rather a great aggravation, of their future torment. A madman is equally to be pitied, whether he is laid upon a bed of down, or a bed of straw. Madness is in the heart of every unregenerate sinner; and the more he possesses of this world's goods, he is so much the more extensively mischievous. Poverty is so far a negative good, to those who have no other restraint, that it confines the effects of the evil heart within narrower bounds, and the small circle of their immediate connections: whereas the rich, who live under the power of sin, are unfaithful stewards of a larger trust, and by their pernicious influence are often instrumental in diffusing profaneness and licentiousness through a country or a kingdom; besides the innumerable acts of oppression, and the ravages of war, which are perpetrated to gratify the insatiable demands of luxury, ambition, and pride.

But, to leave this; if we turn our eyes from the false maxims of the world, and weigh things in the balance of the sanctuary, I believe we shall find, that poor Christians, though they have many trials which call for our compassion, have some advantages above those of the Lord's people to whom he has given a larger share of the good things of the present life. Why else does the Apostle say, "God has chosen the poor?" or why do we see, in fact, that so few of the rich, or wise, or mighty, are called? Certainly he does not choose them because they are poor; for "he is no respecter of persons."

Rather I think we may say, that, knowing what is in the hearts of his people, the nature of the world through which they are to pass, and what circumstances are best suited to manifest the truth and efficacy of his grace, he has, in the general, chosen poverty as the best state for them. Some exceptions he has made, that the sufficiency of his grace may be made known in every state of life; but, for the most part, they are a poor and afflicted people: and in this appointment he has had a regard to their honor, their safety, and their comfort. I have room for but a very brief illustration of these particulars.

Sanctified poverty is an honorable state; not so indeed in the judgment of the world; the rich have many friends, the poor are usually despised. But I am speaking of that honor which comes from God only. The poor, who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," are honored with the nearest external conformity to Jesus their Savior; who, though he was Lord of all, was pleased for our sakes to make himself so poor, that he had not where to lay his head, and submitted to receive assistance from the contributions of his followers; Luke 8:3. By this astonishing humiliation, he poured contempt upon all human glory, and made the state of poverty honorable; and now "he who reproaches the poor, despises his Maker." And as he was, so were his Apostles in the world. They were not only destitute of rank, titles, and estates—but were often in hunger and nakedness, and had no certain dwelling-place. To infer from hence, as some have done, that riches, and the accommodations of life, are unsuitable to the state of a Christian, is the mark of a superstitious and legal spirit. There were in those days several believers that were in a state of affluence; as, for instance, Theophilus, whom Luke addresses by a title of honor, 'most noble or excellent'; the same which Paul ascribes to the Roman Governor. But we may safely infer, that that state of life in which our Lord was pleased to converse with men, and which was the lot of his Apostles, and most favored servants, is honorable in the sight of God.

Again: Poverty is honorable, because it affords a peculiar advantage for glorifying God, and evidencing the power of his grace, and the faithfulness of his promises, in the sight of men. A believer, if rich, lives by faith; and his faith meets with various trials. He himself knows by whom he stands; but it is not ordinarily so visible to others, as in the case of the poor. When ministers speak of the all-sufficiency of God to those who trust in him, and the certain effect of the principles of the Gospel, in supporting, satisfying, and regulating the mind of man, the poor are the best and most unsuspected witnesses for the truth of their doctrine. If we are asked, 'Where do these wonderful people live, who can delight themselves in God, esteem a day in his courts better than a thousand, and prefer the light of his countenance to all earthly joy?'—we can confidently send them to the poor of the flock. Among the number who are so called, there are some who will not disappoint our appeal. Let the world, who refuse to believe the preachers, believe their own eyes; and when they see a poor person content, thankful, rejoicing, admiring the Lord's goodness for affording him what they account hard fare, and, in the midst of various pressures, incapable of being bribed by offers, or terrified by threats, to swerve a step from the path of known duty—let them acknowledge that this is the finger of God. If they harden themselves against this evidence, "neither would they be persuaded though one should arise from the dead." And as poverty is an honorable, so it is comparatively a safe state. True, it is attended with its peculiar temptations; but it is not near so suitable to draw forth and nourish the two grand corruption's of the heart, self-importance, and an idolatrous cleaving to the world, as the opposite state of riches. Those who are rich in this world, and who know the Lord and their own hearts, feel the wisdom and propriety of the Apostle's

charge, "Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in uncertain riches." If poor believers consider the snares to which their rich brethren are exposed, they will rather pray for and pity, than envy them. Their path is slippery; they have reason to cry continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" for they live in the midst of the hurries and vanities of the world, are engaged in a large sphere of action, and are incessantly exposed to interruptions and snares. The behavior of all around them reminds them of their supposed consequence: and, by the nature of their situation, they are greatly precluded from plain dealing and friendly advice. But the poor are not surrounded with flatterers, nor teased with impertinences. They meet with little to stimulate their pride, or to pander to their vanity. They not only believe in their judgments, but are constrained to feel, by the experience of every day, that this world cannot afford them rest. If they have food and clothing, and grace therewith to be content, they have reason to be thankful for an exemption from those splendid cares, and delusive appearances, which are the inseparable attendants of wealth and worldly distinction; and which, if not more burdensome, are, humanly speaking, much more dangerous, and greater impediments to the progress of a spiritual life, than the ordinary trials of the poor. The believing poor have likewise, for the most part, the advantage in point of spiritual comfort; and that principally in two respects. First, As they are called to a life of more immediate dependence upon the promise and providence of God (having little else to trust to), they have a more direct and frequent experience of His interposition in their favor. Obadiah was a servant of God, though he lived in the court of Ahab. He, doubtless, had his difficulties in such a situation; but he was not in poverty. He had not only enough for himself in a time of dearth, but was able to impart to others. We may believe, that he well knew he was indebted to the Lord’s goodness for his provision; but he could hardly have so sweet, so strong, so sensible an impression of God’s watchful care over him as Elijah had, who, when he was deprived of all human support, was fed by the ravens.

Such of the Lord’s people who have estates in land, or thousands in the bank, will acknowledge, that even the bread they eat is the gift of the lords bounty; yet having a moral certainty of a provision for life, I would think that they cannot exercise faith in the Divine Providence, with respect to their temporal supplies, so distinctly as the poor, who, having no friend or resource upon earth, are necessitated to look immediately to their Father who is in heaven for their daily bread. And though it is not given to the world to know what a fellowship is carried on between heaven and earth, nor with what acceptance the prayers of the poor and afflicted enter into the ears of the Lord of hosts; yet many of them have had such proofs of his attention, wisdom, faithfulness, power, and love, in supplying their needs, and opening them a way of relief, when they have been beset with difficulties on all sides, as have been no less certain and indisputable, I had almost said no less glorious—than the miracles which he wrought for Israel when he divided the Red Sea before them, and gave them food from the clouds. Such evidences of the power of faith, the efficacy of prayer, and the truth of the Scriptures (preferable to mountains of gold and silver, and for which the state of poverty furnishes the most frequent occasions), are a rich overbalance for all its inconveniences.

But, Secondly, I apprehend that the humble and believing poor have, in general, the greatest share of those consolations which are the effect of the light of God’s countenance lifted up upon the soul, of his love shed abroad in the heart, or of a season of refreshment from His presence. By such expressions as these, the Scripture intimates that "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" a description of which those who have tasted it will not require, and those who are strangers to it

could not understand. This joy is not always the companion of faith, not even of strong faith; but it is that which a believer, whether rich or poor, incessantly thirsts after; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly good is but vanity and disappointment. The Lord imparts this joy to his people, in season and measure, as he sees fit; but his poor people have the largest share.

They have little comfort from the world, therefore he is pleased to be their comforter. They have many trials and sufferings; and he with whom they have to do knows their situation and pressures: he has promised to make their strength equal to their day, and to revive their fainting spirits with heavenly cordials. When it is thus with them, they can say, with Jacob, "I have enough;" or, as it is in the original, "I have all." This makes hard things easy, and the burden light, which the flesh would otherwise complain of as heavy. This has often given a sweeter relish to bread and water, than the sensualist ever found in the most lavish and expensive refinements of luxury. Blessed are the poor who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him. They often enjoy the most lively foretastes of the glory which shall be revealed. Have not you, my friend, found these things true in your own experience? Yes! the Lord has sanctified your crosses, and supported you under them. Hitherto he has helped you, and he will be with you to the end. As you have followed him upon earth, you will before long follow him to heaven. You are now called to "sow in tears, there you shall reap in joy, and God shall wipe all tears from your eyes." In the mean time, be thankful that he honors you, in appointing you to be a witness for the truth and power of his grace, in the midst of an unbelieving world.

It is true, that even where the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. You have sharp trials, which, for the present, cannot be joyous, but grievous; and you have, doubtless, felt the depravity of your nature, and the subtlety of Satan, at some times prompting you to impatience, envy, and distrust. But these evils are not peculiar to a state of poverty; you would have been exposed to the same had you lived in affluence—along with many others, from which you are now exempted: for riches and poverty are but comparative terms, and it is only the grace of God can teach us to be content in any possible situation of life. The rich are as prone to desire something which they have not, as the poor; and those who have most to lose, have most to fear. That a man’s life (the happiness of his life) "consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses," is an aphorism founded upon the highest authority, and confirmed by universal experience and observation. In a word, you are not poor, but rich. The promises are your inheritance; heaven is your home; the angels of the Lord are ministering spirits, who rejoice to watch over you for good; and the Lord of angels himself is your sun and shield, and everlasting portion. It is impossible that you, to whom he has given Himself, his Son, his Spirit, his grace, his kingdom, can lack anything which is truly good for you. If riches were so, he could pour them upon you in abundance, as easily as he provides you your daily bread. But these, for the most part, he bestows on those who have no portion but in the present life. You have great reason to rejoice in the lot he has appointed for you, which secures you from numberless imaginary needs and real dangers, and furnishes you with the fairest opportunities for the manifestation, exercise, and increase of the graces he has implanted in you. Influenced by these views, I trust you can cheerfully say,

What others value, I resign:

Lord, ’tis enough that you are mine.

I commend you to the blessing of our covenant God, and to Jesus our Savior, "who, when He was rich, made himself poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be rich."

01.01. All our concerns are in His hands

All our concerns are in His hands November 6, 1777. My dear Sir,

You say you are more disposed to cry misery than hallelujah. Why not both together? When the treble is praise, and heart humiliation for the base, the melody is pleasant, and the harmony good. However, if not both together, we must have them alternately: not all singing, not all sighing—but an interchange and balance, that we may be neither lifted too high—nor cast down too low—which would be the case if we were very comfortable or very sorrowful for a long continuance. But though we change—the Savior changes not! All our concerns are in his hands, and therefore safe. His path is in the deep waters; his thoughts and methods of conduct are as high above ours—as the heavens are high above the earth; and he often takes a course for accomplishing his purposes, which is directly contrary to what our narrow views would prescribe. He wounds—in order to heal. He kills—that he may make alive. He casts down—when he designs to raise. He brings a death upon our feelings, wishes, and prospects—when he is about to give us the desire of our hearts. These things he does to test us; but he himself knows, and has determined before-hand, what he will do. The test indeed, usually turns out to our shame. Impatience and unbelief show their ugly heads, and prompt us to suppose this, that, and the other thing, yes perhaps all things, are against us; to question whether He is with us and for us, or not. But it issues likewise in the praise of his goodness, when we find, that, over all our unkind complaints and suspicions—he is still working wonderfully for us, causing light to shine out of darkness, and doing us good in defiance of ourselves!

01.01. All things work together for good

All things work together for good September 28, 1774. My dear friend,

I see the necessity of having, if possible, my principles at my fingers' ends, that I may apply them as occasions arise every hour.

"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. Certainly, if my ability was equal to my inclination, I would remove your tumor with a word or a touch—I would exempt you instantly and constantly from every inconvenience and pain! But you are in the hands of One who could do all this and more, and who loves you infinitely better than I can do—and yet He is pleased to permit you to suffer. What is the plain lesson? Certainly, that at the present juncture, He, to whom all the chains of events, and their consequences are present in one view, sees it better for you to have this tumor than to be without it! For I have no more idea of a tumor rising (or any other incidental trial befalling you), without a cause, without a need-be, without a designed advantage to result from it, than I have of a mountain or pyramid rising up of its own accord in the middle of Main Street. The promise is express, and literally true—that all things, universally and without exception, shall work together for good to those who love God. But they work together! The smallest as well as the greatest events have their place and use—like several stones in the arch of a bridge, where no one would singly be useful—but every one in its place is necessary to the structure and support of the arch; or, rather, like the movement of a watch, where, though there is an evident subordination of parts, and some pieces have a greater comparative importance than others—yet the smallest pieces have their place and use, and are so far equally important, that the whole design of the machine would be obstructed for lack of them.

Some workings and turns of Divine Providence may be compared to the main-spring or main-wheels, which have a more visible, sensible, and determining influence upon the whole tenor of our lives. But the more ordinary occurrences of every day are at least pins and pivots, adjusted, timed, and suited with equal accuracy, by the hand of the same great Artist who planned and executes the whole! We are sometimes surprised to see how much more depends and turns upon these minor events, than we were aware of. Then we admire his skill, and say "he has done all things well!" Indeed, with respect to his works of providence, as well as of creation, he well deserves the title of Maximus in minimis.

Such thoughts as these, when I am enabled to realize them, in some measure reconcile me to whatever he allots for myself or my friends, and convinces me of the propriety of that verse, which speaks the language of love, as well as authority, "Be still—and know that I am God!"

I sympathize with you in your severe trial, and pray and trust that your Shepherd will be your Physician; will superintend and bless the use of means; will give you in his good time health and cure, and at all times reveal unto you abundance of peace. His promises and power are necessary for our preservation, in the smoother scenes he has allotted for us, and they are likewise sufficient

for the roughest. We are always equally in danger in ourselves, and always equally safe under the shadow of his wings. No storms, assaults, sieges, or pestilences, can hurt us, until we have filled up his appointed measure of service! And when our work is done, and he has ripened us for glory—it is no great matter by what means he is pleased to call us home to himself!

Chapter 13

01.01. An essay on the character of the apostle Paul,

An essay on the character of the apostle Paul, considered as an example and pattern of a minister of Jesus Christ by John Newton, 1769

"You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings." 2 Timothy 3:10-11

1. The characteristic excellence of Paul, which was as the spring or source of every other grace—was the ardency of the supreme love he bore to his Lord and Savior. It would not be easy to find many periods throughout his epistles which do not evidence the fullness of his heart in this respect. He seems delighted even with the sound of the name of Jesus, so that, regardless of the cold rules of academic composition, we find him repeating it ten times in the compass of ten successive verses. (1 Corinthians 1:1-10) He was so struck with the just claim the Savior had to every heart, that he accounted a lack of love to him—as the highest pitch of ingratitude and wickedness, and deserving the utmost severity of wrath and ruin. (1 Corinthians 16:22) When he was conscious that, for his unwearied application to the service of the Gospel, in defiance of the many dangers and deaths which awaited him in every place—he appeared to many as one beside himself, and transported beyond the bounds of sober reason; he thought it a sufficient apology to say, "The love of Christ constrains us!" (2 Corinthians 5:14) "We are content to be fools for his sake, to be despised so he may be honored, to be nothing in ourselves that he may be all in all." He had such a sense of the glorious, invaluable excellence of the person of Christ, of his adorable condescension in taking the nature and curse of sinners upon himself, and his complete suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of his people—that he often seems at a loss for words answerable to the emotions of his heart! And when he has exhausted the powers of language, and astonished his readers with his inimitable energy, he intimates a conviction of his inability to do justice to a subject—the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of which are too great for our feeble capacities to grasp!

But, besides these general views, he was particularly affected with the exceeding abundant love and grace of Christ to himself, when he reflected on the circumstances in which the Lord had found him, and the great things he had done for him. That he who had before been a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious—should be forgiven, accepted as a child of God, entrusted with the ministry of the Gospel, and appointed to everlasting salvation—was indeed an instance of wonderful grace! So it appeared to himself, and at the thought of it he often seems to forget his present subject, and breaks forth into inimitable digressions to the praise of Him who had loved him, and given himself for him!

Happily convinced of the tendency and efficacy of this principle in himself, he proposes it to others, instead of a thousand arguments, whenever he would inculcate the most unreserved obedience to the whole will of God, or stir up believers to a holy diligence in adorning the doctrine of their God and Savior in all things. And his exhortations to the conscientious discharge of the various duties of family life, are generally enforced by this grand motive. In a word, at all times, and in all places,

the habitual and favorite subject that employed his thoughts, his tongue, and his pen—was the love of Christ!

Supported and animated by this love, he exerted himself to the utmost, in promoting the knowledge of him whom he loved, and bearing testimony to his power and grace. Nothing could dishearten, or weary or terrify, or bribe him from his duty! This love to Jesus, must and will be universally, the leading principle of a faithful minister. Should a man possess the tongue of men and angels, the finest genius, and the most admired accomplishments, if he is not constrained and directed by the love of Christ—he will either do nothing, or nothing to the purpose. He will be unable to support either the frowns or the smiles of the world. His studies and endeavors will certainly be influenced by low and selfish views. Selfish interest or a desire of applause may stimulate him to shine as a scholar, a critic, or a philosopher; but until the love of Christ rules in His heart, he will neither have inclination nor power to exert himself for the glory of God, or the good of souls!

2. The inseparable effect, and one of the surest evidences of love to Christ, is a love to his people. Of this likewise, our apostle exhibits an instructive and affecting example. The warmth and cordiality of his love to those who loved his Lord and Master, appear in every page of his writings. He so rejoiced in their prosperity, that to hear of it, at any time, made him in a manner forget his own sorrows, when encompassed with troubles on every side. And though, in many instances, he did not meet that grateful return he had reason to expect, yet he could not be discouraged. But when he had occasion to expostulate with some upon this account, he adds, "I will still gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more I love you—the less I am loved." (2 Corinthians 12:15) Of such a generous temper as this, the world, would they observe it, must acknowledge (as the magicians in Egypt), "This is the finger of God!" For nothing but his grace can produce a conduct so contrary to the natural inclination of man, as to persevere and increase in kindness and affection to those who persevere in requiting it with coldness and ingratitude! His epistles to the Thessalonians abound in such expressions and strains of tenderness, as would doubtless be generally admired, were they not overlooked, through the unhappy disregard which too many show to that best of books in which they are contained. When he is appealing to themselves concerning the sincerity of his conduct, and how far he had been from abusing his authority, he says, "We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children," —who, by her tender and assiduous offices, supplies their inability to take care of themselves. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

He then adds, "We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us!" No comment can do justice to the spirit of this sentiment. In another passage, "We were forced to leave you," (1 Thessalonians 2:17) the original term has an emphasis which no single word in our language can answer. It imports such a state of separation as is made between a parent and a child by the death of either, when the child is left a helpless and exposed orphan, or the parent is bereaved of the staff and comfort of his old age. It beautifully intimates the endearing affection which subsisted between the apostle and the people he was writing to, and demonstrates the greatest tenderness, simplicity, and love. But his regard went beyond words, and was evidenced by the whole course of his actions. Nor was it confined to those who had enjoyed the benefits of his personal ministry; his heart was charged with the care and welfare of all the churches; and even those who had not seen

his face, had an unceasing share in his solicitude and prayers, (Colossians 2:1) Nay, so strong was his love to the churches, that it balanced his habitual desire to be with Christ; he could not determine which was best choice—to suffer with the members upon earth (so that he might be serviceable to them), or to reign with the Head in heaven. (Php 1:23-24) In the passage referred to, we see the happy centripetal and centrifugal forces which carried him on through the circle of duty—he constantly tended and gravitated to his center of rest; but successive opportunities of usefulness and service drew him off, and made him willing to wait yet longer. In this part of his character we are not to consider him exclusively as an apostle. All who have truly known the Gospel to be the power of God unto salvation, are partakers of the same spirit, according to the measure of their faith. That person is unworthy the name of a Christian, who does not feel a concern and affection for his brethren who are in the world. It must be allowed that prejudices and misapprehensions too often prevent the Lord's people from knowing each other; but, so far as they believe a person to be a child of God through faith—they cannot but love him. This is the immutable criterion which our Lord himself has given, whereby his real disciples are to be known and acknowledged. (John 13:35) He has not directed us to judge by their discourses, their knowledge, or even their zeal—but by the evidence they give of mutual love! We may as easily conceive of a sun without light, or a cause without an effect, as of a person duly affected with a sense of the glory of God and the love of Christ—and not proportionally filled with a spirit of love to all who are like-minded. But especially this disposition is essential to a minister of the Gospel, and the apostle assures us, that all imaginable qualifications are of no avail without it! Though we could possess the powers of a prophet or an angel, or the zeal of a martyr—if we are destitute of this love—we are, in the sight of God—but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

3. Paul's inflexible attachment to the great doctrines of the Gospel is another part of his character which deserves our attention. He knew their worth, experienced their power in his own soul, and saw that, though they were unacceptable to the wisdom of the world, they bore the impress of the manifold wisdom of God. He takes notice that, in those early days, there were many who "corrupted" the Word of God. (2 Corinthians 2:17) Corrupted properly signifies to adulterate; to imitate the practice of dishonest winemakers, who mix and sophisticate their liquors, so that, though the color is preserved, and the taste perhaps nearly counterfeited, the quality and properties are quite altered. But he says, "We are not as they." He preached the Gospel in its purity and simplicity, the sincere, genuine milk of the word, (1 Peter 2:2) neither weakened by water, nor disguised by any artful sweetening to render it more palatable. He added nothing of his own, nor employed any arts or gloss to palliate the truth—that it might be more acceptable to men of carnal minds. As he was not ashamed of it, neither was he afraid lest it should fall without success to the ground, if not supported and assisted by inventions of his own. He knew whose Word it was, and therefore cheerfully ventured the outcome with him, who alone could procure it a welcome reception. And as he disdained the thought of himself deviating one iota from the plain and full declaration of the truth—neither could he bear, no, not for an hour, with any others who presumed to do so. (Galatians 2:5) I doubt not but the warmth of his zeal, in this respect, has disgusted many in the present day, wherein a seeming candor and tolerance is pleaded for and extended to almost every foolish sentiment—except the truths in which Paul gloried! There is little doubt but many, if they had the courage and honesty to speak out, would add Paul himself to the list of those whom they despise as uncharitable, and hot-brained, narrow-minded bigots; for who has offended more than he—against the rules of that indifference to error, which is at present

miscalled love? The Galatians, in a short time after he left them, had ventured to admit some alteration in the doctrine they had received from him—it was chiefly in one point. They had been persuaded into an undue regard for the law of Moses. This, some may think, was little more than a secondary matter; that it could not have any great or direct influence upon their moral practice, and that they might be very good Christians, though, in this one thing, they could not see exactly with their teacher's eyes. But how different was the apostle's judgement! If the Galatians had returned to the practice of idolatry, or broke out into the most scandalous immoralities—Paul could hardly have expressed his surprise and grief in stronger terms! He changes his usual manner of address, and speaks to them as a foolish people (Galatians 3:1) under the power of some unaccountable fascination. He tells them that, by admitting such an addition, (Galatians 1:6-9) small and inconsiderable as they might think it—they had, in effect, received another Gospel—which was, however, so enervated and despoiled of efficacy, that it was, more properly speaking, become no Gospel at all, utterly unworthy the least pretense to the name!

Further, he denounces an anathema! (the highest curse!) upon any person who should dare to preach any such pretended Gospel, even though, if such a thing were possible, it should be himself, or an angel from heaven! And this denunciation he immediately repeats, lest it should be thought that he spoke rather from warmth of temper, than from a just sense of the importance of the case.

What would some of my readers think of a man who should, at this time, express himself in terms like these? But let it be remembered that our apostle, who was so ready with an anathema upon this occasion, and who, in another place, passes the same severe judgement (1 Corinthians 16:22) upon any man who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ—was far from speaking thus from emotions of anger and ill-will. The disposition of his own mind, the tender concern with which he viewed the worst of sinners, may be judged of from his willingness to be made an anathema himself (Romans 9:3) if, by all he could suffer, he might be a means of saving the Jews, who were his worst enemies, and from whom he had constantly received the most unjust and cruel treatment! But when the cause of the Gospel and the honor of Christ were in question—he could not, he dared not, consult with the feelings of flesh and blood; but, as the minister and messenger of the Lord, he solemnly declared what must, and will, be the awful consequence of neglecting or corrupting the Word of life!

Every faithful minister of the Gospel is possessed of a measure of the same attention to the purity of the truth and faith once delivered to the saints. They must not deviate from their instructions; nor can they behold with indifference, the specious attempts of others to mislead the unwary. They know what censures they must expect upon this account. It is sufficient for them, that they can appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that though, as the servants of Christ, they dare not aim to please men by speaking smooth things—yet they act from principles of benevolence and love, and would rejoice in the salvation of their greatest opposers! The world, perhaps, would judge more favorably of these faithful ministers, if they knew more about them—if they were witnesses to the prayers and tears which they pour out for them in secret; and the emotions of mind they feel when they are constrained to declare the more solemn parts of their message. But, as ministers, and in their public work, they cannot avoid pointing out the danger of those who venture their souls and eternal hopes upon any other doctrine, than that which Paul preached.

4. But though Paul was so tenacious of the great foundation-truths of the Gospel, and would not admit or connive at any doctrine that interfered with them, he exercised, upon all occasions—a great tenderness to weak consciences, in matters that were not essential to the faith, and when the scruples were owing rather to a lack of clear light—than to obstinacy. This was evident in his conduct with regard to the great controversy that soon took place between the Jewish and Gentile converts, about the distinction of meats and drinks, and other rituals enjoined by the law of Moses (Romans 14:1-23); the obligation of which, many, who had been educated in the practice of those observances, did not immediately see were superseded by the Gospel of Christ. He knew and asserted his own liberty; yet, in condescension to the weakness of others—he often abridged himself of it, and declared that, rather than grieve or cause offence to a weak brother—he would eat no meat while the world stood. His practice herein will probably be of general application, so long as the present state of human infirmity exists. A defect in knowledge, the prejudices of previous education and custom, the remains of a legal spirit, the influence of great names, and other causes of a like nature—will probably always operate, so far as to keep up lesser differences in judgement and practice among those who agree in the great and fundamental truths. The enemy gains too much advantage from these things—not to increase such differences into divisions. SELF is too prevalent in the best men, and the tendency of self is—to exact submission, to hurry to extremes, to exaggerate trifles into points of great consequence, and to render us averse to the healing expedients of peace. From these sources, discords and evils innumerable have been multiplied and perpetuated among the various denominations under which the Lord's people have been ranged, which have greatly hindered the welfare and progress of the common cause, and exposed each contending party to the scorn of their real enemies. But were the spirit and conduct of our apostle more adopted, many debates would entirely cease; and in those things where a difference of judgement would still exist—the exercise of patience, gentleness, and mutual forbearance, would, perhaps, afford fairer occasion for the display of the Christian character—than if we were all exactly of one mind! Then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak; the one would not censure—nor the other despise. Nor would those whose minds have been enlarged by a variety of experience and observation, think it at all strange, much less would they be angry, if others, who have not had the same advantages—cannot immediately enter into all their sentiments!

Paul, in knowledge, abilities, and usefulness, was eminently superior to all those among whom he chiefly conversed; and, as an apostle, he had a stronger right than any man since the apostles' day could have—to exact an implicit deference and submission; but he had drunk deeply of the spirit of his Master, and we are concerned to follow him, as he followed Christ, in the exercise of tenderness to the weakest of the flock.

It is not my present business to define what are properly essentials in the Christian religion, and to separate them clearly from the less important points, which, for that reason, and in contradistinction to the other, are called secondary points. This would lead me too far away from my topic; though, perhaps, it would not be so difficult as a person might at first expect, who should be told of all that has been written, with little satisfaction, upon the subject. I foresee a future period in our history, when a treatise of this kind will be almost necessary; and, if I am spared to reach so far, I shall probably embrace the occasion. In the mean time I would just hint an observation or two on this head, which the intelligent reader, if he thinks them just, may apply as

he sees proper:

A. Essentials and secondary points in religion (if we speak with propriety) are derived from the same source, and resolved into the same authority. To consider the commands of God as essentials, and the inventions and traditions of men super-added thereto, as secondary points, would be a very improper, and, indeed, a very false division of the subject. Nothing but what is prescribed by the Word of God, or may be fairly deduced from it—is worthy of the name even of a secondary point in true religion. Human appointments, if not repugnant to Scripture and the light of conscience, may be submitted to for the sake of peace, or when the general purposes of edification cannot be attained without them; but they seem not to deserve a place even among the secondary points of a religion which is of divine institution. All the labored arguments, whether for or against the color of a garment, the shape of a building, and a multitude of other things equally insignificant, seem to have occasioned a needless loss of time and temper, chiefly by a mistake of the question on both sides!

B. Essentials in Christianity are those things without which no man can be a Christian in the sight of God, and by the decision of his Word. And, on the other hand, those things alone are essential, which whoever possesses, is, by Scripture declaration, in a state of favor with God through Christ. These might be branched out into many particulars; but they are fully and surely comprised in two—faith and holiness. These are essential to the being of a Christian; are only to be found in a Christian; are infallible tokens that the possessor is accepted in the Beloved; and whoever dies without them must assuredly perish. These are essentials, because they are absolutely necessary; for it is written, "Whoever does not believe—shall be damned," (Mark 16:16) and, "Without holiness—no man shall see the Lord," (Hebrews 12:14) And they are essential likewise, because they demonstrate and evidence—a saving interest in the promise of everlasting life. Thus our Lord declares, "I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life and will not come under judgment—but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24) And the apostle, writing to the believing Romans, tells them, "But now, since you have been liberated from sin and become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in holiness—and the end is eternal life!" (Romans 6:22)

These, then, are the essentials of religion; and though they are produced by the same power of the Holy Spirit, and derived from a knowledge of the same truths, and therefore cannot be separated, they may properly be distinguished—for the conviction of those who pretend to one without the other. The most specious appearances of holiness, which are not accompanied with faith in Christ, may be safely rejected as counterfeits! On the other hand, a profession of faith which is not evidenced by the fruits of holiness, by gracious tempers, and a tenor of life befitting the Gospel—is dead, deluding, and destructive!

If the question is removed another step, and it should be asked, "which, or how many, of the doctrines of Scripture are necessary to produce the faith and holiness supposed requisite?" It may suffice to say, that, in the nature of things, no person can be expected to believe in Christ, until convinced of his need of him, and of his ability, as a Savior, fully to answer his expectations. And as a supreme love to God, and a hatred of all sin—are evidently included in the idea of holiness, it supposes a disposition of mind which every man’s experience proves to be beyond the power of fallen human nature. And therefore a competent knowledge and cordial acceptance of what the

Scripture teaches concerning the nature and desert of sin; the person and mediatory acts of Christ; the causes, ends, and effects of his mediation; together with the necessity of that change of heart which is expressed by a being born again—appear to be essentially necessary to that faith and holiness which are described in the Gospel.

C. The secondary points of religion include all those particulars of revelation which a person, possessed of the above-mentioned essentials, may as yet be unacquainted with, or unable to judge of with certainty. A careful application to the Scripture, a diligent waiting upon God in prayer, and an improvement of the means of grace—will, by the divine blessing, which is promised to those who seek in this manner—increase our light, comprehension, and certainty, with regard to these points; which, though not essentially necessary to the being of a Christian, are exceedingly conducive to his well-being, to his growth and establishment in the truth. This subject may be, perhaps, illustrated from the physical body, in which what we call the vital parts may be considered as essential to life, because there can be no life without them. We may easily conceive that a man may live without an arm or leg, or several members and organs, which, though highly valuable for use and comfort, are not necessarily connected with life. But if we conceive of him as deprived of his head, heart, or lungs—we can no longer consider him as living. Yet it is desirable to have a body not only barely alive—but thriving.

Just so in true religion: those who are truly partakers of it, will not too curiously inquire—how much knowledge, or what degree of practice—is barely consistent with a possibility of life. But they will earnestly desire to be acquainted with the whole will of God, and that every part of it may have a suitable influence upon their practice.

But, in the mean time, a consolation is provided, in the promises of God made to those who have received the seeds of faith and true holiness, against the fears, doubts, and involuntary mistakes which, from remaining ignorance, they are yet subject to. God will supply what is lacking, pardon what is amiss, and lead them on from strength to strength. They are to walk by the light already afforded, to wait on him for an increase, to be wary of themselves, and gentle to others. And things which as yet they do not understand, God will, in his due time, reveal to them. But to return from this digression.

5. Every part of Paul’s history and writings demonstrates an unselfish spirit, and that his uncommon labors were directed to no other ends than the glory of God and the good of men. No man had, probably, so great an influence over his hearers, or could have a juster claim, from the nature and number of his services, to a suitable provision for himself. But he could say, with truth, "I will not burden you, for I am not seeking what you have—but you!" To cut off all occasions of misapprehension on this head, he usually submitted to work with his own hands rather than be dependent on his friends. It is true, he does not propose himself to us as a pattern in this respect, for he tells us that "the laborer is worthy of his hire," and that "the Lord had ordained that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:14) And when he saw it expedient, he did not refuse to be himself assisted by others. He showed, by accepting such assistance from some, that he understood his liberty, and did not act from a spirit of pride or singularity when he declined it. And by his more general practice, he evidenced that he was superior to all selfish and mercenary motives; and, upon the whole, he was content to appear and live as a poor man. And though he had learned in the school of Christ, how to abound, as well as

to suffer poverty, the latter seems to have been more frequently his lot. (Php 4:12)

He saw too many false teachers, who, under the sanction of a minister, made merchandise of souls, and he not only severely censured them—but by this self-denial, which they were unable to imitate—he manifested the vanity of their pretenses in setting themselves forth as the apostles of Christ. This seems to have been his chief design in it, and the reason of his repeating, with so much earnestness, his determination to take nothing from the Corinthians, who were too much inclined to listen to some of these teachers, to his disadvantage. But whatever parade they might make of gifts or zeal, or however they might presume to equal themselves to him in other respects; he knew they would not attempt to share with him—in the glory of preaching the Gospel freely, which was diametrically inconsistent with their whole design! The circumstances with us are so far different, that, in proposing Paul as a pattern of unselfishness, we do not lay a stress upon his preaching the Gospel without expense to his hearers. Yet, in his noble contempt of worldly advantage, and making everything stoop to the great ends of his mission—he stands as a precedent to all Christian ministers in succeeding times! In those passages of his epistles to Timothy and Titus, where the negative part of a minister's character is given, this is constantly one branch of it, that he must not be influenced by a love of gain; and as constantly the word is compounded with the epithet, filthy—"not given to filthy lucre;" to intimate that nothing can be more dishonest or dishonorable, than to enter the Christian ministry for mercenary reasons! Nor is this the judgement of Scripture only—but the general voice of mankind.

Nothing is a greater bar to a minister's usefulness, or renders his person and labors more contemptible, than a known attachment to money, a grasping fist, and a hard heart! Those who enter into the pastor's office for filthy lucre, who are less concerned for the flock—than their fleece, who employ all their arts and influence to exchange a lesser benefit for a greater, or to superadd one benefit to another—may obtain the reward they seek! But of all the methods of acquiring wealth, which do not directly expose a man to the lash of human laws—this is the most to be lamented and avoided!

If the Scriptures are true; if Paul was a servant of Christ; and if the authority of his precepts and example is still binding—a day will come when mercenary preachers will wish they had begged their bread from door to door, or been chained as slaves to the oar of a galley for life—rather than have presumed to intrude into the church upon such base and unworthy motives! It is to be feared that too many read the awful denunciations upon this head, in the prophets Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:1-40) and Ezekiel, (Ezekiel 13:1-23; Ezekiel 34:1-31) with indifference, as supposing they only relate to the Jews who lived at that time. But they are equally applicable to all who prostitute the Word and worship of God—to the purposes of ambition and avarice!

6. From the foregoing particulars we may collect the idea of true Christian zeal, as exemplified in our apostle. Hardly any word in our language is more misunderstood or abused, than zeal. It is used in the New Testament in both a good or bad sense—and it is considered as a vice or virtue, according to its object and principle. In the BAD sense—it sometimes denotes envy, indignation, or disdain, an obstinate and ignorant opposition to the truth, a misguided warmth in unnecessary things, and a contentious, disputatious temper. A zeal replete with these traits has too frequently been the bane and opprobrium of the Christian church!

But, "It is GOOD to be to be zealous, provided the purpose is good," (Galatians 4:17) and then it is sinful to be otherwise. Our passions were not given us in vain. When the judgement is well informed, and the understanding duly enlightened by the Word of God: the more warmth—the better. But this warmth and earnestness, in an ignorant or prejudiced person, is dangerous and hurtful to himself and others! It is like haste in a man in the dark, who knows not where he is going, nor what harms he may suffer by his haste. False zeal spends its strength in defense of names and forms, the externals of religion, or the inventions of men! False zeal enforces its edicts by compulsion and severity! False zeal would willingly call for fire from heaven; but, unable to do this, it kindles the flame of persecution, and, if not providentially restrained, wages war with the peace, comfort, and liberty of all who disdain to wear its chains; and breathes threatening, slaughter, and destruction with an unrelenting spirit! The mildest weapons (which false zeal never employs alone, except where it is checked by a superior power)—are calumny, contempt, and hatred. And the objects it seeks to harm are generally the quiet in the land, and those who worship God in spirit and in truth. In a word false zeal resembles the craft by which it works—and is earthly, sensual, devilish. But the true Christian zeal is a heavenly gentle flame. It shines and warms—but knows not to destroy. It is the spirit of Christ, infused with a sense of his love into the heart. It is a generous philanthropy and benevolence, which, like the light of the sun, diffuses itself to every object, and longs to be the instrument of good, if possible, to the whole race of mankind. A sense of the worth of souls, the importance of unseen and eternal realities, and the dreadful condition of unawakened sinners—makes it, indeed, earnest and importunate; but this it shows—not by bitterness and constraint—but by an unwearied perseverance in attempting to overcome evil with good. It returns blessings for curses, prayers for harsh treatment, and, though often reviled and affronted, cannot be discouraged from renewed efforts to make others partakers of the happiness itself possesses. It knows how to express a befitting indignation against the errors and follies of men; but towards their persons—it is all gentleness and compassion. It weeps (and would, if possible, weep tears of blood) over those who will not be persuaded. But, while it plainly represents the consequences of their obstinacy, it trembles at its own declarations, and feels for those who cannot feel for themselves.

True Christian zeal is often grieved—but cannot be provoked. The zealous Christian is strictly observant of his own failings, candid and tender to the faults of others; he knows what allowances are due to the frailty of human nature, and the temptations of the present state, and willingly makes all the allowances possible. And though he dares not call evil good, cannot but judge according to the rule of the Scripture—yet he will conceal the infirmities of men as much as he can. He will not speak of them without just cause, much less will he aggravate their case; or boast himself over them!

Such was the zeal of our apostle: bold and intrepid in the cause of God and truth, unwearied in service, inflexible in danger. When duty called, he was not to be restrained either by the threats of enemies, the solicitations of friends, or the prospect of any hardships to which he might be exposed. He cheerfully endured hunger and thirst, watching and weariness, poverty and contempt, and counted not his life dear—so that he might fulfill the great purposes of the ministry which he had received of the Lord. But at the same time, in all his interaction with men—he was gentle, mild, and compassionate. He pursued the peace, and accommodated himself to the weakness, of all about him. When he might command—he used entreaties. When he met with harsh and

injurious treatment—he bore it patiently, and, if opportunity offered, requited it with kindness. Thus as he had drunk of the spirit of Jesus—so he walked in the steps of his Lord and Master.

All who bear the name of ministers of Christ, would do well to examine how far their tempers and conduct are conformable to Paul's. Are there not too many who widely differ from him? Where he was immovable as an iron pillar—they are flexible and yielding as a reed waving in the wind, suiting their doctrines and practice to the depraved taste of the world, and prostituting their talents and calling to the unworthy pursuit of selfish ambition and applause! On the other hand, in things less essential, or not commanded, they invade the rights of the private judgement of others, and attempt to bind heavy yokes and impositions upon those whom Christ has made free. And while they readily tolerate (if not countenance) false doctrine and immorality—they exert all their strength and subtlety to disquiet or suppress those who differ from them in the slightest issue, if they profess to differ for conscience' sake. But Jesus has no such 'ministers'! their claim is utterly vain! None but those who are ignorant of the plainest truths can allow them this character; their tempers, their behavior, the tenor of their professed instructions, and the total lack of efficacy and influence in their ministrations, plainly demonstrate that Christ neither sent them nor owns them!

7. Having considered the subject-matter and the leading views of the apostle's ministry—it may be proper to take some notice of his manner as a preacher. This he reminds the Corinthians of. They were reputed as an educated and clever people. Paul was aware of their character, and expresses himself as if he had been deliberating before he saw them, in what way he would address them with the fairest probability of success. He tells them, (1 Corinthians 2:1-4) that he determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; including, in this one comprehensive expression, the whole scheme of Gospel doctrine. And as to the manner in which he delivered this doctrine, he says, "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom—but in demonstration of the Spirit and with power." We are sure that he did not renounce justness of reasoning, or propriety of expression. In these respects he exceeded their most admired orators, as may appear to any who have skill to compare his epistles and discourses with the best performances of the Greek writers. But he renounced "the enticing," or plausible, "words of man's wisdom." In the term "man's wisdom," may be included— whatever the natural faculties of man are capable of discovering or receiving, independent of the peculiar teaching of the Spirit of God. "Enticing words of man's wisdom" may include all those ways and arts which the wise men of the world have used, or approved, as most effectual to express, adorn, or defend their own wise sentiments and discoveries. These, and the methods of setting them off to advantage, have been divided into many branches, and dignified with high sounding names. But all the efforts of man's wisdom, considered as engaged in the subjects of religion, may be summed up in three particulars:

A. A vain inquiry into things which lie wholly beyond the capacity of man in his present state, and which can only be discovered by supernatural revelation.

B. A vain attempt to account for everything according to the light and principles of depraved reason.

C. A studious exactness in language, either an easy flow of words to please and amuse the ear, or a torrent of strong and figurative expressions to engage the passions, according as a different taste or fashion happens to prevail.

It would be too dry a task to illustrate these points, by adducing specimens of each from the works of the ancient and modern philosophers; but if we had no other employment in hand, it would be easy to show that man's wisdom, in the first sense, is Uncertainty; in the second, Prejudice; in the third, Imposition and artifice. It is sufficient for my present purpose, that the apostle renounced them all.

Instead of vain conjectures, he spoke from certain experience; he could say, "I received of the Lord, that which I also delivered to you." Instead of accommodating his doctrine to the taste and judgment of his hearers—he spoke with authority, in the name of God whom he served. Instead of losing time in measuring words and syllables, that he might obtain the reputation of a fine speaker—he spoke, from the feeling and fullness of his heart, the words of simplicity and truth! The success of his preaching did not at all depend upon the softness and harmony of his words, and therefore he disdained an attention to those petty ornaments of speech, which were quite necessary to help out the poverty of "man's wisdom".

He sought something else, which those who preach themselves rather than Christ Jesus the Lord, have little reason to expect. I mean, the power and demonstration of the Spirit. He knew that this alone could give him success!

Ministers may learn from him, what to avoid and what to seek for—if they would be useful to their hearers. Men can but declare the truths of the Gospel; it is the Spirit of God who alone can reveal them with power, to the heart of the listener. Nothing less than a divine power can present them to the mind in their just importance, and throw light into the soul by which they may be perceived! Nothing less than this power can subdue the will, and open the heart to receive the truth in the love of it. Without this divine power—even Paul would have preached in vain! From what has been said, we may remark two obvious reasons, among others, why we have so much unsuccessful preaching in our days: either the Gospel truths are given up, or the Gospel simplicity departed from. Where either of these is the case, the Lord refuses his power and blessing.

8. Another observable part of Paul's character, is his sincere humility. In the midst of his eminent and extensive services, he retained a deep sense of the evil part he once acted against the Lord. He speaks of himself, on this account, in the most abasing language, as the chief of sinners, and strongly expresses his unworthiness of the grace and apostleship he had received. And though his insight into the mysteries of the Gospel, the communion he maintained with God by faith in His Son, and the beauty of holiness which shone in his life, were all beyond the common measure—yet having, in the same proportion, a clearer sense of his obligations, and of the extent and purity of the divine precepts—he thought nothing of his present attainments, in comparison of those greater degrees of grace he was still pressing after. While, in the eyes of others, he appeared not only exemplary—but unequaled, he esteemed himself less than the least of all the saints; (Ephesians 3:8) and his patience and condescension towards others, and his acquiescence under all the trying dispensations of providence with which he was exercised—were a proof that this was not an pretended manner of expression—but the genuine dictate of his heart! To speak of one's self in abasing terms is easy—and such language is often a thin veil, through which the motions of pride may be easily discerned. But though the language of humility may be counterfeited, its real fruits and acting's are inimitable. Here again, Paul is a pattern for Christians. A humble frame of mind is the strength and ornament of every other grace, and the proper soil

wherein they grow! A proud Christian, that is, one who has a high conceit of his own abilities and attainments, is no less a contradiction, than a sober drunkard, or a generous miser. All other seeming excellencies are of no real value, unless accompanied with humility. And though a person should appear to have little more than a consciousness of his own insufficiency, and a teachable dependent spirit, and is waiting upon the Lord, in his appointed way, for instruction and a blessing, he will infallibly thrive as a tree planted by the waterside; for God, who resists the proud, has promised to give grace to the humble. (James 4:6)

But, in an especial manner, humility is necessary and beautiful in a minister! The greatest abilities and the most unwearied diligence will not ensure success without it! A secret apprehension of his own importance, will deprive him of the Holy Spirit's assistance, without which he can do nothing! "His arm will be dried up, and his right eye will be darkened;" (Zechariah 11:17) for the Lord Almighty has purposed to stain the pride of all human glory, and will honor none but those who abase themselves, and are willing to give all the praise to him alone!

If any man had ground to set a value upon his knowledge, gifts, and services—Paul might justly claim the pre-eminence. But though he was an apostle, and an inspired writer, though he had planted churches through a considerable part of the known world, though he was received as an angel by many to whom he preached; and, by a special blessing, had been caught up into the third heaven; yet he was, by grace, preserved from being exalted above measure—or from assuming an undue superiority over his brethren. The authority with which he was entrusted, he employed solely to their advantage, and accounted himself the least of all, and the servant of all. How very opposite has been the conduct of many since his time—who have aimed to appropriate the glory exclusively to themselves!

Such was our apostle, and the same spirit (though in an inferior degree) will be found in all the faithful ministers of the Lord Jesus! They love his name; it is the pleasing theme of their ministry, and to render it glorious in the eyes of sinners is the great study of their lives. For his sake they love all who love him, and are their willing servants to promote the comfort and edification of their souls. They love his Gospel, faithfully proclaim it, without disguise or alteration, and shun not to declare the whole counsel of God, so far as they are themselves acquainted with it. They contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and are desirous to preserve and maintain the truth, in its power and purity. The knowledge of their own weakness and fallibility makes them tender to the weaknesses of others. And though they dare not lay, or allow, any other foundation than that which God has laid in Zion—yet, knowing that the kingdom of God does not consist in foods and drinks—but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—they guard against the influence of a party spirit. And, if their labors are confined to Christians of one denomination, their love and prayers are not limited within such narrow bounds—but extend to all who love and serve their Master.

They have entered upon the ministry, not for selfish and sordid ends—for popular applause, or filthy lucre—but from a constraining sense of the love of Jesus, and a just regard to the worth and danger of immortal souls! Their zeal is conducted and modeled by the example and precepts of their Lord; their desire is not to destroy—but to save; and they wish their greatest enemies a participation in their choicest blessings. In the subject-matter and the manner of their preaching, they show that they seek not to be men-pleasers—but to commend the truth to every man's

conscience in the sight of God. And when they have done their utmost, and when God has blessed their labors, and given them acceptance and success beyond their hopes, they are conscious of the defects and evils attending their best endeavors, of the weak influence the truths they preach to others have upon their own hearts; that their sufficiency of every kind is of God, and not of themselves; and therefore they sit down, ashamed, as unprofitable servants, and can rejoice or glory in nothing but in him who came into the world to save the chief of sinners!

It might be expected that a spirit and conduct thus uniformly benevolent and unselfish, and witnessed to, in a greater or less degree, by the good effect of their ministry and example among their hearers, would secure them the good-will of mankind, and entitle them to peace, if not to respect. But, on the contrary, these are the very people who are represented as deceivers of souls, and disturbers of society; they are not permitted to live in some places; and it is owing to a concurrence of favorable circumstances if they are permitted to speak in any. The eyes of many are upon them, watching for their halting; their infirmities are aggravated, their words twisted, their endeavors counteracted, and their persons despised. The design of our history is to show, in the course of every period of the church, that those who have approached nearest to the character I have attempted to delineate from Paul, have always met with such treatment. From his declaration, that "all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," (2 Timothy 3:12) we may expect it shall always be so—while human nature and the state of the world remain as they are. However, it may be a consolation to those who suffer for righteousness sake, to reflect, that the apostles were thus treated before them; particularly Paul, who, as he labored more abundantly than the rest—so he suffered more abundantly than the rest. His person was treated with contempt and despite, his character traduced, his doctrine misrepresented. And though his natural and acquired abilities were great, and he spoke with power and the demonstration of the Spirit—yet he was reckoned as "a babbler," and "a madman," and "the scum of the earth, and the refuse of the world!"

"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." Php 4:9

01.01. Assurance of salvation

Assurance of salvation

July 11, 1795

We may easily conceive of a tree without fruit—but the idea of fruit is naturally connected with that of some tree which produces it. In this sense, assurance is the essence of faith; that is—it springs from true faith, and can grow upon no other root. Faith likewise is the measure of assurance. While faith is weak, (our Lord compares it, in its first principle, to a grain of mustard seed,) assurance cannot be strong.

Jesus Christ the Lord is a complete all-sufficient Savior. His invitation to the weary and heavy-laden is general, without exception, condition, or limitation. He has said, him who comes unto me, I will never cast out. God not only permits—but commands us to believe in the Son of his love. The apostle affirms that he is able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him. When Moses raised the brazen serpent in the wilderness, the direction to the wounded Israelites was very short and simple—it was only, Look, and live! Thus the gospel addresses the sinner, Only believe, and you shall be saved.

Why then does not every sinner who is awakened to a sense of his guilt, danger, and helplessness; and whose desires are drawn towards the Savior—believe with full confidence, even upon his first application for mercy? Is not the remedy fully adequate to the malady? Is not the blood of Jesus able to cleanse from all sin? Is not the Word of the God of truth worthy of entire credit? Yet with such a Savior exhibited before the eyes of his mind, and with such promises sounding in his ears—he continues to hesitate and fluctuate between hope and fear. Could he rely as firmly on the Word of God, as he can on the word of a man, whom, he thinks, means what he says, and is able to make good his promises—he would immediately be filled with joy and peace in believing. But experience and observation may convince us, that, however rational and easy this assurance may seem in theory, it is ordinarily unattainable in practice—without passing through a train of previous exercises and conflicts.

It is true, young converts are often favored with comfortable impressions, which lead them to hope that their doubts and difficulties are already ended—when perhaps they are but just entering upon their warfare. They are brought, as it were, into a new world; a strong and lively sense of divine things engrosses their attention; the world and its fascinations sink into nothing in their esteem; the evil propensities which discourage them are overpowered for a season, and they hope they are quite subdued, and will trouble them no more. Their love, gratitude, praise, and admiration, are in vigorous exercise. An aged, experienced Christian may recollect, with a pleasing regret, many sweet sensations of this kind, in the early stages of his profession, which he cannot recall. But he now knows that the strong confidence he felt in these golden hours was not the assurance of faith—it was temporary and transient; it was founded upon what we call a good frame. Though his comforts were strong, his faith was weak—for, when the good frame subsided, his fears returned,

his hope declined, and he was at his wits' end. Then, perhaps, he wondered at his own presumption, for daring to hope that such a creature as himself could have any right to the privileges of a believer. And if, in the warmth of his heart, he had spoken to others of what God had done for his soul, he afterwards charged himself with being a hypocrite, and a false witness both to God and man. Thus, when the Israelites saw the Egyptians, (who had pursued and terrified them,) cast up dead upon the shore of the Red Sea, they praised the Lord, and believed. They were little aware of the wilderness they had to pass through, and the trials they were to meet with—before they could enter the promised land! But strong faith, and the effect of it, an abiding persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved, and of our final perseverance in grace—are not necessarily connected with sensible comfort. A strong faith can trust God in the dark, and say with Job, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him." Yet it is not to be maintained without a diligent use of the instituted means of grace, and a conscientious attention to the precepts of the gospel. For mere notions of truth, destitute of power—will not keep the heart in peace. But this power depends upon the influence of the Holy Spirit; and if he is grieved by the willful commission of sin, or the willful neglect of the precepts—he hides his face, suspends his influence, and then confidence must proportionable decline, until he is pleased to return and revive it.

There are likewise bodily disorders, which, by depressing the physical spirits, darken and discolor the medium of our perceptions. If the enemy is permitted to take advantage of these seasons, he can pour in a flood of temptations, sufficient to fill the most assured believer with terror and dismay. But, ordinarily, those who endeavor to walk closely and conscientiously with God, attain, in due time, an assurance of hope to the end, which is not easily nor often shaken, though it is not absolutely perfect, nor can be, while so much sin and imperfection remain in us.

If it be inquired—WHY we cannot attain to this state of composure at first, since the object of faith and the promises of God are always the same? Several reasons may be assigned.

Unbelief is the primary cause of all our inquietude, from the moment that our hearts are drawn to seek salvation by Jesus. This inability to take God at his Word, should not be merely lamented as an infirmity—but watched, and prayed, and fought against as a great sin. A great sin indeed it is; the very root of our apostasy, from which every other sin proceeds. Unbelief often deceives us under the guise of humility, as though it would be presumption, in such sinners as we are, to believe the declarations of the God of truth. Many serious people, who are burdened with a sense of other sins, leave this radical evil, unbelief, out of their list of sin. They rather indulge it, and think they ought not to believe, until they can find a warrant from marks and evidences within themselves. But this is an affront to the wisdom and goodness of God, who points out to us the Son of his love—as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, without any regard to what we have been, or to what we are, excepting that broken and contrite spirit—which only himself can create in us. And this broken spirit, though unbelief perverts it to our discouragement, is the very temper in which the Lord delights, and a surer evidence of true grace, than those which we are apt to contrive for ourselves. It is written, He who believes not the record which God has given of his Son, makes him a liar. Why do we not startle with horror—at the workings of unbelief, as we should do at a suggestion to commit murder, or the grossest outward enormity?

Again, our natural pride is a great hindrance to true faith. If we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, and are sensible of our need of mercy—we are not easily brought to see that we are so

totally depraved, so exceedingly vile, so utterly destitute of all good, as the Word of God describes us to be. A secret dependence upon our prayers, tears, resolutions, repentance and endeavors, prevents us from looking solely and simply to the Savior, so as to ground our whole hope for acceptance upon his obedience unto death, and his whole mediation. A true believer will doubtless repent and pray, and forsake his former evil ways—but he is not accepted upon the account of what he does or feels—but because Jesus lived and died, and rose and reigns on the behalf of sinners, and because he is enabled by grace to trust in him for salvation.

Further, pride leads us into that spirit of vain reasoning, which is contrary to the simplicity of living by faith. Until this is renounced, until we become in some measure like little children, and receive the doctrines of Scripture implicitly, because they are from God, requiring no further proof of any point than a Thus says the Lord—we cannot be established in our hope. Naaman was very desirous to be healed of his leprosy; but, if the Lord had not mercifully overruled his prejudices, he would have returned a leper—just as he came. Before he went to Elisha, he had considered in his own mind, how the prophet ought to treat him; and not having the immediate attention paid to him that he expected, he was upon the point of going away; for his reason told him, that, if washing could effect his cure, the waters of Syria were as good as those of Jordan. "It seems," to use the words of a late ingenious writer, "that the gospel is too good to be believed, and too plain to be understood, until our pride is abased."

It is difficult to determine, by the eye, the precise moment of day-break, but the light advances from early dawn, and the sun arises at the appointed hour. Such is the progress of divine light in the mind—the first streaks of the dawn are seldom perceived; but, by degrees, objects, until then unthought of, are revealed. The evil of sin, the danger of the soul, the reality and importance of eternal things—are apprehended, and a hope of mercy through a Savior is discovered, which prevents the sinner from sinking into absolute despair. But for a time—all is indistinct and confused. In this state of mind, many things are anxiously sought for as pre-requisites to believing—but they are sought in vain, for it is only by believing that they can be obtained. But the light increases, the sun arises, the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ shines in upon the soul. As the sun can only be seen by its own light, and diffuses that light by which other objects are clearly perceived; so Christ crucified is the sun in the system of revealed truth; and the right knowledge of the doctrine of his cross satisfies the inquiring mind, proves itself to be the one thing needful, and the only thing necessary to silence the objections of unbelief and pride, and to afford a sure ground for solid and abiding hope.

Once more—we cannot be safely trusted with assurance—until we have that knowledge of the evil and deceitfulness of our hearts, which can be acquired only by painful, repeated experience. The young convert, in his brighter hours, when his heart is full of joys, and he thinks his mountain stands too strong to be removed, may be compared to a ship with much sail spread, and but little ballast. She goes on well while the weather is fair—but is not prepared for a storm. When Peter said, "You have the words of eternal life—we believe and are sure that you are the Christ," and when he protested, "Though all men should forsake you—yet will not I," he undoubtedly spoke honestly; but the event showed that he did not know himself! His resolution was soon and sorely shaken in the hall of the high-priest, so that he denied his Lord with oaths and imprecations. He was left to fall—that he might learn he did not stand by his own strength. The parable of the prodigal may be accommodated for an illustration of this point. The Scripture says, "Then shall you

know—if you follow on to know the Lord." But we often want to know at first, and at once; and suppose— If I was but sure that I am right, and accepted in the Beloved, I could go on with more spirit and success. Many rejoice greatly when they seem to obtain this desire—but their joy is short-lived. They soon resemble the prodigal; they become vain, rash, and careless; they forsake their Father's house; their attention to the means of grace is slackened; they venture upon smaller deviations from the prescribed rule, which, in time, lead them to greater. Thus their stock of grace and comfort is quickly exhausted. They begin to be in need; and, after having been feasted with the bread of life, are reduced to feed upon such husks as the world can afford them. Happy, if at length they are brought to their right minds!

But, oh, with what pungent shame and humiliation do they come back to their Father! He, indeed, is always ready to receive and forgive backsliders; but surely they cannot easily forgive themselves for their ingratitude and folly! When he has healed their broken bones, and restored peace to their souls, it may be expected that they will walk softly and humbly to the end of their days, and not open their mouths any more, either to boast, or to censure, or to complain!

For, a man who possesses a Scriptural and well-grounded assurance in himself—will evidence it to others by suitable fruits. He will be meek, sincere and gentle in his conduct before men—because he is humbled and abased before God. Because he lives upon much God's forgiveness to himself—he will be ready to forgive others. The prospect of that blessed hope assuredly laid up for him in heaven—will make him patient under all his appointed trials in the present life, wean him from an attachment to the world, and preserve him from being much affected either by the smiles or the frowns of mortals. To hear people talk much of their 'assurance', and that they are freed from all doubts and fears—while they habitually indulge proud, angry, resentful, discontented tempers, or while they are eagerly grasping after the world, like those who seek their whole portion in it—is painful and disgusting to a serious Christian! Let us pity them, and pray for them; for we have great reason to fear that they do not understand what they say, nor what they affirm!

01.01. Blemishes in Christian character

Blemishes in Christian character

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." Php 4:8

Dear Sir, The precept which I have chosen for my motto is applicable to many particulars which are but seldom and occasionally mentioned from the pulpit. There are improprieties of conduct, which, though usually considered as foibles which hardly deserve a severe censure, are properly sinful; for though some of them may not seem to violate any express command of Scripture, yet they are contrary to that holiness and circumspection which become our profession. A Christian, by the tenor of his high calling, is bound to avoid even the appearance of evil; and his deportment should not only be upright as to his leading principles, but amiable and engaging, and as free as possible from every inconsistency and blemish. The characters of some valuable people are clouded, and the influence they might otherwise have greatly counteracted, by comparatively small faults; yet faults they certainly are; and it would be well if they could be made so sensible of them, and of their ill effects, as that they might earnestly watch, and strive, and pray against them.

I know not how to explain myself better than by attempting the outlines of a few portraits, to each of which I apprehend some strong resemblances may be found in real life. I do not wish to set my readers to work to find out such resemblance's among their neighbors; but would advise them to examine carefully, whether they cannot, in one or other of them, discover some traces of their own features: and though I speak of men only, counterparts to the several characters may doubtless be found here and there among the women; for the imperfections and evils of a fallen nature are equally entailed upon both sexes.

'Austerus' is a solid and exemplary Christian. He has a deep, extensive, and experimental knowledge of Divine things. Inflexibly and invariably true to his principles, he stems with a noble singularity the torrent of the world, and can neither be bribed nor intimidated from the path of duty. He is a rough diamond of great intrinsic value, and would sparkle with a distinguished luster if he were more polished. But, though the word of God is his daily study, and he prizes the precepts, as well as the promises, more than thousands of gold and silver, there is one precept he seems to have overlooked—"be compassionate and humble." 1 Peter 3:8.

Instead of that gentleness and humility which will always be expected from a professed follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, there is a harshness in his manner, which makes him more admired than beloved; and those who truly love him, often feel more constraint than pleasure when in his company. His intimate friends are satisfied that he is no stranger to true humility of heart; but these are few: by others he is thought proud, dogmatic, and self important; nor can this prejudice against him be easily removed, until he can lay aside that cynical air which he has unhappily contracted.

’Humanus’ is generous and benevolent. His feelings are lively, and his expressions of them strong. No one is more distant from sordid views, or less influenced by a selfish spirit. His heart burns with love to Jesus, and he is ready to receive with open arms all who love his Savior. Yet, with an upright and friendly spirit, which entitles him to the love and esteem of all who know him, he has not everything we would wish in a friend. In some respects, though not in the most criminal sense, he bridles not his tongue. Should you entrust him with a secret—you thereby put it in the possession of the public. Not that he would willfully betray you; but it is his infirmity: he knows not how to keep a secret; it escapes from him before he is aware. So likewise as to matters of fact: in things which are of great importance, and where he is sufficiently informed, no man has a stricter regard to truth; but in the smaller concerns of common life, whether it be from credulity, or from a strange and blamable inadvertence, he frequently grieves and surprises those who know his real character, by saying what is not strictly true. Thus they to whom he opens his very heart dare not make him returns of equal confidence; and those who in some cases would venture their lives upon his word, in others are afraid of telling a story after him. How lamentable are such blemishes in such a person!

’Prudens’ though not of a generous natural temper, is a partaker of that grace which opens the heart, and inspires a disposition to love and to good works. He does not bestow his alms to be seen by men; but those who have the best opportunities of knowing what he does for the relief of others, and of comparing it with his ability, can acquit him in good measure of the charge which another part of his conduct exposes him to. For Prudens is a great economist; and though he would not willingly wrong or injure any person, yet the base means to which he will submit, either to save or gain a penny in what he accounts an honest way, are a great discredit to his profession. He is punctual in fulfilling his engagements; but exceedingly hard, strict, and suspicious in making his bargains. And in his dress, and every article of his personal concerns, he is content to be so much below the station in which the providence of God has placed him, that to those who are not acquainted with his private benefactions to the poor, he appears under the hateful character of a miser, and to be governed by that love of money which the Scripture declares to be the root of all evil, and inconsistent with the true love of God and of the saints.

’Volatilis’ is sufficiently exact in performing his promises—in such instances as he thinks of real importance. If he bids a person depend upon his assistance, he will not disappoint his expectations. Perhaps he is equally sincere in all his promises at the time of making them; but, for lack of method in the management of his affairs, he is always in a hurry, always too late, and has always some engagement upon his hands with which it is impossible he can comply: yet he goes on in this way, exposing himself and others to continual disappointments. He accepts, without a thought, proposals which are incompatible with each other, and will perhaps undertake to be at two or three different and distant places at the same hour. This has been so long his practice, that nobody now expects him until they see him. In other respects he is a good sort of man; but this lack of punctuality, which runs through his whole deportment, puts everything out of course in which he is concerned, abroad and at home. Volatilis excuses himself as well as he can, and chiefly by alleging, that the things in which he fails are of no great consequence. But he would do well to remember, that truth is a sacred thing, and ought not to be violated in the smallest matters, without an unforeseen and unavoidable prevention. Such a trifling turn of spirit lessens the weight of a person’s character, though he makes no pretensions to piety, and is a still greater blemish in a

professor.

’Cessator’ is not chargeable with being buried in the cares and business of the present life to the neglect of the one thing needful; but he greatly neglects the duties of his station. Had he been sent into the world only to read, pray, hear sermons, and join in pious conversation—he might pass for an eminent Christian. But though it is to be hoped that his abounding in these exercises springs from a heart-attachment to Divine things, his conduct evidences that his judgment is weak, and his views of his Christian calling are very narrow and defective. He does not consider, that waiting upon God in the public and private ordinances is designed, not to excuse us from the discharge of the duties of civil life, but to instruct, strengthen, and qualify us for their performance. His affairs are in disorder, and his family and friends are likely to suffer by his indolence. He thanks God that he is not worldly-minded; but he is an idle and unfaithful member of society, and causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Of such the Apostle has determined, that "if any man will not work, neither should he eat."

’Curiosus’ is upright and unblamably in his general deportment, and no stranger to the experiences of a true Christian. His conversation upon these subjects is often satisfactory and edifying. He would be a much more agreeable companion, were it not for a bothersome desire of knowing everybody’s business, and the grounds of every hint that is occasionally dropped in discourse where he is present. This puts him upon asking a multiplicity of needless and improper questions; and obliges those who know him, to be continually upon their guard, and to treat him with reserve. He intrudes even with strangers, and is unwilling to part with them until he is punctually informed of all their connections, employment’s and designs. For this idle curiosity he is marked and avoided as a busy-body; and those who have the best opinion of him, cannot but wonder that a man, who appears to have so many better things to employ his thoughts, should find time to amuse himself with what does not at all concern him. Were it not for the rules of civility, he would be insulted every day; and if he would attend to the cold and evasive answers he receives to his inquiries, or even to the looks with which they are accompanied, he might learn, that, though he means no harm, he appears to a great disadvantage and that his prying disposition is very unpleasant.

’Querulus’ wastes much of his precious time in declaiming against the management of public affairs; though he has neither access to the springs which move the wheels of government, nor influence either to accelerate or retard their motions. Our national concerns are no more affected by the remonstrance’s of Querulus, than the heavenly bodies are by the disputes of astronomers. While the newspapers are the chief sources of his news and his situation precludes him from being a competent judge either of matters of fact or matters of right, why should Querulus trouble himself with politics? This would be a weakness, if we consider him only as a member of society; but if we consider him as a Christian, it is worse than weakness; it is a sinful conformity to the men of the world, who look no farther than to second causes, and forget that the Lord reigns.

If a Christian be placed in a public sphere of action, he should undoubtedly be faithful to his calling, and endeavor by all lawful methods to transmit our privileges to posterity: but it would be better for Querulus to let the dead bury the dead. There are people enough to make a noise about political matters, who know not how to employ their time to better purpose. Our Lord’s kingdom is not of this world; and most of his people may do their country much more essential service by

pleading for it in prayer, than by finding fault with things which they have no power to alter. If Querulus had opportunity of spending a few months under some of the governments upon the Continent (I may indeed say under any of them), he would probably bring home with him a more grateful sense of the Lord's goodness to him, in appointing his lot in Britain. As it is, his zeal is not only unprofitable to others, but hurtful to himself. It embitters his spirit, it diverts his thoughts from things of greater importance, and prevents him from feeling the value of those blessings, civil and religious, which he actually possesses. And could he (as he wishes) prevail on many to act in the same spirit, the governing powers might be irritated to take every opportunity of abridging that religious liberty which we are favored with above all the notions upon earth. Let me remind Querulus, that the hour is approaching, when many things, which at present too much engross his thoughts and inflame his passions, will appear as foreign to him, as what is now transacting among the Tartars or Chinese.

Other improprieties of conduct, which lessen the influence and spot the profession of some who wish well to the cause of Christ, might be enumerated, but these may suffice for a specimen.

01.01. Blinded by Satan

Blinded by Satan

April 20, 1774

Dear sir,

I have been pondering a good while for a subject, and at last I begin without one, hoping that (as it has often happened) while I am writing one line, something will occur to fill up another. Indeed, I have an inexhaustible fund at hand; but it is to me often like a prize in the hand of a fool—I lack skill to improve it. O for a warm, a suitable, a seasonable train of thought, that might enliven my own heart, and not be unworthy your perusal! Methinks the poets can have but cold comfort, when they invocate a fabled muse; but we have a warrant, a right, to look up for the influence of the Holy Spirit, who ordains strength for us, and has promised to work in us. What a comfort, what an honor is this—that sinful worms have liberty to look up to God! and that he, the High and Holy One, who inhabits eternity, is pleased to look down upon us, to maintain our peace, to supply our needs, to guide us with his eye, and to inspire us with wisdom and grace suitable to our occasions! Those who profess to know something of this fellowship, and to depend upon it, are, by the world, accounted enthusiasts, who know not what they mean; or perhaps hypocrites, who pretend to what they have not, in order to cover some base designs. But we have reason to bear their reproaches with patience.

Well then may the believer say, Let them laugh, let them rage; let them, if they please, point at me for a fool as I walk the streets! If I do but take up the Bible, or run over in my mind the inventory of the blessings with which the Lord has enriched me—I have sufficient amends. Jesus is mine—in him I have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, a saving interest in all the promises and in all the perfections of God. He will guide me by his counsel, support me by his power, comfort me with his presence, while I am here; and afterwards, when flesh and heart fail—he will receive me to his glory!

Let them say what they will, they shall not dispute or laugh us out of our spiritual senses. If all the blind men in the kingdom should endeavor to bear me down, that the sun is not bright, or that the rainbow has no colors, I would still believe my own eyes. I have seen them both—they have not. I cannot prove to their satisfaction what I assert, because they are destitute of sight, the necessary medium; yet their disputations produce no uncertainty in my mind. They would not question me, they could not hesitate a moment, if they were not blind. Just so, those who have been taught of God, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, have an experimental perception of the truth, which armors them against all the sophistry of infidels.

I am persuaded we have many plain people here, who, if a wise man of the world was to suggest that the Bible is a human invention, would be quite at a loss how to answer him by arguments drawn from external evidences; yet they have found such effects from this blessed book, that they would be no more moved by the insinuation, than if they were told that a clever man, or set of men,

invented the sun, and placed it in the skies! So, if a wise Socinian was to tell them that the Savior was only a man like themselves, they would conceive just such an opinion of his skill in divinity, as a philosopher would do of a clown’s skill in astronomy, who would affirm that the sun was no bigger than a cart-wheel.

It remains therefore a truth, in defiance of all the cavils of the ignorant, that the Holy Spirit does influence the hearts of all the children of God; or, in other words, they are inspired, not with new revelations—but with grace and wisdom to understand, apply, and feed upon the great things already revealed in the Scriptures, without which the Scriptures are as useless as eye-glasses to the blind. Were it not so, when we become acquainted with the poverty, ignorance, and wickedness of our hearts—we must sit down in utter despair of being ever able to think a good thought, to offer a single petition aright in prayer, or to take one safe step in the path of life. But now we may be content with our proper weakness, since the power and Spirit of Christ are engaged to rest upon us; and while we are preserved in a simple dependence upon this help, though unable of ourselves to do anything, we shall find an ability to do everything that our circumstances and duty call for.

What is weaker than a worm? yet the Lord’s "worm" shall, in his strength, "thresh the mountains, and make the hills as chaff!" But this life of faith, this living and acting by a power above our own, is an inexplicable mystery, until experience makes it plain.

I have often wondered that Paul has obtained so much quarter at the hands of some people, as to pass with them for a man of sense; for surely the greatest part of his writings must be, to the last degree, absurd and unintelligible upon their principles. How many contradictions must they find, for instance, if they give any attention to what they read in that one passage, Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And as believers are thus inspired by the Holy Spirit, who furnishes them with desires, motives, and abilities, to perform what is agreeable to his will; so I apprehend, that those who live without God in the world, whom the Apostle styles sensual, not having the Spirit, are, in a greater or less degree, recipients, under what I may call a black inspiration. After making the best allowances I can, both for the extent of human genius, and the deplorable evil of the human heart, I cannot suppose that one half of the wicked wit, of which some people are so proud, is properly their own. Perhaps such a one as Voltaire would neither have written, or have been read or admired so much, if he had not been the amanuensis of an abler hand in his own way. Satan is always near, when the heart is disposed to receive him and the Lord withdraws his restraints, to heighten the sinner’s ability of sinning with a vengeance, and assisting him with such strokes of blasphemy, malice, and falsehood, as perhaps he could not otherwise have attained. Therefore I do not wonder that they are clever and smart, that they raise a laugh, and are received with applause among those who are like-minded with themselves.

But, unless the Lord is pleased to grant them repentance (though it is rather to be feared some of them are given up to judicial hardness of heart), how much better would it have been for them had they been born idiots or lunatics, than to be distinguished as the witty and successful instruments of the powers of darkness—in beguiling, perverting, and ruining the souls of men! Alas, what are abilities and talents, or any distinctions which give pre-eminence in life, unless they are sanctified

by the grace of God, and directed to the accomplishment of his will and glory! From the expression, "Bind them in bundles and burn them," I have been led to think, that the deceivers and the deceived; those who have prostituted their abilities or influence to encourage others in sin, and those who have perished by their means; may, in another world, have some peculiar and inseparable connection, and spend an eternity in fruitless lamentations that ever they were connected here on earth!

I doubt not, that you feel the force of that line:

"Oh to grace how great a debtor—

daily I'm constrained to be!" Had not the Lord separated you for himself—your rank, your abilities, your influence, which now you chiefly value as enlarging your opportunities of gospel usefulness; might, nay certainly would, have been diverted into the opposite channel!

01.01. By the grace of God I am what I am!

By the grace of God I am what I am!

June, 1773

Dear sir,

I must content myself with the idea of the pleasure it would give me, to sit with you half a day under my favorite great tree, and converse with you, not concerning the comparatively petty affairs of human governments—but of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. How many delightful subjects would suggest themselves in a free and retired conversation! The excellency of our King, the permanency and glory of his kingdom, the beauty of his administration, the privileges of his subjects, the review of what he has done for us, and the prospect of what he has prepared for us in future—and if, while we were conversing, he should be pleased to join us (as he did the disciples when walking to Emmaus), how would our hearts burn within us! Indeed, whether we are alone or in company, the most interesting topics strike us but faintly—unless he is pleased to afford his gracious influence; but when he is present—light, love, liberty, and joy, spring up in the hearts that know him. But we cannot meet. All that is left for me, is to use the liberty you allow me of offering a few hints upon these subjects by letter, not because you don't know them—but because you love them. The hour is coming, when all impediments shall be removed—all distinctions shall cease that are founded upon sublunary things, and the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. Glorious day! May our souls be filled with the thought, and learn to estimate all things around us now—by the view in which they will appear to us then. Then it will be of small consequence who was the prince, and who was the beggar, in this life; but who in their several situations sought, and loved, and feared, and honored the Lord.

Alas! how many of the kings of the earth, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, will then say (in vain) to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!" In this world they are for the most part too busy to regard the commands of God, or too amusing to seek his favor. They have their good things here; they please themselves for a while, and in a moment they go down to the grave. In that moment their thoughts perish, their schemes are left unfinished, they are torn from their possessions, and enter upon a new, an untried, an unchangeable, a never-ending state of existence! Alas, is this all the world can afford!

I congratulate you—not because God has appointed you to appear in an elevated rank, (this, abstracted from the opportunity it affords you of greater gospel usefulness, would perhaps be a more proper subject for condolence); but that he has admitted you to those honors and privileges which come from him alone, and which so few in the superior ranks of life think worthy of their attention. "By the grace of God I am what I am!" 1 Corinthians 15:10. As believers, we are often affected with a sense of God's distinguishing mercy to us. We are debtors, great debtors to the sovereign grace of God, which alone makes us to differ from the perishing world around us!

Yet it does not yet appear what we shall be. We cannot form a just conception of the misery from which we are redeemed, much less of the price paid for our redemption! How little do we know of the Redeemer's surpassing excellency, and of the unutterable agonies He endured, when His soul was made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Father to bruise Him—that by His stripes we might be healed! These things will strike us in quite another manner—when we view them from the light of eternity!

May the cheering contemplation of the glorious hope set before us—support and animate us to improve our short interval on earth, and fill us with a holy ambition of shining as lights in this evil world, to the praise and glory of His grace—who has called us out of darkness, into His glorious light!

Encompassed as we are with snares, temptations, and infirmities, it is possible (by His promised assistance) to live in some good measure above the world—above the influence of its cares, its smiles, or its frowns. Our citizenship is in heaven—we are not at home—but only reside here on earth for a season, to fulfill our appointed service. The Lord, whom we serve, has promised that He will guide us by His wisdom, strengthen us by His power, and comfort us with the light of His countenance, which is better than life. Every temporal blessing we receive from Him, is a token of His favor, and a pledge of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which He has reserved for us in heaven. Oh! to hear Him say at last, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord!" will be rich amends for all that we can lose, suffer, or endure, for His sake!

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined—what God has prepared for those who love Him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9

Chapter 18

01.01. Causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace

Causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace

March, 1765 My friend,

I remember, when I once had the pleasure of waiting on you, you were pleased to begin an interesting conversation, which, to my concern, was interrupted. The subject was concerning the causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace; how it happens that we lose that warm impression of Divine things, which in some favored moments we think it almost impossible to forget; how far this change of frame is consistent with a spiritual growth in other respects; how to form a comparative judgment of our proficiency upon the whole; and by what steps the losses we sustain from our necessary connection with a sinful nature and a sinful world, may be retrieved from time to time. I beg your permission to fill up the paper with a view to these inquiries. I do not mean to offer a labored essay on them—but such thoughts as shall occur while the pen is in my hand. The awakened soul (especially when, after a season of distress and terror, it begins to taste that the Lord is gracious) finds itself as in a new world. No change in outward life can be so sensible so affecting. No wonder, then, that at such a time little else can be thought of—the transition from darkness—to light; from a sense of wrath—to a hope of glory, is the greatest change which can be imagined, and is oftentimes as sudden as wonderful. Hence the general characteristics of young converts are zeal and love. Like Israel at the Red Sea, they have just seen the wonderful works of the Lord, and they cannot but sing his praise; they are deeply affected with the danger they have lately escaped, and with the case of multitudes around them, who are secure and careless in the same alarming situation; and a sense of their own mercies, and a compassion for the souls of others, is so transporting, that they can hardly forbear preaching to everyone they meet. This emotion is highly just and reasonable, with respect to the causes from whence it springs; and it is doubtless a proof, not only of the imperfection—but the depravity of our nature, that we are not always thus affected; yet it is not entirely genuine. If we examine this character closely, which seems at first sight, a pattern and a reproof to Christians of longer standing, we shall for the most part find it attended with considerable defects.

1. Such people are very weak in faith. Their confidence arises rather from the lively impressions of joy within—than from a distinct and clear apprehension of the work of God in Christ. The comforts which are intended as cordials to animate them against the opposition of an unbelieving world—they mistake and rest in as the proper evidences of their hope. And hence it comes to pass, that when the Lord varies his dispensations, and hides his face—-they are soon troubled and at their wit’s end.

2. Those who are in this state of their first love, are seldom free from something of a censorious spirit. They have not yet felt all the deceitfulness of their own hearts; they are not well acquainted with the devices or temptations of Satan; and therefore know not how to sympathize or make allowances with others, where allowances are necessary and due—and can hardly bear with any who do not reveal the same earnestness as themselves.

3. They are likewise more or less under the influence of self-righteousness and self-will. They mean well—but not being as yet well acquainted with the spiritual meaning and proper use of the law, nor established in the life of faith, a part (oftentimes a very considerable part) of their zeal spends itself in externals and non-essentials, prompts them to practice what is not commanded, to refrain from what is lawful, and to observe various and needless austerities and singularities, as their tempers and circumstances differ.

However, with all their faults, methinks there is something very beautiful and engaging in the honest vehemence of a young convert. Some cold and rigid judges are ready to reject these promising appearances on account of incidental blemishes. But would a gardener throw away a fine nectarine, because it is green, and has not yet attained all that beauty and flavor which a few more showers and suns will impart? Perhaps it will hold for the most part in grace as in nature (some exceptions there are) —if there is not some fire in youth, we can hardly expect a proper warmth in old age. But the great and good Gardener watches over what his own hand has planted, and carries on his work by a variety of different, and even contrary dispensations. While their mountain stands thus strong, they think they shall never be moved; but at length they find a change. Sometimes it comes on by insensible degrees. That part of their affection which was purely natural, will abate of course when the power of novelty ceases. They will begin, in some instances, to perceive their own indiscretions; and an endeavor to correct the excesses of an imprudent zeal will often draw them towards the contrary extreme of remissness. The evils of their hearts, which, though overpowered, were not eradicated, will revive again. The enemy will watch his occasions to meet them with suitable temptations; and as it is the Lord's design that they should experimentally learn and feel their own weakness, he will in some instances be permitted to succeed. When guilt is thus brought upon the conscience, the heart grows hard, the hands feeble, and the knees weak; then confidence is shaken, the spirit of prayer interrupted, the armor gone. And thus things grow worse and worse—until the Lord is pleased to interpose. For though we can fall of ourselves, we cannot rise without his help! Indeed, every sin, in its own nature, has a tendency towards a final apostasy! But there is a provision in the covenant of grace, and the Lord, in his own time, returns to convince, humble, pardon, comfort, and renew the soul. He touches the rock—and the waters flow. By repeated experiments and exercises of this sort (for this wisdom is seldom acquired by one or a few lessons), we begin at length to learn that we are nothing, have nothing, call do nothing—but sin. And thus we are gradually prepared to live more outside of ourselves—and to derive all our sufficiency of every kind from Jesus, the fountain of grace. We learn to tread more warily, to trust less to our own strength; to have lower thoughts of ourselves, and higher thoughts of Jesus! In which two last particulars, I apprehend what the Scripture means by a growth of grace does properly consist. Both are increasing in the lively Christian—every day shows him more of his own heart, and more of the power, sufficiency, compassion, and grace of his adorable Redeemer; but neither will be complete until we get to heaven.

I apprehend, therefore, that though we find an abatement of that sensible warmth of affection which we felt at first setting out; yet, if our views are more evangelical, our judgment more ripened, our hearts more habitually humbled under a sense of inward depravity, our tempers more softened into sympathy and tenderness; if our prevailing desires are spiritual, and we practically esteem the precepts, ordinances, and people of God; we may warrantably conclude, that his good work of grace in us is, upon the whole, on an increase. But still it is to be lamented, that an increase of

knowledge and experience, should be so generally attended with a decline of fervor. If this was not for what has passed in my own heart, I would be ready to think it impossible. But this very circumstance gives me a still more emphatic conviction of my own vileness and depravity. The lack of humiliation humbles me, and my very indifference rouses and awakens me to earnestness.

There are, however, seasons of refreshment, ineffable glances of light and power upon the soul—which, as they are derived from clearer displays of Divine grace, if not so elevating as the first joys, are more penetrating, transforming, and animating. A glance of these, when compared with our sluggish stupidity when they are withheld—weans the heart from this wretched state of sin and temptation, and makes the thoughts of death and eternity desirable. Then this conflict shall cease; I shall sin and wander no more, see him as he is, and be like him forever!

If the question is—How are these bright moments to be prolonged, renewed, or retrieved? We are directed to faith and diligence. A careful use of the appointed means of grace, a watchful endeavor to avoid the occasions and appearances of evil, and especially assiduity in secret prayer, will bring us as much of them as the Lord sees good for us. He knows best—why we are not to be trusted with them continually. Here we are to walk by faith, to be exercised and tried; by and by we shall be crowned, and the desires he has given shall be abundantly satisfied!

01.01. Christian Liberty

Christian Liberty by John Newton to the Earl of Dartmouth

November, 1776. My London journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of waiting upon your lordship in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time — but afford me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half hour we were together by ourselves, prolonged to half a day. The subject your lordship was pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad should I be, were I able to offer you anything satisfactory upon it.

There is no doubt but first religious impressions are usually mingled with much of a legal spirit, and that conscience at such a time is not only tender — but misinformed and scrupulous. And I believe, as your lordship intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feel a liberty from many fetters we had imposed upon ourselves — we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme.

It seems to me that no one person can adjust the medium, and draw the line exactly for another. There are so many particulars in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advices and models are mixed with such defects — that it is not right to expect others to be absolutely guided by our rules. Nor is it safe for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others. But the Scripture undoubtedly furnishes sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstanced; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be led in the right way — in the path of judgment. By frequent prayer, and close acquaintance with the Scripture, and a habitual attention to the frame of our hearts — there is a certain delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment to be acquired, which renders a nice disquisition concerning the nature and limits of the Adiaphora, as they are called — or how near we may go the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love is the clearest and most persuasive indicator: and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his Word is in our eye — we seldom make great mistakes. From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude — the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are, to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeably to these views, though the Scripture does not enumerate or decide in so many words, for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn — yet it furnishes us with some general guidelines, which, if rightly applied, will perhaps go a good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please God than man.

Some of these canons I will just remark to your lordship; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 8:13, and 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 4:30, and Ephesians 5:11, Ephesians 5:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Ephesians 6:18; to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isaiah 22:12; Luke 21:34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar passages of Scripture (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number,) will bring a Christian under such restrictions as follow.

1. To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, from whatever has a tendency to damp and indispose his spirit in attendance upon the means of grace; for such things, if they are not condemned as sinful per se, if they are not absolutely unlawful, yes though they are, when duly regulated, lawful and right, (for often our chief snares are entwined with our blessings,) yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to deaden our hearts to divine things, of which each person's experience must determine — then there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance — wrong to US. And let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our gold — to pay us with trinkets. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if anything can be pursued, allowed, or rested in — as a tolerable substitute for it.

2. For the sake of the church, and the influence which example may have upon his fellow Christians — the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things, not because they are unlawful — but inexpedient. Thus the apostle, though strenuous for the right of his Christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the use, so as to eat no meat — rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience.

Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some popular amusements — and return thence with a warm heart to my prayer closet, (the possibility of which in my own case I greatly question,) yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful, but because I did it; in which case I would suspect, that though I received no harm — they would.

I have known and conversed with some who, I fear, have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline from imitating others, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kind of compliances. And it seems that an obligation to this sort of self-denial rises and is strengthened and proportioned to the weight and influence of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I should think it sinful to hunt partridge or a rabbits; but, as a minister, I no more dare do it than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offence to some, and be pleaded for as a license by others.

3. There is a duty and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace — in our necessary converse among them. This seems to require, that though we should not be needlessly singular — yet, for their instruction, and for the honor of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of singularity, and show ourselves called to be a separated people; that, though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up, (in which we cannot be too exact,) yet we are not of the world — but belong to another community, and act from other principles, by other rules, and to other ends — than the generality of those about us.

I have observed, that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions and sentiments, and places of worship — provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such compliances, and have thought, that if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits —

then professors would not, in such numbers, and so often run among them, to beg a relief, from the burden of time hanging upon their hands.

Providential and necessary calls of duty, that lead us into the world, will not hurt us — if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our cross — is not so likely to be our snare. But if that spirit, which we should always watch and pray against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself, then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honorable, comfortable, and safe, (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean,) to be thought by some too scrupulous and precise — than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely contrary to a divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the tenor of the gospel, or conformable to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people. The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded, that those who do fear him must hold their tongues, though they should hear his name blasphemed, can hardly be a Christian's voluntary chosen ground. Yet I fear these characters will apply to every kind of amusement in the nation. As to family connections, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their relatives often live as it were in two elements — there is a mutual awkwardness, which makes their interactions rather dry and tedious. But upon that account they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of civility and affection; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is something considerable given up by one or the other. I think Christians ought to be very cautious what concessions they make upon this account. But, as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given your lordship such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not be dogmatic; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts and to the general tenor of Scripture. I submit it to your judgment.

01.01. Christian experience

Christian experience

Dear Sir,

I trust the difference of our sentiments, since we are agreed in the one thing needful, will no more interrupt our union and fellowship, than the difference of our features, or the tone of our voices. I wish you to believe that I would be no advocate for carelessness or formality. I hope my conscience bears me witness, that, besides trusting in the letter of the Scripture, I likewise desire an increase of that inward and comfortable sense of Divine things in which I believe you are happy; and that I wish not only to be a subject of the kingdom of Jesus, but likewise to have that kingdom powerfully set up in my heart—which consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, I see not how these can be distinguished, or what ground I could have to think myself a subject of his kingdom, unless I earnestly desired to have that kingdom in all its branches and blessings flourishing in my soul. I do not know that I live in the neglect of any means appointed of God for my growth in these blessings, or willingly allow myself in what is inconsistent with them; I think my heart is habitually in the pursuit of them, and that there is seldom an hour in any day when lively communion with my God, in Christ, is not present to my view as the chief good. To this purpose, through grace, I can venture to express myself to man, though still it is true, when I come before the Lord, notwithstanding the diligence and circumspection I would aim at, I see myself a poor inconsistent creature, that my strength is total weakness, and all I have is sin.

I confess I am afraid of fixing the criterion of a work of grace too high, lest the mourners in Zion should be discouraged; because I find it is the will of God that such should not be discouraged, but comforted; and because it appears to me, that the Scriptural marks have respect rather to desires, if real, than to attainments, or at least to those attainments which are often possessed by people who are kept very short of sensible comforts: Matthew 5:3-9; Luke 18:12, Luke 18:13; 1 Peter 2:7. The points between you and I seem chiefly the following:

1. When may a person be properly denominated a believer?

2. What are the proper evidences and necessary concomitants of a lively thriving frame of spirit?

3. Whether such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnant of a depraved nature in our present state, will certainly and always preserve our souls from declensions and winter seasons?

4. Whether that gracious humility, which arises from a due sense of our own vileness, and of the riches of Divine grace, be ordinarily attainable without some mortifying experience of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our own hearts? A few lines upon each of these particulars, will, I think, take in the chief parts of your letter.

1. We differ something with respect to what constitutes a believer. I own nothing has surprised me more, in the course of our friendly debate, than your supposing that a person should date his conversion and his commencing a believer, from the time of his receiving the Gospel truths with that clearness and power as to produce in him an abiding assurance. The Apostle, in Ephesians 1:13, makes a plain distinction between believing and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. By the experience and observation of many years, I have been more and more persuaded, that to represent assurance as being of the essence of faith, is not agreeable to the Scripture, which in many places either expressly asserts, or strongly intimates, the contrary: John 1:50, and John 20:29; Romans 10:9; 1 John 5:1. Whoever is not a believer, must be an unbeliever; there can be no medium. Either there are many believers who have not assurance, or else there are many unbelievers who love the Lord Jesus, hate sin, are poor in spirit, and adorn the doctrine of the Gospel by their temper and conversation: and I doubt not but those who now have assurance, had, before they attained it, a something which wrought by love, and overcame the world. I know no principle capable of these effects but true faith, which, though at first it be like a grain of mustard-seed, is the seed of God through it be faint, it is genuine, as the dawning light is of the same nature with that which flows from the noonday sun. I allow that while faith is weak, there may be little solid comfort, if by that expression abiding comfort be meant. Faith gives safety and spiritual life: abiding peace and establishment follow the sealing of the Spirit. But though an infant has not the strength, activity, and understanding, which he will attain when he arrives to the age of manhood, he is as fully possessed of a principle of life, while he is an infant, as at any time afterwards.

2. We seem to differ likewise as to the marks of a lively thriving spirit; at least if any are supposed to be better or surer than those to which our Lord has promised blessedness, Matthew 5:3-9. He has said, "Blessed are those who mourn;" but he has not said, More blessed are those who are comforted. They are, to be sure, more happy at present; but their blessedness consists not in their present comforts, but in those perceptions of Gospel truths which form them to that contrite spirit in which God delights (Isaiah 57:18), and which make them capable of Divine comforts, and spiritual hungering and thirstings after them. I would not represent myself as a stranger to peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In the midst of all my conflicts, I have a heartfelt satisfaction from the Gospel, which nothing else could give. But I mean, though this be with me as an abiding principle, it rarely affords me what I think you intend when you speak of sensible comforts. I cannot feel that warmth of heart, that glowing of love, which the knowledge of such a Savior should inspire. I account it my sin, and I feel it my burden, that I cannot. And when I truly do this, when I can abhor myself for my stupidity, mourn over it, and humbly look up to the Lord for relief against it, I judge my soul to be at such times as much alive to God, as it would be if he saw fit to increase my comfort.

Let me always either rejoice in him, or mourn after him: I would leave the alternative to him, who knows best how to suit his dispensations to my state; and I trust he knows that I do not say this because I set a small value upon his presence. As to the experience of the Apostles, I believe they were patterns to all succeeding believers; but with some regard to the several trials and services to which we may be called in this world, He distributes severally to all his people according to his own will, yet with a wise and gracious accommodation to the circumstances and situations of each. The Apostle Paul connects the aboundings of his consolations with the aboundings of his afflictions, and with the state of the people to whom he preached; 2 Corinthians 1:4-7. And if, instead of

preaching the Gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum in the face of persecution, he had lived in a land of liberty, and been confined to a single church, for anything I know his cup might not have run over so often. Succeeding ministers of the Gospel, when called to very laborious and painful services, have, for the like reasons, been often favored with a double portion of that joy which makes hard things easy and bitter things sweet.

And, in general, those who walk humbly before Him, may expect trials; and in proportion, He will favor them with peculiar comforts. It is in this way he in a great measure fulfills his promise of making their strength equal to their day. And I am enabled to trust him in this matter, that if he should at any time see fit to call me to a more difficult and dangerous sphere of service, or lead me into the furnace of affliction, he would, if he saw it needful, support and refresh me by such manifestations of his glory and love, as I know but little of at present. In a word, a humble, dependent frame of spirit, perseverance in the use of appointed means, care to avoid all occasions of sin, an endeavor to glorify God in our callings, and an eye to Jesus as our all in all—these things are to me sure indications that the soul is right, that the Lord is present, and that grace is thriving and in exercise, whether sensible consolations abound or not.

3. I propose the third question, concerning such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnants of a depraved nature, because I apprehend one effect of indwelling sin is, to render it morally impossible for us to be entirely faithful to that light and power which God has given us. It may sound like a contradiction to say, we cannot do what we desire: but there are many enigmas in a believer's experience, at least in mine; and I never expect to meet the man that knows his own heart, who will say he is always faithful, diligent, and obedient, to the full extent of his ability: I rather expect he would confess, with me, that he feels a need of more ability, and fresh supplies of grace, to enable him to make a better improvement of what he has already received. If some, as you suppose, in their dullest frames can read the Bible, go to the Throne of Grace, and mourn (as they ought) over what is amiss, I must say for myself, I can, and I cannot. Without doubt I can take the Bible in my hand, and force myself to read it; I can kneel down, and I can see I ought to mourn: but to understand and attend to what I read, to engage my heart in prayer, or to be duly humbled under the sense of so dark and dissipated a state of mind; these things, at some seasons, I can no more do than I can raise the dead; and yet I cannot plead positive inability: I am satisfied that what prevents me is my sin, but it is the sin of my nature, the sin that dwells in me. And I expect it will be thus with me at times, in a greater or less degree, until this body of sin shall be wholly destroyed.

Yet I believe the Lord is with me, even when he seems to be absent, otherwise my corruptions, at such seasons, might easily prevail to betray me into open or allowed sin, which, blessed be the grace and care of my good Shepherd, is not the case. I know not if I rightly understand the expression, "We may humbly hope, that those things we fall into, which are not in our power to prevent, will not be set to our account." The least of the evils I feel, and which seem most involuntary, if set to my account, would ruin me; and I trust, that even my worst deviations shall not appear against me, because I am a believer in Jesus: and I know, and am sure, that I do not wish to continue in sin that grace may abound. My conscience bears me witness, that I would not desire the rule of duty to be narrowed, or accommodated to my imperfections in a single instance. If the expression only means, that these unavoidable effects of our evil nature should not break our peace of conscience, or discourage us in our approaches to God, I am of the same mind; through

mercy I have seldom any more doubt of my acceptance in the Beloved, when in a dark frame, than when I am most favored with liberty.

4. Whether true evangelical humility, and an enlarged view of the grace of God in Christ triumphing over all obstacles, be ordinarily attainable without an experience of declensions, backslidings, and repeated forgiveness? is the last question I shall consider. I dare say you will do me the justice to believe, that I would not advise anyone to run into sin in order to get a knowledge of his own heart: David broke his bones thereby; he obtained an affecting proof of his inability of standing in his own strength, and of the skill and goodness of his Physician who healed him: yet no man in his wits would break his bones for the sake of making experiments, if he were ever so sure they would be well set again. You think that a believer is never more humble in his own eyes, or admires Jesus more, than when he is filled with joy and peace: I readily allow, that the present impressions of Divine love are humbling; however, the direct tendency of gracious consolations in themselves, is one thing; what evils they may afterwards occasion through the desperate depravity of our hearts, is another. We have a memorable case in point to explain my meaning. The Apostle Paul's recollection of his course while in a natural state, and the singular manner of his conversion, were evidently suited to make him a humble Christian, and he was so. By an especial favor of the Lord, he was afterwards taken up into the third heaven; what he saw or heard there he has not told us, but surely he met with nothing that could have a tendency to make him proud; doubtless he saw Jesus in his glory, and the humble spiritual worship of heaven; a sight which we might deem sufficient to make him walk in self-abasement all the days of his life: but Paul, though an eminent saint, was still liable to the effects of indwelling sin; he was in danger of being exalted through the abundance of revelations, and the Lord. his wise and gracious keeper, saw fit, in order to prevent it, that a messenger from Satan should be given him to buffet him.

Pride is so subtle, that it can gather strength even from those gracious manifestations which seem directly calculated lo mortify it; so dangerous, that a messenger from Satan himself may be esteemed a mercy, if overruled and sanctified by the Lord to make or keep us more humble: therefore, though we can never be too earnest in striving against sin, too watchful in abstaining from all appearance of evil, and though those who wait upon the Lord may comfortably hope that he will preserve them from such things as would dishonor their profession in the sight of men; yet I apprehend those who appear most to adorn the Gospel in their outward conversation, are conscious of many things between the Lord and their own souls which covers them with shame, and that his tenderness and mercy to them, notwithstanding their perverseness, constrains them with admiration to adopt the language of Micah, "Who is a God like unto you, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" And I believe likewise, that, without such striking and repeated proofs of what is in their hearts, they would not so feelingly enter into the spirit of Job's confession, "Behold, I am vile!" nor would they have such a lively sense of their obligations to the merciful care and faithfulness of their great Shepherd, or of their entire and absolute dependence upon him, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I find these considerations useful and necessary to reconcile me to my lot. The Lord knows what I need, and what I can bear: gladly would I receive, earnestly would I desire, more of his comforts while here; but if I mourn now, I hope to be comforted in heaven; in the mean time it is more immediately necessary for me, both as a Christian and as a minister, that I should be humbled; the Lord's will be done. I cannot pretend to determine what ministers, or what body of

people, come nearest the character of the primitive time; but in my judgment they are the happiest Christians, who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and in whose eyes Jesus is most glorious and precious.

01.01. Combating worldliness

Combating worldliness October 3, 1778.

Dear Madam,

You would have me tell you what are the best means to be used by a young person, to prevent the world, with all its seductive and insnaring scenes, from drawing the heart aside from God. It is an important question; but I apprehend your own heart will tell you, that you are already possessed of all the information concerning it which you can well expect from me. I could only attempt to answer it from the Bible, which lies open to you likewise.

If your heart is like mine, it must confess, that when it turns aside from God it is seldom through ignorance of the proper means or motives which should have kept us near him—but rather from an evil principle within, which prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to light already received.

I could offer you rules, cautions, and advises in abundance; for I find it comparatively easy to preach to others. But if you should farther ask me, how you shall effectually reduce them to practice; I feel that I am so deficient, and so much at a loss in this matter myself, that I know not well what to say to you. Yet something must be said. In the first place, then, I would observe, that though it is our bounded duty, and the highest privilege we can propose to ourselves, to have our hearts kept close to the Lord; yet we must not expect it absolutely or perfectly, much less all at once. We shall keep close to him in proportion as we are solidly convinced of the infinite disparity between him and the things which would presume to stand in competition with him, and the folly, as well as ingratitude, of departing from him. But these points are only to be learned by experience, and by smarting under a series of painful disappointments in our expectations from creatures. Our judgments may be quickly satisfied that his favor is better than life, while yet it is in the power of a mere trifle to turn us aside. The Lord permits us to feel our weakness, that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready in words to confess that we are weak, we do not so properly know it, until that secret, though unallowed, dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves is brought to the trial, and fails us. To be humble, and, like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us, as to cry to him continually to hold us up that we may be safe—is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him. But how shall we attain this humble frame of spirit? It must be, as I said, from a real and sensible conviction of our weakness and vileness, which we cannot learn (at least I have not been able to learn it) merely from books or preachers. The providence of God concurs with his Holy Spirit in his merciful design of making us acquainted with ourselves. It is indeed a great mercy to be preserved from such declensions as might fall under the notice of our fellow-creatures; but when they can observe nothing of consequence to object to us, things may be far from right with us, in the sight of Him who judges not only actions—but the thoughts and first motions of the heart. And indeed could we for a season so cleave to God as to find little or nothing in ourselves to be ashamed of, we are such poor creatures, that we should presently grow vain and self-sufficient, and expose

ourselves to the greatest danger of falling.

There are, however, means to be observed on our part; and though you know them, I will repeat the principal, because you desire me. The first is Prayer; and here, above all things, we should pray for humility. It may be called both the guard of all other graces, and the soil in which they grow. The second, Attention to the Scripture. Your question is directly answered in Psalms 119:9, "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word and following its rules." The precepts of the Word are our rule and delight the promises our strength and encouragement. The good recorded of the saints is proposed for our encouragement; their miscarriages are as land-marks set up to warn us of the rocks and shoals which lie in the way of our passage. The study of the whole scheme of Gospel salvation, respecting the person, life, doctrine, death, and glory of our Redeemer, is appointed to form our souls to a spiritual and divine taste. And so far as this prevails and grows in us, the trifles which would draw us from the Lord, will lose their influence, and appear, divested of the glare with which they strike the senses—as mere vanity and emptiness. The third grand means is, Consideration or Recollection; a careful regard to those temptations and snares, to which, from our tempers, situations, or connections, we are more immediately exposed, and by which we have been formerly hindered. It may be well in the morning, before we leave our chambers, to forecast, as far as we are able, the probable circumstances of the day before us. Yet the observance of this, as well as of every rule that can be offered, may dwindle into a mere form. However, I trust the Lord, who has given you a desire to live to him, will be your guard and teacher. There is none who teaches like him.

01.01. Decline in the Spiritual Life

John Newton’s Letters QUESTION: What are the most obvious Causes, Symptoms, and Effects of a Decline in the Spiritual Life?

Believers are, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins, even as others—but, by faith in the Son of God, they are made partakers of a new and endless life. They derive it from him; and he has said, "Because I live, you shall live also." But the life of this life, if I may so speak, its manifestation and exercise, is subject to great changes. A sick man is still alive—but he has lost the cheerfulness, activity, and vigor which he possessed while he was in health. There are many people, who if they are, as we would hope, really alive to God—are at least sick, languid, and in a declining state. May the great Physician restore them! It is sometimes said, that "the knowledge of a disease amounts to half a remedy"; which will hold thus far in the present case, that unless we are sensible of our disorder and our danger—we shall not be heartily solicitous for a recovery. The causes and symptoms or effects of such a decline are very numerous, nor is it always easy to distinguish them, for they have reciprocal influence to strengthen each other. What may be assigned as the cause, in many cases, is likewise a proof that the plague is already begun; and the effects may be considered as so many causes, which render the malady more confirmed, and more dangerous.

Among the many general CAUSES, we may assign a principal place to doctrinal error. I do not include every mistake or erroneous sentiment, which may be adopted or retained; but there are some errors, which, for the suddenness and violence of their operation, may be compared to ’poison’! Thus the Galatians, by listening to false teachers, were seduced from the simplicity of the gospel; the consequence was, that they quickly lost the blessedness they had once spoken of. Poison is seldom taken in the gross; but, if mingled with food, the mischief is not suspected until it is discovered by the effect.

Thus those who are employed in poisoning souls, generally make use of some important and beneficial truth, as a vehicle by which they convey their malignant drug into the minds of the unwary! Perhaps they speak well of the person and atonement of Christ, or they exalt the riches and freedom of divine grace—while under the veil of these fair pretenses, they insinuate prejudices against the nature or necessity of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Others speak strongly in general terms in favor of personal holiness—but their aim is to withdraw the heart from a dependence upon the Savior’s blood, and the influences of his Holy Spirit, without which the most studied exactness of conduct, differs no less from the holiness of the gospel—than a picture or a statue, or a dead carcass, differs from a living man.

Whoever is thus prevailed upon, in the great and essential points of Scriptural doctrine—to separate, in his judgment and experience, those things which God has joined together, is already infected with a disease in its own nature mortal, and his religion, unless the Lord mercifully interposes, will degenerate into either licentiousness or formality!

We live in a day when too many are tossed to and fro, like ships without helm or pilot, by various winds of doctrine; and therefore those who wish well to their own souls, cannot be too much upon their guard against that spirit of curiosity and desire for 'new things', which the apostle describes by the metaphor of having itching ears, a desire of hearing every novel and singular teacher, lest they imbibe errors before they are aware, and become a prey to the sleight and craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive!

Spiritual pride and self-admiration will likewise infallibly cause a declension in the divine life, though the mind may be preserved from the infection of doctrinal errors, and though the power of gospel truth may for a time have been really experienced. If our attainments in knowledge and giftedness, and even in grace—seduce us into a good opinion of ourselves, as if we were wise and good—we are already ensnared, in danger of falling every step we take, of mistaking the right path, and proceeding from bad to worse, without a power of correcting or even of discovering our deviations—unless and until the Lord mercifully interposes, by restoring us to a spirit of humility and dependence upon Himself. For God, who gives more grace to the humble—resists the proud! He beholds them with abhorrence—in proportion to the degree in which they admire themselves. It is the invariable law of his kingdom, that everyone who exalts himself—shall be abased.

True Christians, through the remaining evil of their hearts, and the subtle temptations of their enemy, are liable, not only to the workings of that pride which is common to our fallen nature—but to a certain kind of pride, which, though the most absurd and intolerable in any person, can only be found among those who make profession of the gospel. We have nothing but what we have received, and therefore to be proud of titles, wealth, knowledge, success, or any temporal advantages, by which the providence of God has distinguished us—is downright sinful! And for those who confess themselves to be 'sinners', and therefore deserving of nothing but misery and wrath—to be proud of those peculiar blessings which are derived from the gospel of his grace, is a wickedness of which even the demons are not capable of! The apostle Paul was so aware of his danger of being exalted above measure, through the abundant revelations and peculiar favors which the Lord had afforded him, that he says, "There was given me a messenger of Satan to buffet me." He speaks of this sharp dispensation as an additional mercy, because he saw it was necessary, and designed to keep him humble and attentive to his own weakness.

Ministers who are honored with singular abilities and success, have great need of watchfulness and prayer on this account. The Lord sees not as man sees. Simple-hearted hearers are apt to admire their favorite preacher, and almost to consider him as something more than man in the pulpit, taking it for granted that he is deeply affected himself with the truths, which, with so much apparent liberty and power, he proposes to them; while, perhaps, the poor worm is secretly indulging self-applause, and pleasing himself with the numbers and attention of those who hang upon his words!

Perhaps such thoughts will occasionally rise in the minds of the best ministers; but, if they are allowed, if they become habitual, and enter strongly into the idea he forms of his own character; and if, while he professes to preach Christ Jesus the Lord—he is preaching himself, and seeking his own glory—he is guilty of high treason against the Majesty of him in whose name he speaks. And sooner or later, the effects of his pride will be visible and noticed. Errors in judgment, gross misconduct, and abatement of zeal, of gifts, of influence, are evils, always to be dreaded, when

spiritual pride has gained an ascendancy, whether in public or in private life. "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" 1 Corinthians 4:7 "The Lord Almighty has planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth." Isaiah 23:9 An inordinate desire and attachment to the things of this present world, may be assigned as a third prevailing cause of a spiritual declension. Unless this evil principle is mortified in its root—by the doctrine of the cross—it will in time prevail over the most splendid profession. That love of the world, which is inconsistent with the true love of God—manifests itself in two different ways, as men by temper and habit are differently inclined: The first is covetousness or greediness for gain. This was the ruin of Judas, and probably the cause of the defection of Demas. By the honorable mention made of him in some of Paul's epistles, Demas seems to have had much of Paul's confidence and esteem for a season. Yet at length his covetous passion prevailed, and the last account we have of him from the apostle, is, "Demas has deserted me—because he loved this present world." 2 Timothy 4:10

Again, there are people not chargeable with the love of money for its own sake—for they rather squander it—than hoard it. Yet they are equally under the influence of a worldly spirit! They manifest their worldly hearts—by an expensive taste in the articles of dress, furniture and feasting—which are always unsuitable to a Christian profession.

It is not easy to exactly mark out the precise line of Christian conduct in these respects, which befits the different situations in which the providence of God has placed us. Nor is it necessary, to those who are poor in spirit—and upright in heart. A simple desire of pleasing God, and adorning the gospel, will solve most cases of how a believer should spend his money—which occupy little and trifling minds. The inclination of our heart—will always direct and regulate our voluntary expenses. Those who love the Lord, and whose spirits are lively in His service, will avoid both stinginess and selfish extravagance. They will rather lean to the frugal side in how they spend their money on themselves—that they may be better able to promote God's cause, and to relieve the necessities of His people.

Misers, who can be content with the mere form of religion, will hoard all they can save—in order to gratify their avarice! Others will spend all they can spare—to gratify their vanity, or their worldly appetites!

It is not easy to determine which of these evils is the greatest. Perhaps of the two, the miser is least accessible to conviction, and consequently the most difficult to be reclaimed. But a desire for extravagance and indulgence, if persisted in, will gradually lead to such compliances with the spirit and maxims of the world, as will certainly weaken, if not wholly suppress—the exercise of vital godliness. In whatever degree the "love of the world" prevails—the "health of the soul" will proportionably decline.

"People who long to be rich, fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows!" 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

Many other causes might be enumerated—but most of them may be reduced to the heads I have already mentioned. The practice of a single sin, or the omission of a single duty—if allowed against the light of conscience, and, if habitual, will be sufficient to keep the soul weak, unfruitful, and uncomfortable, and lay it open to the impression of every surrounding temptation. Sometimes unfaithfulness to light already received, perverts the judgment, and then errors which seem to afford some countenance or plea for a sin which the heart will not give up, are readily embraced, to evade the remonstrances of conscience. At other times, errors, incautiously admitted, imperceptibly weaken the sense of duty, and by degrees, spread their influences over the whole conduct. Faith and a good conscience are frequently mentioned together by the apostle, for they are inseparable; to part with one is to part with both. Those who hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience, shall be preserved in a thriving frame of spirit, they shall grow in grace, go on from strength to strength, shall walk honorably and comfortably. But so far as the doctrines or the rules of the gospel are neglected, a wasting sickness will prey upon the vitals of religion, a sickness, in its nature mortal, and from which none recover—but those on whom God mercifully bestows the grace of repentance unto life. The SYMPTOMS of such a soul sickness are very numerous and diversified, as tempers and situations vary. A few of those which are more generally apparent, and sure indications of a decline in religion are the following.

Bodily sickness is usually attended with loss of appetite, inactivity, and restlessness. Likewise, the sickness of the soul deprives it of rest and peace, causes a dullness and indolence in the service of God, and an indisposition to the means of grace, to secret waiting upon God, and to the public ordinances. These appointments, so necessary to preserve spiritual health, are either gradually neglected and given up, or the attendance upon them dwindles into a mere formal round, without relish and without benefit. To the healthy man, plain food is savory—but the palate, when vitiated by sickness, becomes picky and fastidious, and hankers after varieties and delicacies. Likewise, when the sincere milk of the gospel, plain truth delivered in plain words, is no longer pleasing—but a person requires curious speculations, or the frothy eloquence of man’s wisdom, to engage his attention, it is a bad sign. For these are suited to nourish, not the constitution—but the disease. From slighting or trifling with those means which God has provided to satisfy the soul—the next step usually is—to seek relief from a compliance with the spirit, customs, and amusements of the world. And these compliances, when once allowed, will soon be defended; and those who cannot approve or imitate such conformity, will be represented as under the influence of a narrow, legal, or pharisaic spirit. The sick professor is in a delirium, which prevents him from feeling his disease—and he rather supposes the alteration in his conduct is owing to an increase of wisdom, light, and liberty. He considers the time when he was more strict and circumspect as a time of ignorance, will smile at the recollection of what he now deems his childish scruples, and congratulates himself that he has happily outgrown them, and now finds that the services of God and the world are not so incompatible as he once thought them to be.

Yet while he thus relaxes the rule of his own conduct, he is a critically severe observer of the behavior of others. He sharply censures the miscarriages and even the mistakes of ministers and professors, if an occasion offers, and speaks of these things, not weeping as the apostle did—but with pleasure, and labors to persuade himself, that the strictness so much talked of, is either a cloak of hypocrisy, or the fruit of superstition. True Christians seldom meet with more uncandid misconstruction, or undeserved reproach, than from those who, having once been their

companions, afterwards desert them. When the disorder is at this height, it is truly dangerous, and indeed, as to any human help, desperate. But power belongs to God. May it please him to remember in mercy those who are near unto death, to restore them to their right minds, and to recover them to himself. Otherwise, "it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them!"

01.01. Desires Unrealized

Desires Unrealized by John Newton, 1772 "You cannot do the things that you would." (Galatians 5:17) This is an humbling, but a just account of a Christian's attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given His people a desire and will aiming at great things: without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians; but they cannot do as they would. Their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so (for He who works in them to will, enables then in a measure to do likewise), but in comparison with the mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire He has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavors.

It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could, but in which, from first to last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

1. He would willingly enjoy God in prayer. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honor and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in Heaven, that He should stoop so much lower, to afford His gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth. He can bid them expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind, and greater in degree, than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say, 'You have liberty to cast all your cares upon Him that cares for you. By one hour's intimate access to the Throne of Grace, where the Lord causes His glory to pass before the soul that seeks Him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort than by a day or week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios'--and in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself.

But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would. How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit! And the chief pleasure he derives from the performance is to think that his task is finished: he has been drawing near to God with his lips, while his heart was far from Him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.

2. The like may be said of reading the Scriptures. He believes them to be the Word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day, he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his privilege frequently

dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

3. He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the Person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad is he, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Savior to his mind; and with this view notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting out of our thoughts, of whom we say, He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave Himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could we would set Him always before us; His love should be the delightful theme of our hearts. "From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve." But though we aim at this good, evil is present with us; we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord’s promise, to take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

4. He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Divine providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God and the good of those who fear Him. He doubts not but the hairs of his head are all numbered—that the blessings of every kind which he possesses were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him by the bounty and special favor of the Lord whom he serves; that afflictions spring not out of the ground, but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts—that there is a needs-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt of what he sees with his eyes, and there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress, he cannot do what he would. He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, mummer, and despond.

Alas! How vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency, even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! And what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants! It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God--we are not under the law, but under grace: and even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are overruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on Him, who is appointed unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. The more vile we are in our own eyes--the more precious will Jesus be to us. A deep repeated sense of the evil of our hearts is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due. Again, a sense of these evils will, when hardly anything else can do it, reconcile us to the thoughts of death, yes make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep rooted in our nature, that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not until then, we shall be able to do the thing that we would: when we see Jesus we shall be transformed into His image, and have done with sin and sorrow forever!

Chapter 24

01.01. Difference between acquired and experimental

Difference between acquired and experimental knowledge

April, 1766 My friend,

I shall embrace your permission to fill my paper. As to the subject, that which has been a frequent theme of my heart of late—I shall venture to lay before you; I mean, the remarkable and humbling difference which I suppose all who know themselves may observe, between their acquired and their experimental knowledge. In other words, the difference between their judgment and their practice. To hear a believer speak his apprehensions of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the love of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the importance of eternity—who would not suppose him to be armored against temptation? To hear with what strong arguments he can recommend watchfulness, prayer, forbearance, and submission, when he is teaching or advising others—who would not suppose but he could also teach himself, and influence his own conduct! Yet, alas! The person who rose from his knees before he left his chamber—as a poor, indigent, fallible, dependent creature, who saw and acknowledged that he was unworthy to breathe the air or too see the light—may meet with many occasions, before the day is closed, to discover the corruptions of his heart, and to manifest how weak and faint his best principles and clearest convictions are, in their actual exercise! And in this view—how vain is man! what a contradiction is a believer to himself! He is called a Believer emphatically, because he cordially assents to the Word of God; but, alas! how often unworthy of the name!

If I were to describe him from the Scriptural portrait—I would say that he is one whose heart is athirst for God, for His glory, and for His presence; that his affections are fixed upon an unseen Savior; that his treasures, and consequently his thoughts, are on eternal realities, far beyond the bounds of sense. Having experienced much God’s forgiveness, he is full of mercy and forgiveness to all around. Having been often deceived by his own heart, he dares trust it no more—but lives by faith in the Son of God, for wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and derives from Him grace upon grace; sensible that without Him he has not sufficiency even to think a good thought! In short—he is dead to the world, to sin, to self; but alive to God, and lively in His service. Prayer is his breath, the Word of God his food, and the ordinances more precious to him than the light of the sun. Such is a believer—in his judgment and prevailing desires. But was I to describe him from his actual experience, especially at some times—how different would the picture be! Though he knows that communion with God is his highest privilege, he too seldom finds it so; on the contrary, if duty, conscience, and necessity did not compel him—he would leave the throne of grace unvisited from day to day! He takes up the Bible, conscious that it is the fountain of life and true comfort; yet perhaps, while he is making the reflection, he feels a secret distaste, which prompts him to lay it down, and give his preference to a newspaper! He needs not to be told of the vanity and uncertainty of the world, and all beneath the sun; and yet is almost as much elated or cast down by a trifle—as those who have their only portion in this world! He believes that all things shall work together for his good, and that the most high God appoints, adjusts, and overrules all his

concerns; yet he feels the risings of fear, anxiety, and displeasure, as though the contrary was true! He owns himself to be ignorant, and liable to be deceived by a thousand fallacies; yet he is easily betrayed into flattering views of himself, and self-conceit! He feels himself to be an unprofitable, unfaithful, unthankful servant, and therefore blushes to harbor a thought of desiring the esteem and commendations of men—yet he cannot suppress it! Finally (for I must observe some bounds), on account of these and many other inconsistencies, he is struck dumb before the Lord, stripped of every hope and plea, but what is provided in the free grace of God—and yet his heart is continually leaning and returning to a covenant of works.

Two questions naturally arise from such a view of ourselves.

First: How can these things be—or why are they permitted? Since the Lord hates sin, teaches his people to hate it and cry against it, and has promised to hear their prayers—how is it that they go thus burdened by sin? Surely, if he could not, or would not, over-rule evil for good—he would not permit it to continue. By these exercises of sin and grace, the Lord teaches us more truly to know and feel the utter depravity and corruption of our whole nature, that we are indeed defiled in every part! His method of salvation is likewise hereby exceedingly endeared to us! We see that it is and must be of grace, wholly of grace; and that the Lord Jesus Christ, and his perfect righteousness, is and must be our all in all.

God's power likewise, in maintaining his own work notwithstanding our infirmities, temptations, and enemies, is hereby displayed in the clearest light; his strength is manifested in our weakness!

Satan likewise is more remarkably disappointed and put to shame, when he finds bounds set to his rage and wiles, beyond which he cannot pass; and that those in whom he finds so much evil to work upon, and over whom he so often prevails for a season—escape at last out of his hands! He casts them down—but they are raised again! He wounds them—but they are healed! He obtains his desire to sift them as wheat—but the prayer of their great Advocate prevails for the maintenance of their faith.

Farther, by what believers feel in themselves—they learn by degrees how to warn, pity, and bear with others. A soft, patient, and compassionate spirit, and a readiness and skill in comforting those who are cast down, is not perhaps attainable in any other way.

And, lastly, I believe that nothing more habitually reconciles a child of God to the thought of death, than the wearisomeness of this warfare with sin and temptation. Death is unwelcome to human nature. But the Christian knows that not until death—will conflict cease! Then we shall sin no more. The flesh, with all its attendant evils, will be laid in the grave. Then the soul, which has been partaker of a new and heavenly birth, shall be freed from every encumbrance, and stand perfect in the Redeemer's righteousness before God in eternal glory! But though these evils cannot be wholly removed, it is worth while to inquire, Secondly, How they may be mitigated? This we are encouraged to hope for. The Word of God directs and animates to a growth in grace—and though we can do nothing spiritually of ourselves—yet there is a part assigned us. We cannot conquer the obstacles in our way by our own strength; yet we can give way to them; and if we do, it is our sin—and will be our sorrow. The disputes concerning inherent power in the creature, have been carried to inconvenient lengths; for my own part, I think it safe to use Scriptural language. The Apostles exhort us to give all diligence—to resist the devil; to purge ourselves from all filthiness of

flesh and spirit; to give ourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer; to watch; to put on the whole armor of God; and to abstain from all appearance of evil. Faithfulness to light received, and a sincere endeavor to conform to the means prescribed in the Word of God, with a humble application to the Blood of sprinkling and the promised Holy Spirit, will undoubtedly be answered by increasing measures of light, faith, strength, and comfort. We shall know—if we follow on to know the Lord.

Chapter 25

01.01. Difficulties and snares

Difficulties and snares

April 15, 1776. My dear Sir,

I often rejoice on your behalf. Your call out of the world was a singular, comfortable instance of the power of grace. And when I consider the difficulties and snares of your situation, and that you have been kept in the middle path, preserved from undue compliances on the one hand, and unnecessary singularities on the other, I cannot doubt but the Lord has hitherto helped and guided you. Indeed you have need of his guidance. At your young years, and with your expectations in life, your health firm, and your natural spirits lively—you are exposed to many snares. Yet if the Lord keeps you sensible of your danger, and dependent upon him, you will walk safely. Your security, success, and comfort, depend upon him; and in the way of means of grace—chiefly upon your being preserved in a humble sense of your own weakness.

It is written, "Fear not, I am with you." It is written again, "Blessed is the man who fears always." There is a perfect harmony in those seemingly different texts. May the wisdom which comes from above, teach you and I to keep them both united in our view. If the Lord is with us—we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, his arm is over us, his ear is open to our prayer; his grace sufficient, his promise unchangeable. Under his protection, though the path of duty should lie through fire and water—we may cheerfully and confidently pursue it. On the other hand, our hearts are so deceitful, fallible, and frail; our spiritual enemies so subtle, watchful, and powerful; and they derive so many advantages from the occasions of every day, in which we are unavoidably and unexpectedly concerned; there is so much combustible materials within us, and so many temptations arising from without, capable of setting all in a flame; that we cannot be too jealous of ourselves and our circumstances. When we can say, in the Psalmist’s spirit, "Hold me up" we may warrantably draw his conclusion, "and I shall be safe!" But the moment we lean to our own strength and wisdom—we are in imminent danger of falling. The enemy who wars against our souls, is a consummate master in his subtle devices, prolific in stratagems, and equally skillful in carrying on his assaults by sap or by storm. He studies us, if I may so say, all round, to discover our weak sides. He is a very proteus for changing his appearances, and can appear as a sly serpent, a roaring lion, or an angel of light—as best suits his purpose. It is a great mercy to be in some measure acquainted with his devices, and aware of them. Those who wait humbly upon the Lord, and consult carefully at his word and throne of grace, are made wiser than their enemy—and enabled to escape and withstand his wiles.

I know you will not expect me to apologize for putting you in mind of these things, though you know them. I have a double warrant; the love I bear you, and the Lord’s command, Hebrews 3:13. Use the like freedom with me; I need it, and hope to be thankful for it, and accept it as one of the best proofs of friendship. May the Lord bless and keep you. Pray for us, and believe me to be sincerely yours.

01.01. Divine guidance

Divine guidance

Question: In what manner are we to expect the Lord’s promised guidance to influence our judgments, and direct our steps in the path of duty?

Dear Sir,

It is well for those who are duly sensible of their own weakness and fallibility, and of the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide his people with his eye, and to cause them to hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when they are in danger of turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. For this purpose, he has given us the written word to be a lamp to our feet, and encouraged us to pray for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and apply it. It is, however, too often seen, that many widely deviate from the path of duty, and commit gross and perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have His warrant and authority. This must certainly be owing to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible, and the promise sure. The Scripture cannot deceive us, if rightly understood; but it may, if perverted, prove the occasion of confirming us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those who are under his influence; but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not. It may not be unseasonable to offer a few thoughts upon a subject of great importance to the peace of our minds, and to the honor of our holy profession.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or in forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are nearly concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted. I shall mention some of the principal of these, for it is not easy to enumerate them all.

Some people, when two or more things have been in view, and they could not immediately determine which to prefer, have committed their case to the Lord by prayer, and have then proceeded to cast lots: taking it for granted, that, after such a solemn appeal, the turning up of the lot might be safely rested in as an answer from God. It is true, the Scripture, and indeed right reason, assures us, that the Lord disposes the lot; and there are several cases recorded in the Old Testament, in which lots were used by Divine appointment; but I think neither these, nor the choosing Matthias by lot to the apostleship, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the lands of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse was had to lots by God’s express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, such as can never happen again; namely, the choice of an apostle; who would not have been upon a par with the rest, who were chosen immediately by the Lord, unless He had been pleased to interpose in some extraordinary way; and all these were before the canon of Scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the church to the end of time.

Under the New Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the Throne of Grace, to make our requests known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon him: but we have neither precept nor promise respecting the use of lots; and to have recourse to them without his appointment, seems to be tempting him rather than honoring him, and to savor more of presumption than dependence. The effects likewise of this expedient have often been unhappy and hurtful: a sufficient proof how little it is to be trusted to as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible at a venture, and expected to find something to direct them in the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to this practice, that the Heathens, who knew not the Bible, used some of their favorite books in the same way; and grounded their persuasions of what they ought to do, or of what should befall them, according to the passage they happened to open upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted upon these occasions. And indeed Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquirers in this way as the Bible itself; for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side. Can the opening upon 2 Samuel 7:3, when Nathan said unto David, "Do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions? Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, Matthew 15:28, "Be it unto you even as you will," amount to a proof, that the present earnest desire of the mind (whatever it may be) shall be surely accomplished? Yet it is certain that matters big with important consequences have been engaged in, and the most optimistic expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping (as it is called) upon a text of Scripture. A sudden strong impression of a text, that seems to have some resemblance to the concern upon the mind, has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them: or, on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears and disquietudes, which they have afterwards found were groundless and unnecessary. These impressions, being more out of their power than the former method, have been more generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive.

It is allowed, that such impressions of a precept or a promise as humble, animate, or comfort the soul, by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, are both profitable and pleasant; and many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported (especially in a time of trouble) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by his Spirit with power to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to such particular actions as could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be unwarily misled into great evils and gross delusions; and many have been so. There is no doubt but the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with Scriptures in abundance in this way, and for these purposes.

Some people judge of the nature and event of their designs, by the freedom which they find in prayer. They say they commit their ways to God, seek his direction, and are favored with much enlargement of spirit; and therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet, without other corroborating evidence, I could not admit it in proof of what it is brought for. It is not always easy to

determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful; and when our hearts are much fixed and bent upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first secretly determine for ourselves, and then come to ask counsel of God; in such a disposition we are ready to catch at everything that may seem to favor our darling scheme; and the Lord, for the detection and chastisement of our hypocrisy (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves), may answer us according to our idols; see Ezekiel 14:3-4.

Besides, the grace of prayer may be in exercise, when the subject-matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the intervention of circumstances which we are unacquainted with. Thus, I may have a friend in a distant country; I hope he is alive; I pray for him, and it is my duty so to do. The Lord, by his Spirit, assists his people in what is their present duty. If I am enabled to pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof that my friend is certainly alive at the time I am praying for him: and if the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straitened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.

Once more: A remarkable dream has sometimes been thought as decisive as any of the foregoing methods of knowing the will of God. That many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams, I willingly allow; but, though they may be occasionally noticed, to pay a great attention to dreams, especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct, or expectations upon them—is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who dream, but to those who watch.

Upon the whole, though the Lord may give to some people, upon some occasions, a hint or encouragement out of the common way; yet expressly to look for and seek his direction in such things as I have mentioned, is unscriptural and ensnaring. I could fill many sheets with a detail of the inconveniences and evils which have followed such a dependence, within the course of my own observation. I have seen some presuming they were doing God service, while acting in contradiction to his express commands. I have known others infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured, beyond the shadow of a doubt, of things which, after all, never came to pass; and when at length disappointed, Satan has improved the occasion to make them doubt of the plainest and most important truths, and to account their whole former experience a delusion. By these things weak believers have been stumbled, cavils and offenses against the Gospel multiplied, and the ways of truth evil spoken of. But how then may the Lord’s guidance be expected? After what has been premised negatively, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, God guides and directs His people, by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, who enables them to understand and to love the Scriptures. The word of God furnishes us with just principles, and right apprehensions, to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby to influence and direct our conduct. Those who study the Scriptures, in a humble dependence upon Divine teaching, are taught to make a true estimate of everything around them, and are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God. They thereby discover the nature and duties of their several situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed. The word of God dwelling richly in them, is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture, in their minds, and daily comparing themselves with the rule by which they walk, they grow into a habitual frame of spiritual

wisdom, and acquire a gracious taste, which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges of sounds. And they are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ, which rules in their hearts, and a regard to the glory of God, which is the great object they have in view. In particular cases, the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns, when they are in danger of going wrong, by the dispensations of his providence. They know that their concerns are in his hands; they are willing to follow where and when he leads; but are afraid of going before him. Therefore they are not impatient: because they believe, they will not make haste, but wait daily upon him in prayer; especially when they find their hearts most engaged in any purpose or pursuit, they are most watchful of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move farther or faster than they can perceive his light shining upon their paths. I express at least their desire, if not their attainment: thus they would be. And though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self too much prevails, this is their general disposition; and the Lord, whom they serve, does not disappoint their expectations. He leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that he is and will be their guide even unto death.

01.01. Divine revelation

Divine revelation

Jury 14, 1775 My Dear Friend,

I confess, I am not a friend to that lukewarmness and indifference for truth, which bears the name of candor among many in the present day. I desire to maintain a spirit of candor and benevolence to all men, to wish them well, to do them every good office in my power, and commend what appears to me commendable in a Socinian, as readily as in a Calvinist. But I must judge of principles by the Word of God, and of the tree by its fruit. I meddle with no man's final state; because I know that He who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, can do it whenever, and to whoever, he is pleased. Yet I firmly believe, and I make no scruple of proclaiming it, that swearers, drunkards, adulterers, continuing such, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. And I look with no less compassion upon some people whose characters in common life may be respectable, when I see them unhappily blinded by their own carnal wisdom; and, while they account themselves, and are accounted by many others, master-builders in Zion, rejecting the only foundation upon which a sinner's hope can be safely built.

I am far from thinking that the Socinians are all hypocrites—but I think they are all in a most dangerous error; nor do their principles exhibit to my view a whit more of the genuine fruits of Christianity than deism itself. You say, "If they am sincere, and fail not for lack of diligence in searching, I cannot help thinking that God will not condemn them for an inevitable defect in their understandings." Indeed, my friend, I have such a low opinion of man in his depraved state, that I believe no one has real sincerity in religious matters—until God bestows it! And when he makes a person sincere in his desires after truth—he will assuredly guide him to the possession of it in due time, as our Lord speaks, John 6:44-45. To suppose that any people can sincerely seek the way of salvation, and yet miss it through an inevitable defect of their understandings, would contradict the plain promises of the Gospel, such as Matthew 7:7-8, John 7:16-17. But to suppose that nothing is necessary to be known, which some people who profess sincerity cannot receive, would be in effect to make the Scripture a nose of wax, and open a wide door for skepticism.

I am not a judge of the heart; but I may be sure that whoever makes the Foundation-stone a rock of offense, cannot be sincere in his inquiries. He may study the Scripture accurately—but he brings his own pre-conceived sentiments with him, and, instead of submitting them to the touchstone of truth, he makes them a rule by which he interprets. That those who lean to their own understandings should stumble and miscarry, I cannot wonder; for the same God who has promised to fill the hungry with good things, has threatened to send the rich empty away. So Matthew 11:25. It is not through defect of understanding—but a lack of simplicity and humility, that so many stumble like the blind at noon-day, and see nothing of those great truths which are written in the Gospel as with a sun-beam.

You wish me to explain myself concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. I will try—yet I know I cannot, any farther than as he who taught me shall be pleased to bear witness in your heart to what I say. My first principle in religion, is what the Scripture teaches me of the utter depravity of human nature. I believe we are by nature sinners, and by practice we are universally transgressors; that we are dead in trespasses and sins; and that the bent of our natural spirit is enmity against the holiness, government, and grace of God. Upon this ground, I see, feel, and acknowledge the necessity of such a salvation as the Gospel proposes; which, at the same time that it precludes boasting, and stains the pride of all human glory, affords encouragement to those who may be thought, or who may think themselves, the weakest or the vilest of mankind.

I believe, that whatever notions a person may take up from education—that no one ever did, or ever will, feel himself and own himself to be such a lost, miserable, hateful sinner—unless he is powerfully and supernaturally convinced by the Spirit of God. When God pleases—there is a certain light thrown into the soul, which differs not merely in degree—but in kind—from anything that can be effected or produced by moral persuasion or argument. But (to take in another of your queries) the Holy Spirit teaches or reveals no new truths, either of doctrine or precept—but only enables us to understand what is already revealed in the Scripture. Here a change takes place—the person who was spiritually blind begins to see. The sinner's character, as described in the Word of God—he finds to be a description of himself—that he is afar off from God—a stranger to God—a rebel against Him; and that he has hitherto lived in vain! Now he begins to see the necessity of an atonement, an advocate, a shepherd, a comforter. He can no more trust to his own wisdom, strength, and goodness; but, accounting all his former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ—he renounces every other refuge, and ventures his all upon the person, work, and promise of the Redeemer! In this way, I say, he will find the doctrine of the Trinity not only a proposition—but a principle: that is, from his own needs and situation, he will have an abiding conviction that the Son and Holy Spirit are God, and must be possessed of the attributes and powers of Deity, to support the offices the Scriptures assign them, and to deserve the confidence and worship the Scriptures require to be placed in them, and paid to them. Without this awakened state of mind—a theologian, reputed orthodox, will blunder wretchedly even in defending his own opinions. I have seen labored defenses of the Trinity which have given me not much more satisfaction than I would probably receive from a dissertation upon the rainbow composed by a man blind from his birth! In effect, the true knowledge of God cannot be attained by studies on our part; it must be by a revelation on his part. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal Him." Matthew 11:27. "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." Matthew 16:17. This is a revelation, not objectively of new truth—but subjectively of new light in us. Then he who runs may read. Perhaps you may not quite understand my meaning, or not accede to my sentiment at present. I have little doubt, however—but the time is coming when you will. I believe the Lord God has given you that sincerity, which he never disappoints.

Far be it from me to arrogate infallibility to myself, or to any writer or preacher; yet, blessed be God, I am not left to float up and down the uncertain tide of opinion, in those points wherein the peace of my soul is nearly concerned. I know, yes I infallibly know, whom I have believed. I am under no more doubt about the way of salvation, than of the way to London. I cannot be deceived,

because the Word of God cannot deceive me.

It is impossible, however, for me to give you, or any person, full satisfaction concerning my evidence, because it is of an experimental nature; Revelation 2:17. In general, it arises from the views I have received of the power, compassion, and grace of Jesus, and a consciousness that I, from a conviction of my sin and misery, have fled to him for refuge, entrusted and devoted myself and my all to him. Since my mind has been enlightened, everything within me, and everything around me, confirms and explains to me what I read in Scripture; and though I have reason enough to distrust my own judgment every hour—yet I have no reason to question the great essentials, which the Lord himself has taught me.

I take great pleasure in your correspondence, still more in the thought of your friendship, which I hope to cultivate to the utmost, and to approve myself sincerely and affectionately yours.

Chapter 28

01.01. Eight letters to a Christian friend

Eight letters to a Christian friend

Letter 1

July, 1764. My dear Madam, The spiritual conflict which you express, is inseparable from a spiritual acquaintance with our own hearts. I would not wish you to be less affected with a sense of indwelling sin. It befits us to be humbled into the dust—yet our grief, though it cannot be too great, may be under a wrong direction; and if it leads us to impatience or distrust, it certainly is so.

Sin is the sickness of the soul, in itself mortal and incurable, as to any power in heaven or earth—but that of the Lord Jesus only. But he is the great, the infallible Physician. Have we the privilege to know his salvation? Have we been enabled to put ourselves into his hand? Then we have then no more to do but to attend his prescriptions, to be satisfied with his methods, and to wait his time.

It is lawful to wish we were well; it is natural to groan, being burdened—but still he must and will take his own course with us; and, however dissatisfied with ourselves, we ought still to be thankful that he has begun his work in us, and to believe that he will also complete it. Therefore while we mourn—we should likewise rejoice! We should encourage ourselves to expect all that he has promised; and we should limit our expectations by his promises.

We are sure, that when the Lord delivers us from the guilt and dominion of sin, he could with equal ease free us entirely from sin—if he pleased. The doctrine of sinless perfection is not to be rejected, as though it were a thing simply impossible in itself, for nothing is too hard for the Lord—but because it is contrary to that method which he has chosen to proceed by. He has appointed that sanctification should be effected, and sin mortified, not at once completely—but little by little; and doubtless he has wise reasons for it. Therefore, though we are to desire a growth in grace, we should, at the same time, acquiesce in his appointment, and not be discouraged or despond, because we feel that conflict which his Word informs us will only terminate with our lives.

Again, some of the first prayers which the Spirit of God teaches us to put up, are for a clearer sense of the sinfulness of sin, and our vileness on account of it. Now, if the Lord is pleased to answer your prayers in this respect, though it will afford you cause enough for humiliation—yet it should be received likewise with thankfulness, as a token for good. Your heart is not worse than it was formerly—only your spiritual knowledge is increased. And this is no small part of the growth in grace, which you are thirsting after—to be truly humbled, and emptied, and made little in your own eyes.

Further, the examples of the saints recorded in Scripture prove (and indeed of the saints in general), that the greater measure any person has of the grace of God in truth, the more conscientious and lively they have been, and the more they have been favored with assurances of the Divine favor—so much the more deep and sensible, is their perception of indwelling sin and

infirmity. So it was with Job, Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul.

It is likewise common to overcharge ourselves. Indeed we cannot think ourselves worse than we really are! Yet some things which abate the comfort and alacrity of our Christian profession, are rather impediments than properly sinful, and will not be imputed to us by Him who knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust.

Thus, to have an infirm memory; or to be subject to disordered, irregular, or depressed spirits—are faults of the constitution, in which the heart and will has no share; though they are all oppressive, and sometimes needlessly so, by our charging ourselves with guilt on their account. The same may be observed of the unspeakable and fierce temptations of Satan, with which some people are pestered—but which shall be laid to him from whom they proceed, and not to them who are troubled and terrified because they are forced to feel them.

Lastly, it is by the experience of these evils within ourselves, and by feeling our utter insufficiency, either to perform duty or to withstand our enemies—that the Lord takes occasion to show us the suitableness, the sufficiency, the freeness, the unchangeableness of his power and grace! This is the inference Paul draws from his conflicts; and he learned it upon a trying occasion from the Lord's own mouth, 2 Corinthians 12:8-9.

Let us then, dear madam, be thankful and cheerful! And while we take shame to ourselves—let us glorify God, by giving Jesus the honor due to his name. Though we are poor—he is rich. Though we are weak—he is strong. Though we have nothing—he possesses all things. He suffered for us. He calls us to be conformed to him in sufferings. He conquered in his own person, and he will make each of his members more than conquerors in due season.

It is good to have one eye upon ourselves—but the other should always be fixed on him who is our Savior, Husband, Sustainer, and Shepherd. In him—we have righteousness, peace, and power. He can control all that we fear; so that if our path should be through the fire or through the water, neither the flood shall drown us, nor the flame kindle upon us! Before long he will cut short our conflicts, and say, 'Come up higher!' "Then shall our grateful songs abound—and every fear be wiped away." Having such promises and assurances, let us lift up our banner in his name, and press on through every discouragement. With regard to company which has not a savor of the best things: As it is not your choice, I would advise you (when necessary) to bear it as a cross. We cannot suffer by being where we ought to be, except through our own impatience; and I have an idea, that when we are providentially called among such (for something is due to friends and relations, whether they walk with us or not), that the hours need not be wholly lost. Nothing can come to us—which man not be improved; the most trivial conversation may afford us new views of the heart, new confirmation of Scripture, and renew a sense of our obligations to sovereign and distinguishing grace, which has made us in any degree to differ from the ones who are visiting us.

I would wish when you go among your friends, that you do not confine your views to getting safely away from them without loss—but entertain a hope that you may be sent to do some of them good. You cannot tell what effect a word or a look may have—if the Lord is pleased to bless it. I think we may humbly hope, that while we sincerely desire to please the Lord, and to be guided by him in all things—he will not allow us to take a journey, or hardly to make a short visit—which shall not answer some good purpose to ourselves or others, or both!

While your mirthful friends affect an air of raillery, the Lord may give you a secret witness in their consciences; and something they observe in you, or hear from you—may set them on thinking perhaps after you are gone, or after the first occasion has entirely slipped your memory, "Cast your bread upon the waters—for after many days you will find it again." Ecclesiastes 11:1. For my own part, when I consider the power, the freedom of Divine grace, and holy sovereignty of the Lord in the choice of the instruments and means by which he is pleased to work—I live in hopes from day to day of hearing of wonders of this sort. I despair of nobody's salvation! And if I sometimes am ready to think such or such a person seems more unlikely than others to be brought in, I relieve myself by a possibility that that very person, and for that very reason—may be the first saved! The Lord's thoughts are not like ours. In his love and in his ways there are heights which we cannot reach, depths which we cannot fathom, lengths and breadths beyond the range of our feeble sight. Let us then simply depend upon Him, and do our little best—leaving the event in his hand! In a letter I received from Mrs. **** yesterday, she writes thus: "I am at present very ill with some disorder in my throat, which seems to threaten my life—but death or life, things present or things to come—all things are mine, and I am Christ's! O glorious privilege! precious foundation of soul-rest and peace, when all things concerning us are most troublous! Soon we shall be at home with Christ, where sin, sorrow, and death have no place! In the mean time, our Beloved will lead us through the wilderness. How safe, how joyous are we—in the most dire case!"

If these should be some of the last notes of this 'swan', I think them worth preserving. May the Lord grant that you and I, madam, may be happy in the same assurance, when we shall have death and eternity near in view!

Letter 2

Sept. 1764. My dear Madam, Your welfare I rejoice in; your warfare I understand something of. Paul describes his own case in few words, "Conflicts on the outside, fears on the inside." Does not this comprehend all you would say? And how are you to know experimentally either your own weakness—or the power, wisdom, and grace of God, seasonably and sufficiently afforded—but by frequent and various trials? How are the graces of patience, resignation, meekness, and faith, to be discovered and increased—but by exercise? The Lord has chosen, called, and armed us for the fight; and shall we wish to be excused from the battle? Shall we not rather rejoice that we have the honor to appear in such a cause, under such a Captain, such a banner, and in such company? A complete suit of armor is provided, formidable weapons, and precious balm to heal us—if we receive a wound, and precious cordials to revive us—when we are in danger of fainting!

Further, we are assured of the victory beforehand; and, O what a crown is prepared for every conqueror, which Jesus, the righteous Judge, the gracious Savior—shall place upon every faithful head with his own hand! So let us not be weary and faint, for in due season we shall reap! The time is short—yet in a little while, the struggle of indwelling sin, and all the conflicts surrounding us, shall be known no more! "Be faithful, even to the point of death—and I will give you the crown of life!" Revelation 2:10

You are blessed, because you hunger and thirst after righteousness. He whose name is Amen has said you shall be filled. To claim the promise—is to make it our own; yet it is befitting for us to practice submission and patience, not in temporal things only—but also in spiritual things. We should be ashamed and grieved at our slow progress, so far as it is properly chargeable to our

faults and failures. Yet we must not expect to receive everything at once—but wait for a gradual increase; nor should we forget to be thankful for what we may account a little, in comparison of the much we suppose others have received. A little grace, a spark of true love to God, a grain of living faith, though small as mustard-seed—is worth a thousand worlds! One draught of the water of life gives a saving interest in, and pledge of, the whole fountain!

It befits the Lord's people to be thankful. To acknowledge his goodness in what we have received—is the surest, as well as the pleasantest method of obtaining more. Nor should the grief, arising from the evo;s which we know and feel of our own hearts, rob us of the honor, comfort, and joy, which the Word of God designs for us, in what is there recorded of the person, offices, and grace of Jesus, and the relations he is pleased to stand in to his people. Psalms 23:1; Isaiah 54:5; Song of Solomon 5:16; John 15:15; 1 John 2:1; John 15:1; Jeremiah 23:15; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Matthew 1:21-23. Give me permission to recommend to your consideration Psalms 139:15-18. These verses may be called the Believer's Triumph. Though they are nothing in themselves—yet having all in Jesus, they may rejoice in his name all the day. May the Lord enable us so to do! The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people. But unbelief makes our hands hang down, and our knees feeble, dispirits ourselves, and discourages others; and though it steals upon us under a semblance of humility, it is indeed the very essence of pride. By inward and outward trials, the Lord is promoting the best desire of your heart, and answering your daily prayers. Would you have assurance? True solid assurance is to be obtained no other way. When young Christians are greatly comforted with the Lord's love and presence, their doubts and fears are for that season at an end. But this is not assurance; so soon as the Lord hides his face they are troubled, and ready to question the very foundation of hope. Assurance grows by repeated conflict, by our repeated experimental proof of the Lord's power and goodness to save. When we have been brought very low and divinely helped; sorely wounded and divinely healed; cast down and divinely raised again; have given up all hope, and been suddenly snatched from danger, and placed in safety; and when these things have been repeated to us and in us a thousand times over—we begin to learn to trust simply to the Word and power of God, beyond and against appearances; and this trust, when habitual and strong, bears the name of assurance; for even assurance has degrees.

You have good reason, madam, to suppose, that the love of the best Christians to an unseen Savior—is far short of what it ought to be. If your heart is like mine, and you examine your love to Christ by the warmth and frequency of your emotions towards him—you will often be in a sad suspense whether or not you love him at all. The best mark to judge, and which he has given us for that purpose, is to inquire if his Word and Will have a prevailing, governing influence upon our lives and temper. If we truly love him—we do endeavor to keep his commandments. If we have a desire to please him—we undoubtedly love him. Obedience is the best test; and when, amidst all our imperfections, we can humbly appeal to God concerning the sincerity of our hearts, this is a mercy for which we ought to be greatly thankful. He who has brought us to desire—will likewise enable us to obey, according to his good pleasure.

I doubt not but the Lord whom you love, and on whom you depend, will lead you in a sure way, and establish and strengthen and settle you in his love and grace. Indeed he has done great things for you already. "The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need!" Psalms 23:1. The Lord is your Shepherd! This is a comprehensive word. The sheep can do nothing for themselves. The Shepherd must guide, guard, feed, heal, recover. It is well for us—that our Shepherd is the

Lord Almighty! If his power, care, compassion, fullness, were not infinite—the poor sheep would be forsaken, starved, and die! But we have a Shepherd full of care, full of kindness, full of power, who has said, "I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak!" Ezekiel 34:16. How tender are these expressions, and how well fulfilled! His sheep feed in the midst of wolves—yet are safely preserved; for, though they cannot see him—his eye and his heart are upon them! Do we wonder that Daniel was preserved in the lion's den? Why, it is a common case. Which of God's children have not cause to say, "My soul is among lions!" But our Shepherd stops their mouths, or only permits them to gape and roar, and show their teeth! He does not allow them to bite and tear us at their own will. Let us trust our Shepherd—and all shall be well. As to daily occurrences, it is best to trust that a daily portion of comforts and crosses—each one the most suitable to our case—is adjusted and appointed by the hand which was once nailed to the cross for us! We must trust, that where the path of duty and prudence leads us—that there is the best situation we could possibly be in at that time. We are not required to chasten ourselves immoderately for what is not in our power to prevent, nor should anything that affords occasions for mortifying the spirit of self, be accounted unnecessary.

Letter 3

1768.

Dear friend,

I have been hoping some time to hear from you—but an acquaintance informed me that you were ill. This news prompted me to write as soon as I could find leisure. The Lord has seen fit to visit you with much sickness of late; I say He has seen fit, for all our trials are under his immediate direction, and we are never in heaviness without a needs-be. I trust he does and will give you strength equal to your day, and sweeten what would be otherwise bitter—with the essence of his precious love. I hope soon to hear that you are restored to health, and that you have found cause to praise him for his loving rod.

How happy is the state of a believer, to have a sure promise that all shall work together for good in the end; and in the mean time, he has a sure refuge where to find present relief, support, and protection! How comfortable is it, when trouble is near, to know that the Lord is near likewise, and to commit ourselves and all our cares simply to him, believing that his eye is upon us, and his ear is open to our prayers. Under the conduct of such a Shepherd, we need not fear. Though we are called to pass through fire and water, through the valley of the shadow of death—he will be with us, and will show himself mighty on our behalf.

It seems almost needless to say, that we were very happy in the company of ****. The only inconvenience was, that it renewed the pain it always gives me to part with them. Though the visit was as long as I could possibly expect, it seemed very short. This must be the case while we are here—our earthly pleasures are short, interrupted, and mixed with troubles. This world is not, and cannot be our rest. But it will not be always the case. We are traveling to a better world, where every evil and imperfection shall cease; then we shall be forever with the Lord, and with each other. May the prospect of this blessed hope revive our fainting spirits, and make us willing to endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ! Here we must often sow in tears—but there we

shall reap in joy, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes forever.

I hope the conversation of friends whom I so greatly love and honor, afforded me not only pleasure but profit. It left a savor upon my mind, and stirred up my languid desires after the Lord. I wish I could say the good effect has remained with me to this hour—but, alas! I am a poor creature, and have had many causes of humiliation since. But, blessed be God! amidst all my changes—I find the foundation stands sure; and I am seldom or never left to doubt either of the Lord's love to me—or the reality of the desires he has given me towards himself. Though when I measure my love by the degree of its exercise, or the fruits it produces, I have reason to sit down ashamed as the chief of sinners and the least of all saints. But in Him I have righteousness and peace, and in Him I must and will rejoice!

I would willingly fill up my sheet—but feel a straitness in my spirit, and know not what further to say. O for a ray of Divine light to set me at liberty, that I might write a few lines worth reading, something that might warm my heart, and comfort yours! Then the subject must be Jesus—but of him what can I say that you do not know? Well, though you know him, you are glad to hear of him again and again. Come then, magnify the Lord with me—and let us exalt his name together. Let us adore him for his love, that love which has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, beyond the grasp of our poor conceptions; a love that moved him to empty himself, to take on him the form of a servant, and to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; a love that pitied us in our lost estate, that found us when we sought him not; a love that spoke peace to our souls in the day of our distress; a love that bears with all our present weakness, mistakes, backslidings, and shortcomings; a love that is always watchful, always ready to guide, to comfort, and to heal; a love that will not be wearied, cannot be conquered, and is incapable of changes; a love that will in the end prevail over all opposition, will perfect that which concerns us, and will not leave us until it has brought us perfect in holiness and happiness, to rejoice in his presence in glory. The love of Christ! it is the wonder, the joy, the song of angels; and the sense of it shed abroad in our hearts makes life pleasant and death welcome. Alas! what a heart have I—that I love him no better! But I hope he has given me a desire to make him my all in all, and to account everything loss and dross, which dares to stand in competition with him.

Letter 4

1769.

Dear friend,

I heard of your being laid on the bed of affliction, and of the Lord's goodness to you there, and of His raising you up again. Blessed be His name! He is all-sufficient and faithful; and though He causes grief, He is sure to show compassion in supporting and delivering.

Ah! the evil of our nature is deeply rooted and very powerful—or such repeated, continual corrections and chastisements would not be necessary! And were they not necessary, we would not have them. But such we are—and therefore such must be our treatment. For though the Lord loves us with a tenderness beyond what the mother feels for her nursing child—yet it is a tenderness directed by Infinite Wisdom, and very different from that weak indulgence which in parents we call fondness, which leads them to comply with their children's desires and inclinations, rather than to act with a steady view to their true welfare. The Lord loves His children, and is very

indulgent to them so far as they can safely bear it—but He will not spoil them! Their sin-sickness requires strong medicines, some of which are very unpalatable. But when the case calls for such, no short-sighted entreaties of ours can excuse us from taking what He prepares for our good. But every dose is prepared by His own hand, and not one is administered in vain, nor is it repeated any oftener than is absolutely needful to answer His purposed end. Until then, no other hand can remove what He lays upon us. But when His merciful design is answered, He will relieve us Himself; and in the mean time He will so moderate the operation, or increase our ability to bear up—that we shall not be overpowered.

It is true, without a single exception, that all His paths are mercy and truth, to those who fear Him. His love is the same, when He wounds—as when He heals; when He takes away—as when He gives. we have reason to thank Him for all—but most for His loving corrections and chastisements.

I received a letter from you which mentions dear Mrs. ****'s case, a very trying one—but in this likewise, we see the Lord's faithfulness. Our own experience, and all that we observe of his dealings with others—may convince us that we need not be afraid to entrust ourselves and our dearest concerns in his hands; for he can and will make everything work for good.

How little does the world know, of that sweet fellowship which is carried on between heaven and earth; what petitions are daily presented, and what answers are received at the Throne of Grace! O the blessed privilege of prayer! O the wonderful love, care, attention, and power of our great Shepherd! His eye is always upon us! When our spirits are almost overwhelmed within us—he knows our path. His ear is always open to us. No matter who will overlook and disappoint us—he will not. When means and hope fail, when everything looks dark upon us, when we seem shut up on every side, when we are brought to the lowest ebb—still our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth! To him all things are possible; and before the exertion of his power, when he is pleased to arise and work, all hindrances give way and vanish, like a mist before the sun. And he can so manifest himself to the soul, and cause his goodness to pass before it, that the hour of affliction shall be the golden hour of the greatest consolation.

He is the fountain of life, strength, grace and comfort—and of his fullness his children receive according to their needs. But this is all hidden from the world; they have no guide in prosperity—but hurry on as they are instigated by their blinded passions, and are perpetually multiplying mischiefs and miseries to themselves! And in adversity they have no resource—but must feel all the evil of affliction, without inward support, and without deriving any advantage from it. We have therefore cause for continual praise. The Lord has given us to know his name as a resting-place and a hiding-place, a sun and a shield. Circumstances and creatures may change—but he will be an unchangeable friend. The way is rough—but he trod it before us, and is now with us in every step we take; and every step brings us nearer to our heavenly home. Our inheritance is surely reserved for us, and we shall be kept for it by his power through faith. Our present strength is small, and without a fresh supply, we would be quickly exhausted—but he has engaged to renew it from day to day; and he will soon appear to wipe all tears from our eyes; and then we shall appear with him in glory!

I am very sorry if our friend Mr. **** appears to be aiming to reconcile things that are incompatible. I am indeed afraid that he has been for some time under a spiritual decline; and, as you justly observe, we meet with too many instances to teach us, that many of those who express the

warmest zeal at their first setting out in the Christian race—do not always prove the most steady and thriving afterwards. Yet I am willing to hope, in this case, that he will revive and flourish again. Sometimes the Lord permits those whom he loves to wander from him for a season. And when his time comes to heal their backslidings—they walk more humbly, thankfully, and fruitfully afterwards—from a sense of his abounding mercy, and the knowledge they have by experience acquired of the deceitfulness and ingratitude of their hearts. I hope and pray it will be so with him. However, these things for the present are grievous; and usually, before the Lord heals such breaches, he makes his people sensible, that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake him when he led them by the way.

Indeed London is a dangerous and ensnaring place to professors. I account myself happy that my lot is cast at a distance from it. It appears to me like a sea, wherein most are tossed by storms, and many suffer shipwreck. In this retired situation, I seem to stand upon a cliff; and, while I pity those whom I cannot help, I comfort myself in the thoughts of being safe upon the shore. Not that we are without our trials here; the evil of our own hearts, and the devices of Satan, cut us out work enough—but we are happily screened from many things which must be either burdensome or hurtful to those who live in the way of them; such as political disputes, winds of false doctrines, scandals of false professors, parties for and against particular ministers, and fashionable amusements, in some measure countenanced by the presence of people in other respects exemplary. In this view, I often think of our dear friend's expression, upon a certain occasion, of the difference between London grace—and country grace. I hold it in a twofold sense. By London grace, when genuine, I understand grace in a very advanced degree. The favored few who are kept alive to God, simple-hearted, and spiritually minded in the midst of such snares and temptations, appear to me to be the first-rate Christians of the land. I adore the power of the Lord in them, and compare them to the young men who walked unhurt in the midst of the fire. In another sense, the phrase London grace conveys no great idea to me. I think there is no place in the kingdom where a person may set up for a professor upon a smaller stock of grace. If people can abstain from open immoralities, if they will fly to all parts of the town to hear sermons, if they can talk about the doctrines of the Gospel, if they have something to say upon that useless question, Who is the best preacher? if they can attain to a speaking acquaintance with other professors—then they expect to pass muster. I am afraid there are many who, upon no better evidences than these, deceive both themselves and others for a course of years.

I have almost filled the sheet of paper somehow; and if a line or a word may be a means of suggesting a seasonable and comfortable thought to you, I have my end. Through mercy, we are all pretty well. My soul is kept alive as it were by miracle. I feel much inward warfare; the enemy thrusts sore at me, that I may fall; and I have abundant experience of the evil and deceitfulness of my heart—but the Lord is gracious, and, in the midst of all conflicts, I have a peace springing from the knowledge of his power and grace, and a consideration that I have been helped to commit myself to him.

Letter 5

1769.

Dear friend,

We are much obliged to you for your visit; and I am glad to find that the Lord is pleased to give you some tokens of his presence when you are with us, because I hope it will encourage you to come again. I ought to be very thankful that our Christian friends in general are not wholly disappointed of a blessing when they visit us.

I hope the Lord will give me an humble sense of what I am, and that broken and contrite frame of heart in which he delights. This is to me the chief thing. I had rather have more of the mind that was in Christ, more of a meek, quiet, resigned, peaceful, and loving disposition—than to enjoy the greatest measure of sensible spiritual comforts, if the consequence should be (as perhaps it would) spiritual pride, self-sufficiency, and a lack of that tenderness to others which befits one who has reason to style himself the 'chief of sinners'. I know indeed that the proper tendency of sensible consolations is to humble—but I can see, that, through the depravity of human nature, they have not always that effect. And I have been sometimes disgusted with an apparent lack of humility, an air of self-will and self-importance, in people of whose sincerity I could not at all doubt. It has kept me from envying them those pleasant frames with which they have sometimes been favored; for I believe Satan is never nearer us—than at some times when we think ourselves nearest the Lord! What reason have we to charge our souls in David's words! "My soul, wait only upon God." A great stress should be laid upon that word only. We dare not entirely shut him out of our regards—but we are too apt to allow something else to share with him. This evil disposition is deeply fixed in our hearts; and the Lord orders all his dispensations towards us with a view to rooting it out; that, being wearied with repeated disappointments, we may at length be compelled to betake ourselves to Him alone.

Why else do we experience so many changes and crosses? why are we so often in heaviness? We know that He delights in the pleasure and prosperity of his servants; that He does not willingly afflict or grieve his children—but there is a necessity on our parts, in order to teach us that we have no stability in ourselves, and that no creature can do us good—but by His appointment.

While the people of Israel depended upon Him for food, they gathered up the manna every morning in the field—but when they would hoard it up in their houses, that they might have a stock within themselves, they had it without his blessing—and it proved good for nothing; it soon bred worms, and grew offensive. We may often observe something like this occurs, both in our temporal and spiritual concerns. The Lord gives us a dear friend for our comfort—but before long we forget that the friend is only the channel of conveyance, and that all the comfort is from Himself. To remind us of this, the stream is dried up, the friend torn away by death, or removed far from us, or perhaps the friendship ceases, and a coolness insensibly takes place, we know not how or why. The true reason is, that when we rejoiced amiss in our gourd, the Lord, for our good, sent a worm to the root of it!

Instances of this kind are innumerable; and the great inference from them all is, Cease from man, cease from creatures, for wherein are they to be accounted of? My soul, wait only, only upon the Lord, who is (according to the expressive phrase, Hebrews 4:13.) he with whom we have to do for soul and body, for time and eternity!

What thanks do we owe, that though we have not yet attained perfectly this great lesson—yet we are admitted into that school where alone it can be learned; and though we are poor, slow scholars—the great and effectual Teacher to whom we have been encouraged and enabled to

apply, can and will bring us forward! He communicates not only instructions—but capacities and abilities. There is none like him! He can make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak! And how great is his condescension and patience! How does He accommodate himself to our weakness, and teach us as we are able to bear! Though all are dunces when He first receives them, not one was ever turned out as incapable. For He makes them what He would have them to be! "The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." John 14:26. "He began to teach them many things." Mark 6:34

O that we may set Him always before us, and consider every dispensation, person, thing, we meet in the course of every day, as messengers from Him, each bringing us some line of instruction for us to copy into that day's experience! Whatever passes within us or around us may be improved (when he teaches us how) as a perpetual commentary upon his good Word. If we converse and observe with this view, we may learn something every moment, wherever the path of duty leads us, in the streets as well as in the closet, and from the conversation of those who know not God (when we cannot avoid being present at it), as well as from those who do.

Separation of dear friends is, as you observed, hard to flesh and blood—but grace can make it tolerable. I have an abiding persuasion that the Lord can easily give more than ever he will take away. Which part of the alternative must be my lot, or when, he only knows—but in general I can rely on him—to appoint the time, the manner; and I trust his promise of 'strength suited to the day' shall be made good. Therefore I can for the most part rejoice, that all things are in the hand and under the direction of him who knows our frame, and has himself borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, in his own body. A time of weeping must come—but the morning of joy will make amends for all! Who can expound the meaning of that one expression, "An exceeding and eternal weight of glory?" The case of unconverted friends is still more burdensome to think of—but we have encouragement and warrant to pray and to hope. He who called us—can easily call others! And he seldom lays a desire of this sort very closely and warmly upon the hearts of his people—but when it is his gracious design, sooner or later, to give an answer of peace. However, it befits us to be thankful for ourselves, and to bow our concerns and reasonings before his sovereign will, who does as he pleases with his own.

Methinks winter is your summer. You have been, like the bee, collecting from many flowers; I hope you will carry good store of honey home with you. May you find the Lord there, and he can easily supply the failure of means and creatures. We cannot be in any place to so much advantage—as where the call of duty leads. What we cannot avoid—may we cheerfully submit to, and not indulge a vain thought that we could choose a better situation for ourselves (all things considered) than he has chosen for us! When we have opportunity of enjoying many ordinances, it is a mercy to be able to prize and improve them—but when he cuts us short for a season, if we wait upon him, we shall do well without them. Secret prayer, and the holy Scriptures, are the chief wells from whence we draw the water of salvation. These will keep the soul alive when creature-streams are cut off. But the richest variety of public means, and the closest attendance upon them, will leave us lean and pining in the midst of plenty, if we are remiss and formal in the other two. I think David never appears in a more lively frame of mind—than when he wrote the 42d, 63d, and 84th Psalms, which were all penned in a dry land, and at a distance from the public ordinances!

Letter 6

1772.

Dear friend,

I can assure you of my sincere sympathy with you in your trials. I can in some measure guess at what you feel, from what I have seen and felt myself in cases where I have been similarly concerned. But my compassion, though sincere, is ineffectual. If I can pity—I cannot relieve. All I can do is, as the Lord enables me, to remember you before His throne of grace. But there is One whose compassion is infinite! The love and tenderness of ten thousand earthly friends, of ten thousand mothers towards their nursing infants, if compared with His—are less than a drop of water, compared to the ocean! And His power is infinite too. Why then do our sufferings continue, when He is so compassionate, and could remove them with a word? Surely, if we cannot give the particular reasons (which yet he will acquaint us with hereafter, John 13:7), the general reason is at hand. He does not afflict us needlessly—but for our profit; to make us partakers of His holiness, and because He loves us!

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

But trust Him for His grace;

Behind a frowning providence

He hides a smiling face!

I wish you much comfort from David's thought, Psalms 142:3, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me—You knew my path." The Lord is not withdrawn to distant universe—but His eye is upon you! He does not see you with the indifference of a mere spectator—but he observes with loving attention—He knows, He considers your path. Yes, he appoints it—and every circumstance about it is under His direction! Your trouble began at the hour which He saw best—it could not come before! He has marked the degree of it, to a hair's breadth; and the duration to the minute! He knows likewise how your spirit is affected; and such supplies of grace and strength, and in such seasons as He sees needful—He will afford. Therefore, hope in God, for you shall yet praise Him!

I shall pray that the waters of the sanctuary there, may be healing and enlivening to you all. Our all-sufficient God can give seasons of refreshment in the darkest hours, and break through the thickest clouds of outward affliction or distress. To you it is given not only to believe in Jesus—but to suffer for his sake. We do so, not only when we are called to follow him to imprisonment or death—but when he enables us to bear afflictive dispensations with due submission and patience. Then he is glorified. Then his grace and power are manifested in us. Then the world, so far as they know our case, has a proof before them that our religion is not merely notional—but that there is a power and reality in it. And the Lord's people are encouraged by what they see of his faithfulness to ourselves. And there are more eyes upon us still. We are a spectacle to the universe, to angels as well as to men!

Cheer up. the Lord has put you in your present trying situation, that you may have the fairer opportunity of adorning your profession of the Gospel; and though you suffer much, he is able to make you abundant amends. Nor need I remind you that he has suffered unspeakably more for you! He drank for your sake, a cup of unmixed wrath; and only puts into your hand—a cup of

affliction mixed with many mercies. The account you gave of the poor man detained in the inn was very affecting. Such scenes are or should be instructive, to teach us resignation under the trials we must meet with every day. For not only are we visited less than our iniquities have deserved—but much less than many of our fellow-creatures daily meet with. We need not look about far or long—to find others in a worse situation than ourselves! If a fit of the gout or cholic is so grievous and so hard to bear, what do we owe to him who delivered us from that place of unutterable torment, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth forever, without hope or respite! And if we cannot help interesting ourselves in the groans of a stranger, how ought the groans of Jesus to be as it were, continually sounding in our ears? What are all other sufferings compared to his? And yet he endured them freely. He needed not to have borne them, if he would have left us to perish—but such was his love, he died that we might live, and endured the fiercest agonies that he might open to us the gate of everlasting peace and happiness.

How amazingly perverse is my heart—that I can be more affected with a sad story in a newspaper concerning people I never saw—than with all that I read of His bitter passion in the garden and on the cross—though I profess to believe that He endured it all for me!

Oh, if we could always behold Him by faith—as evidently crucified before our eyes—how would it compose our spirits as to all the sweets and bitters of this poor life! What a armor would it prove against all the snares and temptations whereby Satan would draw us into evil! I long for more love to Jesus—that I may be preserved humble, thankful, watchful, and dependent upon Him. To behold the glory and the love of Jesus—is the only effectual way to be changed into His image!

We are to set out tonight from the Interpreter's house towards the hill Difficulty—and hope to be favored with a sight of the Cross along the way. To stand at the foot of the Cross, with a softened heart and melting eyes; to forget our sins, sorrows, and burdens, while we are wholly swallowed up in the contemplation of Him who bore our sins in his own body upon the cruel tree—is certainly the most desirable situation on this side the grave. To speak of it, and to see it by the light of the Spirit, are widely different things. And though we cannot always enjoy this view—yet the remembrance of what we have seen is an excellent means of encouragement to mount the hill, and to face the lions.

I believe I shall hardly find leisure to fill my paper this time. It is now Saturday evening, and growing late. I am just returned from a serious walk, which is my usual manner of closing the week when the weather is fine. I endeavor to join in heart with the Lord's ministers and people, who are seeking a blessing on tomorrow's ordinances. At such times, I especially remember those friends with whom I have gone to the house of the Lord in company, consequently you are not forgotten. I can venture to assure you, that you have a frequent share in our prayers; yes, are loved and remembered by many here—but as we are forgetful creatures, I hope you will always refresh our memory, and quicken our prayers, by a yearly visit.

What a multitude of eyes and hearts wait at the Throne of Grace! He has a numerous and necessitous family—but He is rich enough to supply them all—and His tender compassions extend to the poorest and most unworthy of them! Like the sun—He can cheer and enlighten millions of His poor pensioners at once! He gives to each one as bountifully—as if there were no others to partake of His favor! His best blessings are not diminished—by being shared among many. The greatest earthly monarch would soon be poor—if he was to give but a pittance to all his subjects.

But Jesus has unsearchable, inexhaustible riches of grace to bestow! The innumerable assembly before the Eternal Throne are all continually supplied from His fullness; and yet there is enough and to spare for His earthly children also—and for all who shall come after us! May He give us an eager appetite—a hunger and thirst that will not be satisfied with anything short of the Bread of Life. We may confidently open our mouths wide—for He has promised to fill them! "Let us therefore approach the Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need!" Hebrews 4:16

Letter 7

1773.

Dear friend,

Since I wrote last, the Lord has been gracious to us here. He crowned the last year with his goodness, and renews his benefits to us every day. He has been pleased to bless the preaching of his Gospel among us, both to consolation and conviction; and several are, I hope, earnestly seeking him, who were lately dead in trespasses and sins.

Dear Mr. **** was released from all his illnesses on the 25th of November. A few days before his death, he was enabled to speak more intelligibly than usual for about a quarter of an hour, and expressed a comfortable hope, which was a great satisfaction to us; for though we had not the least doubt of his being built upon the Rock, it was to us an answer to prayer that he could again speak the language of faith; and much prayer had been made on this account, especially that very evening. After that night he spoke little—but continued chiefly drowsy until he died. I preached his funeral sermon from Lamentations 3:31-33.

Mrs. L****'s illness grows worse and worse. she suffers much in her body, and has much more perhaps to suffer—but her consolations in the Lord abound. He enables her to maintain faith, patience, and submission, in an exemplary manner; and shows us, in his dealings with her, that he is all-sufficient and faithful to those who put their trust in him.

I am glad to hear that you had comfortable seasons while at Bath. It is indeed a great mercy, that God's ordinances are established in that place of dissipation; and I hope many who go there with no higher view than to drink the Bath waters, will be brought to draw with joy the waters of life from those wells of salvation. He does nothing in vain; and when he affords the means, we may confidently hope he will bestow the blessing. The lowness of spirituality which you complain of, when you are in a strange place, is, I suppose, felt by most, if not by all, who can be satisfied in no place without some token of the Lord's presence. I consider it rather as an infirmity than a sin, strictly speaking; though all our infirmities are sinful, being the effects of a depraved nature. In our present circumstances, new things excite new ideas; and when our usual course of life is broken in upon, it disjoints and unsettles our thoughts. It is a proof of our weakness. It may and ought to be lamented—but I believe we shall not get the better of it, until we leave the mortal body to molder into dust!

Perhaps few suffer more inconvenience from this particular than myself; which is one reason why I love home, and seldom leave it without some reluctance. And it is one reason why we should love heaven, and long for the hour when, at liberty from all encumbrance, we shall see the Lord without

a veil, and serve him without distraction! The Lord, by his providence, seconds and confirms the declarations of his Word and ministry. We read and know much concerning the emptiness, vanity, and uncertainty of the present state. When our minds are enlightened by his Holy Spirit, we receive and acknowledge what his Word declares to be truth. Yet if we remain long without changes and trials, and our path is very smooth—we are for the most part but faintly affected with what we profess to believe. But when some of our dearest friends are taken from us, the lives of others threatened, and we ourselves are brought low with pain and sickness, then we not only say—but feel that this world must not, cannot be our rest! You have had several exercises of this kind of late in your family; and I trust you will be able to set your seal to that gracious word, That though afflictions in themselves are not joyous—but grievous—yet in due season they yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

Various and blessed are the fruits which afflictions produce. By affliction prayer is quickened, for our prayers are very apt to grow languid and formal in a time of ease. Affliction greatly helps us to understand the Scriptures, especially the promises; most of which being made to times of trouble. We cannot so well know their fullness, sweetness, and certainty, as when we have been in the situation to which they are suited, have been enabled to trust and plead them, and found them fulfilled in our own case. We are usually indebted to affliction—as the means or occasion of the most signal discoveries we are favored with of the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of the Lord. These are best observed by the evident proofs we have that he is near to support us under trouble, and that he can and does deliver us out of it. Israel would not have seen so much of the Lord's arm outstretched in their behalf, had not Pharaoh oppressed, opposed, and pursued them.

Afflictions are designed likewise for the manifestation of our sincerity to ourselves and to others. When faith endures the fire, we know it to be of the right kind; and others, who see we are brought safe out, and lose nothing but the dross, will confess that God is with us of a truth; Daniel 3:27-28. Surely this thought should reconcile us to suffer, not only with patience but with cheerfulness—if God may be glorified in us. This made the Apostle rejoice in tribulation, that the power of Christ might be noticed, as resting upon him, and working mightily in him.

Many of our graces likewise cannot thrive or manifest themselves, without trials—such as resignation, patience, meekness, long-suffering. I observe some of the London porters do not appear to be very strong men—yet they will trudge along under a burden which some stouter people could not carry so well. The reason is, that they are accustomed to carry burdens, and by continual exercise their shoulders acquire a strength suited to their work. It is so in the Christian life. Activity and strength of grace is not ordinarily acquired by those who sit still and live at ease—but by those who frequently meet with something which requires a full exertion of what power the Lord has given them. So again, it is by our own sufferings, that we learn to pity and sympathize with others in their sufferings. Such a compassionate disposition, which excites our feelings for the afflicted, is an eminent branch of the mind which was in Christ. But these feelings would be very faint, if we did not in our experience know what sorrows and temptations mean.

Afflictions do us good likewise, as they make us more acquainted with what is in our own hearts, and thereby promote humiliation and self-abasement. There are abominations which, like nests of vipers, lie so quietly within, that we hardly suspect they are there—until the rod of affliction rouses them! Then they hiss and show their venom! This discovery is indeed very distressing—yet, until it

is made, we are prone to think ourselves much less vile than we really are, and cannot so heartily abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes. But I must write a sermon rather than a letter—if I would enumerate all the good fruits which, by the power of sanctifying grace, are produced from this bitter tree of affliction! May we, under our several trials, find them all revealed in ourselves, that we may not complain of having suffered in vain. While we have such a depraved nature, and live in such a polluted world; while the roots of pride, vanity, self-dependence, self-seeking, are so strong within us; we need a variety of sharp afflictions to keep us from cleaving to the dust! "I know, O Lord, that Your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness You have afflicted me!" Psalms 119:75. "Before I was afflicted I went astray—but now I obey Your Word." Psalms 119:67. "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness." Hebrews 12:10

Letter 8

1774.

Dear friend, The very painful illness which Mrs. **** so long endured, had doubtless not only prepared you to expect the news of her death—but made you more willing to resign her. You are bereaved of a valuable friend—but life in her circumstances was burdensome; and who can be sorry to consider her now as freed from all suffering—and possessed of all happiness? But, besides this, I trust the Lord has favored you with an habitual sense of the wisdom and propriety of all his appointments; so that when his will is manifested by the event, you are enabled to say, "All is well!" "I was silent, and opened not my mouth, because You are the one who has done this!"

She is gone a little before you; and, after a few more changes, you will meet her again to unspeakable advantage, and rejoice together before the Throne forever! There every tear will be wiped away, and you shall weep no more. The Lord could have prevented the cause of her great sufferings—but I doubt not, that he afflicted her in wisdom and mercy. He could easily have restored her to health—but the time was hastening when he purposed to have her with him—where he is, that she might behold his glory, and have all the desires he put into her heart, abundantly satisfied. Precious in his sight—is the death of his saints! Every circumstance under the direction of Infinite Wisdom. His sovereignty forbids us to say, "Why have you done this?" And his love assures us that he does all things well!

I have lost a friend likewise. I believe I may say few people, not immediately related to her, could value her more highly than myself; and though of late years I could not have the pleasure of her company, it was a constant satisfaction to me to know I had such a friend. Her husband’s sickness and death, followed immediately upon this stroke. I doubt not, but you have been much affected with this dispensation likewise. But here again we have the same stronghold to retreat to. The Lord has done it! What a pleasing prospect of increasing usefulness is now cut off! How many will mourn his loss! Yet we are sure the work which the Lord had appointed him was finished. They who loved his ministry, and were profited by it, are left apparently destitute—but Jesus, the good Shepherd, is able to take care of his own, and will fulfill his promise to them all. He has promised, and truly they shall be fed.

We have had trying and dying times here. Almost half of my time has been taken up with visiting the sick. I have seen death in a variety of forms, and have had frequent occasion of observing how insignificant many things, which are now capable of giving us pain or pleasure—will appear, when

the soul is brought near to the borders of eternity. All the concerns which relate solely to this life, will then be found as trivial as the traces of a dream from which we are awakened! Nothing will then comfort us—but the knowledge of Jesus and his love! Nothing will then grieve us—but the remembrance of our unfaithful hearts to him, and what poor returns we made to his abundant goodness. May the Lord forbid that this thought should break our peace! No! faith in his name may forbid our fear, though we shall see and confess we have been unprofitable servants. There shall be no condemnation to those who are in him—but surely shame and humiliation will accompany us to the very threshold of heaven—and ought to do so. I surely shall then be more affected than I am now—with the coolness of my love, the faintness of my zeal, the vanity of my heart, and my undue attachment to the things of time. O these clogs, fetters, valleys, and mountains, which obstruct my course, darken my views, slacken my pace, and disable me in service! Well it is for me that I am not under the law—but under grace.

Tomorrow is the Sunday. I am usually glad when it returns, though it seldom finds me in that frame of mine which I would desire. But it is my happiness to live among many who count the hours from one ordinance to another. I know they pray that I may be a messenger of peace, and an instrument of good to their souls; and I have cause to hope their prayers are in a measure answered. For their sakes, as much as my own, I am glad to go up to the house of the Lord. O that in watering others—I may be also watered myself!

I have been praying that tomorrow may be a day of power with you and with us, and with all who love Jesus in sincerity; that we may see his glory, and taste his love in the sanctuary! When it is thus, the Sunday is a blessed day indeed—a pledge of heaven. There they keep an everlasting Sabbath, and cease not night or day admiring the riches of redeeming love, and adoring Him who washed his people from their sins in his own blood. To have such imperfect communion with Him as is in this state attainable in this pleasing exercise, is what alone can make life worth the name. For this I sigh and long, and cry to the Lord to rend the veil of unbelief, scatter the clouds of ignorance, and break down the walls which sin is daily building up to hide him from my eyes. I hope I can say, My soul is athirst for God, and nothing less than the light of his countenance can satisfy me! Blessed be his Name for this desire—it is his own gift, and he never gives it in vain. He will afford us a taste of the water of life along the way; and before long we shall drink abundantly at the fountain-head, and be done with illness forever. May we be thankful for what we have received—and still earnestly desirous of more.

01.01. Eight letters to a pastor

Eight letters to a pastor

Letter 1

June 29, 1757, Dear fellow pastor,

I would earnestly press both of us—to follow the Lord fully; to aim at a life of self-denial; to renounce self-will; and to guard against self-wisdom. The less we have to do with the world—the better! Unless we watch and pray—we shall often be ensnared!

Time is precious, and opportunities once gone are gone forever! Even by reading, and what we call studying—we may be comparatively losers. The best way to study—is to be closely waiting upon God in humble, secret, fervent prayer. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in His hands—and He gives bountifully, without upbraiding!

Whatever we may undertake with a sincere desire to promote His glory—we may comfortably pursue. Nothing is trivial—which is done for Him.

Pray for me, that I may be enabled to break through the snares of vanity which lie in my way; that I may be crucified with Christ—and live a hidden life of faith in Him who loved me, and gave Himself for me!

Adieu,

John Newton

Letter 2 August 31, 1757.

Dear Sir,

I wish you much of that spirit which was in the Apostle, which made him content to become all things to all men—that he might win some. I am persuaded, that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ, and the brightest evidences that he is indeed our Master. If any should seem inclined to treat you with less regard, because you are or have been a Methodist teacher, you will find forbearance, meekness, and long-suffering, the most prevailing means to conquer their prejudices. Our Lord has not only taught us to expect persecution from the world, though this alone is a trial too hard for flesh and blood; but we must look for what is much more grievous to a renewed mind—to be in some respects slighted, censured, and misunderstood, even by our Christian brethren; and that, perhaps, in cases where we are really striving to promote the glory of God and the good of souls, and cannot, without the reproach of our consciences, alter our conduct, however glad we would be to have their approbation.

Therefore we are required, not only to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil—but likewise to bear one another’s burdens; which plainly intimates there will be something to be borne with on all

hands; and happy indeed is he who is not offended. You may observe what unjust reports and surmises were received, even at Jerusalem, concerning the Apostle Paul; and it seems he was condemned unheard, and that by many thousands too, Acts 21:20-21; but we do not find he was at all ruffled, or that he sought to retort anything upon them, though doubtless, had he been so disposed, he might have found something to have charged them with in his turn; but he calmly and willingly complied with everything in his power, to soften and convince them.

Let us be followers of this pattern, so far as he was a follower of Christ; for even Christ pleased not himself. How did he bear with the mistakes, weakness, intemperate zeal, and imprudent proposals of his disciples while on earth! And how does he bear with the same things from you and I, and every one of his followers now! And do we, can we think much to bear with each other for his sake? Have we all a full remission of ten thousand talents which we owed him, and were utterly unable to pay; and do we wrangle among ourselves for a few pence? God forbid!

If you should be numbered among the Independents, I advise you not to offend any of them by unnecessary singularities. I wish you not to part with any truth, or with anything really expedient; but if the omitting anything of an indifferent nature will obviate prejudices, and increase a mutual confidence, why should not so easy a sacrifice be made? Above all, my dear friend, let us keep close to the Lord in a way of prayer. He gives wisdom that is profitable to direct. He is the wonderful counselor; there is no teacher like Him. Why do the living seek to the dead? Why do we weary our friends and ourselves, in running up and down, and turning over books for advice? If we shut our eyes upon the world, and worldly things, and raise our thoughts upwards in humility and silence—should we not often hear the secret voice of the Spirit of God whispering to our hearts, and pointing out to us the way of truth and peace? Have we not often gone astray, and hurt either ourselves or our brethren, for lack of attending to this Divine Instruction? Have we not sometimes mocked God, by pretending to ask direction from him, when we had fixed our determination beforehand? It is a great blessing to know that we are sincere; and next to this, to be convinced of our insincerity, and to pray against it.

Letter 3 November 21, 1757.

Dear Sir, Can you forgive so negligent a correspondent? I am indeed ashamed; but (if that is any good excuse) I treat you no worse than my other friends. Whenever I write, I am obliged to begin with an apology; for what with business, and the incidental duties of every day—my time is always mortgaged before it comes into my hands, especially as I have so little skill in redeeming and improving it. I long to hear from you, and I long to see you. I have mislaid your letter, and cannot remember the particulars. In general, I remember you were well, and going on comfortably in your work; which was matter of joy to me; and my poor prayers are for you, that the Lord may own and prosper you more and more. The two great points we are called to pursue in this sinful divided world, are peace and holiness. I hope you are much in the study of them. These are the peculiar characteristics of a disciple of Jesus; they are the richest part of the enjoyments of heaven. And so far as they are received into the heart, they bring down heaven upon earth; and they are more inseparably connected between themselves than some of us are aware of. The longer I live, the more I see of the vanity and the sinfulness of our unchristian disputes. They eat up the very vitals of religion. I grieve to think how often I have lost my time and my temper that way, in presuming to regulate the vineyards of others, when I have neglected my own; when the beam in my own eye

has so contracted my sight, that I could discern nothing but the mote in my neighbor's. I am now desirous to choose a better part. Could I speak the publican's words with a proper feeling, I wish not for the tongue of men or angels to fight about notions or sentiments. I allow that every branch of Gospel truth is precious, that errors are abounding, and that it is our duty to bear an honest testimony to what the Lord has enabled us to find comfort in, and to instruct with meekness such as are willing to be instructed; but I cannot see it my duty, nay, I believe it would be my sin—to attempt to beat my notions into other people's heads. Too often I have attempted it in time past; but I now judge, that both my zeal and my weapons were carnal. When our dear Lord questioned Peter, after his fall and recovery, he did not say, Are you wise, learned, and eloquent? Are you clear, and sound, and orthodox? But this only, "Do you love me?" An answer to this was sufficient then—why not now? Any other answer we may believe would have been insufficient then. If Peter had made the most pompous confession of his faith and sentiments, still the first question would have recurred, "Do you love me?" This is a Scripture precedent. Happy the preacher, whoever he be, my heart and my prayers are with him—who can honestly and steadily appropriate Peter's answer! Such a man, I say, I am ready to hear, though he should be as much mistaken in some points as Peter afterwards appears to have been in others.

What a pity it is, that Christians in succeeding ages should think the constraining force of the love of Christ too weak, and suppose the end better answered by forms, subscriptions, and questions of their own devising! I cannot acquit even those churches who judge themselves nearest the primitive rule in this respect. Alas! will-worship and presumption may creep into the best external forms. But the misfortune both in churches and private Christians is, that we are too prone rather to compare ourselves with others—rather than to judge by the Scriptures. And while each can see that they give not into the errors and mistakes of the opposite party, both are ready to conclude that they are right; and thus it happens, that an attachment to a supposed Gospel-order will recommend a man sooner and farther to some churches, than an eminency of Gospel practice. This, like a worm at the root, has nipped the graces, and hindered the usefulness, of many a valuable man; and those who change sides and opinions are the most liable to it. For the pride of our heart insensibly prompts us to cast about far and near for arguments to justify our own behavior, and makes us too ready to hold the opinions we have taken up to the very extreme, that those among whom we are newly come may not suspect our sincerity. In a word, let us endeavor to keep close to God, to be much in prayer, and to watch carefully over our hearts. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him, and who wait on him continually; to these he will show his covenant, not notional—but experimentally. A few minutes of the Spirit's teaching will furnish us with more real useful knowledge, than toiling through whole folios of commentators and expositors! They are useful in their places, and are not to be undervalued by those who can perhaps in general do better without them. But it will be our wisdom to deal less with the streams, and be more close in applying to the fountain head. The Scripture itself, and the Spirit of God, are the best and the only sufficient expositors of Scripture. Whatever men have valuable in their writings, they got it from hence; and the way is as open to us as to any of them. There is nothing required but a teachable humble spirit; and learning, as it is commonly called, is not necessary in order to this. I commend you to the grace of God.

Letter 4 January 10, 1760.

Dear Sir,

I have procured Cennick's sermons—they are in my judgment sound and sweet. O that you and I had a double portion of that spirit and unction which is in them! Come, let us not despair; the fountain is as full and as free as ever—precious fountain, ever flowing with blood and water, milk and wine! This is the stream which heals the wounded, refreshes the weary, satisfies the hungry, strengthens the weak, and confirms the strong. It opens the eyes of the blind, softens the heart of stone, teaches the dumb to sing, and enables the lame and paralytic to walk, to leap, to run, to fly, to mount up with eagle's wings! A taste of this stream raises earth to heaven—and brings down heaven upon earth. Nor is it a fountain only; it is a universal blessing, and assumes a variety of shapes to suit itself to our needs. It is a sun, a shield, a garment, a shade, a banner, a refuge. It is bread, the true bread, the very staff of life. It is life itself, immortal, eternal life! The cross of Jesus Christ, my Lord,

Is food and medicine, shield and sword.

Take that for your motto; wear it in your heart; keep it in your eye; have it often in your mouth, until you can find something better. The cross of Christ is the tree of life and the tree of knowledge combined. Blessed be God! There is neither prohibition nor flaming sword to keep us back; but it stands like a tree by the wayside, which affords its shade to every passenger without distinction. Watch and pray. We live in a sifting time. Error gains ground every day. May the name and love of our Savior Jesus keep us and all his people!

Letter 5 November 15, 1760.

Dear Sir,

If your visit should be delayed, let me have a letter. I want either good news or good advice; to hear that your soul prospers, or to receive something that may quicken my own soul. The Apostle says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Alas! we know how to say something about it—but how faint and feeble are our real perceptions of it! Our love to him is the proof and measure—of what we know of his love to us. Surely, then, we are mere children in this kind of knowledge, and every other kind is vain. What would we think of a man who would neglect his business, family, and all the comforts of life, that he might study the Chinese language; though he knows beforehand he should never be able to attain it, nor ever find occasion or opportunity to use it? The pursuit of every branch of knowledge that is not closely connected with the one thing needful, is no less ridiculous.

You know something of our friend Mrs. B. She has been more than a month confined to her bed, and I believe her next remove will be to her coffin! The Lord has done great things for her. Though she has been a serious exemplary person all her life, when the prospect of death presented, she began to cry out earnestly, "What shall I do to be saved?" But her solicitude is at an end. She has seen the salvation of God, and now for the most part rejoices in something more than hope. This you will account good news, I am sure. Let it be your encouragement and mine. The Lord's arm is not shortened, nor is his presence removed. He is near us still, though we perceive him not. May he guide you with his eye in all your public and private concerns, and may he in particular bless our communications to our mutual advantage!

Letter 6

July 29, 1761.

Dear Sir, Are the quarrels made up? Tell those who know what communion with Jesus is worth, that they will never be able to maintain it, if they give way to the workings of pride, jealousy, and anger. This will provoke the Lord to leave them dry; to command the clouds of his grace that they rain no showers of blessing upon them. These things are sure signs of a low frame, and a sure way to keep it so. Could they be prevailed upon, from a sense of the pardoning love of God to their own souls, to forgive each other as the Lord forgives us—freely, fully, without condition and without reserve, they would find this like breaking down a stone wall, which has hitherto shut up their prayers from the Lord's ears, and shut out his blessing from filling their hearts. Tell them, I hope to hear that all animosities, little and big, are buried by mutual consent in the Redeemer's grave.

Alas! the people of God have enemies enough. Why then will they weaken their own hands? Why will they help their enemies to pull down the Lord's work? Why will they grieve those who wish them well, cause the weak to stumble, the wicked to rejoice, and bring a reproach upon their holy profession? Indeed this is no light matter; I wish it may not lead them to something worse; I wish they may be wise in time, lest Satan gain further advantage over them, and draw them to something that shall make them (as David did) roar under the pains of broken bones. But I must break off. May God give you wisdom, faithfulness, and patience. Take care that you do not catch an angry spirit yourself, while you aim to suppress it in others; this will spoil all, and you will exhort, advise, and weep in vain. May you rather be an example and pattern to the flock. And in this view, be not surprised if you yourself meet some harsh usage; rather rejoice, that you will thereby have an opportunity to exemplify your own rules, and to convince your people, that what you recommend to them—you do not speak by rote—but from the experience of your heart.

One end why our Lord was tempted was for the encouragement of his poor followers, that they might know him to be a High Priest suited to them, having had a fellow-feeling in their distresses. For the like reason, he appoints his ministers to be sorely exercised both from without and within, that they may sympathize with their flock, and know in their own hearts the deceitfulness of sin, the infirmities of the flesh, and the way in which the Lord supports and bears with all that trust in him. Therefore be not discouraged; usefulness and trials, comforts and crosses, strength and exercise—all go together. But remember Him has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life!" When you get to heaven, you will not complain of the difficult way by which the Lord brought you. Farewell. Pray for us.

Letter 7

Dec. 14, 1761.

Dear Sir,

I pray the Lord to accompany you; but cannot help fearing you go on too fast. If you have not (as I am sure you ought not) made an absolute promise—but only conditional one—you need not be so solicitous. Depend upon it, when the Lord is pleased to remove you, he will send one to supply your place. I am grieved that your mind is so set upon a step, which I fear will occasion many inconveniences to a people who have deserved your best regard. Others may speak you fairer—but none wishes you better than myself. Therefore I hope you allow me to speak my mind

plainly, and believe that it is no pleasure to me to oppose your inclinations. As to your saying they will take no denial, it has no weight with me. Had they asked what you were exceedingly averse to, you would soon have expressed yourself so as to convince them it was to no purpose to urge you; but they saw something in your manner or language that encouraged them; they saw the proposal was agreeable to you, that you were not at all unwilling to exchange your old friends for new ones; and this is the reason they would take no denial. If you should live to see those who are most forward in pressing you, become the first to discourage you, you will think seriously of my words.

If I thought my advice would prevail, it would be this. Call the people together, and desire them (if possible) to forget you ever intended to depart from them; and promise not to think of a removal, until the Lord shall make your way so clear, that even they shall have nothing reasonable to object against it. You may keep your word with your other friends too; for when a proper person shall offer, as likely to please and satisfy the people as yourself, I will give my hearty consent to your removal.

Consider what it is you would have in your office—but maintenance, acceptance, and success. Have you not those where you are? Are you sure of having them where you are going? Are you sure the Spirit of God (without which you will do nothing) will be with you there, as he has been with you hitherto? Perhaps if you act in your own spirit—you may find as great a change as Samson. I am ready to weep when I think what difficulties were surmounted to accomplish your ordination; and now, when the people thought themselves fixed—that you should so soon disappoint them!

Letter 8

Feb. 15, 1762.

Dear Sir,

I have been often thinking of you since your removal, and was glad to receive your letter today. I hope you will still go on to find more and more encouragement to believe, that the Lord has disposed and led you to the step you have taken. For though I wrote with the greatest plainness and earnestness, and would, if in my power, have prevented it while under deliberation—yet, now it is done, and past recall—I would rather help than dishearten you. Indeed, I cannot say that my view of the affair is yet altered. The best way not to be cast down hereafter—is not to be too expectant at first. You know there is something pleasing in novelty; as yet you are new to them—and they to you. I pray God that you may find as cordial a regard from them as at present, when you have been with them as many years as in the place you came from. And if you have grace to be watchful and prayerful, all will be well; for we serve a gracious Master, who knows how to over-rule even our mistakes to his glory and our own advantage.

Yet I observe that when we do wrong, sooner or later we smart for our indiscretion; perhaps many years afterwards. After we have seen and confessed our fault, and received repeated proofs of pardoning love, as to the guilt—yet chastisement, to remind us more sensibly of our having done amiss, will generally find us out. So it was with David, in the matter of Uriah. The Lord put away his sin, healed his broken bones, and restored unto him the light of his countenance—yet many troubles, in consequence of this affair, followed one upon another, until at length (many years afterwards) he was driven from Jerusalem by his own son! So it was with Jacob. He dealt

deceitfully with his brother Esau. Notwithstanding this, the Lord appeared to him and blessed him, gave him comfortable promises, and revealed himself to him from time to time—yet, after an interval of twenty years, his fault was brought afresh to his remembrance, and his heart trembled within him when he heard his brother was coming with armed men to meet him! And thus I have found it in my own experience. Things which I had forgotten a long while have been brought to my mind by providential dispensations which I little expected; but the first rise of which I have been able to trace far back, and forced to confess, that the Lord is indeed He who judges the heart and tries the thoughts. I hint this for your caution. You know best upon what grounds you have proceeded; but if (though I do not affirm it, I hope otherwise), I say, if you have acted too much in your own spirit, been too hasty and precipitate; if you have not been sufficiently tender of your people, nor thoughtful of the consequences which your departure will probably involve them in; if you were impatient under the Lord's hand, and, instead of waiting his time and way of removing the trials and difficulties you found—you have ventured upon an attempt to free and mend yourself. I say, if any of these things have mixed with your determinations, something will fall out to show you your fault. Either you will not find the success you hope for—or friends will grow cold—or enemies and difficulties you dream not of, will present themselves—or your own mind will alter, so as what seems now most pleasing will afford you little pleasure. Yet, though I write thus, I do not mean (as I said before) to discourage you—but that you may be forewarned, humble, and watchful. If you should at any time have a different view of things, you may take comfort from the instances I have mentioned. The trials of David and Jacob were sharp; but they were short, and they proved to their advantage, put them upon acts of humiliation and prayer, and ended in a double blessing. Nothing can harm us, which quickens our earnestness and frequency in applying to a Throne of Grace! Only trust the Lord and keep close to him—and all that befalls you shall be for good. Temptations end in victory; troubles prove an increase of consolation; yes, our very falls and failings tend to increase our spiritual wisdom; and give us a greater knowledge of Satan's devices—and make us more habitually upon our guard against them. Happy case of the believer in Jesus! When bitten by the fiery serpent he needs not go far for a remedy; he has only to look to a bleeding Savior, and be healed.

I think one great advantage that attends a removal into a new place is, that it gives an easy opportunity of forming a new plan, and breaking off any poor habits which we have found inconvenient, and yet perhaps could not so readily lay aside, where our customs and acquaintance had been long formed. I earnestly recommend to you to reflect, if you cannot recollect some things which you have hitherto omitted, which may properly be now taken up; some things formerly allowed, which may now with ease and convenience be laid aside. I only give the hint in general; for I have nothing in particular to charge you with.

I recommend to you to be very choice of your time, especially the beginning of the day. Let your morning hours be devoted to prayer, reading, and study; and do not allow the importunity of friends to rob you of the hours before noon, without a just necessity. And if you accustom yourself to rise early in the morning, you will find a great advantage. Be careful to avoid losing your thoughts, whether in books or otherwise, upon any subjects which are not of a direct subservience to your great design, until towards dinner time. The afternoon is not so favorable to study. This is a proper time for paying and receiving visits, conversing among your friends, or unbending with a book of instructive entertainment, such as history, etc., which may increase your general

knowledge, without a great confinement of your attention; but let the morning hours be sacred.

I think you would likewise find advantage in using your pen more. Write short notes upon the Scriptures you read, or transcribe the labors of others; make extracts from your favorite authors, especially those who, besides a fund of spiritual and evangelical matter, have a happy talent of expressing their thoughts in a clear and lively, or moving manner. You would find a continued exercise in this way would be greatly useful to form your own style, and help your delivery and memory; you would become insensibly master of their thoughts, and find it more easy to express yourself justly and clearly.

What we only read we easily lose—but what we commit to paper is not so soon forgotten. Especially remember (what you well know—but we cannot too often remind each other), that frequent secret prayer is the life of all we do. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given—but all our diligence will fail—if we are remiss in this particular!

Keep close to the work you have undertaken; and endeavor to avoid anything that looks like ostentation, or a desire to be taken notice of. You see I advise you with the freedom of a friend who loves you, and longs to see your work and your soul prosper.

You will, I doubt not, endeavor to promote the practice of frequent prayer in the houses that receive you. I look upon prayer meetings as the most profitable exercises (excepting the public preaching) in which Christians can engage. They have a direct tendency to kill a worldly trifling spirit, to draw down a Divine blessing upon all our concerns, resolve differences, and enkindle (at least to maintain) the flame of Divine love among brethren. But I need not tell you the advantages; you know them. I only would exhort you; and the rather as I find in my own case, the principal cause of my leanness and unfruitfulness is owing to an unaccountable backwardness to pray. I can write, or read, or converse, or hear, with a ready will—but prayer is more spiritual and inward than any of these; and the more spiritual any duty is—the more my carnal heart is apt to draw aside from it. May the Lord pour forth his precious spirit of prayer and supplication in both our hearts!

I am not well pleased with the account you give of so many dry bones. It increases my wonder, that you could so readily exchange so much plump flesh and blood as you had about you—for a parcel of skeletons. I wish they may not haunt you, and disturb your peace! I wish these same dry bones do not prove thorns in your sides and in your eyes. You say, now you have to pray, and prophesy, and wait for the four winds to come and put life into these bones. God grant that your prayers may be answered. But if I knew a man who possessed a field in a tolerable soil, which had afforded him some increase every year; and if this man, after having bestowed seven years' labor in cultivating, weeding, fertilizing, fencing, etc.—just when he has brought his ground (in his neighbor's judgment) into good order, and might reasonably hope for larger crops than he had ever yet seen, should suddenly forego all his advantages, leave his good seed for the birds to eat, pull up the young fences which cost him so much pains to plant—and all this for the sake of making a new experiment upon the top of a mountain; though I might heartily wish him great success, I could not honestly give him great encouragement. You have parted with that for a trifle, which in my eye seems an inestimable jewel; I mean the hearts and affections of an enlightened people! This appears to me one of the greatest honors and greatest pleasures a faithful minister can possess, and which many faithful and eminent ministers have never been able to obtain. This

gave you a vast advantage. Your gift was more acceptable there than that of any other person, and more than you will probably find elsewhere. For I cannot make a comparison between the hasty approbation of a few, whose eyes are but beginning to open, and their affections and passions warm, so that they must, if possible, have the man that first catches their attention; I say, I cannot think this worthy to be compared to the regard of a people who understood the Gospel, were able to judge of men and doctrines, and had trial of you for so many years.

It is indeed much to your honor (it proves that you were faithful, diligent, and exemplary) that the people proved so attached to you—but that you should tear yourself from them, when they so dearly loved you, and so much needed you—this has made all your friends in these parts to wonder, and your enemies to rejoice; and I, alas! know not what to answer in your behalf to either. Say not, "I hate this Micaiah, for he prophesies not good of me—but evil;" but allow me the privilege of a friend. My heart is full when I think of what has happened, and what will probably be the consequence. In few words, I am strongly persuaded you have taken an unadvised step, and would therefore prepare you for the inconvenience and uneasiness you may probably meet with. And if I am (as I desire I may prove) mistaken, my advice will do no harm; you will need something to balance the caresses and success you meet with.

We would be very glad to see you, and hope you will take your measures, when you do come, to lengthen your usual stay, in proportion to the difference of the distance. Pray for us.

01.01. Emptiness of the creature

Emptiness of the creature August 24, 1774.

Dear Sir,

You are going abroad; you will carry with you, I doubt not, the best advice, strengthened by the authority and affection of parents whom you greatly love and greatly reverence. This may seem to make anything a stranger can offer unnecessary, if not impertinent. Yet, confiding in your candor, and in your good opinion of my intention, I shall venture to let my pen run on a little longer. Not only my wishes—but my hopes, are strong in your behalf. Perhaps there is hardly a young man in the kingdom, born to a fortune, who is setting out in life upon equal advantages with yourself. How many men of your years, who have been brought up in affluence—are unprincipled, uninstructed, and have already entered upon a course of dissipation and folly, in which it is impossible they themselves can find satisfaction, and which (unless they are reclaimed from it by an Almighty arm) will infallibly preclude them from usefulness or esteem! Whereas your early years have been successfully employed in the pursuit of knowledge, and your education formed under the most animating and endearing influence; and the Lord has furnished you with every natural ability of body and mind, which may qualify you to serve him in that situation of life which his Providence has allotted you.

What may I not then further hope from these beginnings, especially as it is easy to observe that He has given you an amiable and promising disposition of spirit; and has not only preserved you from being hurried down the stream of a giddy world—but enabled you to account the tender restraint under which you have been educated, not a yoke—but a privilege.

I sympathize with you, at what you will feel when you are first separated from your happy family. But the Lord God, who is the sun and shield of those who fear him, will be always near you. His favor is the one thing needful, which no outward advantages can compensate the lack of; and the right knowledge of him is the one thing needful, which no human teaching can communicate. Were I more intimate with you, I could have asked the question, and perhaps received the satisfaction to know, that you have already begun to consider him in this light; that you feel a vanity in science, an emptiness in creatures, and find that you have desires which only He who gave them can satisfy. I trust it either is—or will be thus. As to worldly education, though it is useful when we know how to make a right use of it—yet, considered as in our own power, and to those who trust to it without seeking a superior guidance, it is usually the source of perplexity, strife, skepticism, and infidelity. It is, indeed, like a sword in a madman’s hands, which gives him the more opportunity of hurting himself and others. As to what the world calls pleasure, there is so little in it, that many of the philosophers of old—though they had little of value to substitute in its place, could despise it. You will perhaps meet with some who will talk another language; who will pretend to be too wise to submit to the Bible, and too happy in worldly things to expect or desire any happiness beside; but I trust you have seen enough to enable you to treat such people with the pity, and such pretensions with the contempt which they deserve. Should we set our concerns with an eternal world aside for

a moment, it would be easy to demonstrate that religion is necessary, in order to make the most of this life, and to enjoy temporal good with the highest relish. In such a world as this, where we are every moment liable to so many unforeseen and unavoidable contingencies, a man without religion may be compared to a ship in a storm, without either rudder, anchor, or pilot. But then, the religion, which only deserves the name, must come from above; it must be suited to the state and wants of a sinner; it must be capable of comforting the heart; it must take away the sting and dread of death; and fix our confidence upon One who is always able to help us. Such is the religion of Jesus; such are its effects, and such are the criteria whereby we are to judge of the various forms and schemes under which it is proposed to us. But I forbear; I am only reminding you of what you know, and what you have known to be verified by living and dying examples. This happiness, my dear sir, is open to you, and to all who seek. He is enthroned in heaven—but prayer will bring him down to the heart. Indeed, he is always before-hand with us; and if we feel one desire towards him, we may accept it as a token that he gave it to us—to encourage us to ask for more. May he who is your guide and guard—be with you at all times, and in all places, and bring you back to your father's house in peace. Should I live to see that day, you have few friends whose welcome would be warmer or more sincere than mine; and if, when you are settled and at leisure, you will afford me a letter—it will be both a pleasure and a favor to me.

01.01. Extract of a letter to a student in divinity

Extract of a letter to a student in divinity

Dear Sir, The subject of your last is important. I can sympathize with your concern, having known much of it myself, and therefore willingly devote my first opportunity to reply. But shall I indeed condole with you? or shall I rather congratulate you on the perplexity you complain of? I know it is not pleasing; but I hope it will be sanctified and profitable to you.

Though I am no enemy to the acquisition of useful knowledge, I have seen many instances of young men who have been much hurt by what they expected to reap advantage from. They have gone to the academy humble, peaceable, spiritual, and lively; but have come out self-wise, dogmatically, censorious, and full of a wisdom founded upon the false maxims of the world. I have been ready to address them with that line of Milton: "If you are he—But ah! how fallen!"

I do not mention this as the necessary fault of the institution, but as the frequent effect of notions too hastily picked up, when not sanctified by grace, nor balanced by a proportional depth of spiritual experience. I am therefore glad to hear, that, notwithstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction, that you still need something which you cannot receive from men or books, in order to complete your fitness for the ministry: that you may be "a workman who needs not to be ashamed," and enabled rightly to divide (to distinguish and distribute) the word of truth.

It seems to me a point of more curiosity than use, to inquire too nicely into the modus of the Holy Spirit's assistance in the composure and delivery of sermons. If we cannot exactly state the boundaries between what we may deem the result of our own thoughts, and the needful influence of the Holy Spirit, it seems a safe way to give him the honor of the whole, and to attribute nothing to ourselves but our infirmities. If we have a capacity, means for improvement, diligence to make use of those means, and if that diligence is attended with any degree of success; may we not acknowledge that the former links of this chain are the effect of his goodness and favor, no less than the latter? To the question, How far is it lawful to expect this assistance of the Holy Spirit? I answer, It is lawful very far, even to lay the whole stress upon it, so as to be firmly persuaded that we can neither meditate nor speak to purpose without it; that if we have not this assistance, whatever else we have, or may think we have, we shall but "darken counsel by words without knowledge." For this, I think, I have warrant in John 15:5. If any person supposes he has so far mastered a system of divinity, that though he can indeed do better with the Spirit's assistance, yet he can make a tolerable shift without it, I envy him not this attainment. But if the question intends, How far a depend-once upon the Holy Spirit may lawfully supersede the use of means? I answer, Not in the least. The blessing and the means are so closely united, that they cannot be separated. The blessing may be surely expected, if diligently sought in the use of proper means, and we have no just reason to expect it without them. But to clear up the whole, let it be considered, What may deserve the name of diligence in this matter? and what are the proper means? By diligence, I understand spiritual diligence. Such an active, improving, industrious habit, as is peculiar to a

heart impressed with some real abiding sense of the love of God, the worth of souls, the shortness of time, and the importance of eternity. Without this turn of mind, though a man should spend sixteen hours every day in his study, he may be a mere trifler. The greatest part of his application will be spent on what is least necessary; and his knowledge will chiefly prove of that sort which puffs up, without communicating any real benefit: Genesis 41:21; Psalms 127:2. The chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are the holy Scriptures, and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw. And I believe you will find, by observation, that the man who is most frequent and fervent in prayer, and most devoted to the word of God, will shine and flourish above his fellows. Next to these, and derived from them, is meditation. By this, I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject, but a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us, what we see, hear, and feel, and to apply all for the illustration and confirmation of the written word to us. In the use of these means, and a humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience will enlarge: and this experience is the proper fund of our ministerial capacity, so far as it may be considered inherent in us: Proverbs 16:23; Matthew 13:52; 1 John 1:3.

These means are of universal importance. The wisest can do nothing without them, the weakest shall not use them in vain. There are likewise subordinate means, which may be healthful, and should in general be attended to: yet they ought not, I apprehend, to be considered as a sine qua non in a minister's call and fitness. The first preachers had them not, and some in the present day are enabled to do well without them.

Under this head, I principally intend all that comes under the usual designation of literature. A competent acquaintance with the learned languages, history, natural philosophy, &c. is very desirable. If these things are held in a proper subservience, if they do not engross too much of our time, nor add fuel to the fire of that self-importance which is our great snare; they may contribute to increase and enlarge our ideas, and facilitate our expressing ourselves with propriety. But these attainments (like riches) are attended with their peculiar temptations; and unless they are under the regulation of a sound judgment, and a spiritual frame of mind, will prove (like Saul's armor to David) rather cumbersome than useful in preaching. The sermons of preachers thus qualified are often more ingenious than edifying, and rather show off the preacher, than commend the Gospel of Christ. As you desire my advice with respect to your future studies, I shall comply without hesitation or ceremony. The original Scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them. There is doubtless a beauty, fullness, and spirit, in the originals, which the best translations do not always express. When a word or phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve one; and it is not to be supposed, unless they were perfectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit, that they should always prefer the best. Only be upon your guard lest you should be tempted to think, that, because you are master of the grammatical construction, and can tell the several acceptations of the words in the best authors, you are therefore and thereby master of the spiritual sense likewise. This you must derive from your experimental knowledge, and the influence and teaching of the Spirit of God.

Another thing which will much assist you, in composing and speaking properly and acceptably, is logic. This will teach you what properly belongs to your subject, and what may be best suppressed; and likewise, to explain, divide, enumerate, and range your ideas to advantage. A lax,

immethodical, disproportionate manner, is to be avoided. Yet beware of the contrary extreme. An affected starchiness and over-accuracy will fetter you, will make your discourses lean and dry, preclude an useful variety, and savor more of the school-lamp, than of that heavenly fire which alone can make our meditations efficacious, and profitable either to ourselves or our hearers. The proper medium can hardly be taught by rule; experience, observation, and prayer, are the best guides. As your inquiry seems chiefly to be, how to fill up your outlines. I would advise you to study the living as well as the dead, or rather more. Converse much with experienced Christians and exercised souls. You will find advantage in this respect, not only from the wise, but from the weak of the flock. In the course of your acquaintance, you will meet with some in a backsliding state, some under temptations, some walking in darkness, others rejoicing in the light, &c. Observe how their spirits work, what they say, and how they reason in their several cases; what methods and arguments you find most successful in comforting the feeble-minded, raising up those who are cast down, and the like, and what answers they return. Compare these with the word of God, and your own heart. What you observe of ten people in these different situations, may be applied to ten thousand. For though some circumstances vary, the heart of man, the aids of grace, and the artifices of Satan, in general, are universally the same. And whenever you are to preach, remember, that some of all these sorts will probably be before you, and each should have something said to their own peculiar ease. The tempted and distressed will be most probably relieved by opening the various states and exercises of the heart, and by showing, from scriptural and other examples, that no new thing has befallen them. The careless and backsliders, who have made a profession, should be reminded of that blessedness they once spoke of, and warned of their danger. Those who are now upon the mount, should be cautioned to expect a change, and to guard against security and spiritual pride. To the dead in trespasses and sins (some such will be always present), it is needful so preach the spirituality and sanction of the law, that they may be stirred up to seek to Jesus. Of him all awakened souls love to hear much. Let Jesus therefore be your capital subject. If you discuss some less essential topic, or bend all your strength to clear up some dark text, though you should display much learning and ingenuity, you will probably fall short of your main design, which I dare say will be to promote the glory of God, and the good of souls.

You will likewise find advantage, by attending as much as you can on those preachers whom God has blessed with much power, life, and success in their ministry. And in this you will do well not to confine yourself to any denomination or party, for the Spirit of the Lord is not confined. Different men have different gifts and talents. I would not wish you to be a slavish admirer of any man. Christ alone is our Master and Teacher. But study the excellencies of each: and if you observe a fault in any (for no human models are perfect), you will see what you are yourself to avoid. Your inquiries respecting my own experience on this subject, must be answered very briefly. I have long since learned, that if I was ever to be a minister, faith and prayer must make me one. I desire to seek the Lord’s direction, both in the choice and management of subjects; but I do not expect it in a way of extraordinary impulse, but in endeavoring to avail myself, to the best of my judgment, of present circumstances. The converse I have with my people, usually suggests what I am to preach to them. At first, my chief solicitude used to be, what I should find to say: I hope it is now, rather that I may not speak in vain. For the Lord has sent me here, not to acquire the character of a great speaker, but to win souls to Christ, and to edify his people. As to preparation, I make little use of books, excepting the Bible and a concordance. Though I preach without notes, I most frequently write more or less upon the subject. Often when I begin, I am at a loss how I shall proceed; but

one thing insensibly offers after another, and, in general, I believe the best and most useful parts of my sermon occur de novo while I am preaching. When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, every thing else is comparatively easy.

I should be very glad if anything I have offered may afford you satisfaction. The sum of my advice is this: Examine your heart and views. Can you appeal to Him who knows all things, concerning the sincerity of your aim, that you devote yourself to the work of the ministry, not for worldly regards, but with a humble desire to promote the Redeemer's kingdom? If so, and his providence has thus far concurred with you, trust him for your sufficiency of every kind, and he will not disappoint you, but will be near to strengthen you according to your day. Depend not upon any cisterns you can hew out for yourself, but rejoice that you have liberty to come to the fountain that is always full, and always flowing. You must not expect a mechanical sufficiency, such as artificers acquire by habit and exercise in their business. When you have preached well nineteen times, this will be no security for the twentieth. Yes, when you have been upheld for twenty years, should the Lord withhold his hand, you would be as much at a loss as at first. If you lean upon books or men, or upon your own faculties and attainments, you will be in fear and in danger of falling continually. But if you stay yourself upon the Lord, he will not only make good your expectations, but in time will give you a proper confidence in his goodness, and free you from your present anxiety.

One thing more I must mention as belonging to the subject: That a comfortable freedom for public service depends much upon the spirituality of our walk before God and man. Wisdom will not dwell with a trifling, an assuming, a censorious, or a worldly spirit. But if it is our business, and our pleasure, to contemplate Jesus, and to walk in his steps, he will bless us: we shall be like trees planted by a constant stream, and he will prosper the work of our hands.

Chapter 32

01.01. Five letters to a Christian friend

Five letters to a Christian friend

Letter 1 January 16, 1775.

Dear friend,

I can sympathize with you in your troubles—yet, knowing the nature of our calling, that, by an unalterable appointment, the way to the kingdom lies through many tribulations, I ought to rejoice, rather than otherwise, that to you it is given, not only to believe—but also to suffer. If you escaped these things, whereof all the Lord's children are partakers, might not you question your adoption into his family? How could the power of grace be manifest, either to you, in you, or by you, without afflictions? How could the corruptions and devastations of the heart be checked, without a cross? How could you acquire a tenderness and skill in speaking to those who are weary, without a taste of such trials as they also meet with? You would only be a hearsay witness to the truth, power, and sweetness of the precious promises, unless you have been in such a situation as to need them, and to find their suitableness and sufficiency. The Lord has given you a good desire to serve him in the Gospel, and he is now training you for that service. Many things, yes, the most important things, belonging to the Gospel ministry, are not to be learned by books and study—but by painful experience. You must expect a variety of difficult trials—but two things he has promised you—that you shall not be tried above what he will enable you to bear, and that all shall work together for your good! Were we to acquire no other knowledge of the Christian warfare, than what we could derive from cool and undisturbed book study, instead of coming forth as able ministers of the New Testament, and competently acquainted with the with the devices, the deep-laid devices and stratagems of Satan—we would prove to be worthless. But the Lord will take better care of those whom He loves and designs to honor. He will try, and permit them to be tried, in various ways. He will make them feel much affliction in themselves, that they may know how to feel much for others. This painful discipline is necessary to enable us to take the field in a public capacity with courage, wisdom, and success, that we may lead and animate others in the fight! It is equally necessary for our own sakes, that we may obtain and preserve the grace of humility, which He has taught you to set a high value upon. Indeed, we cannot value it too highly; for we can be neither comfortable, safe, nor habitually useful, without sincere humility! The root of pride lies deep in our fallen nature, and, where the Lord has given great abilities—pride would grow apace, if He did not mercifully watch over us, and suit His dealings with us, to keep it down.

Therefore I trust He will make you willing to endure hardships, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. May He enable you to behold Him with faith holding out the prize, and saying to you, "Fear none of those things that you shall suffer! Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life!"

We sail upon a turbulent and tumultuous sea—but we are embarked on a good vessel, and in a good cause. We have an infallible and almighty Pilot, who has the winds and weather at his command, and can silence the storm into a calm with a word, whenever he pleases. We may be

persecuted—but we shall not be forsaken; we may be cast down—but we cannot be destroyed. Many will molest us that we may fall—but the Lord will uphold us!

I am sorry to find you are quite alone at Cambridge; for I hoped there would be a succession of serious students to supply the place of those who are transplanted to shine as lights in the world. Yet you are not alone; for the Lord is with you, the best counselor and the best friend! There is a strange backwardness in us (at least in me) fully to improve that gracious intimacy to which he invites us. Alas! that we so easily wander from the fountain of life—to hew out broken cisterns for ourselves; and that we seem more attached to a few drops of his grace in our fellow-creatures, than to the fullness of grace that is in himself! I think nothing gives me a more striking sense of my depravity, than my perverseness and folly in this respect. Yet he bears with me, and does me good continually.

Letter 2

March, 1776

Dear friend,

It gave me particular pleasure to hear that the Lord helped you through your difficulties, and succeeded your desires. And I have sympathized with you in the complaints you make of a dark and mournful frame of spirit afterwards. But is not this, upon the whole, right and beneficial, that, if the Lord is pleased at one time to strengthen us remarkably in answer to prayer—that he should leave us at another time, so far as to give us a real sensibility that we were supported by his power, and not our own?

Besides, as you feel a danger of being elated by the respect paid to you, was it not a merciful and seasonable dispensation which made you feel your own weakness, to prevent your being exalted above measure? The Lord, by withdrawing his smiles from you, reminded you that the smiles of men are of little value, otherwise perhaps you might have esteemed them too highly. Indeed, you pastors that know the Lord, are singular instances of the power of his grace; for (like the young men in Daniel 3:1-30.) you live in the very midst of the fire! Your mathematical studies in particular have such a tendency to engross and fix the mind to the contemplation of cold and uninteresting truth, and you are surrounded with so much intoxicating applause if you succeed in your researches, that for a soul to be kept humble and alive in such a situation, is such a proof of the Lord’s presence and power—as Moses had when he saw the bush unconsummated in the midst of the flames! I believe I had naturally a turn for the mathematics myself, and dabbled in them a little way; and though I did not go far, my head, sleeping and waking, was stuffed with diagrams and calculations. Everything I looked at that exhibited either a right line or a curve, set my wits a wool-gathering. What then must have been the case—had I proceeded to the study of speculative geometry? I bought my namesake’s geometry book—but I have reason to be thankful that I left it as I found it, a sealed book, and that the bent of my mind was drawn to something of more real importance before I understood it. I say not this to discourage you in your pursuits. they lie in your line and path of duty; in mine they did not. As to your academics, I am glad that the Lord enables you to show those among whom you live, that the knowledge of his Gospel does not despoil you either of diligence or acumen. However, as I said, you need a double guard of grace, to preserve you from being either puffed up or deadened by those things, which, to preserve your rank and

character in the University while you remain there, are, if taken in the aggregate, little better than splendid trifles!

If my poor people could form the least conception of what the learned at Cambridge chiefly admire in each other, and what is the intrinsic reward of all their toil, they would say, "What a foolish waste of time!" How gladly would some of them, if such mathematical and metaphysical lumber could by any means get into their heads, how gladly would they desire to get it out again! How many perplexities are they freed from, by their happy ignorance, which often pester those to their lives' end—who have had their natural proneness to vain reasoning sharpened by academic studies!

Letter 3 May 18, 1776.

Dear friend,

Though I wished to hear from you sooner, I put a candid interpretation upon your silence—but felt no disposition to anger. Let our correspondence be free from fetters. Write when you please, and when you can. I will do the like. Apologies may be spared on both sides. I am not a very punctual correspondent myself, having so many letters to write, and therefore have no right to stand upon punctilios with you.

I sympathize with you in your sorrow for your friend's death. Such things are very distressing! But such a case might have been our own. Let us pray for grace to be thankful for ourselves, and submit everything in humble silence to the sovereign Lord—who has a right to do as He pleases with His own.

We feel and grieve for any deaths in our own little circles; but O, the dreadful mischief of sin! Human death is as frequent as the hours, the minutes, perhaps the moments of every day. And though we may be impacted by but one death in a million—the souls of all others have an equal capacity for endless happiness or misery!

I congratulate you upon your admission into the ministry, and pray God to favor you with a single eye to his glory, and a fresh anointing of his Holy Spirit, that you may come forth as a scribe well instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and that his Word in your mouth may abundantly prosper.

I truly pity those who rise early and study late, and eat the bread of worry, with no higher prize and prospect in view—than the obtaining of academic honors! Such pursuits will before long appear (as they really are) as vain as the foolish games of children! May the Lord impress them with a noble ambition of living to and for him. If these scholars, who are laboring for pebbles under the semblance of goodly pearls, had a discovery of the Pearl of great price, how quickly and gladly would they lay down their admired attainments, and become fools—that they might be truly wise!

Friend, what a snare have you escaped! You would have been nothing but a scholar—had not God visited your heart and enlightened you by His grace! Now I trust you account your former academic gains, but loss—compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus. What you have attained in the way of learning, will be useful to you—if sanctified, and chiefly so by the knowledge which you have of its insufficiency to any valuable purpose in the great concerns of life—knowing God and walking with Him!

I am pleased with your fears lest you should not be understood in your preaching. Indeed, there is a danger of it. It is not easy for people of quick minds—duly to conceive how amazingly ignorant and slow of apprehension, the bulk of our congregations generally are. When our own ideas are clear, and our expressions proper—we are ready to think we have sufficiently explained ourselves; and yet, perhaps, nine out of ten (especially of those who are destitute of spiritual light) know little more of what we say—than if we were speaking Greek! A degree of this inconvenience is always inseparable from written sermons. They cast our thoughts into a style, which, though familiar to ourselves, is too remote from common conversation to be comprehended by narrow capacities of our hearers; which is one chief reason of the preference I give to extemporary preaching. When we read to the people, they think themselves less concerned in what is offered—than when we speak to them point-blank.

It seems a good rule, which I have met with somewhere, and which perhaps I have mentioned to you—to fix our eyes upon some one of the congregation whom we judge of the least mental capacity. If we can make him understand, we may hope to be understood by the rest of our hearers.

Let those who seek to be admired for the exactness of their compositions, enjoy the poor reward they aim at. it is best for Gospel preachers to speak plain language. If we thus singly aim at the glory of our Master and the good of souls—we may hope for the accompanying power of his Spirit, which will give our discourses a weight and energy, that the golden-mouthed Demosthenes had no conception of!

I can give you no information of a pastorate in a better situation. But either the Lord will provide you one, or I trust he will give you usefulness, and fullness and a competency of health and spirits where you are. He who caused Daniel to thrive upon vegetables and water, can make you strong and cheerful even in your bad situation—if he sees that best for you. All things obey him, and you need not fear but he will enable you for whatever service he has appointed you to perform! This letter has been a week in hand—many interruptions from without, and indispositions within. I seem to while away my life, and shall be glad to be saved upon the footing of the thief upon the cross, without any hope or plea—but the power and grace of Jesus, who has said, I will in nowise cast out! Adieu.

Letter 4

Sept. 10, 1777.

Dear friend,

I was glad to hear from you at last, not being willing to think myself forgotten. It seems, by your account, that you are far from well—but I hope you are as well as you ought to be—that is, as well as the Lord sees it good for you to be. I say, I hope so—for I am not sure that the length and vehemence of your sermons, which you tell me astonish many people, may not be rather improper and imprudent, considering the weakness of your constitution; at least, if this expression of yours is justly expounded by a report which has reached me, that the length of your sermons is frequently two hours, and the vehemence of your voice so great that you may be heard far beyond the church-walls.

I would be unwilling to dampen your zeal—but I feel unwilling likewise, that by excessive, unnecessary exertions, that you should wear away very soon, and preclude your own usefulness! This concern is so much upon my mind, that I begin with it, though it makes me skip over the former part of your letter—but when I have relieved myself upon this point, I can easily skip back again.

I am perhaps the more ready to credit the report, because I know that the spirits of some high-strung people are highly volatile. I consider you as mounted upon a fiery steed, and provided you use due management and circumspection, you travel more pleasantly than we plodding folks upon our sober, stolid horses—but then, if instead of pulling the rein you plunge in the spurs, and add wings to the wind—I cannot but be in pain for the consequences. Permit me to remind you of an old adage—the end of speaking is to be heard; and if the person farthest from the preacher can hear, he speaks loud enough.

Upon some occasions, a few sentences of a discourse may be enforced with a voice still more elevated—but to be uncommonly loud from beginning to end—is hurtful to the speaker, and in no way useful to the hearer. It is a fault which many inadvertently give into at first, and which many have repented of too late—when the harmful practice has rendered it habitual, it is not easily corrected. I know some think that preaching very loudly—and preaching with power—are synonymous expressions. But your judgment is too good to fall in with that false sentiment.

There is a quotation from Homer, where he describes the eloquence of Nestor, and compares it, not to a thunderstorm or hurricane—but to a fall of snow, which, though pressing, insinuating, and penetrating, is soft and gentle. I think the simile is beautiful and expressive.

Secondly (as we say), as to long preaching. There is an old-fashioned instrument called an hour-glass, which in days of yore, before clocks and watches abounded, used to be the measure of many a good sermon, and I think it a tolerable stint. I cannot wind up my ends to my own satisfaction in a much shorter time, nor am I pleased with myself if I greatly exceed it.

If an angel was to preach for two hours—unless his hearers were angels likewise—the greater part of them wish that he had preached for a much shorter time! It is a shame it should be so—but so it is! Partly through the weakness and partly through the wickedness of the flesh—we can seldom stretch our attention to spiritual things for two hours together without cracking it, and hurting its spring! When weariness begins—edification ends! It is better to feed our people like chickens—a little and often—than to cram them like turkeys, until they cannot hold one more mouthful!

Besides, overlong sermons break in upon family concerns, and often call off the thoughts from the sermon—to the pudding at home, which is in danger of being over-boiled! Long sermons leave likewise but little time for secret or family religion, which are both very good in their place, and are entitled to a share of each Sunday.

Upon the preacher they must have a bad effect, and tend to wear him down before his time. I have known some, by over preaching at first, have been constrained to sit still and do little or nothing for months or years afterwards. I recommend you to this wise advice: Set out at such a pace—that you may hold out to your journey’s end.

Now, if Fame with her hundred mouths has brought me a false report of you, and you are not guilty of preaching either too long or too loud, still I am not willing my remonstrance may go for nothing. I desire you to accept it, and thank me for it as a proof of my love to you, and likewise of the sincerity of my friendship; for if I had wished to flatter you—I could easily have written on another subject.

I have one more report to trouble you with, because it troubles me; and therefore you must bear a part of my burden. Assure me it is false, and I will send you one of the handsomest letters I can devise by way of thanks. It is reported, (but I will not believe it until you say I must), that you stand upon your tiptoes, upon the point of being whirled out of our vortex, and hurried away, comet-like, into the regions of eccentricity! In plain English—that you have a hankering to be an itinerant. But to be serious—for it is a serious subject; let me beg you to deliberate well, and to pray earnestly before you take this step. Be afraid of acting in your own spirit, or under a wrong impression, however honestly you intend—you may be mistaken. The Lord has given you a little charge; be faithful in it, and in his good time he will advance you to a greater—but let his providence evidently open the door to you, and be afraid of moving one step before the cloud and pillar.

I have had my warm fits and desires of this sort in my time—but I have reason to be thankful that I was held in with a strong hand. I wish there were more itinerant preachers. If a man has grace and zeal, and but limited abilities, let him go and diffuse the substance of a dozen sermons over as many counties. But you have natural and acquired abilities, which qualify you for the more difficult, and, in my judgment, not less important, station of a church minister. I wish you to be a burning, shining, steady light. You may perhaps have less popularity; that is, you will be less exposed to the workings of self and the snares of Satan, if you stay with us—but I think you may live in the full exercise of your gifts and graces, be more consistent with your voluntary engagements, and have more peace of mind, and humble fellowship with God—in watching over a flock which he has committed to you, than, by forsaking them, to wander up and down the earth without a determined scope.

Letter 5

Dear friend,

If you have not actually passed the point of no return concerning going into an itinerant ministry—if there is yet room for deliberation, I once more entreat you to pause and consider. In many respects I ought to be willing to learn from you—but in one point I have a little advantage of you. I am some years older, both in life and in experience; and in this difference of time perhaps I have learned something more of the heart, the world, and the devices of Satan, than you have had opportunity for. I hope I would not dampen your zeal—but I will pray the Lord to direct it into the best channel for permanent usefulness. I say permanent. I doubt not that you would be useful in the itinerant ministry—but I more and more observe great inconveniences follow in that way. Where you make a gathering of people, others will follow you; and if they all possessed your spirit, and had your unselfish views, it might be well. But, generally, an able preacher only so far awakens people to a desire to hear, as exposes them to the incursions of various winds of doctrine, and the attempts of injudicious pretenders, who will resemble you in nothing but your eagerness to post from place to place. From such measures, in time, proceed errors, parties, contentions, offenses, enthusiasms, spiritual pride, and a noisy ostentatious form of

godliness—but little of that power and life of faith which shows itself by humility, meekness, and love. A parochial minister, who lives among his people, who sees and converses with them frequently, and exemplifies his doctrine in their view by his practice, having knowledge of their spiritual states, trials, growth, and dangers—suits himself to their various states, and, by the blessing of God, builds them up, and brings them forward in faith and holiness. He is instrumental in forming their experience; he leads them to a solid, orderly, Scriptural knowledge of Divine things. If his name is not in so many mouths as that of the itinerant—it is upon the hearts of the people of his charge. He lives with them as a father with his children. His steady consistent behavior silences in some measure the clamors of his enemies; and the Lord opens him doors of occasional usefulness in many places.

I now wish I had taken larger paper, for I have not room for all I would say. I have no end to serve. I am of no party. I wish well to itinerants who love and preach the Gospel. I am content that they should labor that way, who have not talents nor gifts to support the character, and fill up the office of a parochial minister. But I think you are qualified for more important service. We are hasty, like children—but God often appoints us a waiting time. Perhaps it requires as much or more grace to wait—than to be active; for it is more trying to SELF. After all, whatever course you take, I shall love you, pray for you, and be glad to see you.

01.01. Four letters to a Christian friend

Four letters to a Christian friend

Letter 1

May, 1774. My dear Madam,

We are glad to hear that you had a safe though perilous journey. I hope I shall be always mindful to pray, that the Lord may guide, bless, and comfort you, and give you such a manifestation of his person, power, and grace, as may set you at liberty from all fear, and fill you with abiding peace and joy in believing. Remember that Jesus has all power, the fullness of compassion, and embraces with open arms all that come to him for life and salvation.

Through mercy, Mrs. **** is better again; and I remain so, though death and illness are still walking about the town. O for grace to take warning by the sufferings of others—to set loose to the world, and so number our days as to incline our hearts to the one thing needful. Indeed that one thing includes many things, sufficient to engage the best of our thoughts and the most of our time—if we were duly sensible of their importance. But I may adopt the Psalmist's expression, "My soul cleaves to the dust!" How is it that the truths of which I have the most undoubted conviction, and which are, of all others, the most weighty—should make so little impression upon me? O I know the cause! It is deeply rooted. An evil nature cleaves to me; so that when I would do good—evil is present with me.

It is, however, a mercy to be made sensible of it, and in any measure humbled for it. Before long, this evil nature will be dropped into the grave—then all hindrances shall cease. This thought gives relief—I shall not always live this poor dying life. When I shall see the Redeemer as he is—I shall be like him. This will be a heaven indeed, to behold his glory without a veil, to rejoice in his love without a cloud, and to sing his praises without one jarring or wandering note, forever! In the mean time, may He enable us to serve him with our best. O that every power, faculty, and talent, were devoted to him! He deserves all we have, and ten thousand times more if we had it; for he has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. He gave himself for us. In one sense we are well suited to answer his purpose; for if we were not vile and worthless beyond expression, the exceeding riches of his grace would not have been so gloriously displayed. His glory shines more in redeeming one sinner—than in preserving a thousand angels!

Poor Mr.**** is still in the dark valley—but we trust prayer shall yet bring him out. Mighty things have been done in answer to prayer; and the Lord's arm is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy. It is our part to wait until we have an answer. One of his own hymns says,

The promise may be long deferred,

But never comes too late. The sudden death of our friend is a heavy blow. He was an amiable, judicious, candid man, and an excellent preacher in a great sphere of usefulness; and his age and constitution gave hopes that he might have been eminently serviceable for many years. How often

does the Lord write vanity upon all our expectations from men! He visited a person ill of a putrid fever, and carried the seeds of infection with him to London, where he died. His wife is a very excellent and accomplished woman—but exceedingly delicate in her frame and spirits. How can she bear so sudden and severe a stroke! But yet I hope she will afford a proof of the Lord's all-sufficiency and faithfulness.

O madam, the Lord our God is a great God! If he frowns, the smiles of the whole creation can afford no comfort; and if he is pleased to smile, he can enable the soul under the darkest dispensations to say, "All is well." Yet the flesh will feel, and it ought. Otherwise the exercise of faith, patience, and resignation, would be impracticable. I have lost in him one of my most valued and valuable friends—but what is my loss to that of his people! May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord increase you more and more, you and your children. May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you his peace. I thank him for leading you to us—but especially for making your visit here in any measure agreeable and profitable to yourself. If I have been an instrument in his hand for your comfort, I have reason to remember it among the greatest favors he has conferred upon me. And now, dear madam, once more farewell. If the Lord spares our lives, I hope we shall see each other again upon earth. But above all, let us rejoice in the blessed Gospel, by which immortality is brought to light, and a glorious prospect opened beyond the grave!

There sits our Savior enthroned in light,

Clothed with a body like our own.

There at least, after all the changes and trials of this earthly state, we shall meet to part no more.

Letter 2

1775. My dear Madam,

If the Lord favors Miss M**** with a taste for the library of my proposing, she will be like the merchant-man seeking goodly pearls—and will count all other books but pebbles in comparison of those four volumes, which present us with something new and important whenever we look into them. I shall be much obliged to her if she will commit the third chapter of Proverbs to her memory, and I shall pray the Lord to write it in her heart.

You surprise me when you tell me, that my birthday was noticed by those I never saw. Be so good as to return my thanks to my unknown friends, and tell them, that I pray that our common Lord and Savior will bless them abundantly. His people while here are scattered abroad, and separated by hills and rivers, and too often by denominations and prejudices—but by and by we shall all meet where we shall all know and acknowledge each other, and rejoice together for evermore! I have lately read with much pleasure, and I hope with some profit, the history of the Greenland Mission. Upon the whole, it is a glorious work. None who love the Lord will refuse to say—it is the finger of God indeed. For my own part, my soul rejoices in it; and I honor the instruments, as men who have hazarded their lives in an extraordinary manner for the sake of the Lord Jesus. I am sure that none could have sustained such discouragements at first, or have obtained such success afterwards, unless the Lord had sent, supported, and owned them.

I hope we shall have an interest in your prayers. I trust the Lord is yet with us. We have some ripe for the sickle, and some just springing up; some tokens of his gracious presence among us—but sin and Satan cut us out abundance of work as individuals, though through mercy as a church, we walk in peace. The "toad and spider" are an exhibition of my daily experience. I am often wounded—but the Lord is my health. Still I am a living monument of God’s mercy; and I trust that word, "Because I live you shall live also," will carry me to the end. I am poor, weak, and foolish—but Jesus is wise, strong, and abounding in grace. He has given me a desire to trust my all in his hands, and He will not disappoint the expectation which he himself has raised. At present I have but little to say, and but little time to say it in. When you think of this place, I hope you will think and believe, that you have friends here most cordially interested in your welfare, and often remembering you in prayer. May the Lord be your guide and shield, and give you the best desires of your heart. I pray him to establish and settle you in the great truths of his Word. I trust he will. We learn more, and more effectually, by one minute’s communication with God through the medium of His Word—than we could from an assembly of theologians, or a library of books!

Letter 3

August, 1775. My dear Madam,

It is not owing to forgetfulness that your letter has been thus long unanswered. It has lain within my view this two weeks, demanding my first leisure hour—but affairs of daily occurrence have been so many and so pressing, that I have been constrained to put it off until now. I trust the Lord, by his Spirit and providence, will direct and prosper the settlement of your children. Give my love to your daughter, Miss M****. My idea of her enlarges. Methinks I see her aspiring to be as tall as her mamma. I hope likewise, that she increases in grace and wisdom, as in years and stature; and that hearing our Lord’s flock is a little flock, she feels a thirst to be one of the happy number which constitutes his fold. If she has such a desire, I can tell who gave it her, for I am persuaded it was not born with her; and where the good farmer sows, there will he also reap. Therefore, dear Miss M****, press forward—knock, and it shall be opened unto you, for yet there is room. O what a fold! O what a pasture! O what a Shepherd! Let us love, and sing, and wonder!

I hope the godly people are praying for our sinful, troubled land, in this dark day. The Lord is angry, the sword is drawn, and I am afraid nothing but the spirit of wrestling prayer can prevail for the returning it into the scabbard. Could things have proceeded to these extremities, except the Lord had withdrawn his beneficial blessing? It is a time of prayer. We see the beginning of trouble—but who can foresee the possible consequences? The fire is kindled—but how far it may spread, those who are above may perhaps know better than we.

I do not meddle with the disputes of party, nor concern myself with any political quarrels—but such as are laid down in Scripture. There I read that righteousness exalts a nation, and that sin is the reproach, and, if persisted in, the ruin of any people. Some people are startled at the enormous sum of our national debt. Those who understand spiritual arithmetic may be well startled if they sit down and compute the debt of national sin. Item, The profligacy of manners. Item, Perjury. Item, The cry of blood, the blood of thousands, perhaps millions, from the East Indies. It would take sheets, yes quires of paper, to draw out the particulars under each of these heads—and even then, much would remain untold. What can we answer, when the Lord says, "Shall not I visit you for these things? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Since we received the news of the first hostilities in America, we have had an additional prayer-meeting. Could I hear that professors in general, instead of wasting their breath in censuring men and political measures, were plying the Throne of Grace, I would still hope for a respite. Poor New England! once the glory of the earth, now likely to be visited with fire and sword. They have left their first love, and the Lord is sorely contending with them. Yet surely their sins as a people are not to be compared with ours. I am just so much affected with these things as to know, that I am not affected enough. Oh! my spirit is sadly cold and insensible, or I would lay them to heart in a different manner. Yet I endeavor to give the alarm as far as I can. There is one political maxim which comforts me. "The Lord reigns!" His hand guides the storm; and he knows those who are his—how to protect, support, and deliver them. He will take care of his own cause; yes, he will extend his kingdom, even by these formidable methods. Men have one thing in view; He has another—and his counsel shall stand! The chief piece of news since my last is concerning B.A. She has finished her course, and is now with the great multitude who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the Word of his testimony. Tuesday the 1st of February she was in our assembly, was taken ill the next day, and died while we were assembling the Tuesday following. She had an easy death, retained her senses and her speech until the last minute, and went without a struggle or a sigh. She was not in raptures during her illness—but was composed, and maintained a strong and lively faith. She had a numerous gathering about her bed daily, who were all witnesses to the power of faith, and to the faithfulness of the Lord, enabling her to triumph over the approaches of death; for she was well known and well respected. She will be much missed—but I hope He will answer the many prayers she put up for us, and raise up others in her place. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Blessed are they who know whom they have believed, and when death comes can cheerfully rest their hopes on him who died that we might live. She had been long a precious and honorable woman—but her hope in the trying hour rested not in what she had done for the Lord—but upon what he had done for her; not upon the change his grace has wrought in her—but upon the righteousness he had wrought out for her by his obedience unto death. This supported her; for she saw nothing in herself but what she was ashamed of. She saw reason to renounce her own goodness, as well as her own sins—as to the point of acceptance with God, and died, as Paul lived, determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Our friends, Mr. and Mrs. C**** are moving to Scotland soon. All beneath the moon (like the moon itself) is subject to incessant change. Alterations and separations are graciously appointed of the Lord, to remind us that this world is not our rest, and to prepare our thoughts for that approaching last change, which shall fix us forever in an unchangeable state! O Madam! What shall we poor worms render to him who has brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel, taken away the sting of death, revealed a glorious prospect beyond the grave, and given us eyes to see it? The reflection, that we must, before long, take a final farewell of all that is most capable of pleasing us upon earth, is not only tolerable—but pleasant. For we know we cannot fully possess our best friend, our chief treasure, until we have done with all below. Nay, we cannot until then, properly see each other. We are cased up in vehicles of clay, and converse together as if we were in different coaches with the blinds close drawn round. We see the carriage, and the voice tells us that we have a friend within it. But we shall know each other better, when death shall open the coach-doors, and bring out the company, and lead them into the glorious apartments which the Lord has appointed to be the common residence of those who love him. What an assembly will that be! What a constellation of glory, when each individual shall shine like

the sun in the kingdom of their Father! No sins, sorrows, temptations; no veils, clouds, or prejudices, shall interrupt us then! All names of vain distinction (the fruits of present remaining darkness, the channels of bigotry, and the stumbling-block of the world), will be at an end. The description you give of your present residence pleases me much, and chiefly because it describes and manifests to me something still more interesting, I mean the peaceable situation of your mind. Had he placed you in an Eden some months ago, it would hardly have awakened your descriptive talent. But he whom the winds and seas obey has calmed your mind, and I trust will go on to fill you with all joy and peace in believing. It is no great matter where we are, provided we know that the Lord has placed us there, and that he is with us!

Letter 4

1776. My dear Madam,

We take it for granted that you will now most certainly make us a visit. Do come as soon, and stay as long, as you possibly can. Methinks you will be glad to get out of the smell and noise of London, as soon as possible. If we did not go to London now and then, we would perhaps forget how people live there. Especially I pity professors—they are exposed to as many dangers as people who live in the coal mines; chilling damps, scorching blasts, epidemic disorders, owing to the impure air. Such are the winds of false doctrines, the explosions of controversy, the blights of worldly conversation, the contagion of evil custom. In short, a person had need have a good constitution of grace, and likewise to be well supplied with antidotes, to preserve a tolerable share of spiritual health in such an ungodly situation. And now, how shall I fill up the rest of the paper? It is a shame for a Christian and a minister to say he has no subject at hand, when the inexhaustible theme of redeeming love is ever pressing upon our attention. I will tell you then, though you know it—that the Lord reigns! He who once bore our sins, and carried our sorrows—is seated upon a throne of glory, and exercises all power in heaven and on earth. Thrones, principalities, and powers, bow before him. Every event in the kingdoms of providence and of grace—are under his rule. His providence pervades and manages the whole universe, and is as minutely attentive to every part—as if there were only a single object in his view. From the tallest archangel to the smallest ant or fly—all depend on him for their being, their preservation, and their powers. He directs the sparrows where to build their nests, and where to find their food. He over-rules the rise and fall of nations; and bends, with an invincible energy and unerring wisdom—all events to his sovereign will! So that while many intend other outcomes—their designs all concur and coincide in the accomplishment of his holy will.

He restrains with a mighty hand—the still more formidable efforts of the powers of darkness. Satan with all his hosts cannot exert their malice a hair’s-breadth beyond the limits of his permission. This omnipotent Savior is the head and husband of His believing people. How happy are those whom it is his good pleasure to bless! How safe are they whom he has engaged to protect! How honored and privileged are they to whom he is pleased to manifest himself, and whom he enables and warrants to claim him as their friend and eternal potion! Having redeemed them by his own blood—he esteems them as his treasure, his jewels, and protects them as the pupil of his eye. They shall not lack any good thing. They need not fear. His unerring eye is upon them in every situation; His ear is always open to their prayers; and His everlasting arms are under them for their sure support! On earth he guides their steps, controls their enemies, and directs all his

dispensations for their spiritual good. While in heaven he is pleading their cause, preparing a glorious home for them, and communicating down to them reviving foretastes of the glory which they shall shortly enter into. "The Lord reigns! Let the earth rejoice!" Psalms 97:1 "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!" Revelation 19:6.

O how is this mystery hidden from an unbelieving world! Who can believe it, until it is made known by personal experience, what an fellowship is maintained in this land of shadows between the Lord of glory—and sinful worms! How should we praise him that he has visited us! For we were once blind to his beauty, and insensible to his love, and would have remained so to the last, had he not revealed his goodness and grace to us, and been found by us when we sought him not.

Mrs. **** presents her love. The bite of the leech, which I mentioned to you, has confined her to the house ever since—but I hope she will be able to go out tomorrow. We were for a while apprehensive of worse consequences—but the Lord is gracious. He shows us in a variety of instances what dependent creatures we are, how blind to events, and how easily the methods which we take to relieve ourselves from a small inconvenience may plunge us into a greater trouble. Thus we learn (happy indeed if we can effectually learn it) that there is no safety—but in his protection, and that nothing can do us good—but by his blessing. As for myself, I see so many reasons why he might contend with me, that I am amazed that he affords me and mine so much peace, and appoints us so few trials. We live as upon a field of battle. Many are hourly suffering and falling around us; and I can give no reason why we are preserved—but that he is God, and not man. What a mercy that we are only truly known to him, who is alone able to hear us! May the Lord bless you, comfort you, guide you, and guard you!

Chapter 34

01.01. God rules all!

God rules all!

February, 1774

Dear sir,

"I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. Psalms 135:5-6. God rules all! And though He is concealed by a veil of second causes from common eyes, so that they can perceive only the means, instruments, and contingencies by which he works, and therefore think He does nothing; yet, in reality, He does all, according to His own counsel and pleasure, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. Who can enumerate all the beings and events, which are incessantly before His eye, adjusted by His wisdom, dependent on His will, and regulated by His power! If we consider the heavens, the work of His fingers, the moon and the stars which He has ordained; if we call in the assistance of astronomers to help us in forming a conception of the number, distances, magnitudes, and motions of the heavenly bodies—the more we search, the more we shall be confirmed, that these are but a small portion of His ways! But He calls them all by their names, upholds them by His power, and without His continual energy upholding them—they would rush into confusion, or sink into nothing!

If we speak of intelligences, He is the life, the joy, the sun of all that are capable of happiness. Whatever may be signified by the thrones, principalities, and powers in the world of light, they are all dependent upon his power, and obedient to his command. It is equally true of angels as of men, that without him they can do nothing. The powers of darkness are likewise under his subjection and control. Though but little is said of them in Scripture, we read enough to assure us that their number must be immensely great, and that their strength, subtlety, and malice are such as we may tremble to think of them as our enemies, and probably should—but for our strange insensibility to whatever does not fall under the cognizance of our outward senses. But he holds them all in a chain, so that they can do or attempt nothing but by his permission; and whatever he permits them to do has its appointed subservience in accomplishing his designs. To come nearer home, and to speak of what seems more suited to our scanty apprehensions—still we may be lost in wonder. Before this blessed and only Potentate, all the nations of the earth are but as the dust upon the balance, and the small drop of a bucket, and might be thought (if compared with the immensity of his works) scarcely worthy of his notice! Yet here he presides, pervades, provides, protects, and rules. In him his creatures live, move, and have their being. From him is their food and preservation. The eyes of all are upon him—what he gives they gather, and can gather no more! And at his word they sink into the dust! There is not a worm which crawls upon the ground, or a flower which grows in the pathless wilderness, or a shell upon the sea-shore—but bears the impress of his wisdom, power, and goodness. With respect to men, he reigns with uncontrolled dominion over every kingdom, family, and individual. Here we may be astonished at his wisdom in employing free agents, the greater part of whom are his enemies, to accomplish his purposes! But,

however reluctant, they all serve him. His patience likewise is wonderful. Multitudes, yes, nearly our whole species, spend the life and strength which he affords them, and abuse all the bounties he heaps upon them—in the ways of sin! His commands are disregarded, his name blasphemed, his mercy disdained, his power defied—yet still he spares! It is an eminent part of his government, to restrain the depravity of human nature, and in various ways to check its effects, which, if left to itself, without his providential control, would presently make earth the very image of hell—for the vilest men are not allowed to perpetrate a thousandth part of the evil which their hearts would prompt them to. The earth, though lying in the wicked one, is filled with the goodness of the Lord. He preserves man and beast, sustains the young lion in the forest, feeds the birds of the air, which have neither storehouse or barn, and adorns the insects and the flowers of the field with a beauty and elegance beyond all that can be found in the courts of kings!

Still more wonderful, is Christ's administration in His kingdom of grace! He is present with all His creatures—but in a special manner with His own people. Each of these are monuments of a more illustrious display of power, than that which spread abroad the heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth. For He finds them all in a state of rebellion and enmity—and makes them His willing people! From the moment that He reveals is love to them—He espouses their cause, and takes all their concerns into His own hands. He is near and attentive to every one of them—as if there was only that one! This high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, before whom the angels veil their faces—condescends to hold communion with those whom men despise. He passes by the kings and the princes, to manifest Himself to an humble soul in a mud-walled cottage! He comforts them when in trouble, strengthens them when weak, makes their beds in sickness, revives them when fainting, upholds them when falling, and so seasonably and effectually manages for them, that, though they are persecuted and tempted, though their enemies are many and mighty—nothing is able to separate them from His love! And all this he does alone. All the abilities, powers, and instincts, which are found among creatures, are emanations from his fullness. All changes, successes, disappointments—all that is memorable in the annals of history, all the rising and falls of empires, all the turns in human life—take place according to his plan. In vain men contrive and combine to accomplish their own counsels, unless they are parts of his counsel likewise! The efforts of their utmost strength and wisdom are crossed and reversed, by the feeblest and most unthought-of circumstances. But when he has a work to accomplish, and his time has come, however inadequate and weak the means he employs may seem to a carnal eye—the success is infallibly secured. For all things serve him, and are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter. Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are your ways, O King of saints! This is the God whom we adore! This is he who invites us to lean upon his almighty arm, and promises to guide us with his unerring eye! He says to all of his children, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine! When you go through deep waters and great trouble—I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty—you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression—you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3.

Therefore, while in the path of duty, and following his call, we may cheerfully pass on, regardless of apparent difficulties; for the Lord, whose we are, and who has taught us make his glory our highest end, will go before us, and at his word crooked things become straight, light shines out of

darkness, and mountains sink into plains! Faith may and must be exercised; experience must and will confirm what his word declares, that the heart is deceitful, and that man in his best estate is vanity! But his promises to those who fear him, shall be confirmed likewise, and they shall find him, in all situations, to be our sun, shield, and exceeding great reward.

I have lost another of my people; a mother in our Israel; a person of much experience, eminent grace, wisdom, and usefulness. She walked with God forty years. She was one of the Lord’s poor; but her poverty was decent, sanctified, and honorable. She lived respected, and her death is considered as a public loss. It is a great loss to me: I shall miss her advice and example, by which I have been often edified and animated. But Jesus still lives. Almost her last words were, "The Lord is my portion, says my soul."

Chapter 35

01.01. How to walk with God

How to walk with God

March, 1773

Dear sir, A simple dependence upon the teaching and influence of the good Spirit of God, so as not to supersede the use of appointed means, would, if it could be uniformly maintained, make every part of duty easy and successful. It would free us from much solicitude, and prevent many mistakes. Methinks I have a subject in view already, a subject of great importance to myself, and which perhaps will not be displeasing to you—How to walk with God in the daily occurrences of life, so as to do everything for his sake and by his strength. When we are justified by faith, and accepted in the Beloved—we become heirs of everlasting life; but we cannot know the full value of our privileges, until we enter upon the state of eternal glory. For this, most who are converted have to wait some time after they are partakers of grace. Though the Lord loves them, hates sin, and teaches them to hate it—he appoints them to remain a while in a sinful world, and to groan under the burden of a depraved nature. He could put them in immediate possession of the heaven for which he has given them a fitness—but he does not. He has a service for them here; an honor which is worth all they can suffer, and for which eternity will not afford an opportunity, namely—to be instruments of promoting his designs, and manifesting his grace in the world. Strictly speaking, this is the whole of our business here, the only reason why life is prolonged, or for which it is truly desirable, that we may fill up our connections and situations, improve our comforts and our crosses, in such a manner as that God may be glorified in us and by us. As he is a bountiful Master and a kind Father, he is pleased to afford a variety of temporal blessings, which sweeten our service, and as coming from his hand are very valuable. But they are by no means worth living for, considered in themselves, as they can neither satisfy our desires, preserve us from trouble, or support as under it. That light of God's countenance, which can pervade the walls and dissipate the gloom of a dungeon, is unspeakably preferable to all that can be enjoyed in a palace without it. The true end of life is, to live not to ourselves—but to Him who died for us; and while we devote ourselves to his service upon earth, to rejoice in the prospect of being happy with him forever in heaven.

These things are generally known and acknowledged by professors; but they are a favored few who act consistently with their avowed principles; who honestly, diligently, and without reserve, endeavor to make the most of their talents and strength in promoting the Lord's service, and allow themselves in no views or designs but what are plainly subordinate and subservient to it. Yes, I believe the best of the Lord's servants see cause enough to confess, that they are not only unprofitable in comparison of what they wish to be—but in many instances unfaithful likewise. They find so many snares, hindrances, and temptations, arising from without, and so much encumbrance from sin which dwells within—that they have more cause for humiliation than self-complacence, even when they seem most earnest and most useful.

However, we have no Scriptural evidence that we serve the Lord at all, any farther than we find a habitual desire and aim to serve him wholly. He is gracious to our imperfections and weakness; yet he requires all the heart, and will not be served by halves, nor accept what is performed by a divided heart.

Doing all to the glory of God, is the true alchemy which turns everything to gold, and ennobles the common actions of life into acts of piety; 1 Corinthians 10:31. Nor is there a grain of real goodness in the most specious actions, which are performed without a reference to God's glory. This the world cannot understand; but it will appear highly reasonable to those who take their ideas of God from the Scripture, and who have felt the necessity and found the benefits of redemption.

We are debtors many ways—the Lord has a right to us by creation, by redemption, by conquest, when he freed us from Satan's power, and took possession of our hearts by his grace; and, lastly, by our own voluntary surrender, in the day when he enabled us to fix our choice on himself—as our Lord and our portion. Then we felt the force of our obligations. We saw the beauty and honor of his service, and that nothing was worthy to stand in the least degree of competition with it. This is always equally true, though our perceptions of it are not always equally strong. But where it has been once really known, it cannot be wholly forgotten, or cease to be the governing principle of life; and the Lord has promised to revive the impression in those who wait upon him, and thereby to renew their strength; for in proportion as we feel by what ties we are his—we shall embrace his service as perfect freedom.

Again—when the eye is thus single, the whole body will be full of light. The principle of acting simply for God, will in general make the path of duty plain, solve a thousand otherwise dubious questions, lead to the most proper and obvious means, and preclude that painful anxiety about events, which upon no other plan can be avoided. The love of God is the best casuist; especially as it leads us to a careful attendance to his precepts, a reliance on his promises, and a submission to his will.

Most of our perplexities arise from an undue, though perhaps unperceived, attachment to SELF. Either we have some scheme of our own too closely connected with our general view of serving the Lord; or lay some stress upon our own management, which, though we suspect it may possibly fail us, we cannot entirely help trusting to. In these respects the Lord permits his servants occasionally to feel their own weakness; but if they are sincerely devoted to him, he will teach them to profit by it, and bring them by degrees to a simplicity of dependence, as well as of intention. Then all things are easy. Acting from love, and walking by faith, they can neither be disappointed or discouraged. Duty is their part, care is his, and they are enabled to cast it upon him. They know, that, when their expedients seem to fail—that he is still all-sufficient. They know, that, being engaged in his cause, they cannot miscarry; and that, though in some things they may seem to fall short of success, they are sure of meeting acceptance, and that he will estimate their services not by their actual effects—but according to the gracious principle and desire he has put into their hearts. 2 Chronicles 6:7-8.

Chapter 36

01.01. Imminent Danger and the Only Sure Resource of this Nation

The Imminent Danger and the Only Sure Resource of this Nation by John Newton, February 28, 1794, the day appointed for the national fast

"Come, let us return to the Lord! He has torn us in pieces; now He will heal us. He has injured us; now He will bandage our wounds!" Hosea 6:1

"Who can tell? God may turn and relent; He may turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish!" Jonah 3:9

How great is the power of God over the hearts of men! Nineveh was the capital of a powerful empire. The inhabitants were Heathen. The many prophets who, during a long series of years, had spoken in the name of the Lord to his professed people of Judah and Israel, had spoken almost in vain. The messengers were often mocked, and their message despised. The inhabitants of Nineveh, it is probable, had never seen a true prophet until Jonah was sent to them. If they had reasoned on his prediction, they might have thought it very improbable, that a great city, the head of a great kingdom, and in a time of peace, could be in danger of an overthrow within forty days. But it is said, "they believed God." (Jonah 3:5) The awful denunciation made a general, a universal impression. The king arose from his throne, laid aside his robes, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. A sudden cessation of business and of pleasure took place; he proclaimed a strict fast, the rigor of which was extended even to the cattle. His subjects readily complied, and unanimously concurred in crying for mercy: though they had no encouragement but a ’perhaps’, "Who can tell? God may turn and relent; He may turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish!"

It appears from this, and other passages of Scripture, that the most express declarations of God’s displeasure against sinners, still afford ground and room for repentance. Thus, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, "So when I tell the wicked person: You will surely die, but he repents of his sin and does what is just and right—he will certainly live; he will not die." (Ezekiel 33:14-15) and again, in the prophecy of Jeremiah, "At one moment I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot, tear down, and destroy it. However, if that nation I have made an announcement about, turns from its evil, I will not bring the disaster on it I had planned." (Jeremiah 18:7-8) The Lord God speaks to us by his Word, in plain and popular language. He condescends to our feeble apprehensions. God cannot repent, he is of one mind who can turn him? (Numbers 23:19, Job 23:13) Yet, when afflictive providences lead men to a sense of their sins, to an acknowledgment of their demerits, and excite a spirit of humiliation, repentance, and prayer—he often mercifully changes his dispensations, and averts from them the impending evil. Such was the effect of Jonah’s message to the Ninevites. The people humbled themselves, and repented of their wickedness; and God suspended the execution of the sentence which he had pronounced against them. My brethren, may we not fear, that the men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us, (Matthew 12:41) if we do not imitate their example, and humble ourselves before God? They repented at the preaching of Jonah, and immediately, on their first hearing him; and

they sought for mercy upon a perhaps, when they could say no more, than, Who can tell, whether there may be the least room to hope for it, after what the prophet has so solemnly declared?

God does not speak to us by the audible voice of an inspired prophet; nor is it necessary. We know, or may know, from his written Word, that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked (Isaiah 3:10-11) The appearance of an angel from heaven could add nothing to the certainty of the declarations he has already put into our hands. He has likewise raised up, and perpetuated a succession of his ministers, to enforce the warnings he has given us in the Scripture; to remind us of our sins, and the sure and dreadful consequences, if we persist in them. Nor are we left at an uncertainty as to the outcome, if we humbly confess them, and implore forgiveness, in the way which he has prescribed. The Gospel, the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, is preached unto us. Jesus Christ, as crucified, is set forth among us. (Galatians 3:1, 1 John 1:7, Romans 8:1, Acts 13:39) His blood cleanses from all sin; and those who believe in him are freed from condemnation, and completely justified. They have also free access to a throne of grace, and, like Israel, they have power, by prayer, to prevail with God and with man. (Genesis 32:28) And shall it be said of any of us, that the Lord gave us space to repent, and invited us to repentance, and we repented not? (Revelation 2:21) May his mercy forbid it!

He now speaks to us by his providence. His judgments are abroad in the earth; and it behooves us to learn righteousness. (Isaiah 25:9-11) His hand is lifted up, and if any are so careless, or obstinate, that they will not see, yet, sooner or later, they must, they shall see. The great God has a controversy with the potsherds of the earth. The point to be decided between him and many abroad, and, I fear, too many at home, is, whether he is the Governor of the earth or not? His own people, to whom His name and glory are dear, will hold all inferior concernment in subordination to this. If there is no other alternative, misery and havoc must spread, men must perish by millions, yes, the frame of nature must be dissolved, rather than God be dishonored and defied with impunity. But he will surely plead and gain his own cause, and, either in a way of judgment or of mercy, all men shall know that he is the Lord. I believe there is no expression in the Old Testament so frequently repeated as this, "You," or they, "shall know that I am the Lord! Has he said it, and shall he not make it good?" The rivers of human blood, and all the calamities and horrors which overspread a great part of the Continent, the distant report of which is sufficient to make our ears tingle, are all to be ascribed to this cause. God is not acknowledged; yes, in some places, he has been formally disowned and renounced. Therefore, God sometimes leaves men left to themselves--their furious passions are unchained, and they are given up, without restraint, to the lusts of their own evil hearts! A more dreadful judgment than this, cannot be inflicted on this side of hell. "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!" Hosea 4:17

And, though we are still favored with peace at home, the dreadful storm is at no great distance; it seems to be moving our way, and we have reason to fear that it may burst upon us. But I would be thankful for the appointment of this day; for I should think the prospect dark indeed, if I did not rely on the Lord’s gracious attention to the united prayers of those who fear and trust him, and who know it is equally easy to him either to save or to destroy, by many or by few. (1 Samuel 14:6) Our fleets and armies may be well appointed and well commanded; but, without his blessing upon our councils and enterprises, they will be unable to defend us. He can take wisdom from the wise, and courage from the bold, in the moment when they are most needful. He can disable our forces by sickness or dissension; and, by his mighty wind, he can dash our ships to pieces against the

rocks, against each other, or sink them like lead in the mighty waters! "Who is there who speaks and it happens—unless the Lord has ordained it?" Lamentations 3:37 Our Lord and Savior, when speaking of the eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them, said to the Jews, "Those 18 that the tower in Siloam fell on and killed—do you think they were more sinful than all the people who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well!" Luke 13:4-5. May the application of these words sink deeply into our hearts! It will not befit us to say, either to God or man, that 'we have indeed sinned—but there are greater sinners than ourselves.' It is true, the French Convention, and many others who are infatuated by the same spirit, have exceeded the ordinary standard of human impiety and cruelty. But I hope there are multitudes in that nation, who, though they are overawed by their oppressors, and dare not speak their sentiments, yet are mourning in secrecy and silence, for the abominations which they cannot prevent. But the French have not sinned against such advantages as we possess. They were long the slaves of despotic power, and the dupes of superstition; and of late they have been the dupes of fools, assuming the name of philosophers.

We, on the contrary, were born and educated in a land distinguished from all the nations of the earth, by the eminent degree in which we enjoy civil and religious liberty, and the light of gospel truth. These privileges exceedingly aggravate our sins; and no just comparison, in this respect, can be formed between us and other nations, until we can find a people who have been equally favored, for an equal length of time, by the providence of God—and have likewise equaled us in disobedience and ingratitude! The most dreadful enormities committed in France, are no more than specimens of what human depravity is capable of—when circumstances admit of its full exertion, and when the usual boundaries and restrictions necessary to the peace and welfare of civil society, are judicially removed. The influence of daring infidelity and profligate example, aided by the peculiar state of their public affairs, have broken, in many instances, the strongest ties of social and relative life, and extinguished the common feelings of humanity!

Yet the unhappy French, though our inveterate enemies, are not the proper objects of our hatred or our scorn—but rather of our pity. They know not what they do! Let us pray for them. Who can tell but God, to whom all things are possible, and whose mercies are higher than the heavens, may grant also them repentance! And let us pray for ourselves, that we may be instructed and warned by their history—for, by nature, we are no better than they!

I. But it is time to attend more immediately to our own concerns. The professed purpose of our meeting today, is to "humble ourselves before Almighty God, and to send up our prayers and supplications to the Divine Majesty, for obtaining pardon of our sins, and for averting those heavy judgments which our manifold sins have most justly deserved; and imploring His blessing and assistance on our military, and for restoring and perpetuating peace, safety, and prosperity to himself and to his kingdoms." I hope these expressions accord with the language and desire of our hearts.

Oh! for a glance of what Isaiah saw, and has described! "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord! He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of His robe filled the Temple. Hovering around Him were mighty seraphim, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with the remaining two they flew. In a great chorus they sang, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty! The whole earth is filled with His glory!' The glorious singing shook

the Temple to its foundations, and the entire sanctuary was filled with smoke! Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!'" Isaiah 6:1-5

Oh! that we, by the power of that faith, could behold the glory of the Lord filling this house; that we could realize the presence and the attitude of His attendant angels! They cover their faces and their feet with their wings, as overpowered by the beams of His majesty; and conscious, if not of defilement like us, yet of unavoidable inability as creatures, to render Him the whole of that praise and homage which are justly due to Him!

Oh! that, by faith, we could enter into the spirit of their ascription--'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is filled with His glory!' If we were all thus affected, as the prophet was, surely each one for himself would adopt the prophet's language. Or, if a comfortable hope in the Gospel prevented us from crying out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!" we should, at least, say, (the Hebrew word might be so rendered,) "I am silenced, I am struck dumb! I am overwhelmed with confusion and shame; for I am a man of unclean lips myself, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!"

If we have a degree of this impression, we shall not perplex ourselves concerning the second causes, or immediate instruments of our calamities. The evil of sin, contrasted with the holiness and glory of God, will engross our thoughts! And we shall ascribe all the troubles we either feel or fear--to our own sins, and the sins of those among whom we dwell.

1. Let us first look to OURSELVES. "I am a man of unclean lips! I am a sinner!" This confession suits us all, and is readily made by all who know themselves. A person approaching London from the neighboring hills, usually sees it obscured by a cloud of smoke. This cloud of smoke is the aggregate of the smoke, to which every house furnishes its respective quota. This cloud of smoke is a fit emblem of the sin and the misery which abound in this great metropolis! The Lord said of the Amorites, at a certain period, "Their iniquity is not yet full." (Genesis 15:16) I hope the measure of our iniquity is not yet full; but it is filling more every day, and we are all daily contributing to fill it.

True believers, though, by grace, delivered from the reigning power of sin, are still sinners. (Romans 6:14) In many things, we all sin in thought, word, and deed. We are now called upon to humble ourselves before God, for the sins of our ignorance, and for the more aggravated sins we have committed against light and experience; for those personal sins, the record of which is known only to God and our consciences; for the defects and defilements of our best services; for our great and manifold failures in the discharge of our relative duties, as parents, children, husbands, wives, masters, or servants, and as members of the community. Our dullness in the ways of God, our alertness in the pursuit of our own will and way; our indifference to what concerns his glory, as compared with the quickness of our concerns, when our own temporal interests are affected, are so many proofs of our ingratitude and depravity! The sins of the Lord's own people are so many, and so heightened by the consideration of his known goodness, that, if he was to enter into judgment with them alone, they could offer no other plea than that which he has mercifully provided for them, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared!" (Psalms 130:3-4)

2. It is easy to declaim against the wickedness of the times. But only they who are duly affected with the multitude and magnitude of their own sins can be competent judges of what the prophet meant or felt, when he said, "I live among a people of unclean lips." We ought to be no less concerned (though in a different manner) for the sins of those among whom we dwell, than for our own. We shall be so, if, with the eyes of our mind—we behold the King, the Lord Almighty; because his glory, which should be the dearest object to our hearts, is dishonored by them.

I think this nation (England) might be considered as the Israel of the New Testament, both with respect of his goodness to us, and our perverse returns to him. He has been pleased to select us, as a special people, and to show among us such instances of his protection, his favor, his grace, and his patience—as cannot be paralleled in the annals of any other nation!

We have no certain account when the name of Jesus the Savior was first known in England; it was, probably, at an early period of the Christian era. But we do know, that after the long dark night of superstition and ignorance which covered Christendom for many ages—the dawn of returning gospel light was first seen among us! From the time of Wickliffe, the morning-star of the Reformation, the true Gospel has been known, preached, received, and perpetuated to this day. There have been times when those who loved this Gospel have suffered for it. They were preserved faithful, in defiance of stripes, fines, imprisonment, and death itself! But those times are past. We enjoy not only light—but liberty, and the rights of conscience and private judgment, in a degree until of late unknown!

We have likewise been long favored with national peace, though often other nations in wars have suffered great calamities. Our internal broils at different times have contributed to form and establish our present happy constitution. We breathe the air of civil liberty. Our insulated geographical situation, and naval force, by the blessing of God, have preserved us from foreign invasions; and, when such have been attempted, the winds and seas have often fought our battles! Our wide spreading and flourishing commerce, has raised us to a pitch of opulence which excites the admiration and envy of other nations. Great Britain appears as but a small spot upon a globe or map; but our interests and influence extend, in every direction, to the uttermost parts of the earth! Will not the Lord’s words to Israel apply with equal propriety to us? "What more could I have done for My vineyard than I did? Why, when I expected a yield of good grapes—did it yield only worthless grapes?" (Isaiah 5:4)

How is the blessed Gospel improved among us? This would be a heavy day to me, if I did not believe and know, that there are some among our various denominations, who prize and adorn the Gospel. If these could be all assembled in one place, I hope they would be found to be a very considerable number; and, for their sakes, and, in answer to their prayers, I humbly trust that God’s mercy will still be afforded to us. But, compared with the multitudes who reject, despise, or dishonor the Gospel—I fear they are very few! Too many hate it with a bitter hatred, and exert all their influence to oppose and suppress it. The great doctrines of the Reformation are treated with contempt; and both those who preach, and those who espouse them, are considered as wild enthusiasts or hypocrites, knaves or fools. The Gospel of God is shunned as a pestilence, or complained of as a burden, almost wherever it is known!

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16) The Gospel—recalls them from error, from wickedness, and from misery;

guides their feet into the ways of peace, and teaches them to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. (Titus 2:12) But in the number of those who profess to receive it, there are too many who confirm and increase the prejudices of those who speak against what they know not. Alas! what extravagant opinions, what fierce dissensions, what loose conversation, what open offences, may be found among many who would be thought professors of that Gospel which only breathes the spirit of holiness, love, and peace!

What, then, must be the state of those who avowedly live without God in the world? I need not enlarge upon this painful subject, which forces itself upon the mind, if we only walk the streets, or look into the newspapers. It is not necessary to inform my hearers, that infidelity, licentiousness, perjury, profaneness, the neglect and contempt of God's worship, abound. The laws of God, and the laws of the land, so far as their object is to enforce the observance of his commands, are openly and customarily violated in every rank of life. In a day when the Lord Almighty calls to weeping and mourning— thoughtless security, dissipation, and open sin, are the characteristics of our national spirit. (Isaiah 22:12-13) The loss of public spirit, and that impatience of subordination so generally observable, so widely diffused, which are the consequences of our sins against God, are, in themselves, moral causes sufficient to ruin the nation, unless his mercy interposes in our behalf!

I would be inexcusable, considering the share I have formerly had in that unholy business, if, upon this occasion, I should omit to mention the African slave-trade. I do not rank this among our national sins, because I hope, and believe, a very great majority of the nation earnestly long for its suppression. But, hitherto, petty and selfish interests prevail against the voice of justice, humanity, and truth. This enormity, however, is not sufficiently laid to heart. If you are justly shocked by what you hear of the cruelties practiced in France—you would, perhaps, be shocked much more, if you could fully conceive of the evils and miseries inseparable from this slave traffic, which I know, not from hearsay—but from my own experience and observation, are equal in atrocity, and, perhaps, superior in number, in the course of a single year, to any, or all the worst actions which have been known in France since the commencement of their revolution. There is a cry of blood against us; a cry accumulated by the addition of fresh victims, of thousands, of scores of thousands, I had almost said of hundreds of thousands, from year to year!

It is but a brief and faint outline I have attempted to give of the present state of this nation in the sight of Almighty God, and of the sins for which we are this day assembled to humble ourselves before him!

II. Have we not, therefore, cause to say, with the Ninevites, "Who can tell?" Is there not at least, 'a perhaps?' Is there at least a possibility—that we may yet obtain mercy?

If our sins are no less numerous, no less of a scarlet dye, than those of other nations; and exceedingly aggravated beyond theirs, by being committed against clearer light, and the distinguished advantages we have long enjoyed; if we have not only transgressed the laws of God in common with others—but daringly trampled upon the gracious offers of his forgiveness, which he has long continued to propose to us, with a frequency and energy almost peculiar to ourselves; if "All day long I have spread out My hands to a disobedient and defiant people," (Romans 10:21) and, hitherto, almost in vain; if neither the tokens of his displeasure, nor the declarations of his love, have made a suitable impression upon our minds—who can tell if he will yet be entreated?

May we not fear, lest he should say, "My Spirit shall strive with them no more!" "They are joined to their idols—let them alone!" "When you lift up your hands in prayer—I will refuse to look. Even though you offer countless prayers—I will not listen!" (Hosea 4:17, Isaiah 1:15) Where are now the mighty empires, which were once thought as rooted and established as the everlasting mountains? They have disappeared like the mists upon the mountain tops. Nothing of them remains but their names. They perished, and their memorials have almost perished with them. (Psalms 9:6) The patience of God bore with them for a time—until the purposes for which he raised them up were answered. But, when the measure of their iniquity was full—they passed away, and were dispersed, like foam upon the waters! What security have we—against such a catastrophe? Or, what could we answer, if God should put that question to us, "Should I not punish them for this?" asks the Lord. "Should I not avenge Myself against a nation such as this?" (Jeremiah 5:9) Where are now the churches which once flourished in Greece and in Asia? When the apostle Paul wrote to the Gentile churches, and when our Lord wrote his epistles to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:1-20; Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22) most of them were in a prosperous state. If there ever was a time when the commendations given to them were applicable to professors of the Gospel in our land, I fear we can hardly claim them at present. Can it be justly said of us, that our faith and love are everywhere spoken of, and that we are examples to all who believe? That our works and service, and faith and patience, are known, and the last works, to be more than the first? (Romans 1:8, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, Revelation 2:1; Revelation 2:18-19) Or rather, may it not be truly said of too many, that while they profess to believe in God—that in works they deny him? that they are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold? that they have a name to live, and are dead? that they have forgotten their first love? (Titus 1:16, Revelation 3:1-15; Revelation 2:4) When these defects and declensions began to prevail in the first churches, the Lord admonished and warned them; but, instead of watching and repenting, they gradually became more remiss! At length their glory departed, and their candlesticks were removed out of their places. Many regions, which once rejoiced in the light of the Gospel, have been long overspread with Mohammedan darkness, and the inhabitants are wretched, ignorant, slaves!

Let us not trust in outward privileges, nor rest in a form of godliness destitute of the power. It will be in vain to say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!" (Jeremiah 7:4) if the Lord of the temple should depart from us! When the Israelites were afraid of the Philistines, they carried the ark of the Lord with them to battle. But God disappointed their vain confidence. He delivered the ark of his glory into the hands of their enemies, (1 Samuel 4:5-11) to teach them, and to teach us, that formal hypocritical worshipers have no good ground to hope for his protection.

Alas! then, who can tell? Appearances are very dark at present. Besides what we may expect or fear from the rage and madness of our foreign enemies, we have much to be apprehensive of at home! A spirit of discord has gone forth. "Israel grew fat—and rebelled; the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed! Then they abandoned the God who had made them; they made light of the Rock of their salvation!" (Deuteronomy 32:15) Many Britons seem weary of liberty, peace, and order. Our happy constitution, our mild government, our many privileges, admired by other nations—are despised and depreciated among ourselves; and that not only by the thoughtless and licentious, by those who, having little to lose, may promise themselves a possibility of gain in a time of national disturbance and confusion; but they are abetted and instigated by people of sense, character, and even of religion! I would be quite at a loss to account for this, if I did not consider it

as a token of the Lord’s displeasure. When he withdraws his blessing, no unity or peace can long exist.

"Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though you had an abundance of everything, you will serve your enemies the Lord will send against you, in famine, thirst, nakedness, and a lack of everything. He will place an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you!" Deuteronomy 28:47-48. These words of Moses to rebellious Israel emphatically describe the former and the present state of many of the French nation, who have been plundered, and were glad if only they could escape (great numbers could not so escape) with the loss of their all, and at the peril of their lives, to a more peaceful shore. May their sufferings remind us of our deserts! Who can tell if the Lord may yet be merciful unto us, and exempt us from similar calamities!

III. But though we have much cause to mourn for our sins, and humbly to confess our deserved judgments, let us not despond. The Lord our God is a merciful God. "Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will have pity on us and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us!"

If the fast of this day is not confined to one day—but if, by his blessing, it may produce sincere repentance—then I am warranted to tell you, from his Word, that there is yet hope! You who tremble for God’s ark, for the cause of God, whose eyes affect your hearts, who grieve for sin, and for the miseries which sin has multiplied upon the earth—take courage! Let the hearts of the wicked shake, like the leaves of the trees when agitated by a storm; (Isaiah 7:2) but you have no cause to tremble like them. The Lord God is your refuge and strength, your resting place, and your hiding place! Under the shadow of His wings—you shall be safe! (Psalms 46:1, Psalms 90:1, Psalms 119:114)

1. He who loved you and died for your sins—is the Lord of glory! All power in heaven and in earth is committed unto him. The Lord reigns—though the earth be ever so agitated. All creatures are instruments of his will. The wrath of man, so far as it is permitted to act, shall praise him; and shall be made subservient to the accomplishment of his great designs! And the remainder of that wrath, of all their projected violence, which does not coincide with his wise and comprehensive plan, he will restrain! (Matthew 28:18, Psalms 99:1, Psalms 76:10) In vain they rage, and fret, and threaten! They act under a secret commission, and can do no more than he permits them! If they attempt it—he has his hook and a bridle in their mouths! When the enemies would come in like a flood—he can lift up a standard against them. As he has set bounds and bars to the tempestuous sea, beyond which it cannot pass, saying, "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt!" So, with equal ease, he can "still the tumults of the nations!" (2 Kings 19:28, Isaiah 59:19, Job 38:10-11, Psalms 65:7)

You do well to mourn for the sins and miseries—of those who know him not. But if you make the Almighty God your fear and your dread—he will be a sanctuary to you, and keep your hearts in peace! "Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas!" (Isaiah 8:13-14, Psalms 46:2)

2. Your part and mine is to WATCH and PRAY. Let us pray for ourselves, that we may he found waiting, with our loins girded up, and our lamps burning, that we may be prepared to meet his will in every event. (Mark 13:35, Mark 14:38) Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem, for God’s church,

which is dear to him, as the pupil of his eye, for the spread of his Gospel, and the extension of his kingdom—until his great name is known and adored from the rising to the setting of the sun, (Malachi 1:11) and the whole earth shall be filled with his glory!

Many splendid prophecies are yet unfulfilled; and he is now bringing forward their accomplishment. Light will undoubtedly arise out of this darkness. Let us earnestly pray for a blessing from on high, upon our counsels of government and parliament, and upon all subordinate authorities in church and state—that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, that true religion and good order may be established, and iniquity be put to shame and silence! Thus we may hope to be secured by the sure, though secret, mark of divine protection. The Lord will be our shield—though many should suffer or fall around us. The very hairs of our heads are numbered. Or if, for the manifestation of our faith, and the power of his grace—he should permit us to share in common calamities, we may rely upon him to afford us strength according to our day. He is always near to his people, a very present help in the time of trouble; and he can make the season of their greatest tribulations, to be the season of their sweetest consolations! (Ezekiel 9:4, Matthew 9:30, Deuteronomy 33:25, 2 Corinthians 1:5)

3. And let us pray in FAITH. Let us remember what great things the Lord has done in answer to prayer. When sin had given Sennacherib rapid success in his invasion of Judah, he did not know that he was no more than 'God's axe', or a 'saw in the hand of God'. He ascribed his victories to his own prowess, and thought himself equally sure of capturing Jerusalem. But Hezekiah defeated him—upon his knees. He spread Sennacherib's blasphemous letter before the Lord in the temple and prayed—and the Assyrian army melted away like snow. (Isaiah 10:15; Isaiah 37:14-36) When Peter was locked up and chained in prison—the chains fell from his hands, the locks and bolts gave way, and the iron gate opened—while the church was united in earnest prayer for his deliverance! (Acts 12:5-13) And as we have heard—so have we seen. God has signally answered the prayers of his people, in our own time. Much prayer, both public and private, was offered for our beloved King during his late illness; and how wonderful, how sudden, how seasonable, was his recovery! Surely this was the finger of God! When God thus removed our fears, "we were like men who dreamed!" (Psalms 126:1)

I believe prayer was no less efficacious, towards the end of the year 1792. I know many people treated the idea of danger at that time as false, because the Lord was pleased to avert it. But I hope we have not quite forgotten the language we heard, and the people we daily met with in the street, the many daring conspiracies which were held in this city, and the threatenings which were written in large characters, upon the walls of our houses, at almost every corner. But the hearts of men were turned like the tide, in a critical moment. Then I think the interposition of the Lord was evident. We have had repeated proofs that God hears and answers prayer. The present likewise is a very important crisis. All that is dear to us, as men, as Britons, as Christians, is threatened. Our enemies are inveterate and enraged! Our sins testify against us. But if we humble ourselves before God, forsake our sins, and unite in supplications for his mercy—who can tell, but that he may be entreated to give us that help which it would be in vain to expect from man? Yes, we have encouragement to hope, that if God will be for us—then none can prevail against us. (Romans 8:11) But without his blessing, our most powerful efforts, and best concerted undertakings, cannot succeed for a moment!

You who have access to the throne of grace, whose hearts are concerned for the glory of God, and who lament not only the temporal calamities attendant upon war—but the many thousands of souls who are yearly plunged by war into an eternal, unchangeable state--you, I trust, will show yourselves true friends to your country, by bearing your testimony, and exerting your influence against SIN—the procuring cause of all our sorrows; and by standing in the breach, and pleading with God for mercy, in behalf of yourselves, and of the nation. If ten people, thus disposed, had been found even in Sodom—it would have escaped destruction! (Genesis 18:32)

IV. There may be some people in this assembly, who are little concerned for their own sins, and are, of course, incapable of taking a proper part in the service of this day. Yet I am glad that you are here; I pity you, I warn you. If you should live to see a time of public distress—what will you do? To whom will you look, or where will you flee for help? All that is dear to you may be torn from you, or you from it! Or if it pleases God to prolong our tranquility, you are liable to many heavy calamities in private life. And if you should be exempted from these, death is inevitable, and may be near! My heart wishes you the possession of those principles which would support you in all the changes of life, and make your dying pillow comfortable. Are you unwilling to be happy? Or can you be happy too soon? Many Christian people are now looking upon you—who once were as lost as you are now. And I doubt not—that they are praying that you may be as they now are. Try to pray for yourself! Our God is assuredly in the midst of us. His gracious ear is attentive to every supplicant. Seek him while he is to be found. Jesus died for sinners, and he has said, "those who come to me—I will never cast out." (John 6:37) He is likewise the author of that faith, by which alone you can come rightly to him. If you ask him for saving faith—he will give it to you; if you seek it, in the means of his appointment, you shall assuredly find it. (Matthew 7:7)

If you refuse this, there remains no other sacrifice for your sin. (Hebrews 10:26-27) If you are not saved by faith in his blood—you are lost forever! "Oh! Pay homage to the Son, or He will be angry, and you will perish in your rebellion; for His anger may ignite at any moment! Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" Psalms 2:12

01.01. Indwelling Sin and the Believer

Indwelling Sin and the Believer Three letters by John Newton to the Earl of Dartmouth Letter I. What a believer would do—if he could.

February, 1772. My Lord—I have been sitting, perhaps a quarter of an hour, with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter. . . . At length my suspense reminded me of the apostle's words, Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. These are contrary the one to the other—so that you cannot do the things that you would!" This is a humbling but a just account of a Christian's attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less—the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given his people a desire and will aiming at great things; without this they would be unworthy of the name of Christians; but they cannot do as they would. Their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so (for He who works in them to will, enables them in a measure to do likewise)—but in comparison with the noble mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire He has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered—they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavors. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars, which a believer would do if he could—but in which, from first to last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in prayer. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honor and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven, that He should stoop so much lower, to afford his gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth. He can bid them to expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind and greater in degree than all that the world can afford. By prayer he can say, You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him who cares for you. By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him—you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios. And in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself. But, alas; how seldom can he do as he would! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit! and the chief pleasure he derives from the performance, is to think that his task is finished! He has been drawing near to God with his lips—while his heart was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here,) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief. The like may be said of reading the Scripture. He believes it to be the Word of God: he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb!

Yet, while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day—he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a newspaper. Here again his privilege frequently dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated—so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad he is, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Savior to his mind; and with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon the ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures—he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting Him out of our thoughts, of whom we say: 'He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion!' What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could, we would set him always before us; his love would be the delightful theme of our hearts:

From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve! But though we aim at this good—evil is present with us: we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, to take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of divine Providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God, and the good of those who fear him. He has no doubts that the hairs of his head are all numbered, that the blessings of every kind which he possesses, were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him—by the bounty and special favor of the Lord whom he serves! He fully believes that afflictions do not spring out of the ground—but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts! He is sure that there is a need-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt, than of what he sees with his eyes; and there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress—he cannot do what he would! He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not—he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond! Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency, even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! and what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way—would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God, we are not under the law—but under grace! And even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are overruled for good. By these experiences—the believer is weaned more from SELF, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on Him, who is our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption! The more vile we are in our own eyes—the more precious He will be to us! A deep repeated sense of the evil of our hearts—is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due!

Again, a sense of these evils will (when hardly anything else can do it) reconcile us to the thoughts of DEATH! Yes, they make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep-rooted in our nature, that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement!

Then, and not until then—we shall be able to do the thing that we would! When we see Jesus—we shall be transformed into His image, and be done with sin and sorrow forever!

Letter II.—The evil a believer would not do—if he could.

March, 1772. My Lord—I think my last letter turned upon the apostle's thought, Galatians 5:17, "You cannot do the things that you would." In the parallel place, Romans 7:19, there is another clause subjoined, "The evil which I would not do—that I do." This, added to the former, would complete the dark side of my experience. Permit me to tell your lordship a little part, (for some things must not, cannot be told,) not of what I have read—but of what I have felt, in illustration of this passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and vile imaginations; but this evil is present with me! My heart is like an open highway—like a city without walls or gates. Nothing so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid—but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place! Neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table—exempt me from their intrusion. But if this awful effect of heart-depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature—yet, at least, I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment and best wishes, I find something within me, which cherishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to be horrified by, and flee from—as I would if a toad or a serpent was put in my food or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart (at least my heart) be, that can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency. Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, without the least affectation of humility (however fair his outward conduct appears), subscribe himself less than the least of all saints, and the very chief of sinners!

I would not be influenced by a principle of SELF on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such a conduct—as clearly as I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought ten feet tall—and I know that a desire of being thought wise or good, is equally contrary to reason and truth. I would be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures supposed I had such a desire! And therefore, I fear the very principle of SELF, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The pride of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own; because their good opinion of me—depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this dead fly taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than splendid sins.

I would not indulge vain reasonings concerning the counsels, ways, and providences of God; yet I am prone to do it! That the Judge of all the earth will do right, is to me as evident and necessary as that two plus two make four. I believe that He has a sovereign right to do what He will with his own, and that this sovereignty is but another name for the unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness. But my reasonings are often such, as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formally renounced them! I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit, that would account for every thing—and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend. What an evil is this, for a potsherd

of the earth to contend with its Maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible—yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable.

I would not cleave to a covenant of works. It would seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I have reasons enough to deter me from this. Yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord." I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; and it is the main pleasure and business of my life, to set forth the necessity and all sufficiency of the Mediator between God and Man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his alone. But here, as in everything else, I find a vast difference between my judgment and my experience.

I am invited to take the water of life freely—yet am often discouraged, because I have nothing with which to pay for it. If I am at times favored with some liberty from the above-mentioned evils, it rather gives me a more favorable opinion of myself, than increases my admiration of the Lord's goodness to so unworthy a creature; and when the returning tide of my corruptions convinces me that I am still the same—an unbelieving legal spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed. At least I feel a weariness of being indebted to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness. And I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my desires after an increase of sanctification, arise from a secret wish that I might not be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him.

This, my lord, is only a faint sketch of my depraved heart; but it is taken from the life! It would require a volume rather than a letter, to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I choose to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible Physician. I shall not die—but live, and declare the works of the Lord.

Letter III.—The existence of indwelling sin overruled for good.

April, 1772. My Lord—My two last letters turned upon a mournful subject—the depravity of the heart—which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to walk softly all our days; yet we need not sorrow as those who have no hope. The Lord has provided his people relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being overruled for good—He would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from his hatred to sin—and the love which He bears to his people. As to the remedy, neither our state nor his honor are affected by the workings of indwelling sin—in the hearts of those whom He has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn, on account of what they feel. Though sin wars in us—it shall not reign in us. And though it breaks our peace—it cannot separate from his love. Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness, and perfection, to manifest his favor to such poor defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as in themselves—but as one with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith.

They are accepted in the Beloved. They act from a principle of love. They aim at no less than his glory. Their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon himself. There is a difference in kind between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thoughts of his sins—and the highest and most splendid attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight. Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are supported by almighty power—and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be—as they are now; yet a little while, and they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down. Then they shall see Jesus as He is, and be like him, and with him forever. The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby his own power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, are more signally displayed. His power is displayed—in maintaining his own work in the midst of so much opposition, like a spark burning in the water, or a bush unconsumed in the flames. His wisdom is displayed—in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, who from his knowledge of the evil of our nature, is encouraged to practice against us. He has overthrown many a fair professor, and, like Goliath, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds that there are some against whom, though he thrusts sorely, he cannot prevail. Notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons—they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side. The unchangeableness of the Lord's love, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons He bestows upon his people—than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

Hereby the Lord Jesus Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to him alone. The righteous are said to be scarcely saved, not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favor cannot be disappointed—but in respect of their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they are brought through. But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, wilfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility—they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of God in Christ; Jesus becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them!

They dare not, they will not ascribe anything to themselves, but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished a thousand times over—if Jesus had not been their Savior, their Shepherd, and their Shield! When they were wandering—He brought them back. When they were fallen—He raised them. When they were wounded—He healed them. When they were fainting—He revived them. By him, out of weakness, they have been made strong. He has taught their hands to battle, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of his excellence—have been occasioned by the mortifying proofs they have had of their own vileness. They would not have known so much of him—if they had not known so much of themselves!

Further, a spirit of humiliation, which is both the strength and beauty of our profession—is greatly promoted by our feeling, as well as reading—that when we would do good—evil is present with us. A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord. He has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature.

Whoever is truly humbled—will not be easily angry, nor harsh or critical of others. He will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners, knowing that if there is a difference—it is grace alone which has made it! He knows that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart. And under all trials and afflictions—he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved.

These are some of the advantages and good fruits which the Lord enables us to obtain from that bitter root—indwelling sin.

Chapter 38

01.01. Lead us not into temptation

Lead us not into temptation

July, 1776

Dear sir That I may not weary you by a preamble, I oblige myself to take the turn of my letter from some passage of Scripture; and I fix upon that which just now occurred to my thoughts—a clause in that pattern of prayer which He who best knows our state, has been pleased to leave for the instruction of his people in their great concern of waiting at his throne of grace; Matthew 6:13, "lead us not into temptation." This petition is seasonable at all times, and to all people who have any right knowledge of themselves, or their spiritual calling. The word temptation, taken at large, includes every kind of trial. To tempt, is to try or prove. In this sense, it is said, the Lord tempted Abraham—that is, he tried him; for God cannot tempt to evil. He proposed such an act of obedience to him, as was a test of his faith, love, dependence, and integrity. Thus, all our afflictions, under his gracious management, are appointed to prove, manifest, exercise, and purify the graces of his children. And not afflictions only, prosperity likewise is a state of temptation; and many who have endured sharp sufferings, and came off honorably, have been afterwards greatly hurt and ensnared by prosperity! To this purpose the histories of David and Hezekiah are in point. But by temptation we more frequently understand the wiles and force which Satan employs in assaulting our peace, or spreading snares for our feet. He is always practicing against us, either directly and from himself, by the access he has to our hearts, or mediately, by the influence he has over the men and the things of this world. The words which follow confirm this sense: "Lead us not into temptation—but deliver us from evil," or from the evil one, as it might be properly- rendered here, and in 1 John 5:19. The subtlety and power of this adversary are very great—he is an over-match for us; and we have no hope of safety—but in the Lord’s protection.

Satan’s action upon the heart may be illustrated by the action of the wind upon the sea. The sea sometimes appears smooth; but it is always disposed to swell and rage, and to obey the impulse of every storm. Thus, the heart may be sometimes quiet; but the wind of temptation will awaken and rouse it in a moment; for it is essential to our depraved nature to be unstable and yielding as the water. And when it is under the impression of the enemy, its violence can only be controlled by Him who says to the raging sea, "Be still, and here shall your proud waves be stayed." The branches of temptation are almost innumerable; but the principal may be reduced to the several faculties of the soul (as we commonly speak), to which they are more directly suited.

He has temptations for the understanding. He can blind the mind with prejudices and false reasoning, and ply it with arguments for infidelity, until the most obvious truths become questionable. Even where the Gospel has been received, he can insinuate error, which, for the suddenness and malignity of its effects, may be properly compared to poison. A healthy man may be poisoned in a moment; and if he is—the baneful drug is usually mixed with his food. Many, who for a while seemed to be sound in the faith, have had their judgments strongly and strangely perverted, and prevailed upon to renounce and oppose those truths they once prized and

defended. Such instances are striking proofs of human weakness, and loud calls to watchfulness and dependence, and to beware of leaning to our own understandings. For these purposes he employs both preachers and authors, who, by fine words and fair speeches, beguile the hearts of the unwary. And, by his immediate influence upon the mind, he is able (if the Lord permits him) to entangle those who are providentially placed out of the reach of corrupt and designing men.

He tempts the conscience. By working upon the unbelief of our hearts, and darkening the glory of the Gospel, he can hold down the soul by the number, weight, and aggravation of its sins—so that it shall not be able to look up to Jesus, nor draw any comfort from his blood, promises, and grace. How many go burdened in this manner, seeking relief by performing duties, and perhaps spending their strength in things not commanded, though they hear, and perhaps acknowledge, the Gospel? Nor are the wisest and most established able to withstand his assaults—if the Lord withdraw, and give him permission to employ his power and subtlety unrestrained. The Gospel affords sufficient ground for an abiding assurance of hope; nor should we rest satisfied without it: however, the possession and preservation of this privilege depends upon the Lord's presence with the soul, and his shielding us from Satan's attacks; for I am persuaded that he is able to sift and shake the strongest believer upon earth.

He has likewise temptations suited to the will. Jesus makes his people willing in the day of his power; yet there is a contrary principle remaining within them, of which Satan knows how to avail himself. There are occasions in which he almost prevails to set self again upon the throne, as Dagon was raised after he had fallen before the ark. How else should any, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious—give way to a repining spirit, account his dispensations hard, or his precepts too strict—so as to shrink from their observance, through the fear of men, or a regard to their worldly interest?

Farther: he has snares for the affections. In managing these, he gains a great advantage from our situation in a world which does not know God. The Scripture gives Satan the title of god of this world; and believers learn, by painful experience, how great his power is in and over the people and things of it—so that to be steadfast in wisdom's ways requires unremitted efforts, like pressing through a crowd, or swimming against a stream. How hard is it to live in the midst of pitch and not be defiled? The air of the world is infectious. Our business and unavoidable connections are so interwoven with occasions of sin, and there is so much in our hearts suited to them, that unless we are incessantly upheld by Almighty strength, we cannot stand a day—or an hour. Past victories afford us no greater security than they did Samson, who was shamefully surprised by enemies whom he had formerly conquered. Nor are we only tempted by compliance's which are evil in themselves. With respect to these, perhaps, conscience may be awake, and we stand upon our guard; but we are still upon Satan's ground; and while he may seem to allow himself defeated, he can dexterously change his method, and come upon us where we do not suspect him.

Perhaps our greatest danger arises from things in themselves lawful. He can tempt us by our nearest and dearest friend, and pervert every blessing of a kind Providence into an occasion of drawing our hearts from the Giver! Yes, spiritual blessings, gifts, comforts, and even graces—are sometimes the engines by which he practices against us, to fill with vain confidence and self-sufficiency, or to lull us into formality and indolence. That wonderful power which we call the imagination, partakes largely of that depravity which sin has brought upon our whole frame, and

affords Satan an avenue for assaulting us with the most terrifying, if not the most dangerous, of his temptations. At the best, we have but a poor command over it. We cannot, by an act of our own will, exclude a thousand painful, wild, inconsistent, and hurtful ideas, which are ever ready to obtrude themselves upon our minds: and a slight alteration in the body, in the motion of the blood or nervous spirits, is sufficient to withdraw it wholly from our dominion, and to leave us, like a city without walls or gates—exposed to the incursion of our enemy!

We are fearfully and wonderfully made; and, with all our boasted knowledge of other things, can form no conception of what is so vastly interesting to us—the mysterious connection between soul and body, and the manner in which they are mutually affected by each other. The effects we too sensibly feel. The wisest of men would be accounted fools or mad, were they to express in words, a small part of what passes within them! And it would appear that much of the soberest life—is little better than a waking dream! But how dreadful are the consequences, when the Lord permits some hidden pin in the human machine to be altered! Immediately a door flies open, which no hand but his can shut—and the enemy pours in, like a flood, falsehood and horror, and the blackness of darkness; the judgment is borne down and disabled, and the most distressing illusions seize us with all the apparent force of evidence and demonstration. When this is the case in a certain high degree—we call it a mental derangement. But there are various degrees of it, which leave a person in the possession of his senses as to the things of common life, and yet are sufficient, with respect to his spiritual concerns, to shake the very foundations of his hope, and deprive him of all peace and comfort, and make him a terror to himself. All the Lord’s people are not called to navigate in these deep waters of soul distress; but all are liable. Ah! if we knew what some suffer—whom Satan is permitted to tyrannize in this way, surely we should be more earnest and frequent in praying, "Lead us not into temptation." From some little sense I have of the malice and subtlety of our spiritual enemies, and the weakness of those barriers which we have to prevent their assaults—I am fully persuaded that nothing less than the continual exertion of that Almighty Power which preserves the stars in their orbits—can maintain our peace of mind for an hour or a minute. In this view, all comparative difference in external situations seems to be annihilated. For as the Lord’s presence can make his people happy in a dungeon, so there are temptations, which, if we felt them, would instantly render us incapable of receiving a moment’s satisfaction from an assemblage of all earthly blessings, and make the company of our dearest friends tasteless, if not insupportable.

Ah! how little do the mirthful and the frivolous think of these things! How little indeed do they think of them—who profess to believe them! How faint is the sense of our obligations to Him, who freely submitted to the fiercest onsets of the powers of darkness, to free us from the punishment due to our sins; otherwise we must have been forever shut up with those miserable and merciless spirits, who delight in our torment, and who, even in the present state, if they get access to our minds, can make our existence a burden! But our Lord, who knows and considers our weakness, of which we are so little aware, allows and directs us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation!" We are not to expect an absolute freedom from temptation; we are called to be soldiers, and must sometimes meet with enemies, and perhaps with wounds. Yet, considering this prayer as provided by Him who knows what we are, and where we are, it may afford us both instruction and consolation.

It calls to a constant reflection upon our own weakness. Believers, especially young ones, are prone to rest too much in grace received. They feel their hearts warm; and, like Peter, are ready to

please themselves with thinking how they would act in such or such a state of trial. It is as if the Lord had said, Poor worms, be not high-minded—but fear and pray, that, you may be kept from learning by bitter experience—how weak your supposed strength is. It sweetly intimates, that all our ways, and all our enemies, are in the hands of our great Shepherd. He knows our path. We are short-sighted, and cannot tell what an hour may bring forth. But we are under his protection; and if we depend upon him, we need not be anxiously afraid. He will be faithful to the trust we repose in him, and will allow no temptation to overtake us—but what he will support us under and bring us through. But it becomes us to beware of carnal security and presumption, to keep our eyes upon him, and not to think ourselves safe a moment longer than our spirits feel and breathe the meaning of this petition.

It implies, likewise, the duty of watchfulness on our part; as our Lord joins them elsewhere, "Watch and pray." If we desire not to be led into temptation, surely we are not to run into it. If we wish to be preserved from error—we are to guard against a curious and reasoning spirit. If we would preserve peace of conscience, we must beware of trifling with the light and motions of the Holy Spirit—for without his assistance we cannot maintain faith in exercise. If we would not be ensnared by the men of the world—we are to keep at a proper distance from them. The less we have to do with them—the better; excepting so far as the providence of God makes it our duty in the discharge of our callings and relations, and taking opportunities of doing them good. And though we cannot wholly shut Satan out of our imaginations, we should be cautious that we do not willfully provide fuel for his flame; but entreat the Lord to set a watch upon our eyes and our ears, and to teach us to reject the first motions and the smallest appearance of evil.

I have been so intent upon my subject, that I have once and again forgot I was writing to you, otherwise I would not have let my paper run to so great a length, which I certainly did not intend when I began. I shall not add to this fault, by making an apology. I have touched upon a topic of great importance to myself. I am one among many who have suffered greatly for lack of paying more attention to my need of this prayer. O that I could be wiser hereafter, and always act and speak as knowing that I am always upon a field of battle, and beset by legions!

01.01. Letter to Church in London

A letter from John Newton, which he had printed and distributed to every family in his church in London, in 1781 "I beg you to listen to me patiently!" Acts 26:3 My dear friends,

It being impracticable to write separately and distinctly to every person in the church, I offer you this testimony of my sincere regard for your best welfare. And I wish, while I express myself with the freedom to observe the same respect and tenderness, as if I had an opportunity of conversing personally with each of you. My income from the parish is settled, and regularly and readily paid. I am well satisfied with it; and only desire that you may be benefited by the ministry which you contribute to support. I acknowledge likewise, with thankfulness to God and to you, that in the fellowship I have had among you—I have never received the least personal incivility or unkindness from anyone! Though I cannot but know and lament, that the subject-matter of my preaching is not pleasing to many of you; and, though several steps I have thought it my duty to take, must appeal, to some of you—as unnecessary and troublesome innovations, I have met with no opposition or ill-will. Your conduct has, in this respect, been worthy of the politeness and kindness which distinguish you. The only cause of complaint, or rather of grief, which you have given me, is—that so many of those to whom I earnestly desire to be useful, refuse me the pleasure of seeing them at church every Sunday. My concern does not arise from the lack of hearers. If either a numerous congregation, or the respectable characters of many of the individuals who compose it, could satisfy me—I would then be satisfied. But I must grieve, while I see so few of my own parishioners among them. Let me entreat your favorable attention, while I respectfully and affectionately expostulate on this point. The general design of my ministry in this city, might, and I trust would have been answered, if it had pleased God to place me in some other church; but He saw fit to fix me among you. This appointment gives you a preference in my regard, and makes me studiously solicitous to promote your best welfare; and likewise it gives you a more immediate and particular service to you, than to others. However little worthy of your notice in any other view, if I am a servant of God, a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, if I speak the truth in love—how can I but be pained at the thought, that many to whom the word of salvation is sent (Acts 13:26) refuse to hear it, and reject the counsel of God against themselves! (Luke 7:30) When I consider the progress of infidelity in the present day, I cannot but fear, that there may be some among you who absent themselves from the church, not so much from a dislike of what may be called my doctrines, or my sentiments—as from a disregard to the Christian religion in general. I know how to pity people of this unhappy sentiment, for it was too long my own sentiment. It is not only a dangerous state—but an uncomfortable state; for, notwithstanding their utmost reasonings and endeavors, they cannot wholly avoid painful apprehensions, lest the Bible, which they wish to be false—should prove to be the truth!

It was thus with me, and it must, in the nature of things, be thus with every unbeliever. To doubt or deny the truth of Christianity is too common; but to demonstrate that it is false, is an utter impossibility! I labored long in the attempt—but, when I least expected it, I met with evidence that overpowered my resistance; and the Bible which I had despised, removed my skepticism. He

against whom I had hardened myself, was pleased to spare me! And I now live to tell you, that there is forgiveness with God—that he may be feared! (Psalms 130:4) But the greater part of you, I am persuaded, will agree with me thus far at least—that the Scripture is a divine Revelation. But do not some of you act inconsistently with your acknowledged principles? Can you reconcile your conduct—to the precepts of God, or to the character of those who fear and love Him, as described either in the Old or New Testament? If you have children—you expect them to obey you. And do you profess yourselves to be the children of God—and yet allow yourselves in the breach of His known commandments? The habits of business or amusement in which you live, not only engross your time and thoughts during the rest of the week—but indispose you for the due observation of our church services. You have engagements of another kind, which will not admit of your regular attendance on the public worship of God; and, if you constrain yourself to be present occasionally, the light which a faithful preacher forces upon your conscience offends you, and makes you willing to catch at every pretense which may furnish you with the shadow of an excuse for not hearing him again! But this is not the character of all who have withdrawn themselves. Some of you have not forsaken the public worship; you attend at other churches, are ready to complain that you have been driven from your own. If you have candor to allow that possibly I mean well, yet the manner of my preaching is so different from what you were formerly accustomed to, and from what you approve, that, after having heard me, and perhaps more than once, you have been constrained to seek new places of worship. If I venture to plead with you upon this ground, it is not without being aware of the delicacy of the subject. It will seem like pleading my own cause. But I am conscious that I would not trouble you with a single line—if it were not for your sakes, and with a desire of obviating such misapprehensions as I truly believe you cannot retain without disadvantage to yourselves. As a Christian minister, and preaching to professing hearers, I not only take my text from the Scriptures—but likewise draw from thence the proofs and illustrations of what I advance in my sermons. I frequently, yes constantly, appeal to the Bible—the acknowledged standard and touchstone of all true religious sentiments. As a minister of the church of England, when speaking to the professed members of that church, I might likewise appeal to the current doctrine expressed in our liturgy and articles; but I seldom do it, because having, as I conceive, the highest authority, the Holy Scripture, on my side, I need no other.

If you could be certain, that with respect to the points wherein we differ, that the Scriptures are for you and against me—then your refusal to hear me would be justifiable. But otherwise it behooves you to be cautious, lest, while you think you only reject what appears to you novel or impertinent, your contempt should unhappily fall upon the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, and of Christ Himself. I must magnify my office. (Romans 11:13) On other occasions, I wish to demean myself as the least of all, and the servant of all; but, when I stand in the pulpit, I speak in the name and under the authority of Him, whom we believe will shortly come to be our Judge, and who has said, "He who despises you, despises Me." (Luke 10:16)

I mean not to take up your time, at present, with a detail or a discussion of my doctrines. I offered a brief outline of my thoughts and aims in the first sermon I preached among you, and which was printed solely with the design of presenting it to you; though by a mistake which gave me pain at the time, it became more public than I intended. To the profession I then made, I have, by the goodness of God, been enabled invariably to conform. I doubt not but I have spoken the truth. (Ephesians 4:15) I have endeavored to speak it in love. It is true, I have not dared to disguise or

palliate my principles. I account it a great mercy to me, that I have not been influenced by the fear or the favor of men. But my conscience bears me witness, that so far as truth and duty would admit—I have studied to avoid whatever might give you needless offence or pain. When I came to this church, not being altogether a stranger to what is called the world, and to the maxims prevalent in genteel life, I could not promise myself very genteel acceptance as a preacher. I knew that if I would be faithful to Scripture and my conscience, that some of my hearers must be displeased. But, though I was constrained to risk your displeasure, I have been solicitous not to needlessly provoke it, or to lay any unnecessary difficulties either in your way, or in my own.

Many people whose good sense and liberal education exempt or free them from prejudices of other kinds—are frequently much under the power of religious prejudices. We lament this, more than we wonder at it. The reason is obvious. In temporal concerns they examine and judge for themselves. But in religious matters, they are content to let others judge for them, and (if I may so speak) to swim with the stream of a prevailing opinion. To this cause—I must ascribe some of the objections that are made to my ministry. In almost every age and country where Christianity has been professed, some hard name or term of reproach has been imposed upon those who ventured to maintain a more evangelical strain of doctrine, or a stricter course of conduct—than was agreeable to the spirit of the times in which they lived. Even the name 'Christian', as honorable as we may now think it, was first used by the heathen, as a stigma, a term of the utmost contempt and hatred! Then Christians were, by common consent, reputed the off-scouring and filth of all things. (1 Corinthians 4:13) In a like manner, terms of reproach were applied by the papists—to scorn those whom God honored as His instruments in freeing our forefathers from the shackles of popery, by introducing that light of truth which issued in the Reformation.

Men of the same spirit were afterwards branded in protestant nations with the terms of reproach, such as Pietist, Puritan or Methodist. I have not hitherto met with a person who could give me a definition or precise idea of what is generally intended by these words, by those who use it to express their disapprobation. Until I do, I am at a loss whether to confess or deny that I am (what some account me) a Methodist. If it is supposed to include anything, whether in principle or conduct, unsuitable to the character of a Christian minister—I may, and I do, disown it. And yet it is probable, that some of my parishioners, hearing and easily taking it for granted, that I am a Methodist, think it a sufficient proof that it cannot be worth their while to hear me. That I may not disgust and weary my hearers by the length of my sermons, I carefully endeavor not to exceed three quarters of an hour, at those seasons when I have most reason to hope for the presence of my parishioners. At other times, I allow myself a longer term; but even this, I understand, is thought too long. If I considered my preaching only as a customary appendage, without which I could not, with a good grace, collect my pay—we would not long differ upon this point. So far as brevity would be pleasing to you—it would cost me little trouble to please. But, if the proper ends of preaching are to instruct, to admonish, to exhort, and to persuade; if the great truths of Scripture are to be explained, illustrated, and applied; if the various known or probable states and cases of the several people who compose our congregation are to be attended to; in a word, if, as a preacher, I am conscientiously to endeavor to save myself and those who hear me; (1 Timothy 4:16) then I confess I know not how to answer these ends, were I to limit myself to a much shorter space than I do!

And, sometimes, when my heart has been deeply impressed with a sense of the worth of souls, the brevity and uncertainty of life, and the solemnity of that hour when both preachers and hearers must give an account of themselves to God—I have perhaps, in defiance of my previous determination, been constrained to exceed it a few minutes, though but seldom.

I am persuaded you are mistaken, when you think the length of my discourses is the cause of your dissatisfaction. It is not so much the length, as the subject-matter which wearies you. It is possible I could, if I dared, preach a sermon, which, though it exceeded three quarters of an hour—you would not think too long. Many people can afford their attention for several hours to some vain entertainment without weariness, whose patience is quickly exhausted under a sermon, where the principles of Scripture are plainly enforced, and a faithful application of them is addressed to the conscience!

I lay no claim to the honor of being a polished orator; nor do I expect, or even wish, to engage your attention by the elegance of my words. If I possessed abilities of this kind, I would decline the use of them. I must speak to the unlearned as well as to the wise—and therefore my principal aim is to be understood. Yet I would hope that I am not justly chargeable with speaking nonsense, or expressing myself with a levity or carelessness unsuitable to the pulpit, or disrespectful to the congregation. But, alas! there are too many hearers, who seem more desirous of entertainment, than of real benefit from a Christian sermon!

They do not thus act in the affairs of common life. Were they to consult a physician or a lawyer, they would not be content with listening to some opinion upon a needless point of law, or upon a case of medicine in which they themselves had no personal concern. It is their own case they expect should be considered. But, when they come to church, if the discourse is clever, and the elocution of the preacher is pleasant—it suffices them. And the less the subject comes home to their personal concernment, the more they are pleased with it. That is, they are disposed to be pleased with the preacher—if he says nothing to make them displeased with themselves!

Another objection which I must likewise treat as a prejudice is, that I am an extemporary preacher. The practice of reading sermons to a public assembly, has been hitherto peculiar to the English nation. Burnet observes, that it took its rise soon after the dawn of the Reformation among us. Latimer and other great men, whose names, now that they are dead, are mentioned with some respect, were, when living, treated by many as if they had been enthusiasts. They were contemptuously styled Gospellers, and preaching in tumultuous times, when there were insurrections in different parts of the kingdom, they were traduced as our Savior and His apostles had been before them, and charged with having a design to foment sedition by their sermons! The preachers not only disavowed the charge—but were led to write their discourses, that they might, if necessary, confute their slanderers, by producing what they had actually delivered. The like accusations, and the like suspicions, in some succeeding reigns, rendered the same precaution expedient. At length the custom of writing down the whole sermon, became general and established. In most, if not in all other parts of Christendom, a man who would attempt to read his sermon from the pulpit, would find but few hearers; and would be judged disqualified for the office of a preacher. Insomuch that those who after having previously considered their subject, are not able to speak upon it with some degree of readiness, are obliged not only to write their sermons—but to submit to the burdensome task of committing them to memory; for reading them

would not be endured. With us, on the contrary, the prejudice in favor of reading the sermon is so strong, that many people can form no expectation of sense, argument, or coherence, from a man who preaches without notes. They will require little more proof of his being unworthy of their notice, than to be told he is an extempore speaker. Here again, in the concerns of common life, they judge and act otherwise. There is little doubt but the theaters would soon be much less frequented, if the performers were to appear with notebooks in their hands, and each one to read his respective part. And perhaps the theater is the only place where a public speaker would be much admired, if it were known that he spoke neither more nor less than he had previously determined to say. In parliamentary debates, and in pleadings in our courts of justice, the occurrence of unexpected replies and objections, and other new circumstances, renders it necessary that a man should be so far master of his subject and his thoughts, as to be able to accommodate himself to those sudden turns, which often lead him into a train of discussions and arguments, which could not be premeditated, because such occasions could not be foreseen. If this habit and facility of speaking off the cuff, and applying principles of general knowledge to particular subjects and incidents as they offer—is allowed, approved, and even required in other public speakers, why should it be supposed that the preacher is the only person who cannot, or must not, express his thoughts—but in that order, and in those words, in which he has previously written them? Is not divinity a subject sufficiently copious? Are not the topics which the Scriptures afford, well suited, by their importance, certainty, and authority, to awaken the strongest emotions, and to draw forth the highest exertions of which the human mind is capable? Shall the management of the contested claim of a house or a field, or the interests of contending political parties, be deemed of such consequence as to engage the attention and admiration of hearers? And shall a minister of the gospel, when called by his office to unfold the wonders of redemption, or to enlarge on the solemn themes of judgment, heaven and hell—be thought the only man who has chosen a subject incapable of justifying his earnestness, or of furnishing him with such thoughts and expressions upon the spot, as the most judicious part of his congregation need not hear? Certainly, if the Bible is true, a minister must have the same advantage of all other people who speak in a public character. His subject is more weighty, and of infinitely more concern to his hearers. He speaks in the name of God, and has an express promise of the assistance of His Holy Spirit, if not to supersede his faculties, yet to influence, animate, and guide them, to bring things seasonably to his remembrance, and to apply them to the heart with a divine energy!

We know that it is so in fact; and though we are slighted, and perhaps despised, by many, there are others who receive our testimony with joy, and will acknowledge that what the world esteems the foolishness of preaching, (1 Corinthians 1:21) has, by the blessing of God, made them wise unto salvation. (2 Timothy 3:15)

I earnestly entreat you, my beloved friends, seriously to consider these things. In the midst of the various sentiments and opinions which prevail, it is at least certain that we are all mortal; and that life is not only short—but highly precarious. If you believe the Scriptures, you acknowledge, that after death there is an appointed judgment, followed by an unchangeable, everlasting state. If so, should you not carefully examine the ground of your hope, and fear even the possibility of a mistake, which, if not rectified before death—will then be fatal and without remedy?

If you would not sign a lease or a contract without examining it for yourselves, why will you venture your eternal soul implicitly upon the prevailing opinions of those around you? Especially, when our

Lord Himself has told us, that whoever may be right, the many are undoubtedly wrong! "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it!" (Matthew 7:13) If for the present you seem confirmed in your manner of thinking and living, by the numbers, names, and examples, of those with whom you agree; yet consider, that you must soon be separated from them all. Not one of them will be able to answer for you to God, in the day of judgment. You may live in a throng—but you must die alone.

Religious subjects are seldom the chosen topics of conversation, in what is usually called good company; if occasionally introduced, how superficially are they treated, yet how instantly are they decided upon, and then how readily dismissed! But sooner or later their importance will be known. The Scripture is the rule by which we must all be judged at last; it is therefore our wisdom to judge ourselves by it now. Would you be persuaded to do this, praying to God for that assistance which you need to direct your inquiries, and which He has promised He will afford to those who ask Him—it would have a happy effect upon your principles and your peace. Search and read for yourselves, to see—if the Scripture does not speak to all mankind as in a state of condemnation; (Romans 2:19) if it affords us any hope of deliverance—but for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ; (Acts 4:12) if it intimates any method of being saved through Him—but by a faith (Mark 16:16) wrought by the operation of God, and evidenced by a temper of love, and a habit of cheerful obedience to His precepts (Colossians 2:12, Galatians 5:6, 1 Peter 1:2) If these points, which comprise the general scope of my preaching, are contained and taught in the Bible—then they ought not to be spoken against.

I have no selfish interest to forward by this address, except that interest which I feel in your welfare. I have no favor to solicit from you—but that you would attend to the things which pertain to your eternal happiness. I can truly say, "What I want is not your possessions—but you!" (2 Corinthians 12:14) Though I am not indifferent to your good opinion, so far as respects my integrity and moral character, yet it is a small thing with me to be judged by any man’s judgment. Nor would your united approbation content me, except I could hope it was founded in your cordial acceptance of the gospel which I preach.

I have taken this method, as it seemed the only one in my power of acquainting some of you with my sentiments, which it highly concerns you to know; not because they are mine—but (I speak it with confidence) because they are true, and of the utmost importance. However amiable and benevolent you are in your private characters, unless you are born again, (John 3:3) born from above, delivered from the love and spirit of the world, (Galatians 1:4) and made partakers of the love and spirit of the Lord Jesus, (Romans 8:9) you cannot be accepted by Him in the great approaching day of His appearance. My heart longs for your salvation; but whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, I must take your consciences to witness, that I have been faithful to you. If after this warning any of you should finally perish—I am clear of your blood! (Acts 20:26)

Permit me to make one request. It is not likely that I shall ever trouble you in this way again, and therefore I would entreat you to preserve this paper. If it makes no impression on you at present, a more favorable season may come. If you pay but little attention to it in your prosperity, a time of affliction may invite you to peruse it again. If you regard it not while I am living—you may, should you survive me, read it more carefully after my decease.

It is however probable, that some of you will not survive me. Death may be even at your door! If the thought of such a visitant is unwelcome to you, it is owing to a secret consciousness that you are not prepared for it, and therefore you seek refuge from the painful apprehension, in a round of business or pleasure; perhaps, for the present, with too much success. Yet, sooner or later, the hour you dread must come! "It is appointed for all men once to die—and after death comes the judgment." There we shall all meet. May the Lord God so influence your minds now, that our meeting then may be comfortable and happy!

Thus far I have written chiefly to those who absent themselves from the church. But I thank God I am not wholly deserted by my parishioners. With regard to those who have patience and candor to hear me, I have a hope that what may now seem harsh and difficult in my sermons, may hereafter approve itself to their judgment. No person in the congregation can be more averse from the doctrines which I now preach—than I myself once was! This gives me encouragement for others, especially when they are willing to attend on the means which God has promised to bless. For faith comes by hearing. (Romans 10:17) If I have at any time, contrary to my intention, uttered a single sentence in my own spirit, or that might give them just cause of offence, I would be glad, if I knew it, to ask their pardon.

Some of you there are, (may God increase the number,) who not only hear—but approve, because they have an experience in their own hearts that I speak the truth. They have felt the evil of sin—and the necessity of a Savior. They have received the, record God has given of His Son, and place their whole dependence upon Him, as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30) To these I can address myself with more freedom.

You know the difficulties of my situation, and will assist me with your prayers. I trust likewise you will assist me with your conduct, and that your lives and godly speech will contribute to stop the mouths of gainsayers, and constrain them to acknowledge, that the doctrines of grace, which I preach, when rightly understood and cordially embraced—are productive of peace, contentment, integrity, benevolence, and humility.

Many eyes are upon you, watching for your halting, and seeking occasion by your miscarriages, if they can observe any—to speak evil of the way of truth. (2 Peter 2:2) May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ enable you to disappoint them and make them ashamed!

We must expect some opposition, along with many temptations and trials. But we are engaged in a good cause, and we have a mighty Savior, a compassionate Friend, a prevailing Advocate! He knows your path; He sees your conflicts—and He has engaged to support, to guide, and to guard you, and at length to make you more than conquerors, (Romans 8:37) and to bestow upon you a crown of everlasting life!

I am your affectionate servant,

John Newton

Chapter 40

01.01. Letter to Church in Olney

A letter from John Newton, which he had printed and distributed to every family in his church in Olney, in 1768 My dear friends,

Every person in our church has a place in my heart and prayers—but I cannot speak to each of you individually. Yet I am desirous to give full proof that I watch for the welfare of your souls; and likewise, (if it is possible,) to have a witness in every conscience, that none may plead ignorance of those things which it highly concerns them to know. I hope you will receive this paper in good part, as a token of my love, and read it with attention. The great God, who appoints to all people "the bounds of their habitation," (Acts 17:26) has been pleased to fix your place in a place favored with the light of the gospel. This is a great and distinguishing privilege in itself; but it may be abused, and, if it is—will certainly aggravate your guilt and condemnation!

"JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED!" (1 Corinthians 2:2) is preached among you! This foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11) which GOD Himself has provided, whereon poor sinners may build their eternal hope, is set before you. You are warned of the evil of sin, of the wrath of God denounced against transgressors, and of the impossibility of being saved without that true faith, which, being of the operation of GOD, purifies the heart, "and works by love." And the great blessings of salvation, immortality, pardon, justification, adoption, holiness, perseverance, and eternal glory—are preached among you, as the sure and inseparable effects of a living faith in the Son of God. (Colossians 2:12. Acts 15:9. Galatians 5:6) In a little time we must all give an account of our improvement of the opportunities we are favored with. This thought, joined to a consideration of the state of our church, leads me to offer a word in season to each of you. Perhaps there is hardly a single person who will not be more or less concerned under one or other of the following particulars.

1. If God has taught you the truths I have mentioned above, if you have true faith in His Son Jesus Christ, or if, convinced of its necessity, you are humbly and diligently seeking it in the use of the means He has appointed; I may address you in the angel’s language to Mary, "Hail, you who are highly favored!" (Luke 1:28) for if you have this faith, you have the promise and pledge of everlasting life; (John 6:47) or if you account yourself but a seeker, the word of the living God is engaged for your success; for He has said, "Those who seek—shall find." (Matthew 7:7)

I trust that you will readily receive this word of exhortation. You are called with a "high and holy calling;" (Php 3:14, 2 Timothy 1:9) watch and pray, therefore, that you may be preserved from the snares of the world, and the devices of Satan. That no errors in judgment, no sinful indulgence in practice, nothing contrary to the spirituality, love, gentleness, and patience, which befit the gospel of Christ, may defile your conscience, rob you of your comfort, or "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2) through your miscarriage.

You are called out of darkness into marvelous light," (1 Peter 2:9) that by your profession God may be glorified. Therefore keep close to His Word as your rule; be constant in your application at the

throne of grace; attend diligently upon His public ordinances, that thus by waiting upon the Lord—your strength may be renewed, (Isaiah 40:31) and "your light" may shine before men" (Matthew 5:16) to His praise. That justice, truth, fidelity, sobriety, and diligence, may adorn the exercise of your ordinary calling; and that you may fill up your relations in life as a master or servant, a husband or a wife, a parent or a child, in such a manner as may and will be expected from one who has "tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Peter 2:3) Beware of a worldly, or selfish, or proud, or peevish, or passionate spirit! If you give way to any of these evils, you will walk uncomfortably yourself, you will grieve or discourage others, and you will open the mouths of the wicked to "blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called." (James 2:7)

2. But if you are one of those who account the gospel of Christ as a burden, and can hardly be brought to give it a patient hearing; what can I say to you? You are already prejudiced against all I can offer, and perhaps account me "an enemy because I tell you the truth." Yet I would gladly persuade you of my good-will for you. I have no complaint to make of you upon my own account; having received no personal incivility even from those who are dissatisfied with my ministry. Though you are unwilling to hear me from the pulpit—yet let me expostulate a minute with you in this way. If I cannot prove my doctrine by the Scripture, and even by the articles and public offices of our own church—you have reason to be displeased with me. But why will you venture to reject, what you must confess may at least possibly be the truth? I am sure you cannot disprove the general subjects of my ministry, not even to the satisfaction of your own minds, if you will sit leisurely down, and examine them by the New Testament.

It is, indeed, easy to turn off my inquiry with a laugh, while you are in health and good spirits; but if you can remember a time when you have been sick, and apprehensive of the approach of death, probably you then felt your confidence fail, and was not so sure of the safety of your state as you once thought yourself. Such a time will come again. You may be cut off by a sudden stroke, and you must eventually die. You must experience that untried moment, and render up your soul to the solemn tribunal of God. Oh, then, beware of resting your eternal hopes upon any less authority than God’s Word! You may now be supported by others; but no teacher, or friend, or favorite author, can or will stand between you and your eternal Judge. You may live in a crowd—but you must die alone. What you think of yourself, or what others may think of you—is of small consequence; the main question is, "What you are in the sight of the Great Judge, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden!" (1 Corinthians 4:3.) For, according to His unalterable sentence—you must stand or fall to eternity. Alas! if our gospel is true, and you live and die a stranger to it—it will be more tolerable in that day for those who never heard of the name of Jesus, than for you! (Matthew 11:22).

3. There are too many people among us who abstain from the public worship, not so much from any particular objection they have to the doctrines of the gospel—as from an inconsiderate and worldly turn of mind, which keeps them in a general neglect of true religion.

Many associate for drink and worldly pleasures, to the grief of all serious people, and in defiance to the commandments of God. If I could have suppressed these enormities, I would. But, I can only give notice as a minister and a watchman, that "for these things the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience!" (Ephesians 5:6.) If you, my reader, are concerned in these practices, let me entreat you to consider what you are doing. Why will you "provoke the Lord to jealousy?" (1

Corinthians 10:22.) Are you stronger than He? If your whole dependence was upon what we call a great man, you would not dare to willfully and publicly disobey him! And can you think it safe to trifle with the great God! Do you not know that your life, your health, the peace of your family, and the success of your labor—all depend upon Him? Are you not afraid, lest by openly affronting His Majesty—that you should provoke Him to send a curse upon all your concerns, and to blast all your endeavors? (Haggai 1:6-9)

Every rebellion against God makes our state more desperate, sin being in its nature, progressive. How many have made a confession to this purpose—at the gallows? And how many families may be found that are as full of misery, dissension, and confusion, as they are destitute of the fear and worship of God? Alas! I shall tremble for you if you do not lay this admonition to heart! I shall fear lest you provoke the Lord to give you up to a reprobate mind, or lest, in the course of His providence, He should set some mark upon you, to teach others by your example, that it is a dreadful thing to sin against the Lord! (Romans 2:4) But, though His patience should bear with you to the last—and to the last you should despise it, yet death will finally summon you to judgment, unless by His grace you are brought to repentance! Though you may say, "Peace, peace" to yourself—sudden destruction will then come upon you, and you shall not be able to escape! (1 Thessalonians 5:3)

If you are one of those who do not wholly neglect the public worship of God—but accustom yourself to attend only once on Sundays, give me leave to ask you, or rather to desire that you would ask your own conscience, whether you have sufficient excuse for not attending twice? I know the circumstances of many families, such as sickness, young children, etc. will necessarily confine some people at home. But a due allowance for these impediments, will by no means account for the great difference between our congregations in the morning and in the afternoon of the same day.

Now, if you have not a lawful hindrance to plead, consider whether the same reasons that require your presence at the public worship once, are not equally strong for your being there both parts of the day. Why do you go at all? Is it not to join with others in paying homage to the great God? But by doing this once only, where opportunity and the example of others invite you twice—you contradict yourself, and act as if you thought it was sometimes your duty to join in worship, and sometimes not worth your while. Or, do you go with a hope of receiving good for your souls? Why then should you at any time be willing to stay away? Perhaps the opportunity you miss might have been made peculiarly useful to you. At least the Lord may justly punish your frequent neglect, by withholding His blessing when you do attend. And this may be one reason why you have attended morning worship so long—yet to so little purpose.

4. It is with grief that I observe how generally the Word of God is disregarded among us, though few can plead ignorance of His will. The Scripture denounces a woe against those "who are mighty to drink strong drink," (Isaiah 5:22) and against "him who urges strong drink upon his neighbor to put him to shame." (Habakkuk 2:15) The Scripture declares, "Everyone who swears shall be cut off with a curse." (Zechariah 5:3, Exodus 20:7) These threatenings are frequently repeated in the ears of those who have not entirely cast off the mere form of religion. Yet I fear that intemperance, riot, and profaneness, visibly gain strength from year to year. If you will go on in those practices— remember I this day take God and your consciences to witness, that "I am

innocent of your blood!" (Acts 20:26) As I have forewarned you before, so I tell you again, "The wrath of God hangs over you! Unless you repent—you will surely perish!" (Luke 13:3-5) It will be a great aggravation if you perish "with your eyes open!"

Think, I beseech you, before it is too late, of that awful passage, "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations! When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." The Lord will never be willing to forgive him; His wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven!" (Deuteronomy 29:18-20)

There is one sin too frequent in the parish, which upon this occasion I think it especially necessary to mention. Paul assures us, (agreeably to many other passages of Scripture,) that "God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery!" (Hebrews 13:4) Adultery, which implies a breach of the marriage-contract, is so dreadful, so irreparable an evil, and as such condemned even by the heathen who know not God—that I would hope none of you are chargeable with it! If you are, however you may conceal your wickedness from your fellow-creatures, you cannot hide it from God! His eye is upon you, and His justice will surely overtake you! Indeed, if He is pleased to give you faith in the name of Jesus, and a sincere repentance of your crimes, there is yet hope, for "the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin!" (1 John 1:7) Otherwise I testify to you from His Word, that "you shall surely perish!" He who said, "You shall not commit adultery," (Exodus 20:14) will not hold you guiltless in the day of His wrath!" The apostle joins whoredom with adultery, and has expressly inserted fornication in the black list of those sins which will certainly exclude from a place in the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19) If you have been guilty, may the Lord fix a sense of your sin upon your conscience while you are reading, that you may not think it a light matter—but may instantly humble yourself before Him, and flee to the Refuge provided for helpless sinners in the gospel! (Hebrews 6:18) If by His restraining grace and providence, you have been hitherto preserved from this iniquity, you have reason to praise Him. And oh, pray to Him, (I speak more especially to young people,) that you may be enabled to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11)

It is your duty and interest to flee from this hateful evil, and to watch against the temptations which lead to it, as you would avoid a pestilence! By complying with it, you hazard all your peace and comfort in this life, as well as sin against the great God. If an immoral relationship between single people does not issue in marriage, a long train of mischiefs is the usual consequence; shame, remorse, misery, and very often total ruin, especially on the woman’s part. And, even if the parties are afterwards married, though this may lesson the scandal in the sight of men—the sin committed against God remains the same. And an occasion is opened for such reflections and suspicions, as frequently embitter the peace and destroy the confidence and affection—in which they might otherwise have lived.

5. I observe likewise, with great concern—a spirit of open impiety and infidelity which spreading among some people. They are bold to "proclaim their sin as Sodom;" (Isaiah 3:9) they cannot be content with the practice of wickedness, or with tempting others to partake of their evil deeds—but they are prompted to scoff at the truths of the gospel, and to ridicule and revile those who will not

"run with them into the same excess of sin." (1 Peter 4:4) If anyone, of this unhappy turn, should read this paper, I would take the opportunity to tell you—that I pity you, and pray for you. I well know the gall and wormwood (Lamentations 3:19) of your state—for it was once my own. I am not surprised at anything you say or do. You sin against the light, and this makes you desperate! "It is hard to kick against the goads." (Acts 9:5) I can tell from my own past experience, that your heart and your language do not always agree. You are sometimes constrained to reverence the people you affect to despise; and often, when you boast of jollity and pleasure, you feel something within which makes you wish you could change conditions with a dog or a toad! You understand what I mean.

Why then should you remain in this miserable bondage, where there is One who is able to set you free? Perhaps you have concluded that you have gone too far to stop; that you have sinned with too high a hand to be forgiven. A secret despair of this kind, is Satan's great engine, by which he hurries many sinners to the most dreadful sins! But may I not give my own case for your encouragement against such a conclusion? You have probably heard that I was once "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man!" (1 Timothy 1:13-16) I was so, indeed, to a degree I cannot express! But I obtained mercy! The exceeding abundant grace of our Lord Jesus Christ brought me out of that dreadful state, and in His providence He has placed me among you, that you may have a proof before your eyes, of His gracious declaration, that "Every sin or blasphemy can be forgiven!" "There is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared!" (Matthew 12:31, Psalms 130:4)

Oh, that I could prevail with you to seek Him while He is to be found, to submit to Him before the gate of mercy is quite shut! Then "I am sure iniquity should not be your ruin!" (Ezekiel 18:30) for "He is able to save all who come unto God by Him—to the uttermost!" (Hebrews 7:25)

Let me give you one caution: do not make the Scripture, or the people who love it, the subjects of your wanton mirth. "Scoff no more—or your punishment will be even greater!" (Isaiah 28:22) A common proverb says, "It is harmful to play with sharp-edged tools!" I am sure it may be applied in the present case. If the cause you despise is the cause of God, it will be a dreadful thing to be found fighting against Him!

6. There remains a considerable number to whom I have not yet spoken; who may know they are not true believers, yet are tolerably regular in their attendance upon the means of grace, and are not habitually guilty of gross and open sins. I commend you for your readiness to hear the gospel, and rejoice that it has some influence upon your conduct. But I would caution you against resting in religious privileges, or thinking yourself safe, because you have escaped the wicked abominations in which you see some others live. Every sin—though not so heinous in the judgment of man—is sufficient to damn the soul. If you "love the world—the love of the Father is not in you. (1 John 2:15) "To be carnally-minded is death." (Romans 8:6) "Covetousness is idolatry." (Colossians 3:5) If you are under the prevailing power of passion, pride, and resentment, you are strangers to the grace of God. (Galatians 5:20) In a word, "if you have not the Spirit of Christ, you do not belong to Him." (Romans 7:9) A mere form of godliness, without the power, (2 Timothy 3:5) will leave you helpless and hopeless!" Can you be content to be no more than chaff among the wheat, (Matthew 3:12) to converse and worship with the people of God for a season here on earth—and then to be separated from them forever? Can you be content to see those

whom you know and love, your friends and relatives, received into the kingdom at last—and you yourselves shut out! (Luke 13:2; Luke 13:5-30) How awful will your disappointment be! May the Lord awaken you to a diligent search into your own hearts, and into His holy Word, and not allow you to take up with anything short of a real and saving conversion!

Look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, (Hebrews 12:2) who is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and pardon, life and immortality! (Acts 5:31) And remember you have His faithful promise, "Him who comes unto me, I will never cast out." (John 6:37)

I can truly say, my dear friends, that "my heart's desire, and prayer to God for you, is that you may be saved!" (Romans 10:1) As some, I fear, have hitherto heard in vain, and some will not hear me at all—I have chosen this method to address you all. I hope none will be offended, for I would not willingly offend even a child. I hope I can appeal to yourselves, that God has given me a desire to live peaceably with all men, and to the utmost of my power, to promote your eternal welfare. "What I want is not your possessions —but you!" (2 Corinthians 12:14) In a little while "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." (2 Corinthians 3:10) There I must give an account of my ministry—and you must account for the privileges with which you have been favored. When I think of the solemnities of that day, and the worth of your immortal souls—I am at a loss for words suitable to my desires on your behalf. "I beseech you by the tender mercies of our God," (Romans 12:1) I warn you by His approaching terrors, (2 Corinthians 5:11) that you do not receive the gospel of God in vain! (2 Corinthians 6:1) And, though I cannot expect to prevail on you all, yet I write in hope, that the blessing from the Lord will make the reading of this paper useful to some. And, if it is so, even one to person—I esteem it an over-payment for all the labors of my whole life. And now I commend you to God, to the Word of His grace, and to the teaching of His Spirit. (Acts 20:32) I make it my earnest request to the favored few who know the Lord, and have received the spirit of prayer, that in your supplications at the throne of grace, you will frequently bear in remembrance, Your affectionate friend and servant in the gospel of Christ,

John Newton

Chapter 41

01.01. Letters to William Bull, from 1773 to 1805.

Letters of John Newton to William Bull, written from 1773 to 1805.

Mr. Bull became pastor of the Independent church at Newport Pagnell about the same time that Mr. Newton came to Olney. (The two places were but five miles apart.) The acquaintance between these friends did not commence until some time after this. No sooner, however, did they come really to know each other than this acquaintance speedily ripened into a very intimate, and, as it proved, a life-long friendship. In his Diary, at this time, Mr. Newton speaks again and again of the high esteem in which his friend was held. Thus he says: "I find few with whom I can converse with equal advantage, whose manner of thinking is so deep and solid." Again: "He has just called and spent an hour with me. I could sit silent half a day to listen to him, and am almost unwilling to speak a word for fear of preventing him." Once more: "I admire Mr. Bull; so humble, so spiritual, so judicious and so savory . . . I think he will be my most profitable companion in these parts." The fellowship between Mr. Newton and Mr. Bull, as may be well supposed, was very frequent, so long as the former resided at Olney; and when he removed to London, there was abundant opportunity for its renewal, as Mr. Bull was in the habit, for many years, of preaching for several sabbaths at the Tabernacle and at Tottenham Court and Surrey Chapels. The flame of their affection burnt brightly to the last; for, as Mr. Newton writes in 1800, when to write had become a task, "If two needles are properly touched by a magnet, they will retain their sympathy for a long time. But if two hearts are truly united to the Heavenly Magnet, their mutual attraction will be permanent in time and to eternity. Blessed be the Lord for a good hope, that it is thus between you and me. I could not love you better if I saw or heard from you every day."

Mr. Bull was pastor of the church at Newport for fifty years; a church which he was enabled, by the blessing of God, to raise from a very low condition to a state of great prosperity. For a considerable portion of this time be also presided over a theological institution, in the formation of which Mr. Newton took a very active part, and the special design of which was to train suitable young men of evangelical sentiments for the Christian ministry, without regard to denominational distinctions.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Psalms 133:1

Dear Sir, At present it is January with me — both within and without. The outward sun shines and looks pleasant — but his beams are faint, and too feeble to dissolve the frost. So is it in my heart! I have many bright and pleasant beams of truth in my view — but cold predominates in my frost-bound spirit, and they have but little power to warm me!

I could tell a stranger something about Jesus, which would perhaps astonish him. Such a glorious person, such wonderful love, such humiliation, such a death! And then, what He is now in Himself, and what He is to His people. What a Sun! what a Shield! what a Life! what a Friend! My tongue can run on upon these subjects sometimes, and could my heart keep pace with it — I would be the happiest fellow in the country!

Stupid creature! to know these things so well, and yet be no more affected with them!

Indeed, I have reason to be upon ill terms with myself. It is strange that pride should ever find anything in my experience to feed upon; but this completes my character for folly, vileness, and inconsistency — that I am not only poor — but proud! And though I am convinced I am a very wretch, as nothing before the Lord — I am prone to go forth among my fellow-creatures as though I were wise and holy!

You wonder what I am doing — and well you may. I am sure you would, if you lived with me. Too much of my time passes in busy idleness, too much in waking dreams. I aim at something — but hindrances from within and without make it difficult for me to accomplish anything. I have written three or four pages since you was here, in the little book I showed you. It is to be but about the size of a shilling pamphlet; and if I go on as I have begun, it may be finished before Christmas! I dare not say I am absolutely idle, or that I willfully waste much of my time. I think I could complete my book in five or six days, if I had nothing else to do; but I have seldom one hour free from interruption. Letters come that must be answered—visitants that must be received—business that must be attended to. I have a good many sheep and lambs to look after — sick and afflicted souls dear to the Lord; and therefore whatever stands still — these must not be neglected. Among these various avocations, night comes before I am ready for noon, and the week closes when, according to the state of my business, it should not be more than Tuesday! Oh precious irrecoverable time! Oh that I had more wisdom in redeeming and improving you! Pray for me, that the Lord may teach me to serve him better.

Mrs. Newton has been one week confined to her chamber through illness — but is pretty well again. We abound in mercies and causes for gratitude; but what a shame and pity to make such poor returns to the Author of them! I long to come to Newport to see you — but I believe I must wait for that pleasure until the days are a little longer. In the meantime you will be as welcome to us here, if you will trot over — as a new guinea to a miser’s pocket.

I am very affectionately yours,

John Newton January 27, 1778

Naughty Sir, To keep me at home four afternoons upon the tip-toe of expectation — and not come near me at last. If you cannot send me a certificate, signed by the doctor and church-warden, specifying that you were too ill to travel, I have reason to be angry with you! But to show my forgiving spirit, if you will come over on Monday To dinner, I will give you something to eat, and your certificate of pardon.

I am to preach (if I can) three times on Fast-day — but have at present fixed only upon one text, which, for a certain reason, I shall not mention to you at present. I send you, however, according to order, a text and a plan which I found among my old papers. I preached it about sixteen years ago to a congregation of about twelve, in my own house, sometime before I was brought into the public ministry. I have not time to read it over; but if it may put any hints in your way, it is at your service. I cannot send you my present thoughts upon another text, for a plain reason, namely, that I am not able yet to think for myself; and I must receive — before I can communicate. It would be mocking you to offer you drink — out of an empty vessel.

Since I have begun to write, I have thought perhaps one of my texts will be either Psalms 97:1, or Psalms 19:1. The whole system of my politics is summed up in that one sentence, "The Lord reigns!" I wish you would send me, by the bearer, some hints towards a sermon on it. It would be a good text if I knew how to manage it. The times look awfully dark indeed; and as the clouds grow thicker, the stupidity of the nation seems proportionally to increase. If the Lord had not a remnant here, I would have very formidable apprehensions. But he loves his children; some are sighing and mourning before him, and I am sure he hears their sighs, and sees their tears. I trust there is mercy in store for us at the bottom; but I expect a shaking time before things get into a right channel, before we are humbled, and are taught to give him the glory. The state of the nation, the state of the churches — both are deplorable. Those who should be praying — are disputing and fighting among themselves! Alas! how many professors are more concerned for the mistakes of government, or of the Americans, than for their own sins! When will these things end?

Love me, and pray for me, and come to see me — for I cannot come to you. With my love and Mrs. Newton's to you and Mrs. Bull, I remain, your obliged friend, John Newton Olney, 24 Feb., 1778.

Dear Sir,

I am so monstrous busy, I have hardly time to tell you how sorry I am for my disappointment, and your illness, which was the cause of it. Indeed, I am as sorry for both, as a Calvinist ought to be. It was the time you and I appointed for meeting; had it been the Lord's time — nothing could have prevented you. I wish he may give you permission to come next Monday, or any day after tomorrow which you please, only send word. What do you think of it? I have a double motive for wishing to see you now, because, besides having your company, it would be a proof that you were better.

Last Sunday afternoon we had a great personage with us at church. I endeavored to persuade all the congregation to kiss Him. But though I talked a whole hour about it, few would comply. Alas! it was because they did not know him; and though I told them who he was, they would not believe me.

Dear Sir, When I found the morning coaches came in without you, I was not much disappointed. I know how difficult it is to get away from Northampton if you are seen in the street after breakfast. The horseleech has three daughters, saying, Give, give! The cry there is, Preach, preach. When you have told them all, you must tell them more, or tell it them over again. Whoever will find tongue — they will engage to find ears. Yet I do not blame this importunity. I wish you were teased more with it in your own town; for though undoubtedly there are too many both at Northampton and here whose religion lies too much in hearing — yet, in many, it proceeds from a love to the truth, and to the ministers who dispense it. And I generally observe that those who are not willing to hear a stranger (if his character is known) are indifferent enough about hearing their own minister.

I beg you to pray for me. I am a poor creature, full of needs. I seem to need the wisdom of Solomon, the meekness of Moses, and the zeal of Paul — to enable me to make full proof of my ministry. But, alas! you may guess the rest.

Send me "The Way to Christ"! I am willing to be a debtor to the wise and unwise, to doctors and shoe-makers, if I can get a hint, or a Nota Bene from anyone, without respect to parties. When a

house is on fire, Churchmen and Dissenters, Methodists, Papists, Moravians, and Mystics — are all welcome to bring water. At such times nobody asks, "Dear friend, what church do you worship at?" Or "What do you think of the five points?"

Love and thanks to Mrs. Bull, etc,

John Newton 28th April, 1778.

Dear friend, My dear wife has been quite ill. Her head was ill when at your house — but she can carry it off pretty well, if not quite bad, for her spirits are naturally very good, which is a great mercy. Sickness is a bitter pill to the flesh — but good natural spirits sweeten the pill, if I may so say, and make it rather more palatable. The Lord is good; he knows what we need, and when we need it; and then have it we must and shall — whether it be sweet, bitter, or sour, for he will withhold no good thing from those who fear and love him. He weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance; with equal accuracy he adjusts all that concerns us. Worms as we are, he is attentive to everything that relates to our peace and welfare, as though we, each of us singly, were the sole objects of his providential care. At the same time, he is providing for the lions and ravens, supporting all the ants and worms that creep upon the earth; at the same time he upholds and enlightens the inhabitants of the heavenly world. His eye and his heart are attentively fixed upon you and worthless me. Well may we say, "Who is a God like unto you!"

Affectionately yours, John Newton Olney 1st July, 1778.

July 7, 1778 My dear friend,

I don’t know that I have anything to say worth the postage, though perhaps, had I seen you before you set off, something might have occurred which will not be found in my letter. Yet I write a line, because you bid me, and are now in a far foreign country. You will find Mr. **** a man to your tooth—but he is in Mr. W****’s connection. So I remember Mr. Bede, after giving a high character of some contemporary, kicks his full pail of milk down, and reduces him almost to nothing, by adding in the close to this purpose; "But, unhappy man—he did not keep Easter our way!" I don’t care a fig for all such religious connections! Therefore I venture to repeat it, that Mr. ****, though he often sees and hears Mr. W****, and I believe loves him well, is a good man—and you will see the invisible mark upon his forehead, if you examine him with your spiritual spectacles.

I do pity you in London! I see you melted with heat, stifled with smoke, stunned with noise! Ah! what a change from the brooks, and bushes, and birds, and green fields—to which you lately had access. Of old they used to retire into the deserts for contemplation and meditation. If I was to set myself a moderate penance—it might be to spend two weeks in London in the height of summer! But I forget myself. I hope the Lord is with you—and then all places are alike. He makes the dungeon and the stocks comfortable, Acts 26:1-32. Yes, even a fiery furnace, and a lion’s den! A child of God in London—seems to be in all these trying situations—but Jesus can preserve His own people. I honor the grace of God in those few (comparatively few, I fear,) who preserve their garments undefiled in that Sardis! The air is filled with infection; and it is by God’s special power and miraculous preservation, that they enjoy spiritual health—when so many sicken and fall around them on the right hand and on the left. May the Lord preserve you from the various epidemic soul diseases which abound where you are—and may He be your comfort and defense from day to day.

Last week we had a lion in town. I went to see him. He was wonderfully tame; as friendly with his keeper, as docile and obedient as a pet dog. Yet the man told me he had his surly fits, when they dared not touch him. No looking-glass could express my face more justly—than this lion did my heart. I could trace every feature—as wild and fierce by nature; yes, much more so—but grace has in some measure tamed me. I know and love my Keeper, and sometimes watch his looks that I may learn his will. But, oh! I have my surly fits too! Seasons when I relapse into the savage again, as though I had forgotten all.

July 13, 1778 My dear friend, As we are so soon to meet, as I have nothing very important to communicate, and many things occur which might demand my time; I have no other plea to offer, either to you or myself, for writing again—but because I love you.

I pity the minister with whom you talked this morning. But we must take men and things as we find them—and when we fall in company with those from whom we can get little other good, it is likely we shall at least find occasion for the exercise of patience and charity towards them, and of thankfulness to him who has made us to differ. And these are good things, though perhaps the occasion may not be pleasant. Indeed, a Christian, if in a right spirit, is always in his Lord's school, and may either learn a new lesson, or how to practice an old one—by everything he sees or hears, provided he does not willfully tread upon forbidden ground. If he were constrained to spend a day with the poor creatures in Newgate prison, though he could not talk with them of what God has done for his soul, he might be more sensible of God's mercy, by the contrast he would observe around him. He might rejoice for himself—and mourn over them—and thus perhaps get as much benefit as from the best sermon he ever heard!

It is necessary, all things taken together, to have interaction more or less, with narrow-minded people. If they are, notwithstanding their prejudices, civil to us—they have a right to some civility from us. We may love them, though we cannot admire them; and pick something good from them, notwithstanding we see so much to blame. It is perhaps the highest triumph we can obtain over bigotry—when we are able to bear with bigots themselves. For they are a set of troublesome folks, whom Mr. Self is often very forward to exclude from the comprehensive love and tenderness which he professes to exercise towards those who differ from him.

I am glad your present home (a believer should be always at home) is pleasant; the rooms large and airy; your host and hostess kind and spiritual; and, upon the whole, all things as well as you could expect to find them, considering where you are. I do not wish you to live there, for my own sake as well as yours—but if the Lord should so appoint it—I believe he can make you easy there, and enable me to make a tolerable shift without you. Yet I certainly shall miss you; for I have no person in this neighborhood with whom my heart so thoroughly unites in spiritual things, though there are many whom I love.

Conversation with most Christians is something like going to court; where, except you are dressed exactly according to a prescribed standard, you will either not be admitted, or must expect to be gaudily stared at. But you and I can meet and converse without pretense, without fear of offending, or being accounted offenders, for a word out of place, and not exactly in the right mode.

I think my sentiments and experience are as orthodox and Calvinistic as need be; and yet I am a sort of speckled bird among my Calvinist brethren. I am a mighty good Churchman—but pass

among them as a secret Dissenter. On the other hand, the Dissenters (many of them I mean) think me defective, either in understanding or in conscience, for staying where in the church. Well! there is a middle party, called Methodists—but neither do my dimensions exactly fit with them. I am somehow disqualified for claiming a full brotherhood with any party. But there are a few among all parties who bear with me and love me—and with this I must be content at present. But so far as they love the Lord Jesus, I desire, and by his grace I determine (with or without their permission) to love them all. Church denomination walls, though stronger than the walls of Babylon, must come down in the general ruin, when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up, if no sooner! My dear friend,

I thought that it pleased your very heart to see so much simplicity and spirituality in a lady of fortune. It is not wealth — but the love of it, and the pride of it, which are hurtful to professors. I know several people of distinction, who are as eminent for humility and devotedness to God — as for their rank in life. And, through mercy, I have no intimacy with any in a line of life above me, but what I think are such. It is the triumph of grace — to make the rich humble, and the poor thankful.

Oh, the gospel is an admirable expedient, a cure-all, equally suited to every condition of life, a universal cordial, a sovereign antidote! Those who truly receive it, are qualified to live in every situation to which the Lord in his providence appoints them. Though the air is infected, and thousands fall around them — they shall flourish, for the grace of their Lord is always sufficient for them, and the truths upon which they feed keep them from being either elated by prosperity, or depressed unduly by trials. Everywhere, and in all things, they are instructed. They hear the voice of their Beloved, are guided by his eye, animated by his example, and cheered by his presence!

I love you a little better than I did, because you know and love Dr. Conyers. I am not fond of making comparisons between ministers, and yet am almost constrained to set him at the head, as the first of "the first three" of our line. But I should not do so, upon the account of his gifts as a minister, if I did not know he is little in his own eyes. I estimate a minister’s character from combining what he is in the pulpit — with what he is when out of it; and they stand highest upon my scale, whose conduct is most expressive of the doctrines they preach.

If we cannot attain to "the first three," or to be ranked among "the thirty," still it is a mercy to be on the Lord’s side, and to be honored with an employment in his family, though in a lower place, so we may but be enabled to say, "I do a little for him, and to feed a few of the weakest and poorest of his children, for his sake."

Especially ought I to think so, who was before a blasphemer and a reviler! That I, who once deliberately renounced him, despised his blood, and crucified him afresh, that I should be redeemed and saved from the wilds of Africa, and put in trust with the blessed gospel — this was mercy indeed. I am ready to say —

"The first archangel never saw

So much of grace before." And yet I am not duly affected with it. Oh stupid, cold creature, to be no more humbled, no more thankful!

I am sincerely yours, John Newton Olney, 18th July, 1778.

July, 1778 My dear friend,

I was glad to hear that you were again within a few miles of me; and I praise the Lord, who led you out and brought you home in safety, and preserved all in peace while you were abroad, so that you found nothing very painful to embitter your return. Many go abroad in health—but return no more. The affectionate wife, the prattling children, listen for the well-known sound of papa's foot at the door—but they listen in vain! A fall or a fever has intercepted him, and he is gone—far, far away. Some leave all well when they go from home—but how changed, how trying, the scene when they come back! In their absence, the Lord has taken away the desire of their eyes with a stroke! Or perhaps ruffians have plundered and murdered their family in the dead of the night—or a fire has devoured their habitation!

Ah! how large and various is the list of evils and calamities with which sin has filled the world! You and I have escape them. We stand, though in a field of battle, where thousands fall around us—only because the Lord is pleased to keep us. May He have the praise—and may we only live to love and serve him. My wife has been very ill, and my heart often much pained while you have been absent. But the Lord has removed his hand—she is much better, and I hope she will be seen in his house tomorrow. I have few trials in my own person—but when the Lord afflicts her, I feel it. It is a mercy that he has made us one—but it exposes us to many a pain, which we might have missed if we cared but little for each other. Alas! there is usually an ounce of the golden calf, of idolatry and dependence, in all the warm regard we bear to creatures! For this reason, our sharpest trials usually spring from our most valued comforts.

I cannot come to you; therefore you must come hither speedily. Be sure to bring Mr. B**** with you. I shall be very glad to see him, and I long to thank him for binding my book. It looks well on the outside, and I hope to find it sound and savory. I love the author, and that is a step towards liking the book. For where we love—we are generally tender, and favorably take everything by the best handle, and are vastly full of candor. But if we are prejudiced against the author, the poor book is half condemned before we open it. It had need be written well; for it will be read with a suspicious eye, as if we wished to find treason in every page.

I am glad I profited you by calling myself a speckled bird. I can tell you, such a bird in this day, that wears the full color of no sect or party, is a rare breed; if not quite so scarce as the phoenix—yet to be met with but here and there. It is impossible I should be all of one color, when I have been a debtor to all sorts; and, like the jay in the fable, have been indebted to most of the birds in the air for a feather or two. Church and Dissenter, Methodist and Moravian, may all perceive something in my coat taken from them. None of them are angry with me for borrowing from them—but then, why could I not be content with their color, without going among other flocks and coveys, to make myself such a motley figure? Let them be angry; if I have culled the best feathers from all, then surely I am finer than any!

I am sincerely yours,

John Newton

Dear Mr. Bull, When you are with the King, and are getting good for yourself, speak a word for me and mine. I have reason to think you see him oftener, and have nearer access to him than myself. Indeed, I am unworthy to look at him, or to speak to him at all — much more that he should speak tenderly to me; yet I am not wholly without his notice: he supplies all my needs, and I live under his

protection. My enemies see his Royal arms over my door, and dare not enter. Were I detached from him for a moment, in that moment they would make an end of me.

I am, as I ought to be, your affectionate and obliged,

John Newton My birthday, 4th August, 1778.

August, 1778

Dear friend,

If the Lord affords health; if the weather be tolerable; if no unforeseen change takes place; if no company comes in upon me tonight, (which sometimes unexpectedly happens,) with these provisos, Mr. S **** and I have engaged to travel to **** on next Monday, and hope to be with you by or before eleven o'clock! In such a precarious world, it is needful to form our plans at two days' distance, with precaution and exceptions, James 4:13. However, if it be the Lord's will to bring us together, and if the purposed interview is for his glory and our good, then I am sure nothing shall prevent it. And who in his right wits would wish either to visit or be visited upon any other terms? O! if we could but be pleased with his will, we might be pleased from morning to night, and every day in the year.

Pray for a blessing upon our coming together. It would be a pity to walk ten miles to pick straws, or to come with our empty vessels upon our heads, saying, "We have found no water!" My dear friend,

I was unwilling not to leave a line to tell you that we sympathize with you and Mrs. Bull in your severe trial. (The death of an infant.) But, at the same time, I rejoice exceedingly in the Lord's goodness, enabling you to be resigned and satisfied with his will, despite all the feelings and pinchings of flesh and blood. Had the child lived, the warmest desires of a parent's heart for him could only have been, that he might at last have arrived to that rest and happiness, to which the Lord has now brought him by a shorter cut. Saving thereby him from many troubles, and you from some occasional heartaches, which must otherwise have been experienced. If you can now believe and say, "He does all things well" — with what transport would you say it, if the whole plan of his wisdom and love was unfolded to your view? He will condescend to unfold it to you hereafter, and it will fill you with admiration. Your tender plant is now housed, out of the reach of storms. It is an affliction, to be cordially rejoiced in, when the Lord, who cares for us, intimates his will by the event.

What a blessing to be a Christian — to have a hiding place and a resting place always at hand! To be assured that all things work for our good, and that our compassionate Shepherd has his eye always upon us, to support and to relieve us. The flesh will feel the sharp affliction — but faith and prayer will lighten the burden, and heal the wound. Daily your sense of the Lord's goodness will increase, and the sense of pain will abate, so that you will have less sorrow, and more joy, from day to day. The Lord favored us with a tolerable day yesterday, and I hope he was in the midst of us — yet, upon the whole, we have but slack times. Oh for a revival, a day of Pentecost, a visible accomplishment of that gracious promise, Ezekiel 34:6! I trust my soul desires it; but, alas! my desires are faint and cold. My subjects yesterday were, forenoon, Psalms 142:1-2; afternoon, 1 Corinthians 10:12, a watch word. In the evening, a hymn about the sheep and the Shepherd, how

he dwells among them, and they lie around in safety at his feet. They are surrounded by wolves, visible and invisible — these growl and thirst for blood; but the Shepherd's eye controls them. He stands and feeds his sheep in the midst of their enemies, who grudge and snarl — but cannot prevail against the sheep, helpless as they are, because the Lord is their Shepherd.

Pray for your poor friend and brother,

John Newton Olney, 7th Sept., 1778, Monday.

October 27, 1778 My dear friend,

I have been witness to a great and important revolution this morning, which took place while the greatest part of the world was asleep. Like many state-revolutions, its first beginnings were almost indiscernible—but the progress, though gradual, was steady—and the event decisive. A while ago darkness reigned. Had a man from space then dropped, for the first time, into our world—he might have thought himself banished into a hopeless dungeon. How could he expect light to rise out of such a dark state? And when he saw the first glimmering of dawn in the east, how could he promise himself that it was the forerunner of such a glorious sun as has since arisen! With what wonder would such a new-comer observe the bounds of his view enlarging, and the distinctness of objects increasing from one minute to another; and how well content would he be to part with the twinkling of the stars, when he had the broad day all around him in exchange! I cannot say this revolution is extraordinary, because it happens every morning—but surely it is astonishing, or rather it would be so—if man was not astonishingly stupid!

We were once such strangers! Darkness, gross darkness, covered us. How confined were our views! And even the things which were within our reach—we could not distinguish. Little did we then think what a glorious day we were appointed to see; what an unbounded prospect would before long open before us! We knew not that there was a Sun of Righteousness, and that he would dawn, and rise, and shine upon our hearts. And as the idea of what we see now—was then hidden from us, so at present we are almost equally at a loss how to form any conception of the stronger light and brighter prospects which we wait and hope for. Comparatively we are still in the dark—at the most, we have but a dim twilight, and see nothing clearly—but it is the dawn of immortality, and a sure presage and earnest of glory.

Thus, at times, it seems a darkness that may be felt broods over your natural spirits—but when the day-star rises upon your heart, you see and rejoice in his light. You have days as well as nights; and after a few more vicissitudes, you will take your flight to the regions of everlasting light, where your sun will go down no more. Happy you, and happy I—if I shall meet you there, as I trust I shall. How shall we love, and sing, and wonder, and praise the Savior's name!

Last Sunday a young man died here of extreme old age, at twenty-five. He labored hard to ruin a good constitution, and unhappily succeeded—yet amused himself with the hopes of recovery almost to the last. We have a sad multitude of such poor creatures in this place, who labor to stifle each other's convictions, and to ruin themselves and associates, soul and body!

How industriously is Satan served! I was formerly one of his most active under-tempters! Not content with running down the broad way which leads to destruction by myself—I was indefatigable in enticing others! And, had my influence been equal to my wishes—I would have

carried the whole human race to hell with me! And doubtless some have perished, to whose destruction I was greatly instrumental, by tempting them to sin, and by poisoning and hardening them with principles of infidelity. And yet I was spared! When I think of the most with whom I spent my ungodly days of ignorance, I am ready to say, "I alone have escaped alive!"

Surely I have not half the activity and zeal in the service of Him who snatched me as a brand out of the burning—as I had in the service of His enemy! Then the whole stream of my endeavors and affections went one way; now my best desires are continually crossed, counteracted, and spoiled, by the sin which dwells in me! Then the tide of a corrupt nature bore me along; now I have to strive and swim against it. The Lord has cut me short of opportunities, and placed me where I could do but little mischief—but had my abilities and opportunities been equal to my heart desires—I would have been a monster of profaneness and profligacy! A common drunkard or profligate is a petty sinner—compared to what I once was. I had unabated ambition, and wanted to rank in wickedness among the foremost of the human race! "O to grace how great a debtor—daily I'm constrained to be!" "By the grace of God—I am what I am!" 1 Corinthians 15:10 But I have rambled. I meant to tell you, that on Sunday afternoon I preached from "Why will you die?" Ezekiel 33:10-11. I endeavored to show poor sinners, that if they died—it was because they would; and if they would—they must. I was much affected for a time. I could hardly speak for weeping, and some wept with me. From some, alas! I can no more draw a tear or a serious thought, than from a millstone!

November 27, 1778 My dear friend,

You are a better expositor of Scripture than of my speeches—if you really inferred from my last that I think you shall die soon. I cannot say positively you will not die soon, because life at all times is uncertain. However, according to the doctrine of probabilities, I think, and always thought, you bid fair enough to outlive me. The gloomy tinge of your weak spirits—led you to consider yourself much worse in point of health than you appear to me to be. In the other point I dare be more positive, that, die when you will—you will die in the Lord. Of this I have not the least doubt; and I believe you doubt of it less, if possible, than I, except in those darker moments when the evil humor prevails.

I heartily sympathize with you in your illnesses—but I see you are in safe hands! The Lord loves you—and He will take care of you. He who raises the dead—can revive your spirits when you are cast down. He who sets bounds to the sea, and says "Hitherto shall you come, and no further," can limit and moderate those illnesses which sometimes distresses you. He knows why He permits you to be thus exercised. I cannot assign the reasons—but I am sure they are worthy of His wisdom and love, and that you will hereafter see and say, "He has done all things well!"

I do not like to puzzle myself with second causes, while the first cause is at hand, which sufficiently accounts for every phenomenon in a believer's experience. Your constitution, your situation, your temper, your distemper, all that is either comfortable or painful in your lot—is of his appointment! The hairs of your head are all numbered. The same power which produced the planet Jupiter—is necessary to the production of a single hair! Nor can one your hairs fall to the ground without His notice—any more than the stars can fall from their orbits! In providence, no less than in creation—He is the absolute Sovereign and Ruler.

Therefore fear not—only believe. Our sea may sometimes be stormy—but we have an infallible Pilot, and shall infallibly gain our port! My dear friend,

I have heard of Mr. Palmer's dismissal from this state of sin and pain. Though old people must die, the stroke will be felt by near friends whenever it comes. But the loss of those who die in the Lord should not be long or deeply mourned. They are gone a little before us — and we hope to meet them soon again, and upon far better terms, when there will be no abatement of joy, and when joy shall have no end. I hope Jesus, the everlasting Father, who never dies, will comfort and bless his wife under all changes and events.

I hope your weak spirits, strengthened by the great and good Spirit of the Lord, have happily surmounted what you have lately had to go through, and that you rejoice to think that in less than a hundred years your turn will come to go and see your Beloved, and that in the mean time you will preach, and act, and speak for him as much as possible. When will you come and tell me something about him? Let me expect you on Friday, or any day but Wednesday, because I shall then be at Weston. My dear wife is tolerably well at present — but sometimes complaining a little; I should say, ailing; for I hope she is sensible she has no reason to complain. I write in great haste. Adieu; may the Lord bless you.

I am yours entirely,

John Newton

October, 1778 My dear friend, Your letters are always welcome; the last doubly so, for being unexpected. If you never heard before, of a letter of yours being useful, I will tell you for once, that I get some pleasure and instruction whenever you write to me. And I see not but your call to letter-writing is as clear as mine, at least when you are able to put pen to paper.

I must say something to your queries about 2 Samuel 14:1-33. I do not approve of the scholastic distinctions about inspiration, which seem to have a tendency to explain away the authority and certainty of at least one half of the Bible. Though the penmen of Scripture were ever so well informed of some facts, they would, as you observe, need express, full, and infallible inspiration, to teach them which things the Lord would have selected and recorded for the use of the church, among many others which to themselves might appear equally important.

However, with respect to historical passages, I dare not pronounce positively that any of them are, even in the literal sense, unworthy of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the dignity of inspiration, Some, yes, many of them, have often appeared trivial to me—but I check the thought, and charge it to my own ignorance and temerity. It must have some importance, because I read it in God's book. On the other hand, though I will not deny that they may all have a spiritual and mystical sense, (for I am no more qualified to judge of the deep things of the Spirit, than to tell you what is passing this morning at the bottom of the sea,) yet if, with my present quota of light, I would undertake to expound many passages in a mystical sense—I fear such a judge as you would think my interpretations fanciful and not well supported. I suppose I would have thought the Bible complete, though it had not informed me of the death of Rebekah's nurse, or where she was buried. But some tell me that Deborah is the law, and that by the oak I am to understand the cross of Christ—and I remember to have heard of a preacher who discovered a type of Christ crucified in Absalom hanging by the hair on another oak. I am quite a mole when compared with these

eagle-eyed divines; and must often content myself with plodding upon the lower ground of accommodation and allusion; except when the New-Testament writers assure me what the mind of the Holy Spirit was, I can find the Gospel with more confidence in the history of Sarah and Hagar, than in that of Leah and Rachel; though, without Paul's help, I should have considered them both as family squabbles, recorded chiefly to illustrate the general truth—that vanity and vexation of spirit are incident to the best men, in the most favored situations. And I think there is no part of Old Testament history from which I could not (the Lord helping me) draw observations, that might be suitable to the pulpit, and profitable to his people. But then, with the Bible in my hands, I go upon sure grounds. I am certain of the facts I speak from, that they really did happen. I may likewise depend upon the springs and motives of actions, and not amuse myself and my hearers with speeches which were never spoken, and motives which were never thought of, until the historian rummaged his pericranium for something to embellish his work. I doubt not, but were you to consider Joab's courtly conduct only in a literal sense, how it tallied with David's desire, and how gravely and graciously he granted himself a favor, while he professed to oblige Joab; I say in this view, you would be able to illustrate many important scriptural doctrines, and to show that the passage is important to those who are engaged in studying the anatomy of the human heart.

I have said enough or too much. I could, after all, preach very willingly upon God's devising means to bring his banished home again, and take occasion to lisp my poor views of that mysterious and adorable contrivance, without taking upon me to say that either Joab or the woman of Tekoa thought of the gospel when they cooked up that affair between them, or that even it was the express design of the Holy Spirit, in the place. These points are always true, and always to be remembered, asserted, and repeated:

1st. That man, by the entrance of sin, is a banished creature, driven far away from God, from righteousness, from happiness.

2nd. That he must have remained in this state of banishment forever, if God had not devised to bring him home again.

3rd. That these means are worthy the Divine contriver, full of glory, holiness, wisdom, and efficacy.

4th. Man, who was far off, is by faith actually restored and brought near by Jesus Christ. Had it not been for Joab's courtly conduct, we would not have been favored with this expression, so apt and suitable for the basis of a gospel sermon; nor could I have been gratified with your thoughts upon the subject, or have had the pleasure of presenting you with mine.

I am sorry for your bodily complaints — but hope I may ascribe a part of them to low spirits; I am therefore unwilling to think you so bad as you think yourself. We are pretty well. Love to Mrs. Bull.

Believe me most sincerely yours,

John Newton

Dear Sir,

I shall expect you with earnestness on Tuesday, and I hope the weather, and especially illness, will not prevent you; and I beg you not to listen too much to that lowness of spirits which would persuade you, I suppose, to confine yourself always at home; because I am satisfied, that when

you can muster strength to withstand this depressing, discouraging solicitation, and force yourself to ride and chat with some friend, you take the best course for relief; and, among all the friends you may think of treating with your company on such occasions, be sure none will be more glad to receive you than your friend at the Olney Vicarage!

I think my feelings will warrant me to make that line my own. The Lord has been pleased to put some grains of sympathy into my constitution; and the difficult turns of life I have passed through, have not been unuseful to give me some apprehension what impression afflictions make upon other people. It is true, I have not been much exercised with nervous complaints myself — but my situation here has afforded me a sort of second-hand experience of this kind, for I have lived almost fourteen years among a people dear to my heart, many of whom, to their other various trials, have that of a delicate and agitated nervous texture superadded, (owing in great measure, I suppose, to their sedentary and confined occupations,) which has given much scope to my observation and compassion.

I understand something of your complaint, and know how to pity you; but, since you say all is well, and shall be well — since you are in the wise and merciful hands of One who prescribes for you with unerring wisdom, and has unspeakably more tenderness than can be found in all human hearts taken together — I shall sorrow for you as though I sorrowed not; and I hope you will do the same for yourself. He weighs all your painful dispensations with consummate accuracy, and you shall not have a single grain of trouble more, not for a single moment longer — than he will enable you to bear, and will sanctify to your good. As to our death — let it suffice us that it is precious in his sight. The how, the when, the where — every circumstance, is already planned by infinite wisdom and love. Satan may suggest that the hour will be terrible; but Jesus promises to be with us to lead us through the dark valley; and when we come to the brink of the river, I trust we shall find the ark there before us, to keep the waters down.

I have been preaching from a text tonight which I recommend as a suitable cordial for you in your present situation, Isaiah 41:17, "When the poor and needy seek water," etc. May the Lord himself apply and fulfill it to your comfort. Meditate upon it until you come, and then tell me more of it than I have been able to speak about it, which you may easily do, for I have only skimmed upon the surface and edge — of what has neither bottom nor bound.

I am running on as if you were on the other side of the Atlantic, or as though I had given up the hope of seeing you so soon as Tuesday. Come, if possible. I will endeavor to be alone, and will no more blab my expectation of your company, than I would if I had found a pot of honey, and was afraid of my neighbors breaking in upon me for a share.

Mrs. Newton joins in love, and will be glad to receive you, and will excuse you if you should feel but poorly. Our respects to Mrs. Bull. The rest when we meet. May the Lord come with you, then it will be a good visit.

I am affectionately and sincerely your friend, brother, and servant,

John Newton Olney, 18 Dec, 1778, nine in the evening. My dear friend,

You say you hate controversy — so do I; and therefore I beg nothing that passes between you and I, in our friendly researches after truth, may be included under so frightful a name. You and I may

propose, debate, and sometimes differ — but I think it unlikely that we should ever dispute.

I am glad your fever is gone. I hope that all dark, unpleasant thoughts will vanish like mists before the midsummer sun, and that you will have a cheerful Christmas, a comfortable close of the old year, and a happy entrance upon the new.

I have not yet time to think of Christmas texts for this year — but I send you two old ones, if you can pick a hint or two it is well — and I and my hints will be honored. My dear wife was very ill, indeed, last Wednesday night. After suffering about eight hours, the Lord relieved her. It seemed to me as if it might have been fatal in a few more hours. What a mercy to have an infallible Physician always within call, always in the house! Oh! what a precious present help in trouble! Help us to praise him. She is tolerable — but has not yet recovered the shock. She thanks you and Mrs. Bull for your love and returns it.

Adieu, in great haste — but always your most affectionate,

John Newton

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the savory dish which you sent me in your last post, I hashed it up my own way, and set it before my people on Christmas morning, and hope some of them fed heartily upon it. In the evening I preached from John 10:10.

What have you for New Year's day? I am not yet provided for the old folks in the forenoon. To the youth in the evening I think to preach from Jeremiah 3:19. Chiefly to resolve the difficulty which occurs among the children, considering them

1. as guilty 2. as obstinate.

Sovereign grace alone could surmount these difficulties. Grace has provided a Savior to take away the guilt, and the agency of the Holy Spirit to overcome the obstinacy, to give ground, liberty, and power to call God, Father: then all is easy. This is the principal thought I have in view. Pray for me, that I may open my mouth to speak boldly, plainly, affectionately, and successfully. We are tolerably well.

We wish you, and Mrs. Bull, a comfortable close of this year, and a happy entrance upon the next. And so with our joint love we bid you hearty farewell.

Yours in the best bonds,

John Newton

29th Dec. My dear Mr. Bull, My dear wife is ill again, a most violent pain in her head has lasted about thirty hours and, still continues. Pray for her; I wish you not to expect me either Tuesday or Wednesday. Mr. Scott and his wife are both very ill of a putrid fever. He caught it by attendance on the sick poor. A noble wound! Shall soldiers risk their lives, and stand as a mark for great guns, for sixpence a day, or for worldly honor? and is it not worth venturing something in imitation of Him who went about doing good, and when the good we aim at is for his sake? However, by his illness, and while it remains, I shall be confined at home that I may be within his call.

Love to Mrs. Bull. I am in great haste, and with great sincerity, Your affectionate

John Newton February 23, 1779 My dear friend, On Saturday I heard you had been ill. Had the news reached me sooner, I would have sent you a letter sooner. I hope you will be able to inform me that you are now better, and that the Lord continues to do you good by every dispensation he allots you. Healing and wounding are equally from His hand—and are equally tokens of His love and care over us! "The Lord gives—and the Lord takes away. Praise the name of the Lord!" Job 1:21.

I have but little affliction in my own person—but I have been oftened chastened of late by proxy. The Lord, for his people's sake, is still pleased to give me health and strength for public service. But, when I need the rod — he lays it upon my dear wife! In this way I have felt much—without being disabled or laid aside. But he has heard prayer for her likewise, and for more than a two weeks—she has been comfortably well. I lay at least one half of her sickness to my own account. She suffers for me, and I through her. It is, indeed, touching me in a tender part. Perhaps if I could be more wise, watchful, and humble—it might contribute more to the re-establishment of her health, than all the medicine she takes! The last of my sermons was a sort of historical discourse, from Deuteronomy 32:15; in which, running over the leading national events from the time of Wycliffe, I endeavored to trace the steps and turns by which the Lord has made us a fat and thriving people; and in the event blessed us, beyond his favorite Jeshurun of old, with civil and religious liberty, peace, honor, and prosperity, and Gospel privileges. How fat we were when the war terminated in the year 1763, and how we have kicked and forsaken the Rock of our salvation of recent years! Then followed a sketch of our present state and spirit as a people, both in a religious and political view. I startled at the picture while I drew it, though it was a very inadequate representation. We seemed willing to afflict our souls for one day, Isaiah 58:5. But the next day things returned into their former channel. The sermon seemed presently forgotten, except by a few simple souls, who are despised and hated by the rest for their preciseness, because they think sin ought to be lamented every day in the year. Who would envy Cassandra her gift of prophecy upon the terms she had it—that her declarations, however true, should meet with no belief or regard by here hearers? It is the lot of all Gospel ministers, with respect to the bulk of their hearers. But blessed be the grace which makes a few exceptions! Here and there, one will hear, believe, and be saved. Everyone of these converts is worth a world! Our success with a few—should console us for all our trials.

Come and see us as soon as you can, only not tomorrow, for I am then to go to T****. My Lord, the Great Shepherd, has one sheep there, related to the fold under my care. I can seldom see her, and she is very ill. I expect she will be soon removed to the pasture above. Give our love to your dear wife.

John Newton

August 19, 1779 My dear friend,

Among the rest of temporal mercies, I would be thankful for pen, ink, and paper, and the convenience of the postal system, by which means we can waft a thought to a friend when we cannot be with him. My will has been to see you—but you must accept the will for the deed. The Lord has not permitted me.

I have been troubled of late with the rheumatism in my left arm. Mine is a sinful, vile body, and it is a mercy that any part of it is free from pain. It is virtually the seat and subject of all diseases—but the Lord holds them, like wild beasts in a chain, under a strong restraint. Was that restraint taken off, they would rush upon their prey from every quarter, and seize upon every limb, member, joint, and nerve—at once. Yet, though I am a sinner, and though my whole body is so frail and exposed, I have enjoyed for a number of years, an almost perfect exemption both from pain and sickness. This is wonderful indeed, even in my own eyes. But my soul is far from being in a healthy state. There I have labored, and still labor, under a complication of diseases; and—but for the care and skill of an infallible Physician, I must have died long ago. At this very moment my soul is feverish, dropsical, paralytic. I feel a loss of appetite, a disinclination both to food and to medicine—so that I am alive by miracle. yet I trust I shall not die—but live, and declare the works of the Lord. When I faint he revives me again. I am sure he is able, and I trust he has promised to heal me—but how inveterate must my disease be, that is not yet subdued, even under his management!

Well, my friend, there is a land where the inhabitants shall no more say, "I am sick." Then my eyes will not be dim, nor my ear heavy, nor my heart hard! One sight of Jesus as he is—will strike all sin forever dead!

Blessed be his name for this glorious hope! May it cheer us under all our present uneasy feelings, and reconcile us to every cross. The way must be right, however rough, that leads to such a glorious end!

O for more of His gracious influence, which in a moment can make my wilderness-soul rejoice and blossom like the rose! I want something which neither critics nor commentators can help me to. The Scripture itself, whether I read it in Hebrew, Greek, French, or English, is a sealed book in all languages, unless the Spirit of the Lord is present to expound and apply it to my heart! Pray for me. No prayer seems more suitable to me than that of the Psalmist. "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name."

John Newton

April 23, 1779 My dear friend, May I not style myself a friend, when I remember you after the interval of several weeks since I saw you, and through a distance of sixty miles? But the truth is, you have been neither absent nor distant from my heart for even a day. Your idea has traveled with me; you are a kind of familiar, very often before the eye of my mind. This, I hope, may be admitted as a proof of friendship.

I know the Lord loves you, and you know it likewise. Every affliction affords you a fresh proof of it. How wise is his management in our trials! How wisely adjusted in season, weight, continuance, to answer his gracious purposes in sending them! How unspeakably better to be at his disposal—than at your own! So you say; so you think; so you find. You trust in him, and shall not be disappointed. Help me with your prayers, that I may trust him too, and be at length enabled to say without reserve, "What you will, when you will, how you will." I had rather speak these three sentences from my heart, in my mother-tongue, than be master of all the languages in Europe.

August 28, 1779 My dear friend,

I want to hear how you are. I hope your illness is not worse than when I saw you. I hope you are easier, and will soon find yourself able to move about again. I would be sorry, if, to the symptoms of the kidney stone, that you would have the gout in your right hand—for then you will not be able to write to me.

We go on much as usual; sometimes very poorly, sometimes a little better—the latter is the case today. My rheumatism continues—but it is very moderate and tolerable. The Lord deals gently with us, and gives us many proofs—that he does not afflict willingly. The days speed away apace! Each one bears away its own burden with it—to return no more. Both pleasures and pains which are past—are gone forever. What is yet future will likewise be soon past. The final end will soon arrive! O to realize the thought, and to judge of things now in some measure suitable to the opinion we shall form of them, when we are about to leave them all! Many things which now either elate or depress us—will then appear to be trifles as light as air!

One thing is needful—to have our hearts united to the Lord in humble faith; to set him always before us; to rejoice in him as our Shepherd and our portion; to submit to all his appointments, not of necessity, because he is stronger than us—but with a cheerful acquiescence, because he is wise and good, and loves us better than we do ourselves; to feed upon his truth; to have our understandings, wills, affections, imaginations, memory—all filled and impressed with the great mysteries of redeeming love; to do all for him, to receive all from him, to find all in him. I have mentioned many things—but they are all comprised in one, a life of faith in the Son of God. We are empty vessels in ourselves—but we cannot remain empty. Except Jesus dwells in our hearts, and fills them with his power and presence, they will be filled with folly, vanity, and vexation. My dear friend,

I have been at the great house.* I could have wished for a more favorable account of your illness — but you are in the Lord’s hand — in the hand of Him who loves you better than I do — better than you can love yourself! He will therefore order all things concerning you, and give you strength according to your day. This great Physician can support and heal — when other physicians are found to be of no value.

I am waiting with suspense for a further account of the war-fleets. If the news proves unfavorable, it will come soon enough to us all. Now perhaps is the crisis, or perhaps before now the blow is struck. My soul, wait only upon God — he directs the storm, and he can hush it into a calm. He loves his people, and numbers the hairs of their head. Whatever may be his purpose towards the nation, he says to his own people — it shall be well with them.

Here I was interrupted by a visit from Mrs. Foster; she has just left us, and I am just going to the great house and therefore cannot fill up my paper as usual. I wish the bearer may bring me a better account of you. May the Lord fill you with his peace. We join in love to you and Mrs. Bull. I am constrained to subscribe myself in haste, Affectionately yours,

John Newton Olney, 7 Sept. 1779.

* What is called the great house, was an ancient mansion, then unoccupied, and now pulled down, in which Mr. Newton rented a room, where meetings were held for prayer, and exposition of the word of God. In this room Mr. Bull sometimes preached for Mr. Newton. I have by me a list of names, in the hand-writing of Mr. Newton, of these letters, of the people who engaged in prayer;

and it is interesting to observe among them the frequent recurrence of the name of the poet William Cowper, from the year when he came to reside at Olney, to the year 1773, when a dark cloud came over his mind, and peculiar views of himself unhappily prevented him from entering a place of worship to the end of his days. So strictly conscientious was this interesting man, that I have frequently seen him sit down at table when others have risen to implore a blessing, and take his knife and fork in hand, to signify, I presume, that he had no "right to pray." "Prove to me" (he writes) "that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing, even in the belly of this hell, compared with which Jonah's was a palace, a temple of the living God." — Southey's "Cowper," vol. iv. p. 235. My dear friend,

I wish you may be able to send us word by the bearer, that your illness is removed, or at least abated. If not, still I hope He favors you with soul peace and resignation to his will. My race at the Olney church is nearly finished. I am about to form a connection for life with a church in Woolnoth, London. I hope you will not blame me; I think you would not if you knew all circumstances. However, my conscience, through mercy, is clear; and my path, in my own view, and in the judgment of several of my most spiritual friends, is plainly the path of duty. I hope and beg you will pray for me.

Indeed I am not elated at what the world calls preferment. London is the last situation I would have chosen for myself. The throng and hurry of the business world, and noise and party contentions of the religious world — are very disagreeable to me. I love woods and fields, and streams and trees; to hear the birds sing, the sheep bleat. I love retreat and rural life, such as I have been happy here for more than fifteen years. I thank the Lord for his goodness to me here. Here I have rejoiced to live; here I have often wished and prayed that I might die. I am sure no outward change can make me happier — but it does not befit a soldier, to choose his own post. On Tuesday we purpose going to Northampton, and to return by Newport on Thursday, take a bit of dinner, and change a few expressions of love with you and Mrs. Bull, and home early in the afternoon, because I am to preach in the evening.

It is a weeping time with us at Olney — my people feel each one for themselves; but I must and do feel for them all. But I trust the Lord will provide them a pastor after his own heart.

Adieu. Pray for us. May the Lord bless you, both you, and your children.

I am most affectionately yours,

John Newton Olney, 25 Sept. 1779. My dear friend, Do not say, do not think, that I have forgotten you. I have waited to tell you some news, until I can wait no longer. The Lord gave us a safe and comfortable journey, and my dear wife has been comfortably well since we came here. I delivered my presentation to the bishop's secretary on Friday last, and on Sunday I received notice that a caveat was lodged against my institution by some person or people who pretend to dispute Mr. Thornton's right of presenting. This counter-claim causes a delay or suspense — but, it is thought, will soon appear to be groundless.

However, through mercy, your poor friend feels himself very easy about the event. The affair is where I would have it — in the Lord's hand. If He fixes me here — I humbly hope and believe he will support me, and it shall be for good. If He appoints otherwise, I trust it will be no grief of heart to me to return to Olney, where I shall be within five miles of dear Mr. Bull. I am, however, glad I

accepted the offer, whatever the outcome may be.

Noisy London, and its unsettled, hurrying kind of life — is not quite to my tooth! I believe if I settle in London, I shall entreat Him, in whose hands all my affairs, the greatest and the smallest, are, in his good providence — to prepare me a habitation somewhere about the outskirts of the town, where I may enjoy some measure of privacy, fresh air, and see the green fields and trees at no great distance from me. This will be the more feasible, as the parsonage house is occupied by the post office, which seems to furnish me with a fair excuse for not residing in the parish.

Though many things will occasionally force themselves upon my thoughts, I trust, in answer to your prayers for me, the Lord will help me to remember that one thing is needful — and, comparatively speaking, one only. It matters little whether I live and die in Olney or London — in the city or the suburbs — provided I am where He would have me be, favored with his light and grace and consolation — and qualified, by his holy anointing — to honor, love, and serve him, in whatever circumstances his wisdom may appoint.

Mr. Foster is now at Olney, and I have entered upon his services, which amount to eleven sermons in a two weeks. Upon my first coming there — I preached from 1 Thessalonians 5:25, "Brethren, pray for us;" when, after giving them some account of the difficulties and trials attending the ministerial office in general, I endeavored to engage the prayers of many in my behalf, with respect to the new prospect before me. Surely I shall need a singular communication of divine wisdom, zeal, meekness, and fortitude, in a London situation.

Brother, pray for me, and may the Lord enable you to pray in faith. My weaknesses are many. I am but a child to go in and out before a great people, and to stand in a conspicuous and important post. But the Lord is a good and all-sufficient Master, and I would wrong his goodness and faithfulness — were I to question his promise of strength according to my day. Should this relocation take place, I hope the outcome will show it is the Lord’s doing. Had not the proposal come to me unexpected, unsolicited, I think I may honestly add, undesired — and so circumstanced, that neither my own judgment, nor the advice of some of my most spiritual friends would permit me to decline it, without a fear of opposing His will — I say, could I not view it in this light, I would be uneasy, and afraid of the experiment. But now I can trust that if God brings me hither — his presence will be with me. My poor mistaken people, by their hasty refusal of Mr. Scott, have given me a pain which I did not expect. But I cannot help it. May the Lord overrule it for good, and provide better pastor for them than they can expect.

While we can meet daily at a throne of grace, and exchange a letter when we please — let us not think ourselves far asunder. Your company has been pleasing and edifying to me, and I shall sensibly miss it. But our friendship will be inviolable. You have a near and warm place in my heart, and will retain it as long as life continues. I confidently expect the same on your part. I long to hear how you do — shall be thankful to know you are getting better, and especially to be told that all your painful dispensations are evidently sanctified, and that you have that peace which can exist and flourish in affliction. My dear wife joins in love to you and Mrs. Bull, and your two young plants. May the Lord make them plants of renown; may they increase in wisdom as in years, and grow up to his praise and your comfort.

Adieu. Send me a letter soon. And believe me to be most affectionately your faithful friend and brother,

John Newton 14th October, 1779.

October 26, 1779

(Mr. Newton refers to a severe trial through which Mr. Bull had passed three days before, in the sudden death of a dear child, five years old, after he had been bereaved of four other children, one only surviving. The following is an extract from Mr. Bull's letter, dated Oct. 23, announcing this painful event:

Dear sir, pray for me. My bodily pain is great, the sorrow in my heart is real; but the love of the Lord is the same. Oh! how I rejoice in him this day, while I grieve in self. I seem to long to be where my dear Polly is; and, blessed be my God, I shall go there some day, perhaps soon. My dear lamb has revealed a peculiar sweetness of temper these three or four months, and a fondness for reading quite remarkable. For five or six weeks she had got up before me in the morning to read a Scripture chapter to me while I was dressing; and one day she cried very much because I got up before her. She gave me great delight by this practice, and it was her own. This is a pleasant tale to me, and you can excuse it. The lamb looks exceedingly beautiful now she is laid out; but, oh! my faith sees her spirit in the hands and heart of God my Savior, and that delights me. My dear wife is very poorly; and poor lonely Tommy is tolerable, and is kept for some future trial.

I wish that I may silently rejoice in my Savior for cutting off all sources of comfort, but himself. Indeed it does look as if he would have my whole heart, and would make everything else taste bitter that he may taste the sweeter. As lately as yesterday, my dear child read me Psalms 25:1-22 before I was up. Oh! how little did I think affliction and death were so near!) My dear friend,

I feel for you a little in the same way as you feel for yourself. I bear a friendly sympathy in your late sharp and sudden trial. I mourn with that part of you which mourns—but at the same time I rejoice in the proof you have, and which you give, that the Lord is with you in truth. I rejoice on your account, to see you supported and comforted, and enabled to say, "He has done all things well!"

I rejoice on my own account. Such instances of his faithfulness and all-sufficiency are very encouraging. We must all expect times of trouble in our turns. We must all feel in our concernments, the vanity and uncertainty of creature comforts. What a mercy is it to know from our own past experience, and to have it confirmed to us by the experience of others—that the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and that he knows those who trust in him.

All creatures are like candles; they waste away—while they afford us a little light, and we see them extinguished in their sockets one after another. But the light of the sun makes amends for them all. The Lord is so rich that he easily can, so good that he certainly will—give his children more than he ever will take away! When his gracious voice reaches the heart, "It is I—do not be afraid! Be still—and know that I am God!" when he gives us an impression of his wisdom, power, love, and care—then the storm which attempts to rise in our natural passions is hushed into a calm; the flesh continues to feel—but the spirit is made willing, and something more than submission takes place—a sweet resignation and acquiescence, and even a joy that we have anything which we value, to surrender to his call.

Love and best wishes to you and Mrs. Bull from your most affectionate friend,

John Newton My dear friend,

How are you? and what are you about? I am afraid that either your spirits are grown weak, or your memory fails you a little. Pluck up your courage; then remember how much you are beloved by a local sojourner, and send Dr. Ford a letter, or at least a note; if it be but three lines, he will gladly pay three-pence for them to the post-man. The church in Woolnoth and I are not yet married. I told you somebody forbade the plans, and the prohibition is not yet taken off. Nothing has been done, or attempted to be, within these two days; but I believe we shall soon hasten into the midst of things. The Lord still enables me to abide by the surrender I made of the affair into his hands, and I wait the event with a tranquility almost approaching to indifference. However, in my private judgment, it appears much more probable that the bar will be removed, and the match take place, than the contrary. But until it is determined, I wish to consider it as an uncertainty. To wed the church in Woolnoth — is in some respects pleasing; but then to be divorced from Olney — will be in many respects painful. Again, to leave Olney will free me from many known and sharply felt inconveniences; but then, to live in London may expose me to other trials, which though at present unknown, may be equally sharp to my feelings. What a comfort this, that when "I am in a strait between two, and what to choose I know not," the Lord will mercifully condescend to choose for me! What a comfort that when we are quite dead as to consequences — He has promised to see for us, with his infinite and unerring eye!

Tell Mrs. Bull we love you both, have felt for you both, and shall be glad to hear that you are both pretty well. The Lord loves you likewise — and therefore he afflicts you. He has given you grace — and therefore he appoints you trials, that the grace he has given may be preserved and manifested to his praise. He has made you a good soldier, and therefore he appoints you a post of honor. You are not merely to walk about in a soldier’s coat, at a distance from the noise and danger of war, and to brandish your sword without any risk of meeting an enemy; but he sends you down to the field of battle. You feel as well as hear — that our profession is a warfare; and you feel as well as hear, likewise — that the Lord is with you, fights for you, and supports you with strength, and covers your head in the day of conflict.

Accept this love token, and pay me in kind. I have not time to enlarge. I wish you a good night and a good morrow. Tomorrow! It is the Lord’s day. May we be in the Spirit. I think to be a hearer in the forenoon at the Brethren’s Chapel — to hear Mr. Latrobe, if he preaches. In the afternoon (if I do not alter my mind), I shall say something myself about a treasure — and the earthen, worthless, brittle vessels the Lord is pleased to put it in, even into such a foul piece of clay as your very poor — but very affectionate friend,

John Newton London, Nov. 20th, 1779. My dear friend,

I must write a short letter today, for many of my friends will expect to hear the outcome of my long waiting in town. The Lord’s hour came in due time, and yesterday the Bishop gave me the pastorate of St. Mary Woolnoth, and tomorrow I am to be inducted — that is, put into possession of the key and the bell-rope, and thereby installed in all the rights, uses, and profits of the employment. So the curate of Olney is now transplanted and placed in the number of the London rectors. How little did I think of this when I was living, or rather starving — when a slave in Africa!

"The sport of slaves, Or, what's more wretched still, their pity." But the Lord is Sovereign and Almighty. He chooses and does what is well-pleasing in his sight. Whom he will — he slays; whom he will — he keeps alive. What cause for praise, that it pleased him to extend his mercy to you and I.

Many wish me joy. You, I believe, will pray and wish for me — that I may have much grace, and be favored with wisdom, fidelity, zeal, and meekness suited to the demands of my new and important situation. Through mercy, I feel little in this new situation to elate me. I hope I see the Lord's hand and call in it, and so far it pleases me. My concern at leaving many whom I love dearly at Olney, and my solicitude about them — will in a good measure qualify things in the changes which otherwise are not disagreeable to flesh and blood. But I need not repeat this in a short letter, when I believe I have written to the same purpose already.

Thank you for your letter. Not having it with me, I cannot answer it particularly. In general I know you are afflicted — and comforted; sick — and well; sorrowful — yet always rejoicing. This checker-work will last while life lasts — but it will not last always. Deliverance is approaching, and in the meantime we know all things are dispensed to us by infinite wisdom — in number, weight, and measure — with a far greater accuracy than any doctor can adjust his medicines to the state and strength of his patients. My dear wife has a head-ache today — but I hope she will be better. When I tell her that I have joined her love with mine — to you and Mrs. Bull and Tommy, I am sure she will confirm it.

I hope to see Newport and Olney next week. I am in all places, and at all times, most affectionately yours,

John Newton

Dec. 1, 1779. My dear friend,

Many an eager look I darted through my study-window this morning, in hopes of seeing you and your grey horse. I need not tell you I was sorry to miss my expected pleasure; but I was more sorry to learn the cause of your not coming, though I suspected it before I received your note. I long with a great longing to have you here — yet not so as to wish you should make the attempt at the price of pain and inconvenience to yourself. Supposing the Lord relieves you, and you are pretty well tomorrow, what do you think of coming — and returning when you have quite enough of us for one time? If I should be weary of you first, I will tell you so.

Until then I have two thoughts to comfort me:

1st, that we love each other;

2nd, that though we do we are not necessary to each other, your Lord and mine is equally near to us both; and a visit from him is sufficient to comfort either of us, though we were in the solitary situation of Robinson Crusoe.

Indeed, supposing you really have the stone, and that your pains are sharp and frequent, I would rather encourage you to submit to the operation, than dissuade you from it. But I understood that since you had changed your medicine, you were, in general, free from pain. I would hope that He whom you serve, would support you under the operation, and bring you safely through it. If you

judge it expedient, therefore, come to London, and consult an able surgeon; but by no means commit yourself to a country practitioner.

I hope soon to be in town. How glad shall I be to visit you in your confinement, daily, if possible; at least, often! You will ask counsel at the throne of grace, and then do as the Lord shall determine your mind. If it be his will, you need not regard the expense or consequences. The Lord will provide! My dear wife sends love to you, and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. She is doing poorly; so that though we talk of a speedy removal, we as yet can make no preparations for it. I believe I must return to London without her; for I promised to be there before the 16th, and must keep my word if possible. The paper bids me leave off — but I will not until I have once more assured you that I am very sincerely and affectionately yours,

John Newton Olney, Jan. 3, 1780 My dear friend,

I must send this messenger to inquire after your welfare, to inform you of my own, to thank you for all your love, and to charge you to believe that you have a warm place in my heart.

Through mercy, I am well and comfortable; feel a little left-handed and awkward for lack of my dear wife, as I usually do in her absence.

'Tis true, I have cause enough for grief and humiliation for what passes within my heart; but then I have a friend, a rich, compassionate, powerful, unchangeable Friend; and the thought of him — who he is, where he is, what he has done, and what he is doing — somehow composes my mind and maintains my peace. Could he be taken from me, or my expectations founded upon him fail — I would instantly sink to the bottom of the bottomless pit of despair! My entrance to St. Mary Woolnoth is hitherto as favorable as I could expect; indeed, more so. Some of my new parishioners are rather pleased, and some who do not quite relish what I say, seem to believe that — at least I speak from my heart and mean well. In my next parcel to Mrs. Newton (tomorrow), I will endeavor to send you my first address to them. I sent one of them to every house. It was in general well received, though the printer made a mercenary blunder, by printing them for sale — when I did not intend one should be sold, and fixing the price at sixpence for a single sheet, worth at the most but two-pence. We shall divide the spoil between us; he will get the money — and I shall get the blame. It will furnish a handle to some for representing me as very ostentatious in publishing my first sermon, and very mercenary for fixing the price so high! What cannot be cured — must be endured. The Lord knows my intention in printing it, and he is able to secure my character. I have endeavored to clear myself to a few, chiefly those in my own parish; but I cannot run about to tell everybody, nor is it needful. Mr. Self has been not a little mortified — but I tell him to sit still, and leave his cause in the Lord's hands.

I know not when my dear wife will come up — but I hope it will be in the Lord's best time. I would willingly hope to see her on Friday — but I hardly expect it. I hope you have been, or will go to see her, if you are pretty well, and she stays after you receive this. If not, I wish you to treat her with a little letter by Friday's post. She desired me to ask you to write to her — but I forgot it. She loves to see you, and to hear from you.

Write to me, and if you can tell me you are pretty well, and free from pain — I shall rejoice; if you say you are coming to town, I shall rejoice more. I expect, however, you will inform me that the Lord stands by, and strengthens and comforts you; this will, or should rejoice me most of all. My

time is expended; I am going to the church prayer-meeting, if any people come — frequently there is not one. I will try them a while, and if they do not attend, I shall give up the Friday prayer-meeting and preach a sermon on Wednesday. I shall do so by and by — but not yet.

I must make no hasty innovations. You know that if a man has but a horse to break, he does not jump immediately upon his back, and make him feel the spur the first time he sees him. He begins softly, strokes him, feeds him, shows him the bridle before he attempts to put it on, and brings him forward by degrees. Poor sinners, and especially poor sinners that are rich — are at least as intractable and wild as horses and mules — and must be humored a little in matters where conscience is not directly concerned. I know that you will pray for me — that the Lord may give me true wisdom and humble boldness.

"With hearty love to Mrs. Bull and little Tommy, I remain, my dear friend, Your most affectionate,

John Newton 19th January, 1780. My dear friend,

I once thought to defer writing a little longer, for the pleasure of telling you, that I sent you the very first letter I wrote in my new habitation; but then I must have waited another post, and possibly you are sufficiently angry with me already. If you have been in cheerful spirits, I knew your candor would prompt you to make large allowances for the unsettled state in which I have been; but if your thoughts have been of the gloomy cast, then my silence has appeared to you through an unfavorable medium, and bore, in your view, a strong resemblance to those frightful figures, apathy and ingratitude.

Prone as we are to indulge hard thoughts of the Lord — we have no right to be offended if our fellow-worms, even our dear friends, think hard of us, and therefore I forgive you, unasked, and beforehand, all the peevish and ill-founded surmises which may at any time have found a place in your peri-cranium concerning me, as if I did not dearly love you, or greatly care for you, or set a high value upon your letter — because I have not yet answered it.

Nay, I cannot answer it now, for I cannot find it! It is in some of my books, or boxes, or drawers, of which yesterday deprived me. For then, and about that time, some people came, and took all belongings, and lodged them in a house in Charles' Square; and there it seems I must go after them, if I intend to have any further use of them. At the same place and day there arrived a wagon from Olney (larger, I believe, than any of the wagons sent to Jacob from Egypt) accompanied with a cart, both full of my baggage. This is amazing, as several years ago, I could have carried all my belongings in my pocket, from Dan even to Beersheba! Those words, "With my staff I came over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands," suit me almost as well as they suited him who first spoke them. I wish I could use them with equal sensibility. My relocation, indeed, should affect me with double thankfulness, if compared with his; for I had no angry Laban to harass my rear, nor threatening Esau, to dispute my passage, and terrify me in front. All has been made as easy as possible. Our new Bethel (for it is already consecrated to be God's house) bids fair to be a pleasant and convenient abode. Perhaps we shall sleep in it tonight. When I write next I hope to be able to tell you that your room is fitted up for your reception, and then you must come and take possession of it as soon as possible. I have lately seen somebody who lately saw you, and had the pleasure of hearing that you were pretty well.

I forwarded you yesterday, a letter from Mrs. Weber. In a former letter to Mr. Foster, she says, the gaiety and dissipation of Petersburg can hardly be conceived of, by those who are only acquainted with such a faint expression of them as can be observed in London. I hope the grace of our Lord will make her a very salamander, for it seems she is to live in the midst of the fire. I both fear and hope for her. I know that God is able to over-power all the glare of the world, by one glance of the light of his countenance; but how few are able to exist, much more to thrive and grow in such a worldly situation!

Through mercy I feel myself quite at home there; and though I consider the state of my auditory, and avoid as much as I can giving unnecessary disgust, I am enabled to speak very plainly to them. Some hear with patience, some I think with attention, some refuse to hear any more at present. Of these, a part go elsewhere, and a part nowhere — but the Lord can bring them again. I hope my heart longs for their salvation — but the means are my part, success is in the Lord's hands. I wish to be earnest — but not anxious.

I shall hope to hear a good account of your health, as I trust we are united in the strongest bands. I often think of you. We join in hearty love to you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. Pray for us; pray for Olney and Woolnoth. The Lord bless us all.

I am, your very affectionate, obliged brother, servant, and scholar,

John Newton My dear friend,

Come magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. Be it known to you and Mrs. Bull, that I am very well, though on Tuesday morning I had a fall, and dislocated my shoulder. It was soon reset, and since the operation I have my arm in a sling, and have kept house hitherto — but hope to be at St. Mary Woolnoth's tomorrow.

Many leagues I have traveled by land and by water, many falls I have had, and many vain fears have I felt in apparent danger — but at this one time of my receiving hurt, danger was quite out of sight and out of thought. I was standing at my own door, put my foot carelessly back against a stone, which tripped me up, and threw me over a short post. I rose instantly, had no other hurt, bruise, or strain, only the arm had slipped out of the socket. A surgeon was with me presently, and after being sometime pulled about by four men, the Lord mercifully recalled and guided the bone to its proper station, and I have felt no pain since — but eat, sleep, and converse as usual. When you have thanked the Lord for his goodness to me, add your prayers, that this and every other dispensation may be sanctified to us.

Thanks are due likewise on my dear wife's account. I felt and feared more for her than for myself. She was much alarmed, especially as I was, while under the surgeon's hands, before she could see me or know what hurt I had received. You know what frightful pictures imagination can draw in an hour of suspense — and how it stands aghast at its own portraits! But the Lord supported her, and she is now pretty well.

I do not mean to compliment you by calling myself your scholar. The Lord can teach by whom he pleases — and I am sure none can teach me without him. Nay, I doubt not but he can teach even you, and even by me. His power makes all instruments much upon a par; and Balaam's donkey was as well qualified to reprove his master, as Moses himself could have been. However, this I

know, that I am, or ought to be, thankful that my acquaintance with you was renewed, and for every opportunity of smoking a pipe with you since that time. Let the advantage and pleasure of friendship be ours, let the praise for every benefit received be wholly given to the Lord, for we can only be to each other what he is pleased to make us.

I can write no more at present — but our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and request your prayers for me, and my dear, and my people.

I am most affectionately yours,

John Newton

15 April, 1780. My dear friend,

Either you or I are a little faulty. I hope it is you, and I chide you for it — but very gently, for fear the chiding should properly belong to myself. However, I must and will chide you, for supposing (which I will not allow without proof) that you wrote last. You might have written again before this time. You have not such a multiplicity of subjects and objects to engross you as I am beset with. The Bibles you received probably came from me; or rather from the Lord, through my hands. And, if he sent them, I trust you will find he sends a blessing with them. He will, likewise, direct you how to dispose of them. The cure of my arm happily advanced without interruption, and it is now in a manner well; a little stiffness only remains, and it answers the purpose of a barometer, to give me notice of change of weather. Some tell me this will be an abiding infirmity, and I need not be sorry for a little occasional pain, if it should, at the same time, remind me of the Lord's goodness in preserving me from worse consequences. Mrs. Newton has comfortable health in her new situation. She sends her love with mine to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. I am sorry to say that we have not yet got our spare bed up — but I hope before long to inform you it is ready for you. I write this to go by Mr. Wilkinson, who purposes seeing Olney with his bride on Thursday. He is settled within about a hundred yards of me, which is a very agreeable circumstance.

We go on quietly and comfortably here at Woolnoth. I feel myself at home here, and have lately set up my Sunday evening lecture. My stated service now is three weekly sermons, and one monthly. I believe my parishioners make the smallest part of my auditory — but at this time of the year most of the principal folks are in the country. But I stand upon my post, and the Lord can persuade them to hear me whenever he pleases. In the mean time, the church is tolerably well filled without them.

I feel the loss of my retired rural walks at Olney — but I hope I am where I ought to be; and He whom I serve can compensate all seeming inconveniences. I have less time and less opportunity for secret waiting upon Him than formerly — but he is pleased to keep me in some measure alive. I would learn to count nothing as an interruption, because if I am broken in upon from morning until night when at home (as is frequently the case), I have reason to believe nobody comes to me — but those whom God sends; and I wish to be in such a frame of spirit as to feel myself equally present with him, and engaged in his service, whether at home or abroad, alone or in company. This is the true secret of piety — not to wish that incidents and events were at our own disposal — but to have wisdom to improve them as they arise; and, like the mariner, so to suit my sails, as to avail myself to the utmost of every wind that blows. Oh for more of that simplicity and singleness of intention, which, like the much talked of alchemist's stone, turns all to gold, and sanctifies and

converts every action of common life, into a part of that pious service which we owe to Him who bought us with his blood!

Excepting the lack of woods, and streams, and walks, where I may hide myself from the noise and throng of men, my situation is very comfortable. A good convenient house, a tolerably open place, not much enveloped in the smoke of London. A walk of a mile or more to church is rather healthful than otherwise. I have exercise enough with an evil heart — but the enemy is not permitted greatly to harass me. I have seen some tall cedars sadly shaken, and almost overturned, by the storms of temptation which frequently blow here; but, I, though a shrub — am still sheltered and preserved. The last of this month is fixed for the publication of the infidel book so much talked of. I feel a sort of trembling for its appearance. Much has been attempted to prevent its coming abroad — but in vain. The world are expecting it with an air of triumph. Let us pity and pray for the author. He ran well in time past, though now, alas! hindered and turned aside. Let us fear and pray for ourselves. We are not so wise but we may be misled, nor so strong but we may be thrown down — if left to ourselves. If the Lord maintains in us a humble, dependant spirit — we shall cry to him to hold us up, and so we shall be safe — but not otherwise. For my part, I dare not throw a stone at anyone — but may well take occasion, from the fall of others — to admire the grace which has hitherto preserved me from making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. I am shocked and wearied with what I hear from time to time of the advantages Satan gains over great professors.

Blessed be God, though your spirits are weak, and your health infirm — you have not given occasion for the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Oh, it is better to be sick, or lame, or dead, or burned alive, than to be of the number of those through whom offences come. Pray for us, and be assured that whether I write or not, I always feel myself to be your obliged and affectionate friend and servant,

John Newton

22nd May, 1780. My dear friend, Your kind, though brief inquiries, must be answered speedily, and, therefore, almost as briefly as you propose them. We have had a terrible storm — but our infallible Pilot has supported and brought us, thus far, safely through. The winds and waves have likewise subsided at his mighty command; and now all is tolerably calm. We have a war-like sort of peace. The city is full of soldiers; but the discipline and decency of conduct they observe, is truly admirable, beyond what I could have conceived possible to be maintained by so large a body of men.

Charles Square was full of people on Monday the 5th — but they behaved peaceably, made a few inquiries, and soon went away. We were apprehensive of their return, as there was a house in the square inhabited by a foreigner, and they were once afterwards at the corner of the next street. But He who has a hook and bridle in the mouths of those who think themselves their own masters — was pleased to turn them another way. We were preserved safe, and only suffered by sympathy with others, from what we heard with our ears and saw with our eyes, together with apprehensions of still more dreadful consequences, if the Lord did not interpose. The devastations on Tuesday and Wednesday nights were horrible. We could count from our back windows six or seven terrible fires each night, which, though at a distance, were very affecting. On Wednesday night and Thursday, the military arrived and saved the city, which otherwise I think would, before this time, have been in ashes, from end to end. So soon, so suddenly, can danger arise; so easily,

so certainly, can the Lord set bounds to the wickedness of man, in the height of its rage, and say, "Hitherto shall you come, and no further."

I believe multitudes went to St. George's fields, in the simplicity of their hearts, not aware of the consequences, not aware that many, with very different views, would avail themselves of the occasion, and meet with them. So children sometimes play with gunpowder, and think themselves safe, until a spark sets all in a flame about their ears. The Lord permitted it, and he is wise and just and good, and knows how to bring good out of seeming evil. Mrs. Newton was marvelously supported while things were at the worst — but the incessant dangers we were in, had some effect, and she began to droop, when the greatest danger was over. Through mercy, she is now revived, and pretty well again; as, likewise, Sally and Peggy, who, poor things! were little prepared for such awful scenes.

I preached on Wednesday, and had a tolerable auditory; but I cannot describe the consternation and anxiety which were marked on the countenance of almost every person I met in the streets that day. I hope never again to see so strong an exemplification of many descriptions in the prophecies of Jeremiah. All faces gathered blackness indeed. Through mercy, I did not fear much for myself — but I felt for my little family, my neighbors, and especially for the public. The impression made upon my mind is not yet worn off, and, indeed, I ought not to wish I could quite forget it.

I preached on Sunday forenoon from Lamentations 3:22. "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." In the evening, from Psalms 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God."

I hope your next letter will tell us that you are better. We are glad to hear Mrs. Bull and Tommy are well. We join in love to them and to you. Can you contrive to show this to Mr. Scott, for I have not time to write to him at present? Thank you for your prayers; I hope you will continue them. The Lord bless and keep you and yours.

Believe me to be your affectionate friend,

John Newton Charles Square, London, June, 1780. My dear friend, Your letter came last night, and while I was reading it, Mr. Self, who is sometimes a little cross, as well as sly, whispered in my ear, "You would not have heard from him now, if it had not been for the occasion mentioned in the letter." But I snubbed him, and let him know that I would not admit any insinuation against Mr. Bull — that I would thank you for writing to me at all: I was determined not to stand upon punctilios.

I left your letter with Mr. Thornton, and having read it but once, my memory does not present any part of it that requires a particular answer. From the whole, I learn that you are better and worse as formerly; that if you are afflicted — you find it good to be so; if you have a cross — you are supported under it; and, if your cross is doubled — your strength is proportionately increased. You are enabled to trust the Lord, and you find him faithful. You prefer his wish to your own, and experience proves that he chooses better for you than you could choose for yourself. Thus all is well.

I now invite you to London. The storm I hope is past — the tumults over and gone. The executions which justice and a regard to the public tranquility demand, will soon be finished. Come, for the bed and parlor and all things are now ready. Come, and see our us in our house, which, by dint of

a warm imagination, we make to resemble Olney as much as possible. It is the same within doors, for we are the same people. The same Sir and Madam to receive you. The back parlor looks into a garden; and there is a field with cows in it.

We sometimes meet people in the street, whose features remind us of some whom we know in the country; but such a resemblance of you will not suffice. I must have your original identical person — therefore take a place, and come up as soon as possible; and may the Lord bless you upon the road, and come himself with you. Persuade Mrs. Bull to come likewise. I long for the time. How snugly shall we sit and smoke our pipes, while we settle the affairs of the state and of the churches! Do you not rejoice in the prospect of peace and union with America again? How sudden — how seasonable was the turn! how unexpected, at least by me! Indeed I am a shallow politician. But let the wise men say what they will, I say it was the Lord's doing, and we had but little reason to expect so favorable an outcome. It was the Lord — but the praise is given by many to the instruments. Oh, wretched people! when afflicted — we murmur; when relieved — we boast. It is well there are a praying few among us, or we should be given up to ruin. Could you send me three or four of my letters to you, (if you have not burnt them,) to stand among those which are now gone to the press? One of your youths might transcribe such extracts as you might think fit to mark off, free from such trifles as would be quite unfit for the public eye: none should be later than the close of last year, and they must come soon if at all. The Lord Jesus be with you, and with us all. Love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. May he increase in grace and wisdom, as in years and stature. Adieu.

I am yours sincerely, affectionately, and obliged,

John Newton Charles Square, July, 1780. My dear friend, Being resolved to keep you in my debt, I write immediately to inform you that your acceptable letter, with the packet of my own letters, came safe to hand last night. My dear wife has what I call a comfortable measure of health — a few needful mementos of frailty — yet permitting her to eat, sleep, and converse with friends. The Lord is very good, and I have still a favored lot. Peace in the heart, in the parlor, in the kitchen, and in the house of God. Our whole little household love you, and desire to be remembered to you and by you.

I find you have still pains and indispositions — but as they are sanctified and sweetened, your case makes me both sorry and glad in the same breath. I am not so apprehensive of your constitution breaking up, as you seem to be; I hope you will live to a good old age, and your lips still feed many. If you are still doing quite poorly — come and try the air of Charles Square. I think it would do you good, and that even the journey would be of service to you. I would talk to you, my dear wife would nurse you, and you shall have Orinoco as much as you please and as often.

However, I can venture to promise you — that you shall live until your work is done, and I am pretty sure when the time of dismissal comes, you will rejoice in the summons. The Lord will smile upon you, and then you will smile upon death; for when death has lost his sting, he has an angel's face! We are going where we shall all know each other at first sight. My dear wife sends her love to you, and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. "We beg many prayers.

I am yours most affectionately,

John Newton Charles Square, 19th July, 1780. My dear friend,

I am just come from Clapham, and it is now past two o'clock. I ought to sit down, and smooth and sort my thoughts, which are usually tumbled about by a two or three days absence from home, so that my heart upon a return, is something like a country shop on the evening of a fair day, and needs a deal of setting right. But then your letter says to please write, and my heart feels as if I ought to answer you. And, therefore, I must let my shop still be disheveled, until I have chalked you out a short answer to your inquiries.

Though in haste to satisfy you, I am in no haste for rectifying the minister's mistake, in what he thought proper to assert. I remember when I would have flown like a lapwing from house to house, from town to town, to justify my own dear self's character. But of late I have in some measure learned, one may be tolerably at ease, though other people say more than they ought. And if conscience is on my side — if the matter affirmed is not true — I sit quiet, and do not think myself bound to make everybody as wise as myself.

We are pretty well, and join in love to you and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. Adieu, love us and pray for us.

I am, yours affectionately,

John Newton Charles Square, 12th August, 1780. My dear friend,

If you will neither come nor write, you must please yourself, for I am sure you will not please me. Now that you are grown into a great letter writer, I must be shut out of your correspondence I suppose. Perhaps your spirits are sunk into your shoes again, and you think you are not able to write. Try, however, as soon as possible, for I want to hear about you. If not, this is the last threepence you will have to pay for letters from me for a good while to come.

Watchman, what of the night? I think it a long one, and I cannot yet see a streak of dawn. All parties are contriving to prolong a war which they are all weary of. Some attempt is on foot towards peace — but I fear it will not succeed. Sin prevails, and requires a scourge, and therefore war continues, though the voice of personal interest no less than humanity, calls loudly for peace. When either we or our opponents seem to droop, some unexpected advantage revives hope again. When either they or we presume to boast, as though success were almost within reach, some disaster comes to damp the vain confidence, and to show that the battle is the Lord's. These changing events insensibly draw on both sides farther and farther into mischiefs, and make them more and more heedless of consequences. In the meanwhile, an increase of stupidity and hardness at home, keeps pace with the increase of danger from abroad. And though it is now evident to all here that London was within a few hours of being reduced to ashes, and its preservation was little less than miraculous; that alarming crisis is now almost forgotten, not only by profane but by professor — and things go on much as they might do if there was no war, no danger, or if we had no signal mercies or deliverances to record. I must include myself in this censure. The mischiefs and abominations attendant on a general election will now be superadded to our habitual course of national sin. Oh, what a train of riot, debauchery, and perjury, is upon the march to overspread the land! What an idea must an American savage form of Christians and Christianity — if he were to visit us at such a time as this!

Well, we must sojourn a time in this Vanity Fair — but, blessed be God, it is not our home. We are traveling to another country, and are taught another language, which the people of the fair do not

understand. They stare at us as outlandish people, and are displeased because we will not adopt their maxims and customs. They are highly affronted if we presume to pity them. And much the same sort of treatment we might expect if we ventured to pity some people in Bedlam, and to say to their faces, Alas; poor men — you are mad! No, though he mistakes his cell for a palace, his chains and straw for ensigns of royalty — he would insist that he is in his sober senses, that you are the mad person, and for your pity he returns you pity mixed with scorn! Of course, we are glad to get away from such unreasonable people, and all they can say does but the more confirm us, that they are insane To be shut up with the mad folks in Bedlam would be a great trial — how is it we are no more affected with our situation in this great Bedlam, the world? There is hardly an instance of insanity within those dreary walls, which we may not find parallels to among our acquaintance who are permitted to walk at large. Their imaginations are so disordered, that they call evil good, and good evil; they are fond of their enemies, and startle at the sight of a true friend. They boast of liberty — while they are tied and bound with the chain of sin. They delight in mischief, scattering firebrands and arrows, and say, Am not I in sport? Some are groaning under the weight of a straw; and others in rapturous admiration, viewing bubbles which successively disappear as fast as they can blow them up. Oh, it is a mad world indeed! The Lord quicken our longings for that land where all are in their right minds — and where we, likewise, shall be quite in our senses. For, indeed, the insanity around us is epidemic, and there are few of the soberest but give proof enough they are not quite free from the general infection.

We both unite and send our love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, with one heart. I hope you continue to pray for us. The Lord keeps me alive. I wish I could say lively. But it is a miracle I am no worse, considering the hurry in which I live. The little leisure I have for retirement indisposes me for the improvement of that little.

Affectionately yours,

John Newton Charles Square, 8 Sept. 1780. My dear friend,

Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects! As I hope the fever has by this time left you — I congratulate you on its coming, because I take it for granted, that it brought a blessing with it, and will leave a blessing behind it. I am glad, however, that the information of your being better came at the same time with the news of your having been ill; for though my judgment is well satisfied that the Lord does all things well — yet I am capable of feeling no small anxiety when those whom I love are in jeopardy and affliction. May the Great Physician give a blessing to every means, give you health and ease, and reveal to you the abundance of peace and truth.

I hope this fever will not retard, much less prevent, the pleasure we propose in receiving you under our peaceable roof. What a mercy to have a peaceable roof to rest under! Preserved in outward peace by the kind, protecting, providential arm of the Lord, and favored with internal peace by the blessing of his good Spirit. This is our present mercy. He makes us of one mind in the house, he is about our bed and dwelling by night, and about our path by day. I am wonderfully favored with peace, likewise in the business of His house. I have as yet met with no incident to try either my faith or my patience as a minister — but all hitherto wears an encouraging aspect.

Whatever the parishioners, or any of them, think, they give me no disturbance. I could wish, indeed, that I had more access to them, and that more came to hear. I was invited to dine with one

of them yesterday. It was the first invitation I had received from any who were not professedly serious. They behaved well. I behaved poorly, for I could not at the first meeting introduce the best subject. This is often a hindrance to me; but the Lord can give me farther opportunity, and put a word in my mouth some time.

Ah! it is a shame to seem so earnest and pressing in the pulpit — and then to be so cold and mealy-mouthed at table! But I have not the talent of happily introducing the most profitable topics where I am a stranger. Often when I am in company — if what I have said were written down and brought to me afterwards — how should I — at least, how ought I — to blush, if I were constrained to read it! Our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy; bring him with you, by all means. The Lord bless and keep you all.

I am your affectionate friend,

John Newton

25 Sept. 1780. My dear friend,

Two letters for one — how kind! I thank you. I would send you one every week if I had time. This you know, and therefore accept the will for the deed.

I have not yet fixed on my texts for Christmas day. The two candidates which at present seem disposed to offer, are Genesis 49:10-12, for the morning, and John 9:39, for the evening. If they shall resolve to stand, and no powerful competitor interpose, it is probable they may both carry the election, especially the latter. I preached on it one Christmas evening, and have the notes by me. If the Lord pleases to give me new thoughts to fill up this old plan, and breathe his good Spirit upon the whole, then I may bring forth things new and old to his praise.

"Jesus said, For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." John 9:39 Why did Christ come?

I. For judgment. Two senses of the word: purpose — or appointment; and manifestation — or trial, Luke 2:35. The gospel calculated to give sight to the blind, and to prove that they are stark blind who pretend to see without it, Luke 2:53, Matthew 11:25.

II. The blind see. The Spirit, by the gospel, makes the blind both see and feel their guilt and misery; then shows them pardon, life, and happiness in a Savior.

III. They who pretend they see — are made blind. These are of two sorts.

1. Such as absolutely reject the truth because it does not suit what they call their reason. Many of the most important doctrines, the more they are examined by fallen proud reason — will appear the more unreasonable. Instance in —

First, The Deity of Jesus, will be absurd to those who feel not the need of an Almighty Savior. So that 1 Corinthians 12:3.

Second — Justification by the righteousness of another will be thought absurd.

Third — That God, in point of acceptance, pays no more regard to men’s best actions than their sins, is deemed another absurdity.

Fourth — Even to assert that he has a right to do what he will with his own, is accounted another hard and unreasonable point; though they claim such a right for themselves in their own concerns.

Thus the gospel reveals the thoughts of their hearts. Their boasted morality (if they have any) is found destitute of the love of God, and of truth. They profess to see — but are quite dark, yes, the light that shines around them increases their darkness.

2. Such as receive the gospel in the notion, and value themselves upon it — but are destitute of the power; none make a greater parade of seeing than these, none more fatally blinded. They smile at a self-righteousness founded upon works — but are themselves in the very spirit of the Pharisee. An acknowledgment of the doctrines which they misunderstand and abuse, serves them for a righteousness; and, trusting to this, they despise all who are stricter than themselves, and dislike close and faithful preaching as they would poison. A minister may preach in general terms, and have their good word; but, if he deals faithfully and plainly with conscience — if he bears testimony, not only against dead works — but against dead faith, they will think they do God service by censuring and reviling him. Awful case! to be blinded by the very truths they profess and believe. Yet I fear it is too common.

We are past the solstice, and shall soon perceive the peep, at least the forerunners of spring. Come, May! come, June! that we may trot down to Olney, Weston, Newport, Bedford. Ah, wretched creature I am! Will I dare to wish the time away? Rather wish every minute was an hour, while you have so much to do, and can so poorly improve the little space allotted to do it in. Well, I wish to wait patiently. May I improve the interval! But though we shall be happy together, we are not necessary to each other, and that’s a mercy. The Lord is sufficient. I wish to leave it with him, where, or what, or how — I am to be next June, or tomorrow. If he is mine — all is well; and if his will is done — all is right. My dear wife is pretty well. The Lord seldom afflicts us all together — but in our turns we are taught to feel for and help each other. Mr. Barton is her doctor, under the great Physician, who, I hope, condescends to take her case in hand. He wounds — and he heals; he does both at the best time. Your cough, I hope, will be silenced and melted away before long, and you will join with all the spring birds in hymning the praises of the great Shepherd. Yes, let us love, and sing, and wonder, and go singing and wondering on through life, until we join the songs and admiration of the blessed before the throne.

Adieu, your very true friend,

John Newton December 24th, 1780. My dear friend,

These are horrid times indeed! Worse and worse, and I fear they will be worse still. But we know who is at the helm. What a mercy to know this! Reynolds says somewhere, "Jesus will either be your pilot in the ship, or your plank in the sea." This is good news, and therefore we need not fear for ourselves; for should we see a general shipwreck we shall survive it, and get safe to land. While we cleave to such a plank — we cannot sink. But the connection and union is much nearer still. He is the Head — we the members. Now a man cannot drown while his head is above water. The members of Christ are in floods and depths; waves and billows roll over them — but the Head is on high, their life is hid and secure in him, and in good time the Lord will draw out the members after it.

If I were as I wish to be, I would not fear at all for myself. I would say, "My all is in the Lord's hands, and there I leave it. He undertakes to manage and care — and I have only to sit still and admire his wisdom." But I would wish to be much affected for others. Oh, the distresses and calamities which sin occasions! Sin has excited, and it still continues, the war. Ah, what a devouring sword! how many fatherless and widows has it made! how many has it plunged into eternity! What fruitful fields are drenched with blood, and become wildernesses! Sin raised the late terrible hurricanes. What a desolation! Yet we (as a people) are stupid and insensible still, and his hand is stretched out still.

There is a fast-day coming. I shall preach two sermons, if the Lord pleases, and think to print one of them. I thought to have printed a fast-day sermon at Olney, and I have it by me written at length. With some refurbishing and alterations it will do for the present time; and I think my situation here rather requires and calls upon me for a public testimony.

Let us hear from you very soon. Tell Mrs. Bull and Tommy, that we send our love and our prayers that the grace of a gracious Savior may fill all our hearts, Amen.

John Newton Jan. 20th, 1781. My dear friend,

I do not envy you of your pleasure of reading one hundred and fifty pages of academics in Latin. It would have taken me a year, instead of a month, to wade through. I have lost my acumen for such 'learned disquisitions' — and perhaps I am as well without it.

How many hundreds, yes thousands, of pages have I read — of which there is now hardly any trace in my memory! I do not, however, account it all lost labor. Without doubt, many ideas which now occasionally offer themselves as my own — have been borrowed from others, though I have ungratefully forgotten the very names of my benefactors! But at my time of life, I wish to be like Mary — to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to make a transition from commentators — to that Great Teacher, who alone can influence the heart!

While I was writing — enter Dr. Barton. We never meet I believe — but we talk more or less of our friend at Newport. He tells me that he has prescribed something to good effect, and that your pains have retreated before his medicines. If it is for your good — I wish them never to return; but if the Lord makes them messengers of grace and blessing to you — I dare not shut the door against them, were I able.

I heard on Tuesday that the Bishop of Lichfield was to preach the sermon to the Society for Propagating the Gospel. Yesterday I purposed to be there — but when the hour came, I forgot it. Ah, such a head! The town rings of his sermon. Many dissenters I am told were there. He charmed away their prejudices, and sent them home full of commendations. His text was Hebrews 13:8. His sermon upon it admirable for sense, composition, and elocution, and the whole strain evangelical. I hear it is to be printed. His point was, as I am informed, to show that Jesus Christ is in all ages — today, yesterday, and forever, the same. He displayed Jesus in his personal glories, in his work of redemption, in his government and law. What a foolish head was mine to forget the appointment!

I am glad my book of letters, Cardiphonia is at hand, to put you often in mind of me. You see me there in my best — and in my worst. Or, rather, you see what I am — and you may guess what I would be. It seems likely to sell and spread, which I shall be glad of, if the Lord is pleased to

accompany them with his blessing. If my letters are owned to comfort the afflicted, to quicken the careless, to confirm the wavering — I will rejoice. I prefer being useful to one soul — to the applause of twenty nations and ages. The hour is coming when the united commendation of all mankind will be of no more value than the playful words of a few dirty boys in the street. I would, if possible, set no more value upon it now — than I shall then; but there is much tinder in my heart; and vile, ignorant, and insufficient as I know myself to be, I can but just manage the compliments that have been hinted in my hearing. How foolish, as well as wicked, is this self-delight!

If a man commended a coin which I called mine — it would not work much upon my pride, for I neither coined it, nor made the die; and if I am enabled either to write or to speak to the purpose, neither I, nor the sin which dwells in me, have any right to praise.

Company prevented finishing my letter before dinner, and now that I have dined — I am stupid, and half asleep; which you would soon perceive, without my telling you, if I do not hasten to subscribe myself, Your affectionate

John Newton

Feb. 17, 1781. My dear friend, Your letter has been with me about two weeks, and must be answered, let who will, wait. You threaten me and frighten me with your suspicions; though, when you apprehend that the glow of my friendship turns pale and languid, from a just consciousness of my own feelings, I attribute it rather to the illness in you, than to any change in myself, in hope to convince you, in defiance of all your surmises, that I love you dearly. I know your make, and therefore forgive you. For your other apprehensions and admonitions, I trust my heart thanks you. My situation here in London is ensnaring, indeed. There is a littleness, a weakness, a wickedness in my mind — which makes me liable to be carried away like a dead fish down the stream, by the things you mention. If I am kept holy — it is surely by that Power which can preserve a spark alive in a tempest, or in the ocean. But, to the praise of His grace, I am not conscious of my spirit being greatly hurt hitherto.

Though the slavery I was reduced to in Africa made no profitable impression upon my mind at the time — I hope the Lord has made the recollection of it useful to me since; and I may praise him that it is seldom, if ever, one whole day out of my thoughts. It occurs to me almost hourly, that the rector, the author, the hymn-maker, who is admitted to the notice of 'my lord this', and 'my lady that' — was redeemed from abject slavery — the lowest state of human wretchedness. If it is hinted to me that I have written or said something pretty or pertinent on pious subjects, I am reminded that the hand which wrote it, and the mouth which spoke it, were once employed by Satan — that I was a most horrid blasphemer of the Savior, whom I now commend. Nor is this all. The whole of my experience, since I began to know the Lord, has been graciously suited to keep me from forgetting myself altogether. Ah, what a series of inconsistency and perverseness am I conscious of! Can I be proud of pointing out rules to others — which I so sadly deviate from myself? However, it is true, that notwithstanding all I have seen and known, and felt, and said, and done — such a heart as mine would soon be proud — if Almighty Power did not keep it down.

I have heard of a playwright who put copies of his comedy into the hands of four friends to revise. When he came to collect the copies afterwards, he found one scene struck out here and there by one, another by another, so that among them they had demolished the whole play. The lot of my

Cardiphonia seems the reverse of this. You speak favorably of all the letters — but think those to the nobleman inferior to the rest. A gentleman of some eminence for name, taste, and literature, at Bristol, writes me his approbation of the whole — but gives a peculiar preference to the nobleman's. Some of them, as you observed, are rather essays, because the subjects were given me, and I was desired to treat them something at large, and because such parts of those letters which had not a reference to the subject were excluded. There is, likewise, a sort of deference when a little man writes to a great man, which will not admit quite so much familiarity as between people on a par. Yet some of them, I think, are as much epistles as any in the volumes. However, it matters not whether they are essays, dissertations, sermons, or letters — so that they may be useful. If you could tell me which letters the Lord is pleased to make most acceptable and serviceable to the readers, I would soon tell you which are the best letters in the volumes.

I allow that the address to Mr. ___ is vexatious to the curiosity of a reader. But you are sensible it would have been improper to print the names. Some of the people are unknown to you, and when that is the case, it seems indifferent whether they were written to John Nokes, or Thomas Styles; however, you shall have a key to the most. Some of them would not wish to be known, and I shall, therefore, leave them, as they are, to exercise your sagacity.

I have a fast-day sermon in the press, which you will see in good time. My dear wife is better and worse — at present tolerably well. Betsy and I are quite well. We all love you, and unite in love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. Believe me yours, not in a languid but in a glowing degree,

John Newton 5th March, 1781. My dear friend,

I am pleased that you approve my fast-day sermon; but I ought to be sorry such a picture of the state of the nation, (or rather a sketch, for it is no more,) is so palpably true, that you cannot charge me with over-exaggerating the features. I ought to be sorry, likewise, that I am so little affected myself with the subject. I am too little impressed either with the sight of abounding sin — or the apprehension of approaching judgment. I live in the midst of a polluted people, and I am, alas! a sharer in the general pollution; yet do I not lay either the one or the other sufficiently to heart! A voice at length is heard from the East Indies. The Lord has begun to plead with us there, and I shall not wonder if the cries of the oppressed at length prevail, for an extirpation out of that quarter of the globe. To an eye of sense, a cloud, portending an awful storm, appears over us — but faith sees the hand that guides its motions, and relies on the promises by which wisdom and love have engaged to bring light out of the darkness. Let us believe, and we shall see the salvation of God.

There is a certain day, which, for reasons unknown to me, is the best and fittest in the whole year for me to go to visit you. But I am not almanac-maker sufficient to pick this day out from the rest, by my own skill. I know not whether it is in May, June, or September. But there is One who knows all things, who bids me trust to him, and he will direct my steps — not by an audible voice from heaven — but by the movements of his providence. Something shall still hinder and delay until the right time comes, and then all hindrances shall give way; and bolts and locks, though made of brass, shall fly open of their own accord, without any need of my contriving to pick them with false keys. There is a previous question, whether the Lord sees it proper I should go at all to Olney this year? Mr. Self eagerly says "Yes, I hope so." But Mr. Self can give no sufficient reason why he should not be mortified and disappointed, for he knows he deserves no better. My love to Miss

Myers, if still with you. May the Lord make and keep her peaceful, humble, spiritual, and give her large amends in grace and comfort for all that her profession has cost her.

I am glad to hear you continue tolerably well. I hope the barometer of your spirits is rather up than down, and that you will bestow a placid smile upon my letter when you read.

I have not yet seen Mr. Madan's pernicious book, nor am I eager for it. It would have been better for some people if they had never learned to read or write! Ah, what are talents — if not consecrated to the Lord's service, and under the influence of his Spirit! They are but like a sword in the hands of a madman, with which he indiscriminately wounds his enemies, his friends, and himself.

You pity me; I almost pity myself. I could like a little more leisure; but if I am where I ought to be — imagination could not place me better. Yesterday I wandered an hour in the most retired parts of Hyde Park, and I thought it pleasant. My dear wife's health is variable, like the weather — which is saying, she is not very ill, or long ill at a time. The Lord is good. Love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. Farewell. Pray for Hoxton.

John Newton 21st April, 1781. My dear friend,

We would be glad to have you with us — but must be content with talking of you. I hope your Best Friend will be with us, and then we can make a good shift without this or the other particular person. I suppose the apostle John was secluded from his friends when at Patmos, and I suppose he hardly missed them. Creatures are candlelight comforts: when they are put out, or burn out, the sun can well supply the place of them all. You are often upon my mind; or, to say it better, you are always in my heart. This is a truth which does not at all depend upon my coming or my not coming to Newport to see you. The above was written on Thursday; it is now Saturday morning. We are returning home, and shall have the pleasure of Mrs. Wilberforce and Dr. Conyer's company to dinner. I meant to fill my paper — but the naughty pen will not write. I have had pleasant company, and some outwardly pleasant walks about the park and heath; but something has been lacking. My soul is too much like Gideon's fleece — dry; though I can perceive the dew falling around me.

We join our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and to Miss Myers, if still with you. As I shall hardly have time to write more today, I subscribe myself now most affectionately yours,

John Newton Greenwich, 12th May, 1781.

Dear Sir, When I returned on Saturday, Miss Myers called, and brought me a little strip of paper. She said she was feeling poorly; made but a short stay, and I have not seen her since. We were glad to hear that though you had been ill, you were then better.

I have reason to be thankful that Cardiphonia seems acceptable among the Lord's people. It has been much called for — but I hear nothing of a new edition being wanted yet. Most of the letters are so desultory, that it would be difficult to find a title to each which would comprise the whole subject; but more of this when we meet. I shall sit in silence, to hear any remarks you make, in hopes of profiting by them.

We hope to travel to Bedford on Monday. My thoughts run much upon the interview with my old friends — if the Lord preserves them and us with health and peace, and especially if he is pleased

to meet us, and to cause our hearts to burn within us. Otherwise we shall only yawn, and trifle away our precious time. If a group of empty pots should meet together, with the charitable design of filling each other, they would all be disappointed; but place them by a fountain, or under a running pipe, there they might first receive, and then communicate. You will pray, therefore, for us — first, that we may have a safe and prosperous journey to you; and secondly, that we may not come in vain, or alone.

Company is come, and dinner is coming, so no more at present, (but love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.) From your affectionate friend, and so forth,

John Newton May 26, 1781.

Dear friend,

If I had your leisure, and you had my inclination, we would exchange letters more frequently. You seem determined not to write first, and I am hardly able to write at all. But, if the Lord is with you, and you are pretty well, why should you puzzle yourself about folks that are fifty miles distant? The Lord is very gracious to us. My dear wife is still favored with very tolerable health. Preaching six or seven times per week agrees wondrously well with me, in this hot weather. I eat heartily, sleep soundly, and I believe continue to grow fat. I am often favored with liberty in public, which sometimes amazes me — when I consider what I am conscious of in private. My late visit to Bedford, Newport, and Olney, left a pleasant savor upon my mind; and the recollection of incidents which, by the Lord's blessing, may be profitable, remains upon my mind. I was glad to find and leave you so well, for you seemed to me better than at any time since I have known you. I hope you will continue mending, until you are as sound and hearty as an oak. I mean, if so much health may be good for you. But if illnesses, etc., are means by which the Lord designs good for your soul, then I must consent that you be afflicted. It is better to be sick or cast down, than to be proud or careless, or to do foolish things, to make the church weep, and the world laugh.

Public affairs look darker still, expectation is on tiptoe, waiting for hourly news from all parts abroad — but foreboding that the news whenever it comes, or from whatever quarter, will be distressing. I am afraid what we next hear from America will not be pleasing. That unhappy country is still likely to be a scene of desolation. In the West Indies, Tobago is gone, and perhaps by this time some other of our islands. And the cry of oppression in the East Indies seems at length to have awakened judgment there. I think of the words, "In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short." He seems about to cut us short on all sides. Yet the spirit of our nation seems like the thoughtless mariner asleep on the top of the mast, heedless of the danger, which is increasing every day.

Yet still I hope there is mercy. The gospel spreads — grace reigns — the number of praying souls are upon the increase, and their prayers I trust will be heard. We are sure that the Lord reigns, that the storm is guided by the hands which were nailed to the cross, and that as he loves his own — he will take care of them. But they who have not an ark to hide themselves in, will probably weep and wail before the indignation is past.

Blessed be God for the prospect of an eternal land of peace, where sin and every sorrow will be excluded. There we shall have a day without cloud and without night. The sun shall go down no more, the voice of war shall be heard no more. The inhabitants shall feel pain no more, shall weep no more, shall go out no more. Then, no more unsanctified desires — and therefore no more

unsatisfied desires. Oh what a state of love, life, and joy — when we see Jesus as he is! and by beholding, are changed into his image, and made (according to the utmost capacity of our natures) perfectly like him.

Well it shall, it will come, it approaches nearer every hour! My love to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, Mr. Fordham, not forgetting Mr. Goode, when you see him.

I am your sincere friend and brother, servant, and fellow pilgrim, etc.,

John Newton 26th July, 1781. My dear friend,

It is not for you and I who know that the Lord does all things, and believe that he does all things well — it is not for us to shake our heads and say, Alas! alas! I wish it was otherwise. I trust he has adjusted the time of your coming to London to answer important purposes, and then I ought to be well pleased, though my own humor and feelings are crossed by it. We thank you for your kind intention of spending some of your first days with us, and glad we shall be to have you "from morn until noon, from noon until dewy eve."

Give our hearty love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and tell Mrs. Bull that so sure as you come in our way, we will do all in our power to take care of you, and make you easy.

I am affectionately yours,

John Newton September 1, 1781. My dear friend,

Yes, dear Mrs. Barham is gone home. She lived honorably, and died peaceably. Were I to preach a funeral sermon, I would say but little about her; but I would make the people stare, if I could, by telling them what a wonderful Friend she had; one who paid all her debts, and who was so attentive to her, that his eye was never off her by night or day for a long number of years; one who, by looking at her, could sweeten her pains, renew her strength, and fill her with wisdom, grace, and peace. It was to his praise, and not to hers, that she filled up every character and relation of life with propriety, endured pain with cheerfulness, and gave an edifying and memorable example to all around her. It was this kind Friend who first introduced me to her, and I was honored with her friendship because she believed I loved her Friend. Well, she is gone, and I am a loser; but I do not wish her back again. She is gone to see her best Friend; and I hope, one day, to see her with him. If she could speak to us now, she would say, "Be not slothful — but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises!"

I love to see and notice God’s providential hand in every circumstance of domestic life. Trivial as they may seem singly, they are often of great importance to us in their consequences; and therefore He, in whose sight all the nations of the earth are but as the drop of a bucket, condescends to direct them.

We are insensibly slipping into the winter season. By-and-bye, we expect frost, snowstorms, and rain; short, lowering days, and long, gloomy nights. A few weeks or months of these inclement changes will prepare us (if we live) to value and welcome the return of spring, which will soon pass away to make room for summer, autumn, and then winter again. Thus things go round and round — but every season brings us a stage nearer to an eternal year of perpetual spring — a day without night, where our sun shall be clouded or go down no more. Happy prospect! We shall not

always be as we are now. We are now at school, learning to sing the song of redeeming love, and, before long, we shall be translated to sing it before the throne of God! Your poor friend,

John Newton

13 Oct. 1781.

Dear Sir,

I am not surprised that a little of the gloom of November should tinge your spirits; but I hope as the weather is bright again, your barometer will stand higher when you read my letter than when you wrote your own. However that be, I shall venture to address you with the Angel's salutation, "Hail, you that are highly favored! The Lord is with you." You live in a strong city, which has salvation itself for walls and bulwarks; your frequent changes are numbering off apace, and the last when it comes (I hope a good round number of years hence) will introduce you to a state of unchangeable and endless peace and joy! With such a home in view, the trials we may meet upon the road are of no great comparative importance. Let us not be weary in doing or suffering the Lord's will, for in due season we shall reap.

I have printed, very privately, a letter to my parishioners, and sent one under cover and seal to every housekeeper. I would have sent you one, if I had a frank. The next time you ride to Mr. Cowper's, you may see it. With our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, I remain most sincerely yours,

John Newton

Nov., 1761. My dear Mr. Bull,

If I was strictly to do nothing by partiality, I would not answer your letters within six months, having some, and from people whom I love, lying by me, of a still longer date than that. But if I have a strong predilection in your favor, I cannot help it, and I hope it is not sinful to indulge it, so as to take you out of course. The great State Ship seems to be getting apace into shoal water, and I fear will be aground soon. Things go on from bad to worse; and repentance seems as little thought of as ever. But though she should, (like Paul's ship), be broken all to pieces, the Lord's people on board her shall get safe to the heavenly shore. We need not, we ought not, to fear for ourselves; but who can help being affected with the case of the many, who have no ears to hear the Lord's voice, no eye to see his hand, in the awful calamities our sins have brought upon us! May I not rather say, Who is sufficiently affected? I am sure I am not.

Trade is much at a stand-still — bankruptcies increase — the distresses of the poor are likely to be great, especially if the new year should bring us, (as I expect,) a hard frost.

Oh, what a mischievous thing is sin! how does it fill the world with a variety of woe! But our Lord says to his people, Do not let your hearts be troubled. He will take care of us while here, and by and by we shall be removed to a better soil and a better climate, where we shall never be disturbed by the din of war. The Lord reigns! He governs the world, and let men contrive and plot as they will, they are all instruments in his hand, and shall in the end bring nothing to pass — but what is worthy of his wisdom and goodness to appoint or permit. Even the wrath of men shall praise him. And what man in his wrath or ambition would do if he could, if it be not a part of the Lord's wise plan — shall fail and evaporate. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and other boasters, who

expected to carry everything before them according to their own wills — had their bounds and commissions, beyond which they could not pass. When they attempted it, they quickly found a hook and bridle in their jaws, and were stopped, turned, and confounded.

It is just so in modern times: when mortals speak proudly, the Lord is above them. He takes the wise in their own craftiness. He blows upon their schemes, and they break like a bubble upon the waters. Let us rejoice that this God, who pours contempt upon princes, is our God. Whatever storms and floods arise, we are in the ark — which is under the protection and the pilotage of Him that loved us, and gave himself for us. My dear wife is sometimes poorly — but, upon the whole, pretty well; we live in peace, and do tolerably well. Our little girl and myself are favored with good strong health. We all send our love to you, love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. I hope you pray often, and earnestly, for us. You are seldom long out of my mind. In particular, it is usual with me to pay you a mental visit on a Saturday evening, when I suppose you are thinking about the business of the morrow. My texts on Christmas-day were Hebrews 2:14-15; and in the evening, John 9:39. I shall need two sermons for New-year's day — but am not yet provided. The hour of prayer and supper is just at hand (nine o'clock), and therefore I must bid you a good night. The Lord bless you,,

John Newton

28th Dec. 1781. My dear Sir, I found your letter last night after I came home, thank you for it. This was my text on New Year's day, "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." Psalms 71:9

I am drawing nearer and nearer to the season which David either expected or felt. I observe that the aged believer has no additional claim upon the Lord, who might have rejected him when he first came, and now at last might justly cast him off, as to any plea he can offer for himself; for his services have been all defective or defiled, and he must confess himself unprofitable and unfaithful. But his plea, in the name of Jesus, is strong and sure.

Many reasons teach the aged believer the need of this prayer. As his graces are still imperfect, so his powers are feelingly upon the decline. It was but little he could do, at his best — and now less and less.

He feels other props and comforts dropping off apace. When he was young he had warm spirits and pleasing prospects; but now what a change of the friends in which he once delighted! In some he has found inconstancy — they have forsaken and forgotten him; and others have been successively taken away by death. They have fallen like the leaves in autumn — and now he stands almost a naked trunk. If any yet remain, he is expecting to lose them likewise, except he himself is taken from them.

Old age abates, and gradually destroys, the relish of such earthly comforts as might be otherwise enjoyed. Pains, infirmities, loss of sleep and appetite, the failure of sight, hearing, and all the senses — are harbingers, like Job's messengers, arriving in close succession to tell him that death is upon his progress, and not far distant!

If youth has no security against death — then old age has no possibility of escaping the grim monster. But though friends fail, cisterns burst, gourds wither, strength declines, and death

advances — if God does not forsake me — then all is well. "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." Psalms 71:9 This subject does not directly suit you at present; but if you live long enough, you will be old in time, and therefore I sent you a little sketch of my sermon.

I wish poor old England had a heart suited to this prayer. The nation has had a time of manhood, strength, and bloom. But it is now gray-headed, weak, and doting; and, alas! its grey hairs are not found in the ways of righteousness. Yet I have a good hope the Lord will not utterly cast off this sinful nation, so as to abandon it to the will of his enemies. He has a remnant, and a work among us, and I hope the word is, 'Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.' We must be brought down, impoverished, and put to shame. His glory requires it; and if we love his name, we must not be greatly sorry for those dispensations which are necessary to convince the nation and the world that the Lord is God. The bulk of a people called Christian, do not know that the Lord is God; but it is a truth they must learn, whatever the acquisition may cost.

I wish I could feel as I ought — for myself — for the churches — for the nation. I do not wonder that our plans have been wrong, and all our expectations defeated. But SIN is the cause. If we had not provoked the Lord, he would have presided in our councils; and so far as war had been necessary and right, he would have given our commanders wisdom, union, fidelity, and success. Still it shall be well with those who sigh and mourn before him, and whose eyes affect their hearts. May the Lord make this new year a good and happy one to you and Mrs. Bull and Tommy. We join in love.

I am sincerely yours,

John Newton

3 Jan 1782. My dear Gentle Bull,

I Hope Tommy has lost his fever, and Mrs. Bull continues well. Love to both from both your poor friends here. Peggy was so well as to visit us on Saturday; but when I returned her visit on Monday, she was very doing poorly again.

All the illnesses in the city Hospital are but feeble types of the various symptoms of that worst of diseases, sin. The best earthly physicians are still men — feeble emblems of Him who heals soul and body with a word. His name is Jesus. He comes to the poor — as readily as to the rich; he takes no fees; and no case ever miscarried in his hand. To him I commend you, and all your soul illnesses.

I am your most affectionate

John Newton January 24, 1782. My dear Sir,

They say the chameleon assumes a variety of colors, according to the color of different objects near him. Thus changeable are my feelings often when I am reading your letters. One paragraph makes me look bright, for you are pretty well, and in good spirits. Perhaps the very next is almost filled with the words pain, weakness, dejection, and the like; then my heart puts on a sable hue, and assimilates itself to your complaints. But, perhaps, before the letter closes, your complaints are forgotten, your spirits revive, and mine likewise, of course. Upon the whole, cheerfulness predominates with me, because I consider your comforts as real and abiding, and your complaints

as rather imaginary and transitory.

We were glad to hear that you and Sir Thomas had a safe and good journey home, and that Mrs. Bull was in less pain than when you left her. My wishes for her are, 1st, that her affliction may be sanctified; and then, 2nd, that, if the Lord pleases, it may be relieved and removed.

He is the best physician; he can make the lame walk, and heal a wound, whether it be in the leg or in the heart; yes, he wounds only to heal, and afflicts us that he may thereby take occasion to comfort us. I trust she feels herself safe in his merciful hands, and believes that he will surely do her good. If we suffer, it shall neither be in vain, nor for a long time. Yet in a little while, and he will change these vile bodies, and fashion them according to the pattern of his own glorious body. What a thought is that! Could we have dared to hope for so much, if he had not promised it? No; it would have been presumption; but, now God has promised it, it were presumption to question his word.

It seemed high time for me to write — and yet I find nothing at hand to fill up the paper. Shall I touch upon politics? We have revolutions and changes — but the newspapers (my chief sources of intelligence) have told you all the Lord is doing, and will do something worthy of himself; this we may be sure of. As to the particulars, we must await the openings of his Providence; and, since we already know that the sum total will be — all is right, we may wait with patience and confidence. At present, we seem to have some distant prospect, at least, of peace; a blessing which appears to me of such great importance, that I am not very solicitous as to the terms by which it may be attained. It seems, the outs are now to be the ins, and the ins the outs; and I suppose a new party will be attended with a new opposition; for these things, among us, seem to be as much of course, as that a shadow should be inseparable from the body. In the meantime, my part, as a Christian, is to be quietly subject to "the powers that be;" for they are all (whether they intend it or not) busy in accomplishing the will of my Lord. In the great ship of the nation, I am only a passenger; the mariners will never consult me about the course they should steer, nor regard my advice if I should give it them unasked. If I have any office on board, it is, at most — but that of a chaplain, who, though he has no hand in the navigation, is doubtless engaged, by both character and interest, to pray for a good voyage; and that He, who has the wind and weather at his disposal, may, in mercy, bring the poor tempest-tossed vessel safely through the storm.

"Certainly, man walks about like a mere shadow. Indeed, they frantically rush around in vain, gathering possessions without knowing who will get them!" Psalms 39:6

What a bustle are most men in, about the momentary concerns of the present life! They are like children playing blind-man’s bluff! And while the blindfold hinders them from seeing that they are upon the edge of a precipice, in the midst of their eager play — they slip, they fall in succession one after the other — and they are inevitably, irrevocably gone! But others crowd in to fill up their vacancies — and the game still goes on! With what a mixture of compassion and indignation, may we conceive the holy angels have, as they behold what is transacting upon the earth!

Forever adored, be the gracious Savior, who took the blindfold from our eyes, withdrew us from the dangerous brink — to sit in peace and safety at his feet. "For He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness — and transferred us into the Kingdom of His dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins!" Colossians 1:13-14. "Satan, who is the god of this world, has

blinded the minds of those who do not believe!" 2 Corinthians 4:4

Now, if we are wise to know our privilege, all the commotions around us need not affect us any more (as to our own personal concernments) than the rattling of the storm against the wall, when we are sitting snug within doors by the fire-side. Yet it befits us to pity those who are found in the street exposed without shelter to the fury of the tempest.

Love from us both to Mrs. Bull and Mr. Tommy. Continue to pray for us, and may the Lord bless you and yours.

I am your affectionate friend,

John Newton 23rd March, 1782. My dear friend,

Thanks for your letter, and I will thank the Lord for putting out the St. Anthony's fire, for relieving Mrs. Bull, and for removing Tommy's fever. He is a tender plant; I can conceive something of your feelings when he is threatened. I hope he will be spared for your comfort, and am sure he will if it be upon the whole best; if otherwise, I doubt not but He who has supported you under former trials, would still give you proofs of his all-sufficiency, and enable you to acquiesce in the appointments of his wisdom.

Mr. Clayton lately called upon me, to tell me, that many people are seriously thinking of establishing a new academy for preparing young men for the ministry — in which the greatest stress might be laid upon truth, life, spirituality; and the least stress possible upon modes, forms, and non-essentials — that it must be at a moderate distance from London — that, in fact, Newport was the place fixed upon, for the sake of one Mr. Bull, who lives there, and who it was hoped would accept the superintendency. He said some talked of a much larger sum — but that he himself made no doubt but so far as 500 pounds per annum would be readily subscribed to promote so good a design.

He then said it was his request, and the desire of many of his friends, that I would draw up a plan for the forming such an academy, and likewise that I would write to you upon the subject. The design met my hearty approbation, as it stood connected with Mr. Bull, who I said appeared to me the most proper person I could think of, to undertake it. As to my drawing up a plan, I half promised to write my thoughts of it — that is, I mean to tell Mr. Clayton, by letter, how I would sketch out such an institution, if I lived in Utopia, and could have the management of things my own way. If they can pick any hints worthy of notice from such an attempt, they shall be welcome to them; but to draw a formal plan how an academy should be regulated in this enlightened age and country, and to hit such a medium as might unite and coalesce the respectable Dissenters and Methodists, who seem willing to promote this academy, might savor too much of presumption in one who was never either at university or academy himself — but rather spent the time which other young men employ in study, in the wilds of Africa!

However, feeling myself rather awkward as to the service assigned me, I told Mr. Clayton I would wish to hear from you first, expecting that a sketch from you would, in a measure, illuminate me, and qualify me for the undertaking.

I wish, therefore, to know something of your mind and views, and the sooner the better. It is a service I have long wished to see you more fully engaged in, and am not willing to see that time

which might be better employed, taken up in the instruction of young Christian pastors.

There is much thirst for the gospel in Lancashire: people willing to hear, and actually more congregations formed than preachers can be procured for. A Mr. Gardiner, from Lancaster, has been long in town. He seems a lively, understanding man. A part of his business is to procure preachers, if he can; but the situation is so distant, and the service not over pleasing to flesh and blood. Grace, humility, zeal, self-denial, and extempore speaking — are requisites. He says there are now two congregations, in particular, that afford a good prospect: in the one — if the minister can live upon 100 pounds per year; in the other — if he can live by faith in the promises. He desired me to ask if your Mr. Fordham is ready to take the field; if he would like such a service; if you think it would suit him, etc. I must just add, Love, love, love, and wish you all a good night.

I am always and very much your

John Newton 11th April, 1782.

Monsieur, dear friend, My little portion of retired time is so much engrossed by the academy business, that I can hardly afford ten minutes to write a line by Mrs. Wilberforce. Yet I would wish you to know that I am not unmindful of you. My work grows upon my hands, and is likely to be a volume; and, after all, not what Mr. Clayton asked for — an academy for England — but for Utopia. But if the Lord enables me to drop some hints that may be useful to the design, I shall be thankful. Some people may perhaps think it a satire upon present academies — but this was not my intention. I think one more writing forenoon may bring me to a conclusion; but then I must transcribe it. For though my first thoughts are usually my best, in the main — yet it is so carelessly and badly written, with so many mistakes, so many words interlined, and scratched out, and put one for another — that few people but myself can cleverly decipher it! I will go on, with my best speed: indeed, I must, for I cannot comfortably attend to anything else until it is finished.

I know that we love you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and that I must hasten to subscribe myself, Yours, affectionately,

John Newton

2nd May, 1782. My dear friend,

I finished the task Mr. Clayton assigned to me about ten days ago, and put it into his hands. I understand it has passed from him, and is passing into other hands. Your curiosity to see it, I am told, is upon tip-toe; but it must wait awhile. I suppose it will not return to me for some time.

I have had the pleasure of pleasing my employer, at least; and perhaps a few of every party may like it; but I expect many of all the parties concerned, will not much admire my plan. I have given my sentiments undisguised and at large, without much caring who is pleased or displeased; for as I live in Utopia, it is of no importance to me what the people who live at such a distance as London are pleased to think of me. The most flattering sentiment I form of my performance is, that though I have filled seven sheets of post paper with very close writing, I have a good hope there will hardly be found a single period which will meet with your disapprobation. Your good opinion is of more consequence to me than that of others, because you are a nearer neighbor to me; for you live, or at least frequently reside, in Utopia as well as myself. Though you and I are both originals in our way — we have our separate and distinct peculiarities, and, consequently, cannot be exactly alike.

Yet it appears to me, that I have the honor to think more with you, upon the whole circle of our professional subjects, than with any minister I know; and accordingly, I expect that you will approve in a manner of the whole and every part of my plan; whereas I can hardly think of any other friend of mine who may not find something to object to here and there. But if I should be disappointed in this my optimistic expectation, and have not come so near your views as I think, you must let me down as softly as you can, for fear the mortification should hurt me, and I should feel too much when constrained to say, Ah my misery! The scene of my play is laid in Utopia; the acts, or heads, are four:

I. The situation, why not too near the metropolis, nor too far from it — but about a moderate day's journey of fifty or so miles.

II. The choice of the tutor. I will not tell you that it is your picture drawn from the life. It is sufficient if I have hit off a general idea of what you wish to be.

III. The choice of pupils. Why they must be serious, capable, and having desires already towards the ministry upon just and solid grounds.

IV. Their studies and line of conduct. What they are to learn and do; and what they are not to learn nor do. If this part should be thought a satire upon some academies, I can honestly say I did not intend it as such. I do not mean to meddle with anybody's affairs but my own, I set out with a simple desire of tracing the clue of truth wherever it might lead me.

It is an important subject, and I care not who knows my opinion of it, as I seemed providentially called to it. That a Dissenting minister should be sent by Dissenters to me for a plan of an academy seemed so extraordinary, that after a few fears lest my shoulders should be too weak for the burden, I complied with readiness, almost as if Gabriel had been sent to set me to work.

Tell Mrs. Bull and Tommy that we love them. My dear wife is at present but poorly. Miss Newton, as we sometimes call her, and her Papa are, through mercy, in full health.

Praise the Lord for his goodness to us, and pray him to sanctify our comparatively light crosses.

Believe me always and affectionately yours,

John Newton

25th May, 1782. My dear friend,

I set about the task Mr. Clayton gave me with good spirits, from a persuasion that though you and I might possibly differ about some subordinate parts of my plan, I would in some good degree meet your idea upon the whole, otherwise I would not have attempted it. I am glad of your approbation, because I hoped for it, and aimed at it. I believe as you say, that I think more nearly with you on the subject, than with any other person I am acquainted with.

Mr. Clayton and Mr. John Wilson my neighbor are now both out of town. The latter is expected home tomorrow. I understand the present tutors of the Evangelical Academy have proposed to resign their charge, and I believe some of the supporters of that institution thought of you as the properest person to undertake it. But my plan will not suit with their design, which seems to be chiefly to give a little assistance to people who have already begun to preach. But Mr. Wilson told

me, that he did not doubt but there were people enough, both willing and able, to carry my scheme into execution; that is, to give a number of promising young men a regular education, and that there was not a doubt but you were the proper person to engage in it.

Here the matter must rest at present, until his return, and for a few weeks afterwards. If it should proceed, it will be perhaps desirable to print a few copies of the Utopian plan, not for publication — but to distribute among friends, as it would take a long time to circulate a single manuscript. If it should be printed, you will of course have a copy among the first. If not, I will endeavor to send it you again, that you may get it transcribed, if you think it worth while. I have done my part, and you have done yours, by signifying your willingness to listen to the proposal, if it should be made to you. The rest is in the Lord's hands; if it is agreeable to his will, and a service which he will deign to smile upon, he will bring it forward. If not, we are but where we were, and I trust we do not wish to see anything brought forward — but under his auspices and influence. This will seem an awkward business all round to some people. What apology can Mr. Clayton make to many Dissenters for applying to a clergyman for a plan of an academy? And what can the poor cleric say to some people in his line, for chalking out the plan of a dissenting methodist academy? How will the staunch Tabernacle folks like my innuendos against some of their popular, loud, powerful preachers? I think this poor speckled bird will be pecked at by fowls of every wing. But it is well, that though he does not wish to offend any of them, he is mighty indifferent as to their censures. If we act with a single eye, and are desirous to serve and please the Lord — we may be easy as to consequences. When the conscience is clear and the heart simple — neither the applauses nor the anathemas of worms are worth two-pence per bushel. Your letter is a curiosity in its kind, for you have not found room for a single line respecting either health or sickness. From which I am willing to infer, that you were not very ill, or in very great pain, when you wrote it; or you would not have omitted a subject so familiar to your pen. I was indisposed a few days — but not confined or stopped in my public work.

I have some reason to think of the apostle's words, "As poor — yet making many (at least some) rich." I seem to preach with liberty, and to be heard with acceptance and profit by the congregation. I cannot but hope the Lord enriches some of my hearers by my ministry — but, at the same time, it is certain I feel very poor to myself. If they are feasted — it is otherwise with me. Through mercy I have just bread enough to keep me alive — and this is more than I deserve. In the pulpit, and while the eyes of my fellow-creatures are upon me — I seem to be in earnest, and talk big! Perhaps some who hear me think, 'You lead a happy life!' But if they knew how and what I am at home — they would pity me. Ah, what a poor cold, confused, inconsistent creature! I am a poor servant, indeed! and my only comfort springs from thinking (which yet I do too seldom and faintly) what a wondrous Master I serve.

We join in hearty love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. I trust you believe me to be your very affectionate friend and servant,

John Newton

20th June. My dear friend,

Mr. John Wilson is now returned. He is my intimate friend, warmly disposed to forward our Utopian plan, and for his character, connections, his ability, and generosity — he is a proper person to

move in it. Thus far we have made a good beginning. He is the only one with whom I have talked about it, except Mr. Clayton, who will not be at home until the end of next week. In the mean while, Mr. Wilson wishes the plan may be printed just as it is, not published; and I mean soon to send it to the press, and take off two hundred and fifty copies, to be distributed among those who may be expected will promote the design. The only preliminary we have as yet settled, and which is the sine qua non of the whole business, is that Mr. Bull is to be the tutor. But Mr. Wilson thinks we had better form the actual plan, before the affair is publicly talked of. He says, if otherwise, a number of people are called together to consult about it, each one will probably have some proposal or nostrum of his own; the aggregate of which may diverge so far from the original scheme as to overturn it, and render it unworthy either of your acceptance, or of our endeavor to promote it; whereas, if the plan is previously fixed, in such a manner that no just objections can lie against it — it may go down the more glibly, and save abundance of labor. The good opinion we have of you, makes us desirous that you should be under as little control as possible. The whole management will be left to yourself: yet this power must be delegated to you by some proper authority; and those who support you in it, will have a right to know how it is exercised, and likewise to be occasionally consulted. A principal difficulty that occurs to us, is concerning the admission of students. We would not have any forced upon you, or to continue with you — if you find that their temper, conduct, or lack of capacity or industry, should render them improper people. On the other hand, if the negative or the exclusion should rest wholly upon you, it will put you in an invidious situation. Those who are excluded will, of course, think themselves injured; and it is probable the fathers, mothers, brothers, and cousins, and so on, of such aggrieved people will rise up against you, as an austere and unreasonable man. We must have your thoughts upon the best method or medium for obviating this difficulty. My plan, you will observe, proposes a certain annual stipend for the tutor, whether the pupils be more or fewer, with a reasonable allowance for the board of each beside. It takes for granted, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, on the one hand; and, on the other, that the tutor, for the sake of serving the Lord, and training up a number of youths for the ministry, who are to be supported by subscription — that is, by charity — will, by the proposals he makes, show an unselfishness worthy of the cause he serves, and of the character he bears in Utopia. You might probably make more money from half the number of students, if you confined yourself to the sons of gentlemen who can afford to pay handsomely. On this point, I must get you to speak for yourself, and propose your own terms — as I believe your friends would rather you should mention what you think right, than undertake to judge for you.

I request you, therefore, according to the hints which I have dropped, to take a good pen, good black ink, then light your pipe, and write me such a letter, expressive of your views and wishes, as will be proper for me to show to any people whom it may concern. After all, both you and I may have our labor for our pains; but this I know, that if the thing is of the Lord — it shall prosper. Some great affairs have grown from as small beginnings; and, at the worst, whether He is pleased to bring this about or not, when we mean simply and humbly to serve him, he will graciously accept of the intention.

I saw Mr. Monk at church today, and invited him to come to see me. There is, it seems, an honesty about him which I like. Poor, wise, foolish, evangelical, self-righteous people of Olney! Too many there seem more solicitous that the minister should preach the gospel, than to profit by the gospel themselves. Our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.

I am much and always yours,

John Newton

3rd July, 1782.

I showed Mr. Wilson this letter. He approves all but what I say of him. He thinks you will overrate his consequence. His personal good-will and service you may depend upon — but he says his influence is not worth mentioning.

Dear Sir,

I believe something will come of our Utopian plan, that a proposal will be made to you, such as I judge, from your letters, you will not refuse. But, as yet, things are in embryo, and not sufficiently ripe for particularizing. I was lately sent for unexpectedly by some gentlemen, with whom I had not exchanged a word upon the subject, excepting with Mr. Clayton, who was present; but the invitation did not come from him (he is but just returned from Scotland). There will be a second meeting in less than a two weeks, when I may perhaps be able to tell you more.

It seems generally agreed upon, that you are to be the man. As to Newport, the only objection (which yet may be overruled) is to the distance. Some think a subscription will languish — if the academy is so far off, and especially that no committee will undertake to travel so far. For these reasons a situation within twenty miles of London would be preferable. I expect the question will be asked, "Can Mr. Bull be prevailed on to relocate to some place within these limits?" If you would put an answer into my mouth, you must write in the course of the week. You will ask the Lord, and he will tell you what to say. It should seem you could hardly go to a place where your ministry would be less regarded than where you are. But notwithstanding this, you will not go without his permission. If it is his will — he will prepare both your mind and your way.

You know the Lord does all things right, and not a hair of his children’s heads, falls to the ground without him. You know he can bring light out of darkness, and has wise reasons for all that he does, and for all he permits to be done. Dwell a minute upon these thoughts before you read further.

Now you are prepared, I proceed to tell you, that a friend of yours and mine was grievously hurt by an ox on Monday last. Mr. Sharp and two other surgeons attend him. They tell me there are no symptoms at present to forbid the hopes of a recovery, though they have not been without fear of a fracture in his skull. But from present favorable appearances, they hope it is not so. Our friend lives not far from Barbican, and his name is Barton.

I am with him every day. He is perfectly sensible, and spoke yesterday very comfortably. I shall see him again by and by. Mrs. Barton is very composed and comfortable. A single ox, you see, can hurt the shell of a believer; but, blessed be God — all the bulls of Bashan, if collected, cannot touch his kernel. He is safe, for his life is hid with Christ in God.

I know three Bulls at Newport, which I believe are all very harmless, and therefore I send my love, and Mrs. Newton’s, to them.

Yours,

John Newton 21th July, 1782.

Monsieur Mon Cher Ami —

Mr. Barton showed me your letter, and desired me to inform you, that though he does not think himself competent for writing — yet he hopes he is in a fair way of doing well, and gets forward daily, though slowly. I can tell you that his situation has been highly precarious — but the Lord watched over him. A small addition to the momentum with which the ox struck him, must have fractured his skull: as it was, it put his head so much out of sorts, that he was at first, for a time, senseless, then delirious for another period, and so confused and mazy for a long time, that he could hardly think at all; his eyes, likewise, were affected — he could scarcely bear the light. But when your letter came he was able to read it. He is now cheerful, can smile, and smoke a pipe; has been abroad in a coach several times. I hope to see him about the streets, as usual, in a fortnight's time. But Mr. Sharp wishes him to come forward very gently. I believe, nay, I more than believe, the Lord has been with them both. Mrs. Barton has been wonderfully supported, so as to sit up with him (when needful) night after night. I visited them daily; she was always the same — composed, resigned, and speaking only of the Lord's goodness. They send their love to you.

You will soon receive an official letter from the chairman of the Utopian Society, inviting you to London. I hope you will come up as soon as you can, and fix the time in your official answer. We had but one additional member last night — but I think the Lord sent him — a man of weight, both of character and fortune. He offered hearty concurrence and assistance, upon two conditions:

1. That the academy might not be fixed nearer than thirty miles to London (if fifty, he thought so much the better). That the number of students might be small, not exceeding twelve; and, to make short of it, he moved that it was desirable the proposed academy should be formed as near as may be upon the plan lately printed and signed Omicron — this was carried.

2. That Mr. Bull be asked to undertake it. Two resolves to this purpose will be transmitted to you in form; the next meeting will depend upon your coming to meet with them. Now put yourself in the Lord's hand, and make no unnecessary delay to come over and help us. My brother and sister are with us, and it is uncertain how long they will stay, therefore we cannot lodge you; but shall be glad of as much of your company as you can afford. Your city friends will be glad to take you in, and your business will now lie in the city.

I have not time for more at present — but love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy from my dear wife, and from your affectionate

John Newton 21 August. 1782.

Dear Professor Bull, Doctor of Utopia,

Mr. Vanity has been hinting to me your impatience and uneasiness; how you have been watching the post, and counting the days, and thinking it a vast while since you heard from me. But I say, how can vanity be so vain? However, though I ought to suppose you can make a good shift without me, I am not willing to be forgotten by you, and therefore I will just enclose you a line of thanks for your last post.

I hope all your complaints are subsided — that you will not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord to the Utopians. I suppose Mr. Clayton told you how, and how far, we went on at the last meeting. It therefore had an auspicious beginning, the subscription was tolerable, considering the number present; and the mode of admitting students, etc., was settled in a way which I hoped would be satisfactory to you. Next Tuesday a little abridged account of the design is to be agreed upon, to be printed, as a sort of bill to put into the hands of inquirers, which will save the trouble of telling the same thing over and over. I was asked to draw up something, and I have it ready to lay before them. I have little doubt but the subscription will soon be sufficient for the support of the first four, if we knew where to find them.

I went last time to withdraw, now that I had seen the society formed, and the business actually on foot; but just before we broke up, a motion was made, and passed without a negative, that I be asked to attend the next meeting. I seem to be hooked in, and perhaps shall not be able to force myself out, without breaking through proprieties; if not, I shall stay and make myself as easy as I can. Some of the wags have called us the Utopian Society; and I believe we shall assume it as our own voluntary description, and wear the reproach (if it was so intended) as our honor. But indeed I cannot complain of reproaches or persecution in this business. Having had only civil things said to me about it hitherto. Even a friend of ours, not far from Tooke's Court, thanked me for the plan, which he said he much approved in the main. I did not expect he could approve that part which glances upon church order — but he showed no disposition to dispute about it.

Mr. Webb, pastor of the Independent church, is gone — fully ripe I doubt not, like a shock of corn in due season. I loved and respected him greatly, and thought him among the first, if not the very first, of his denomination. I speak not of him as a scholar or divine. He probably was not inferior to his brethren in these characters. I knew him chiefly as a Christian; as such I thought him — eminent, solid, humble, spiritual, peaceful in himself, and of course a friend of peace. Grace reigned in his heart, and out of the abundance of his heart — his mouth spoke. He seemed to have no leisure to speak much of other subjects, and there was a savor in all that he said. His manner of speaking showed that he knew himself. I knew no man who had less of what I call the don about him. He shone without affecting to blaze or sparkle; and while others considered him as a teacher — he seemed to consider himself as a learner. In his last illness he did not speak of any remarkable consolations — but expressed an edifying, encouraging example of a calm, unshaken confidence in Jesus Christ crucified, as the sole and sufficient ground of his hope. I have lost for a season, a valuable friend — but I hope by and by to see him again. Blessed are the dead who die thus in the Lord, they rest from their labors and conflicts, and are now before the throne.

We are much as usual; upon the whole pretty well; what we chiefly lack is more gratitude and sensibility to the Lord of our life. I trust, however, the desire of my heart is towards him. We join in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. Pray for us, and believe me to be yours,

John Newton

16 Nov., 1782.

Dear friend, On Monday, part of a pig-hog came to our door; and though it brought no recommendation, nor could speak a word for itself — we, according to our accustomed kindness and hospitality to such strangers, gave it a friendly welcome. It was doubly welcome when the

postman called afterwards, and informed us from whence it came. We thank Mrs. Bull for thinking of us, and you for seconding her motion. My brother and sister have left us about two weeks ago. But just now we are under a cloud. Sally Johnson has been very ill. I hope she is better: in the medical phrase, out of danger. But we were apprehensive of losing her. She has had a violent pain in her breast, and we were much afraid an inflammation would take place. It is a disorder of which her mother, and several of her family, have died, which circumstance alarmed us rather the more. If the Lord should please to take her to himself — we shall feel it. She has lived long with us, has been always affectionate and faithful, and for a number of years we have considered her rather as an intimate friend, or a relative, than as a servant. She is in the Lord's hands — all whose appointments are right; and we hope he will enable us to think and say so under every change he may allot us; but I now seem to hope she will not die — but live to declare his wonderful works. I hope before the time you have fixed, she will be restored.

We are kept in long suspense about the peace. I know we shall have one if the Lord sees fit to give it us; and at any rate, there is a peace passing understanding, of which the politicians cannot deprive us. I cannot but long that a stop may be put to the horrid effusion of blood, which sin has so long occasioned. However, it shall truly go well with those who fear the Lord. May he abundantly bless you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and your house, and your congregation, and all your concerns. We unite in love to you all.

I am very much yours,

John Newton 20th Dec., 1782. My Dear friend,

We love your company, and shall not be weary; but I do not mean to chain you: you shall be quite at liberty to please yourself if you can, and I will do my best to please you likewise. It would be strange if the men of this world were to have no fling at Utopians. But you know the fable of the Dog and the Moon. Let them bark — let us shine. Let them scold us, and let us pray for them. If we are in the Lord's way in the path of duty — a bushel of our fellow-worm's opinions, either pro or con, can do us neither good nor harm.

I hope you will preach away all your cough and pain, and come to us robust and strong as an eagle. However, we shall expect you to complain a little of course, and you will allow us to smile at you a little as usual. We meet tonight to examine the merits of the first candidate for the academy. Mr. Odel's guinea will be welcome, and deserves thanks. Farewell! Love and a good journey to you all from J. & M. NEWTON.

Rev. Professor and dear friend, For once I consult your pocket and my own. It will cost you nothing to receive my congratulation for your escape out of the ditch, and your thanks to me, for it may return to me as cheap. Well, the Lord is to be owned and praised in all things. We live always upon the brink of innumerable dangers; for the most part they are invisible, and while we do not see them — we talk of being in safety; but if one is permitted to appear — then we account our preservation as marvelous. Whereas, the real wonder is, that we are preserved a single hour in any situation. I am glad the horse was not permitted to destroy the hopes of Utopia with one blow of his foot. I hope you are spared for some good purposes, and, among others, to prepare the ministers, who shall in due time prepare the sermons, by which the Lord will graciously prepare the hearts of many sinners to seek his face.

I hope soon to give you joy of a very promising pupil, recommended by Mr. Foster. I cannot doubt but he will please and encourage you as a first-fruit, if he is admitted. A meeting was called for his admission on Monday last — but there were only Mr. Adams, Neale, and Plummer present; and no minister being there, the gentlemen chose to defer the determination until Monday next. I was at Clapham, and therefore not in fault; nor can I attend next Monday; but I have told Mr. Neale my full satisfaction in the candidate, who, I hope, will soon be under your orders.

I showed Mr. Neale your last letter, in which the rules are. He thinks with me, that they are all very proper and necessary, and, so far as we know, may be sufficient; but you must be the best judge of what is requisite to establish a good police in your republic. But a thousand rules will not secure cheerful and affectionate obedience from your subjects, unless you have the Lord's special blessing to conciliate their hearts, and to keep them steadfast in the pursuit of the grand design of the institution. The society seem, one and all, at present, disposed to treat you with the fullest confidence, and to second all your wishes; and if, when the subscribers increase, there should any people be added who are not equally liberal-minded, still the committee, I doubt not, will be cordially disposed to make your service as comfortable as possible.

People will find fault as they please, and it is a mercy to sit loose to their opinions, and let them talk on — provided we can do it in a right spirit. I mean, from a humble consciousness that our views are upright before the Lord — and that we are simply aiming to serve him. If he smiles — it little signifies who is displeased. But we will pray for grace, that we may do nothing that can give just displeasure to anybody. Our new institution promises well. We are now six members, and voted in a seventh last night. We begin with tea; then a short prayer introduces a conversation for about three hours upon a proposed subject, and we seldom flag. Mr. Bates usually sits silent the first half hour, and perhaps takes the second to himself in a continued discourse. The light he throws upon the subject, and the precision with which he treats it, are admirable; and so are his humility and sincerity. He is indeed a main pillar in the society, and I hope those meetings will prove a benefit to us all. I think they are the most interesting and instructive conversations I ever had a share in. Perhaps it may gratify your curiosity to be told the points we have hitherto discussed. Take them as follows:

1st Meeting. What is the proper idea of growth in grace; and what are the best evidences of such growth, both in ourselves and others? Proposed by J. N.

2nd Meeting, To what is owing the different reception of the gospel among professors, so that in some it thrives, and in others seems to produce no good fruit? Proposed by Mr. Foster.

3rd Meeting. Is the decalogue a compact summary of the law of God to man? Or, how far had it a peculiar respect to the state of the Israelites at that time? Proposed by J. N.

4th Meeting. How far is it the duty of a minister to accommodate himself to the weakness, the taste, or the prejudices of his hearers? The subject for the next meeting is to be, What influence has natural temper and constitution upon religion?

Thus far for the history of our Royal Society, which, perhaps, deserves that name more than that which meets at Somerset House; as, with us, I trust the members are all of the royal family, and the King himself condescends to meet with us.

Considering my little leisure time, I have written a long letter; shall only add our joint love to you and yours, a request for your prayers, and an assurance that I am yours very affectionately,

John Newton

Feb. 28, 1783. My dear friend, Your suspicions about what you term my long silence rather grieve me, especially as I know not how to remove their cause in future, for, as I am circumstanced, it is morally impossible for me to write as often as I would. I should hope our friendship is too strong to be affected by punctilios. If I was not to hear from you for a great while, though I should be deprived of a pleasure, I should impute the delay to a hundred causes — to any cause, rather than indulge an apprehension that your regard was abated. Judge of me the same way, and be assured that I love you dearly, whether I can find time for writing or not. When I can, I am sure I always do myself a pleasure. At present, I do not think myself much to blame, for I believe it cannot be three weeks since I wrote last.

I suppose Mr. Neale has already informed you that Mr. Gardiner was unanimously accepted, and that the society only waits for a letter from him, in compliance with the rules, and do not wish to give him the trouble of a journey to London. Your recommendation of any person upon your personal knowledge, will, I believe, be always accepted; only, to save time, it should be accompanied with a letter from the candidate. Had Mr. Gardiner written when you did, the business would have been finished at once, and upon the spot. I hope you will, upon inquiry, find that he is able to support himself as to the incidental expenses of clothes and books, as that expense does not properly fall within the society's plan. But should it be otherwise, my good offices will not be lacking. I take it for granted, he will not wish to be dependent, if it can be avoided.

Mr. Armstrong will be ready for you in about two or three weeks. He could not quit his office until today. And then he will need a little time to settle his affairs. I trust he will prove a promising first fruit, and do not doubt of your loving him as soon as you see him. You will presently perceive that he is modest and spiritual; and I expect that, upon further acquaintance, you will find that he has a turn for study and improvement.

It is a time of feeling with us. My wife's sister is very ill — and we have little room to hope for her recovery. She buried her husband last May, and her daughter, aged fourteen, in October. Her surviving child, a girl of twelve, is now with us — a sweet, amiable creature; but it is probable she will not survive long, as she has symptoms of decline. She has been with us three weeks.

You know something of my dear wife's turn, and will judge that, with a sick sister at a distance, and a sick child before her eyes, she is tried. However, she is supported, and I trust she will be supported. The Lord is very gracious: we have found him so. He has already brought her through many of these family trials, and some of them have been very sharp. Having had such proof of his goodness in times past, why should we not say, "I will trust and not be afraid!" For he is the same; his arm is not shortened, nor his ear heavy, neither can his compassions fail.

Mr. Ribright languished until last Monday morning, and then died. I trust his end was safe, though his path was not comfortable. I attend his funeral this afternoon. Tomorrow evening I am to preach a sermon for him, from Psalms 46:10.

Now may the Lord bless you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and all yours, and me and my dear wife, and all mine, and bring us at last to his eternal joy. In the mean time, as often as we are permitted to meet upon earth, may it be to our mutual comfort. We send love for love. I am yours indeed,

John Newton My dear Mr. Professor,

Mr. Armstrong breakfasted with me the other morning. I find he cannot be with you as soon as he proposed. He could not quit his place before yesterday; nor can he receive his pay, and complete his affairs at the office, until next Tuesday. On Wednesday he hopes to be at Newport. I feel a pleasure in anticipating the pleasure you will have in receiving him. I think he bids fair to be an honor and an encouragement to you.

We are to meet next Monday, when I doubt not the whole business will be settled. Your second edition of "house rules "will then be reviewed, and, I suppose, of course confirmed.

If I have any unanswered letter of yours, it is mislaid; but I rather think I wrote last. At any rate, I make no apology, because I am either so busy or so indolent that I know not when I can amend. But I can promise to love you, and think of you.

I continue to creep on. I preach to others with some marks of acceptance. I attempt to preach to my own heart likewise — but it is very dull, and not easily impressed. It is a strange heart; it needs to be emptied — and filled, to be broken — and bound up, to be softened — and consolidated, at the same time. And this I suppose is not peculiar to my heart only. Every heart that is spiritually alive, has its own complaints, and one great Lord attends to them all. He is not embarrassed by the variety of applications and cases: not one is overlooked, not one but is incessantly under his care and management; and though the cure is gradual, it is sure. None are refused who apply; none who are once received — are given up as incurable. But yet, alas! my disorders prove very lingering, though under his hand. I know the cause: I too often trifle with him. I am not duly faithful to his prescriptions; I presume sometimes to prescribe for myself. How often have I thrown myself back by my own folly, when I seemed rather in a hopeful way! No physician but he could bear with such a patient! That I am no better — I may thank myself! That I am not worse, that I am still alive, and that I am still encouraged to hope I shall not die but live — is wholly due to his mercy and compassion.

I am sometimes almost weary and ashamed either to write or preach anymore, there is such a vast difference between what I am in myself, and the idea the Lord has given me of what a believing sinner ought to be. Our conversations at the Castle and Falcon, which are still carried on once every two weeks, are suited to lead me deeper into the study of human nature and of my own, than is perhaps very common even among good people.

I find, upon consideration, that the appearances of grace are in general far beyond the reality; and that when proper abatements are made for constitution, association, imitation, situation, and other circumstantials — what remains that is truly genuine and sterling, would be but like a few grains of gold extracted from a heap of ore and rubbish! Or rather we are a made metal, of a golden color, and some gold in the constitution — but not much. With regard to what we call experience, the adage will hold, I am not what I appear to be.

I believe I told you my wife's sister in Scotland, is near her end — very happy in the Lord, and rejoicing in the prospect before her. She was living when we heard last — but there is no probability of her recovery. We are now set up with two children, having received her daughter as an additional trust. She is about a year younger than Betsy — a pretty, amiable child. She brought the symptoms of tuberculosis with her — but she is much better, and we entertain hopes of the Lord's sparing her. If he does I shall be glad, because I hope I did and do sincerely give her up to his will, though I love her dearly, as I think everybody must love her, who sees her.

I am now near the bottom of my paper, having just convenient room to send our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and then to tell you in three or four short lines, according to fashion, that I am, dear sir, with great respect, Your affectionate, obliged, and obedient friend, servant, and brother,

John Newton 25th April, 1783.

P.S. I have found your letter of the 9th, and am reminded to congratulate you on the chirping of your Oxford chicken. I hope, (as old Honest says,) he will prove a rooster of the right kind, and crow to some purpose.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Gardiner's letter was highly approved, and confirmed your recommendation and mine, which, however, would have been sufficient — but that it was necessary to comply with the rule which requires a letter from the candidate. It only remains now for you and Mr. Gardiner to fix between yourselves the time of his coming to Newport. When he is with you, you will please to inform Mr. Neale.

Mr. Whitwell's letter was very orthodox — but very short; if he writes again, he is wished to be more particular. He is thought to be a member of Mr. Saunders' church, at Bedworth, whose recommendation therefore will be necessary, and it should speak not only to his moral character — but as to the probability of his ability and capacity for the ministry. He sometime since applied for admission at Homerton — but was refused as being under age; their age, it seems, is eighteen — if he is under seventeen, he is inadmissible with us.

Mr. Armstrong has resigned his place — but no officer is appointed in his place. He expects one tomorrow — but cannot therefore be with you tomorrow as he intended. And Thursday is a holiday. But you may depend on him as soon as possible. He is on tip-toes to see Newport.

Having two students in hand, the money will soon begin to be collected, and new subscriptions applied for. And thus the business into which we were providentially and unexpectedly led to engage, is at length coming to maturity. I trust the hand of the Lord is in it, and that his blessing will forward it. The character of the two first students appears to me a favorable omen. I do not expect any two can be proposed who will be more likely to do honor to the undertaking. I shall be often with you in spirit, rejoicing in beholding your order and proficiency.

What a comfort to think that as we are by office teachers — so it is our privilege to be learners and pupils under the great Doctor and Head of the church, of whom it may well be said, "There is none teaches like him!" What a dunce would I have proved — under any other instructor! Nay, with all the advantages I have, I am a poor creature still. How long in learning a single lesson from him! And then, how often and quickly do I forget, and have to learn it over again! Yet he bears with me,

and I humbly trust he will make something of me at last.

I have only time and room to wish you good success in the name of the Lord, that his blessing may rest upon tutor and pupils; upon Mrs. Bull, and Tommy; your heart, your house, and congregation; upon all you preach to at Newport, Sherrington, Woburn, and everywhere else. My dear wife is pretty well, her sister still on this side Jordan — but in daily expectation of a passage over to Canaan's shore. Our new child has still the symptoms on her, so that, though she is in some respects better than when she came to us; her state is very precarious. Love us, and pray for us; adieu.

Yours entirely,

John Newton

29 April, 1783. My dear friend,

Until just now, I hoped the silence and the blame were all on your side; but how did my crest fall when, looking in the drawer among my unanswered letters — I found one from you! And is it possible that I have not yet thanked you for it? (though dated the 3rd of May;) and is it possible I have not thanked you, both in my own name and Mrs. Newton's, for your kind remembrance of her? Should this be the case — yet now I ask your pardon, and begin to amend the moment I am sensible of my fault, and hope you will forgive me. A rumor has lately reached me, I know not how, that you either are, or have been, very ill; I hope it will prove but a rumor, and that a letter will speedily return, with an information either that you have been as well as usual, or, at least, that if you were ill, you are now better. If you suffer, I can feel for you, and pity you; but, at the same time, I must remember, that you are in good hands; that your afflictions are numbered, weighed, and measured with the most precise accuracy by Him who loves you better than I can do; and that they are all tokens of love, and appointed to work for your good, Such considerations, of course, must moderate my sorrow.

We are both much obliged to you for your letter to my dear wife. As little as she loves writing, I believe she would be bound to thank you herself, if she did not keep a secretary. Since I have had the honor of that office, she seldom writes. But we are especially bound to thank the Lord for so graciously supporting her under a trial, which, in its own nature, was very affecting, and which, when viewed at a distance, and as approaching, threatened as if it would be almost too heavy for her; but the Lord is all-sufficient. Long expectation of the event, in some measure, prepared her to receive the news. The known character of the deceased, her faith and hope in life and death, the consideration of where and with whom she now is, all these thoughts suggest relief. In a word, we see it is the Lord; and hope we can say, It is well.

Eliza, our new dear child, was likewise prepared for her part of the loss. She had been with us two months, long enough to be satisfied that we were disposed to do our utmost to supply the place of her parents. Perhaps I am but merely repeating what I have said before. Her illness continues — but she is no way worse than when I wrote last; and we might perhaps indulge more hope of her recovery, were it not that her abiding symptoms are so exactly similar to those of her brother and sister, who died of the same disorder, and at nearly the same age. But the Lord will do that which is best.

I hope Utopia College is now opened, and that the Lord smiles upon the commencement. It will not be open long, as the vacation is at hand. About that time will be our quarterly meeting, which perhaps you may be present at, in your way to Tunbridge Wells, where I understand you are expected. At that meeting I suppose measures will be taken for making the academy more public, by printing the rules, and perhaps by reprinting and publishing the Utopian plan. There is but little increase of the subscriptions yet — but I trust money will come in as fast as proper students offer. Is Mr. Gardiner yet with you? If he is, give my love to him, as well as to Mr. Armstrong, who, I hope, answers the character I gave of him.

I am glad you were so well pleased with your visit to Yardly. I hope Mr. Raban has been useful at that place upon the whole. I wish that in his attempts to water others, he may be also watered himself; and that the Lord may, for his reward, give him a heart and wisdom to promote the peace of Olney, and strengthen the hands of Mr. Scott. If Christ is preached successfully, I ought to rejoice, though I cannot approve of every step that has been taken.

We are still favored with many mercies. My dear wife is tolerably well. The church at Woolnoth, my other wife, seems pretty well likewise, and has a good deal of company on some days. I have many pleasant and kind connections; but I have a troublesome inmate, a lodger, who assumes, as if the house was his own, and is a perpetual incumbrance, and spoils all. He has long been noted for his evil ways — but though generally known, is not easily avoided. He lodged with one Saul of Tarsus long before I was born, and made him groan and cry out lustily. Time was when I thought I would shut the door, to keep him out of my house — but my precaution came too late — he was already within — and to turn him out by head and shoulders is beyond my power, nay I cannot interdict him from any one single apartment.

If I think of retiring into the closest corner — he is there before me. We often meet and jostle, and snarl at each other — but sometimes (would you believe it?) I lose all my suspicion, and am disposed to treat him as an intimate friend! This inconsistency of mine I believe greatly encourages him, for I truly believe he would be ashamed and afraid to be seen by me, if I always kept him at a proper distance. However, we both lay such a strong claim to the same dwelling, that I believe the only way of settling the dispute will be (which the Landlord Himself has spoken of) to pull down the house over our heads. There seems something disagreeable in this mode of proceeding — but from what I have read in an old book, I form a hope that when things come to this crisis — I shall escape, and my enemy will be crushed in the ruins.

Love to Mrs. Bull, and the little Bull, from my dear, and from your most affectionate, if not your most humble, friend,

John Newton Monsieur Mon Ami, Our journey hence was very safe and pleasant, and we found all well. I continue taking medicine, have had no return of the fever, preached three times on Sunday, and my health, strength, and appetite, seem no worse than formerly. Blessed be the Lord my healer. My dear wife likewise is charmingly well, able to come downstairs to breakfast every day, which she had seldom done for a twelvemonth before. Eliza is in good spirits. I hope the late jaunt has done us all good. It was indeed a very pleasant month to me, no part of it more so than the time I spent in Bedford, notwithstanding the fever, for it was a very pleasant fever.

I am getting into statu quo, and seem to feel the adage "Home is home." It is a great mercy to have a comfortable home, to which we can think with pleasure of retreating, while we meet with much kindness and many pretty things abroad. I was very comfortable at Olney and at Bedford, and the one day I was at Newport — but Charles Square is more homish still. And then the church at Woolnoth, that is a pleasant home indeed. I feel myself there upon my own ground, and when I look round, I see my own family about me.

I hope the recollection of the late gentle visitation is, and will be, useful to me. The value of health and time, when improved for the Lord, the vanity of earthly things, their insufficiency to help and comfort us in an hour of trouble — our absolute dependance upon God, and many other points which might be mentioned, were brought home to my mind in the fever. I was likewise favored with great peace and composure; I saw and felt that the foundation on which I had built was fully able to bear me. The gospel appeared to me to be indeed the wisdom and the power of God; and I was enabled, like a little child, to commit myself without anxiety or reserve, to Him who promised to care for me. My dear friend, may the great and glorious name of Jesus, be deeply engraved on your heart and mine, and on the hearts of all dear to us. Whether we consider him as our Surety, our Advocate, or our Lord, how precious should he be! His favor is life, his service is perfect freedom. The knowledge of him is safety, wisdom, and happiness. A discovery of the glory of God in his person, fills the understanding with heavenly light, the affections with divine love, and unites the will to our proper good.

How many things utterly impossible to a man’s natural strength, are feasible and easy by the right application of mechanical powers! Without them a stone of a few hundred pounds weight is immoveable — but with them he can raise a stone of many tons to the height of St. Paul’s. But there are no powers comparable to those which are furnished by the gospel machine, if I may so speak. Thus assisted, a weak worm can do, endure, and overcome all things. He can draw near to a holy God, sinner as he is, with confidence; no wonder then that he can face a frowning world without dismay, and smile at Satan’s rage. He goes on from strength to strength, and sings the song of victory while on the field of battle. Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!

I hope this will find you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, in good health. We unite in love to you all. I shall often be with you in spirit. Give my love to your pupils. May the Lord fill you with that meekness of wisdom which is from above, and make you a successful instrument in training and preparing them for his service.

Mrs. Gardiner has been much better — but two or three days ago she had a relapse. They thought she would have died — but she is reviving again. I am going to see her this morning; I suppose she can not be long for this world. My time is now expired. The Lord bless you and yours. Pray for me and mine, and believe me to be always your affectionate,

John Newton 11th Sept. 1783.

Dear and Reverend Bull,

Though I have not much to offer, I must write for three reasons. 1st. To thank you, (if I have not yet done it) for the gifts you sent by the Northampton coach. 2nd. To prevent your thinking in a low-spirited hour that I have forsaken or forgotten you. 3rd. To draw a letter from you. A fourth student will be with you soon. He is gone into the country to kiss his father and mother, and then

means to put his hand to the plough, and away to Newport. It is Mr. Armstrong's acquaintance in Paternoster Row.

I congratulate you upon having an opportunity of showing to others what a Christian, when misrepresented, ought to do — not to hang down his head like a bulrush — but rather to rejoice if the charge is false, and if it is for the Lord's sake, Matt, 5:11, 12. Not to wear out his shoes with running about to justify himself — but simply and patiently to commit his cause to the Lord; who, if and when he sees good, will find a way to clear us, better than we can ourselves, Psalms 37:5-6. Not to render railing for railing — but contrariwise, blessing; being reviled, to bless; being defamed, to entreat, 1 Peter 2:23; 1 Corinthians 4:12-13. Our rule in such cases is beautiful and plain. Happy are they who, knowing these things, can practice accordingly when occasions arise! We know who has suffered reproach before us, and for us, and who was called a Samaritan, a madman, a glutton, and a drunkard; and we know how he wept and prayed for those who knew not what they did — leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.

I wish people could learn to keep their tongues quiet; but since they will talk, and show their displeasure, I hope it is a token for good to the Newport Academy; for I take, it for granted, that this undertaking has given rise to much of the stir that has been made about you. It is said you are a mystic — but a cunning one; for that whenever I, or other of your friends, called upon you, your mystical books were presently hurried out of sight. This, so far as it related to myself, I could, and did, flatly contradict; and as to others, you might do it, and with propriety. If some good folks were to catch me reading Shakespear, I would rather hide the book than offend them; for they, being no judges of Shakespear, or of my motive for reading him, would be hurt if they saw a play-book in my hand. I would not wish them to think more favorably of play-books than they do, or to think unfavorably of me on Shakespear's account; for indeed I have not leisure to look in him sometimes for a year together.

If we declare war against bigotry, those who choose to defend it must, of course, oppose us. And of these, some may mean well. Early prejudices and long habits are not easily overcome. Systems and parties squeeze some people into a narrowness of thinking — which they can never outgrow. If we have more liberty and comprehension of mind, we may be thankful — but we have no right to be angry with them. We should remember, too, that there are extremes on both sides, and that we, as well as others, may verge too near the one, in endeavoring to avoid the other.

I believe our Eclectic Society has been increased since I mentioned it last, by the addition of two members whom we value greatly — Mr. Clayton and Mr. Latrobe. Our number is now eight: we can admit but one more, and shall therefore endeavor to be very careful whom we choose. We think the Lord has favored us; we are all unanimous and pleased with each other. We are one as to essentials, and our smaller differences of sentiment are such as only conduce to give the conversation a more agreeable variety, and tend to illustrate our subjects to greater advantage. The spirit of the design is kept up, and every member seems to find it well worth his while to attend punctually. I hope I find some real advantage, and have reason to number it among my chief privileges. Help us with your prayers, that life and love, peace and truth — may flourish among us. Our domestic affairs are much as usual: some trials — many comforts. Mrs. Newton is frequently ailing, which is but saying, in other words, she is frequently pretty well. Eliza is but so-so. I do not expect we shall have her very long, nor do I think she is in immediate danger, or much worse than

when at Olney; but she certainly is not better.

We unite in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. The Lord be with you all, and with us also. Give my love to Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Armstrong, not forgetting Mr. Inglis, though I have not the pleasure of much personal acquaintance with him.

I am affectionately yours,

John Newton 31st October, 1797

Mon Cher Ami,

I have had a cold and hoarseness — have kept house pretty much, when necessity has not called me abroad; however, the Lord strengthened me; so that, last week (including the two Sundays), I preached ten times. I may speak well of Dr. Pulpit, and think that I may be said, not in the worst sense of the word, to live by my preaching. I am now nearly well. Three doses of Dr. Pulpit yesterday did me good, and almost removed my hoarseness.

Eliza is much as when you saw her, only that, within these few days, she has a cough. Miss Catlett is as hearty as a buck. Mrs. Newton has been kept within doors about a week by a cold, cough, and hoarseness; but I hope she does not get worse. The rest of our family are as usual.

I preached yesterday morning from Psalms 90:9. "We spend our years as a tale that is told." A dry, dull, worn-out tale it would be, if the Lord had not mercifully taught us to aim at his service, and given us a vista — a prospect of life and immortality, through the dark shadows which surround us.

We join in love. It gives me pleasure to assure you that I am sincerely and warmly yours,

John Newton December 29th, 1783.

Dear Sir, The papers told me that the Wellingborough train, which went down the day you did, was robbed. I infer from your letter, that either the report was not true, or that some other vehicle had the honor of conveying you to Newport. For I suppose, if you had fallen into the hands of the Moabites you would have mentioned it. It pleased me to hear that you had a good journey, found all pretty well at home, and that, though you yourself are but so-so, you were not very bad when your letter set off.

I find Mr. Sparks, who called upon me today, and who, I expect, will soon be with you, seems to have made up his mind already, and to have no other view but to the church. Perhaps you may have some who would rather receive the Lord’s Supper with Mr. Scott, than as Dissenters; and as we all preach but one Lord, and mean one thing, I hope you will not only allow them to go — but give them your frank approbation. If otherwise, I am afraid disagreeables might, in time, take place. I speak not from my attachment to church — but from my love of liberty, my desire to see the academy flourish, and particularly from my great regard and affection for you, which induced me from the first to embark my reputation and interest in the same foundation with you. The frost has been long and severe. This morning the Lord has bid the gentle south breath upon the ice and snow, and the waters begin to flow. How soft — yet how powerful, is the influence of a general thaw! It operates equally and universally in every place, and does more in an hour than the united efforts of mankind could effect in an age. I consider it as a beautiful emblem of the effects of his

Spirit upon the heart, upon many hearts at once. It silently but invisibly softens the strongest prejudices; makes the heart which before was as hard as the rock — tender and yielding. It brings on a spring, and the desolate, dreary wilderness, becomes the garden of the Lord. Oh for such a thaw in my heart! For though I talk away in public, I know much of wintry and frosty seasons within me. I trust my leading aims and desires are right — but all that is right is so faint, so cold, so debased by something inconsistent with it, so defective and so defiled — that I would be at my wits' end, if my hope and dependence were not, in a good measure, brought to a point.

If I am saved, (I trust I shall) it will be freely and absolutely, in a way of sovereignty; notwithstanding a thousand things which would seem, humanly speaking, to make salvation next door to impossible. But when I am beaten from everything else, it still remains true that Christ has died, that he now lives and reigns, that "he is able to save to the UTTERMOST," and that he has said, "Him that comes unto Me — I will NEVER cast out." Never and to the uttermost are great words, they have an extensive signification, and take in all varieties of cases, characters, and circumstances. Upon such unlimited sovereign promises, I cast my anchor, and they hold me — otherwise I should be the sport of winds and waves.

Dr. Watts' motto shall be mine, it is big enough for him, me, you, and for thousands that approve it, "Jesus only!" In him I have an offering, an altar, a temple, a priest, a sun, a shield, a Savior, a shepherd, a hiding place, a resting place, food, medicine, riches, honor, wisdom, righteousness, holiness — in short, everything. The paper could not contain an inventory of the blessings, and treasures — the unsearchable, inexhaustible blessings and treasures — which are hidden in him, and communicated by him to poor sinners who believe in his name. But though I am, I trust, an heir — I am as yet a minor, and in my actual experience, am too often more like a servant than a son. But there is a time appointed of the Father. I hope one day to be of age, and to come to the full enjoyment of my boundless inheritance.

Mrs. Newton and Eliza are much as when you saw them. We send our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and mine, if you please, to the Utopians. Be assured that I love you dearly, and feel an interest in all that concerns you, and feel much pleasure in a persuasion that you are and will be thus minded towards your affectionate friend,

OMICRON.

21 Feb. 1784. My dear Monsieur Taureau,

You will observe that it is not so clear to me as it seems to you, that the Dissenters hold the right of private judgment. So far as my private judgment coincides with theirs, they will indeed allow I have a right to use it — but few of them will allow me to go farther. They will rather think they have a right to judge for me, and to condemn me when I stop short of their standard. However, I love them if they love my Lord, and am glad to think we shall, before long, see eye to eye, and be all of one mind.

I think many circumstances that led to the institution of the Newport Academy sufficiently warrant my hope that the thing is of the Lord. If so, he will give his blessing to it; and if so, again, I need not wonder if it occasions some stir dislike and opposition. If there is good to be done at Newport, Satan will not stand and look on with the indifference of a mere spectator. He will do what he can to disturb the peace of the academy within doors, and to misrepresent it abroad. The tutor and the

pupils, too, had need be angels, to keep quite out of his reach and influence; and as his own name is legion, so he has a legion of instruments, of various talents, in his service — some to invent a falsehood; and some who would not go so far as to invent a falsehood, are yet very well pleased to circulate it, and if they can say, 'I was told so,' think they are quite safe and right. The skill of others lies in exaggerating; of others in coloring and misrepresenting — which they do so cleverly, that though the substance of what they say is truth, it shall have all the effects of a lie! Others are masters in the way of surmise and insinuation. They will not say 'it is so' — but 'I wish it may not prove so' — which, with weak and credulous folks, answers the purpose no less than if they had proved it certainly was so. Again, others, when a word or an action is capable of two constructions — have an admirable dexterity in taking it by the wrong handle! No wonder if the continued efforts of so many arts and so much industry should make a great noise abroad, and be sensibly felt at home. But simplicity and integrity, under the Lord's blessing, though they may be sometimes jostled — cannot be overthrown. If the Lord gives you grace and wisdom to do your part, you may depend on it he will do his, and fulfill that promise. "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper."

Utopia is in the press, and will be published with a list of subscribers, the state and regulations of the academy, etc., next month. By that we hope the list will be something enlarged.

I have had a cold — but it is quite gone. Mrs. Newton is pretty well, excepting now and then a headache. Eliza much as usual. We begin to think the winter long — but we expect summer will come, because we have a promise, Genesis 8:22. Equally sure are the promises of his grace.

He will not fail, he cannot change. We must expect cloudy and wintry seasons — but there are times when the believing soul hears, sees, and feels according to the beautiful description, Solomon's Song, chapter 2:10-13. I hope it will be spring with you when this letter arrives; if not, wait a little, and it will surely come. Our love to Mrs. Bull, and the young Bull, who I hope thrives and grows in a good pasture. You may tell whom you please that I am always glad to avow myself your affectionate friend and servant,

John Newton

April 3, 1784. My dear friend, This world is a state of trial and exercise. At present, such things are needful; but they will not be needful always. We are passing through conflict — to triumphs; through sufferings — to glory. Even at present, many things which worry us appear to our better judgment so trivial, that we are ashamed to find they can make such impression on our minds. How very trivial, then, will they be deemed when we shall be translated into the world of light! It is owing chiefly to imagination and self-will that they now owe their supposed importance. Before long, death shall be swallowed up of life, and the concerns of time will be lost in eternity — as a pebble sunk in the depths of the ocean. The first moment of our joining in the songs and joys before the throne of God — will make us abundant amends for all the difficulties we meet with in the wilderness! We shall not then say, as we often do now, when we have obtained what we earnestly desired, 'Is this all?' Fullness of joy and pleasure for evermore, with the entire exclusion of every evil, will be a mighty ALL indeed. We are now comparatively asleep; the greatest part of our life is spent in a succession of dreams, of which more are of the distressing, than of the amusing kind; but, before long, we shall awake, and be satisfied with his image. The tears will be wiped from our eyes, and we shall weep no more!

Eliza has been for some time under the care of Dr. Benamor, and we hope (though an alteration is hardly discernable) she is rather better than worse. Her spirits are rather better, and we think her looks are likewise. If the Lord be pleased to restore her, I trust it will be to our great comfort; if otherwise, I hope and believe her end will be peace. I think I have given her up to him, and shall be enabled to say, He does all things well. But it is certain I love her dearly, and her life, in my short-sighted view, appears very desirable; though, because I am short-sighted, I dare not positively ask it. Our other child is at home from Highgate; has something of a cold at present; otherwise, she is very well, and the picture of health. My dear wife is in her usual so so way. We have many and great mercies, both as individuals and as a family; and a few of these mercies come in disguise — under the appearance of trials.

We hope it is well with Mrs. Bull and Tommy, and that, notwithstanding all you have met with, you are still alive, and likely to live, and can smile and smoke your pipe as usual. I am your most observant, obedient, obliged

John Newton

3rd June, 1784. My dear Mr. Taureau,

Mr. ___ was a little reserved at first; but when, by degrees, we became acquainted, we were intimate indeed. I found the Lord had already taught him all I wished to teach him, if I were able. I had heard a bird sing, that he was a well-meaning, friendly man — but as blind as a stone. It was, therefore, an agreeable surprise to find that the blind man could see as well as most of us. His views of the person and atonement of our Lord; his sense of himself as an unworthy sinner; his comfortable persuasion of acceptance in the Beloved; his hope of perseverance through grace; and the general tone of his whole conduct, gave me as full satisfaction as I have of most people whom I know — that he is not only a real — but an eminent Christian. It is true he does not deal much in shibboleths, and he likes the service of the established church, and attends his own parish, which I thought I would not find fault with, until I could point out where he might go to mend himself.

I judge him a humble, spiritual, benevolent man; and though not laced up in a system — yet he is of a very thinking and judicious turn. He has studied Bishop Butler, which I mention as a specimen of his cast. However, he sees beyond Butler; and understands, embraces, and admires the gospel of salvation. He told me that he was sixty-five years of age — that he has feared the Lord, and walked much in the way he does now, for many years; but could never make are acquaintance to whom he could freely open his mind before I came to him. So much for Mr. .

What with walking, talking, riding, and sailing — O Time, how pleasantly and how swiftly do you pass! But now I must break off at once, for my time is elapsed; and I can only add that I am very well, my dear wife is pretty well, Eliza has been rather better, and farther, that we join in love to you, to Mrs. Bull, and to Tommy. I am yours indeed,

John Newton October 1, 1784.

Mon Cher,

I must decline all letter writing for a good while, except what is absolutely necessary. I have a writing project before me, purposing, if the Lord pleases, to treat you and the public with two

volumes of sermons ("on the "Messiah"], which I suppose will, in quantity, be equal to Cardiphonia. Not one of these is yet written — but all to be drawn from short notes, which I put down as I go on. To do a little daily in this business, which I mean to begin with about the New Year, I must do nothing else with my pen. My leisure time is so very scanty at present.

It is not worth inquiring when Mr. Cowper writes. If you send your letter to him, I shall have it when he writes, which is regularly once a two weeks; and if it stays with him a few days, it is no great matter, unless you write on business that requires an immediate answer; in which case, I will gladly pay the post. As to academy business, Mr. Neale is your man.

Thank you for your being glad that we had a safe and comfortable journey. I likewise am glad that yours was pleasant, and useful to yourself and others; and I hope since your return, you can say with me, "Abroad is pleasant; but home is home!"

We are disciples — Jesus is our Master. The world we live in is His school, and every person and event is under His management, designed to forward us in the great lessons which He would have us learn — such as . . .

self-denial,

a distrust of creatures, and

an absolute dependance upon Himself. In this view,

afflictions — are mercies,

losses — are gains,

hindrances — are helps,

and all things, even those which seem most contrary — are working together for our good.

Creatures smile — or frown, caress — or disappoint us,

friends — grow cool, and enemies — become kind,

just as His wisdom sees most expedient to promote our spiritual progress. Where we look for most blessing — it often comes to little;

when we look for nothing — we often obtain most benefit.

Our wisest plans and best endeavors at one time produce great troubles! At another time, what we do at random, and what we account the most trifling incidents — are productive of happy, lasting, and extensive consequences.

It is well for us if, by a long train of such changing, checkered experiences — we at length attain to some proficiency, and can say with David, "My soul, wait only upon God; for my expectation is from Him." The heart possession of two maxims of Matthew Henry, is well worth all that the acquisition can cost us:

"Every creature is that to us — which God makes it."

"We cannot expect too little from man — nor too much from God." In this school I am placed — and these lessons I am aiming to learn. But I am a poor scholar and indeed any master but He who condescends to be my teacher — would turn me out as an incorrigible dunce!

Mrs. Newton has been unwell of cold — but is, through mercy, a little better. I am well, all but a rheumatism, which has made a lodgment in my left arm, and possibly may take up its winter quarters there. The Lord might have quartered it in my head or my stomach — but he is merciful to my weakness. I have not strength or patience to bear much violent pain, and therefore he is pleased to deal gently with me. We hope Eliza rather gains ground; upon the whole, we have great cause for thankfulness.

God still gives me liberty in the pulpit, which is the chief thing; and I believe no minister can be more comfortable and happy with his people than I am. Mr. Whitfield used to call his pulpit, his throne. When I am upon my throne, I can look down upon the poets, philosophers, artists, archbishops, cardinals, popes, and kings of the earth — with pity. If they know not my Lord and Savior — they are to be pitied indeed. I would not exchange the honor of proclaiming his glory and grace, and preaching his gospel to sinners a single day — for a whole life of what they account the best and the greatest.

We join in love to you, to Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. Write if you please, and when you can; but whether you write or no, remember to pray for your truly affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

6th Dec, 1784.

Mon Cher Taureau,

I suppose Mr. Scott has before now told you that I sent the certificate for Busby’s lecture, and that on the very same day the secretary de-camped, which has deranged their business for a time. However, Lord Dartmouth has told me, that the application is properly entered upon the books, and that there is no reason to doubt of Mr. Thomas Bull’s having an appointment next year, if he should not have it this year. And now permit me to thank you for the nice Irish leave you took of us. The next time I went to Mrs. Wilberforce’s, I asked, "Is Mr. Bull at home?" Answer — "Yes, sir; he is at home at Newport — and has been there these past ten days." I was a little disconcerted at having discovered myself to be such a stranger to your motions; perhaps it hurt my Vanity, which may have been formerly tickled by those who took it for granted that I, to be sure, was a sort of privy Counselor with you. Otherwise it did not hurt me at all. My friendship does not stand upon punctilios, and therefore though I had your company (I mean by our two selves) but once during the three weeks you were in London, I natter myself that you love me no less than if you had called every day, and that you would probably have called oftener, had not your headquarters been in John-street. You see I give you fair credit, and make fair allowances.

You will please to accept this letter, even though it should be short, as a special favor. I cannot write much nor often, while I have the "Messiah sermons" in hand — and this excuse for silence will last me I suppose during the present year. But I was willing to send you a line now, that if you hear from me but little in future, you impute it not to silence — but necessity. Your letter has slipped out of my reach just now; and the contents have slipped out of my memory, therefore

though I acknowledge the receipt of it, I cannot properly answer it. I am glad you have a prospect of students, and wish we may have a prospect of money to support them. But I expect not to know much about the affairs of the academy, until Mr. Neale returns from Staffordshire, which I am told will be in about a two weeks.

Easter is a busy preaching time in our line. My texts on Good Friday were John 19:30; 1 Peter 3:18. I did not interrupt the course of the "Messiah sermons" on Sunday morning — but instead of his resurrection, I preached upon the grand event consequent upon it, which is yet to take place, Revelation 11:15. Yesterday I put Mr. Johnson in my pulpit, (who I think gives us an earnest of a judicious good preacher); today I hope to see Mr. Foster in it; tomorrow and Friday I mount it again. Blessed be God, whatever else is dear in London — the gospel is good, cheap, and in great plenty. And now what can I say farther than what you know, and what we have said to each other over and over? The Lord is good! This truth, though often acknowledged, should, like his repeated mercies, be new to us every morning. Great, wise, holy, just, and gracious — he hates and punishes the sin, he saves and loves the sinner. May we sit at the foot of the cross; and there learn what sin has done, what justice has done, what love has done, what the soul is worth, and what plenteous forgiveness flows from the fountain which was there and then opened, that we might wash and be clean, and drink and live!

I wish Mrs. Bull peace, patience, and healing. I wish Tommy to grow in grace, as I suppose he grows in Greek. I wish the students at Newport, humility, diligence, and proficiency. I wish their tutor much light, unction, and influence. I wish myself to be willing to be what, and where, and how the Lord would have me be — to cast all my care simply upon him, and to be always satisfied in my mind that he assuredly cares for me.

I farther wish you to think often of me and mine, and to remember us in your prayers; and I wish you a good night, so no more at present — but our joint love to you and yours, from your most obedient,

John Newton 25th March, 1785. My dear friend,

We agreed not to tease each other with letters, and I have kept my agreement pretty well. If I could write with both hands at once, you might hear of me oftener — but my right hand is so engaged and engrossed, that I must be excused. But it costs me no time to love you — to love you and lift up my heart to the Lord to bless you, when you are upon my mind, is almost all that I can do for you. Only Sally is now going to Olney, I send this that you may think of me.

I have almost finished preaching the "Messiah sermons" — only two or three sermons more. The writing goes on slowly — but I have finished thirteen out of fifty. My dear wife has been ill — in great pain, confined to the house more than a month, and most of the time to her room. The Lord has relieved her, and last Sunday evening she was at church. Eliza keeps pretty much at a par — but when the Lord sees it fitter for her to be better it shall be done. He speaks, and it is done.

We join in love to Mrs. B. and Mr. T. Remember mine to the young men who stand in your professorship’s presence daily. May the Lord do you good, and do them good by you. My love to your son Thomas. I rejoice in the prospect of his preaching the gospel. Tell him from me what I trust he knows, and will know with an increasing evidence as he goes on — that it is not worth while to preach, unless we preach Jesus and him crucified. Ah, his name is powerful and precious

indeed! May he be our theme in the pulpit and in the parlor, living and dying. Let the world take the rest.

Happy they who can say, His I am, and Him I serve. I commend you all to his blessing. Pray for us. I am yours indeed,

John Newton 15th June, 1785. My dear friend,

I thank you for your very kind letter, which, notwithstanding my eagerness to seize all the time I can for the "Messiah," must be answered.

(John Newton adopted his wife’s niece, Eliza, after both of Eliza’s parents died of tuberculosis. Eliza herself had the fatal disease, and lived with the Newtons for the last two years of her life.) The death of our sweet Eliza was so comfortable, so glorious, that I thought it my duty to record it in writing; and my mind soon prompted me to print it, that I might the more easily inform my friends. At that time my heart was so soft, and my feelings so strong, that I could not trust myself to write a narrative for the public inspection. But when we are talking by the fire-side with an intimate friend in whom we can confide, we can indulge ourselves in a thousand little sensibilities, and, what other people would call, weaknesses, which we should not choose to utter, if we were to speak with an audible voice upon the Royal Exchange. Therefore I have written and printed only for my friends. Not one will be published or sold. A copy will come to you in due time. I wrote from my feelings, and almost dropped a tear for every word. But I would not have you think there was one sorrowful tear among them. That would have been foolish and ungrateful indeed. Blessed be the Lord, I can hardly name one of the many merciful dispensations with which he has favored me in the course of my life, which my heart is more satisfied with, or which calls more loudly upon my gratitude, than this last. A trial it doubtless was — to part with such a child; but I have not been permitted for a moment to wish it had been otherwise.

Mrs. Newton is pretty well; you know she can feel, and will expect that she did upon the late occasion; but the Lord has mercifully supported her. We join in love to you and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy; and Betsey joins with us. We thank you for your sympathy and prayers. We buried dear Eliza last Wednesday evening; and I preached her funeral sermon on Sunday evening. The church was crammed. The text she chose for herself. Revelation 14:13. I was a good deal affected — but was enabled to restrain my emotions so far, that I was composed and master of my thoughts, and revealed no more to the audience than was suited to impress them likewise. I think I was favored with liberty, and have reason to hope it was a blessing to all.

You will excuse me, if for once I send a shortish letter. I have much to attend to at present. Whether I write long or short, seldom or often — I love you dearly, and mean more than many words could express, when I subscribe myself your affectionate and obliged friend,

John Newton 19 October, 1785, Mon Cher Taureau, Your letter was very welcome, and I thank you for it. It is true, we are both traveling towards that land from which no traveler returns; but I am so many miles before you on the road, that it is probable that I may finish my journey first. Be that as it may, our times are in the Lord’s hands. I trust we shall meet there at last. In the mean time, may we be enabled to live while we do live.

We are agents for the Lord in a foreign country, where we have properly no business of our own — but are to manage for him. We are to do what we can today; for our recall will be soon, and may be sudden. Oh for grace to have all done! all ready! loins girded up, lamps burning! that, when he sends for us, we may be ready and glad to go home! Wonderful grace, that he encourages us to hope, that, unworthy as we are, he will condescend to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Is it possible? His judgment is according to truth; yet my conscience tells me that I am, in a sense, an evil and slothful servant. But I am not under the law — but under grace. He accepts the will for the deed. He has taught me to aim and to wish to serve him; and though my best is imperfect, defective, and defiled — he pardons for his own sake. I must plead guilty in myself, and to rest all my eternal hopes upon the blood which is able to save the chief of sinners. "Who is a God like You — who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever, but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the sea!" Micah 7:18-19. Lord, be it unto your servant according to your word! Did you possess the gift of foresight, and think to save your credit upon easy terms, when you promised to lodge in Charles-square next time you came to town, if we could receive you? I no more thought of removing into the city, when I saw you last, than of going to Bengal; but sure enough, I have taken a house in Coleman Street Buildings. It will be mine soon. But, first, there is some painting to be done, and then we must wait awhile for the smell of the paint to go off a little. Second, there are reasons why we must go in as soon as we can. And from these premises, taken together, I am ready to infer — or, at least, to fear — that if you come up in the Easter week, you will find us either in the very hurry of relocating, or so entirely unsettled, that we shall not be able to take you in. If it should prove so, I shall be very sorry; but I must be patient, for I cannot help it. If we are in town, at your vacation, you will find a prophet’s chamber; but it is possible, much about that time, we may be at Southampton, or somewhere else. We must then wait for the Christmas season, if we are all spared so long. I can only say, that whenever it suits you, and we are upon the spot — you may be assured of a hearty welcome.

Coleman Street is about half way between London Wall and King’s Arms Yard. It is an airy, lightsome situation (for the City); and No. 6, which we are going to, is a very good house. I was providentially led to this house, and have it remarkably cheap. It is nearer to all my connections by a mile, and within seven minutes’ walk of my church. I trust you will pray that the Lord, who has shown so much of his goodness at Charles-square, will afford us his gracious presence in Coleman-street likewise; for without him — a palace would be but a dungeon! The "Messiah" is nearly printed off; I think it will be finished this week. But we must wait awhile for an index, without which I do not think a book complete. I suppose about the time you are published in London — the "Messiah" will be published. Here, again, I entreat your prayers that the Lord may be pleased to breathe his blessing upon a service, which I trust he himself put into my heart. Indeed, if it had not been much impressed upon my mind, I would hardly have had firmness and perseverance to finish it, in the midst of the many engagements and avocations which call upon me daily. Considering that I have greatly lost my habit of rising early, I almost wonder that besides other writing, visiting, and being visited — I should be able to write for the press, so much as will fill nearly a thousand octavo pages in print, in less than ten months!

If the Lord is pleased to make it useful, it would be foolishness in me to be much concerned what my fellow-worms may think of the performance. I expect to appear, as I am, a speckled bird, in the

eyes of the religious world; and in some places I have expressed myself with a freedom, which will not be very pleasing to some of my superiors. I have not designed to give offence — but some truths will offend some people. I hope sincerity has been my aim — but I know my heart is deceitful. However, I would be very thankful that the Lord has enabled me to finish this work — which I consider as my most important publication, and it will probably be my last, except a fugitive paper for a magazine or so. I certainly could not go to the press with a more noble subject. It will likewise have some novelty, and much variety, to recommend it.

I could easily get the letters I send you franked — but I think until you inclose mine (as I have repeatedly desired you) under cover, to Samuel Thornton, Esq., I must make you pay postage, by way of fine. I much value your letters, and would not grudge postage, if necessary. But it is so very easy to inclose them to Mr. Thornton, that the money seems thrown away, and therefore I must tax your pocket — that your pocket may refresh your memory. If you should receive this free — it will positively be the last that will come so, unless you adopt my mode of conveyance.

P__ is a good man — but young and warm; he knows little more of the world — than if he had lived all his days in a secluded forest. Help him with your advice. I hear he intends setting up Wednesday and Friday prayers in Olney church. Poor man, he is little aware that such an attempt will be sufficient, in such a place as Olney, to set up his name as a heretic and a pharisee. If you can dissuade him from being over churchish, at least while he stays there, you will do him a kindness. My letter is as long as yours — but yours is worth half a dozen such. But you have what I can offer: when I can send you better, I will. My dear wife has been often ill of late — but I praise the Lord she is pretty well now. Betsey is hearty. You have the love and good wishes of our whole family. Love to Mrs. Bull, and to Tommy the Grecian. Be assured that I am sincerely and always Your affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton My dear friend,

I am very sorry about your accident — but I am very thankful that you were not hurt. Such catastrophes, as this may properly be called, have often been attended with dislocated or broken bones, a fractured skull, or instant death — so frail is man!

Often, when he thinks himself safe, and is dreaming of his own importance, as if he were a necessary part in the complicated movements of Divine Providence — he falls like grass before the scythe! And not by the hands of a giant, or the fangs of a tiger — but the smallest trifle is sufficient to destroy him! For example — how many loose stones do we see in the road; it seems no great matter where they lie. Yet any one of them, by changing the direction of a wheel — is sufficient to confound all the plans of this mighty creature! One stone stumbles him down; he falls with his head upon another — in that very moment all his future plans perish! But the Lord gave His angels charge over you; therefore you fell unhurt, and are still alive to praise and serve Him.

I see so much of the uncertainty of life, and how little I can either foresee or prevent what the next moment may bring forth — that I would be a very great coward — afraid not only of riding in a coach — but of walking across a room — if I was not in some degree enabled to confide in the Lord’s protection! "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" Psalms 119:117

I am at Southampton, or near it. I have been at Lymington and Portsmouth. I am going today to Salisbury; tomorrow to Bath; and shall be the next day at Bristol, if the Lord permits. In the course

of next week, we hope to return to beloved home. We have had a merciful excursion hitherto. Health, safety, kind friends, good accommodation, pleasant rides and walks, Christian converse, opportunities of hearing and preaching the good gospel. Fresh air and salt water have agreed well with me. My dear wife has been tolerable; and Betsey, who was rather poorly before we set out, looks like a country girl again. But I am still a poor creature, and know not whether my causes for thankfulness or shame are most abundant. It is well that I am permitted to look to Him who lived and died for sinners.

I must defer the long letter you ask for, until another time. We are packing up, and must set out soon. Accept this as a token of love. Continue to pray for me. Love to Tommy, ditto to Mr. and Mrs. Storry, when you see them. I can feel for them in the death of another child. But he is well disposed of; and all things are right and good for those who love God. Adieu.

Yours indeed,

John Newton 5th Sept., 1786, Mon Cher Taureau,

You have set me a good example, and I am willing to follow it; therefore, though your letter has not been with me two hours, I begin an answer. I am glad to hear that all is well and peaceful with you, and it is so with us likewise — such is the Lord’s goodness to us. I sometimes express myself in Herbert’s words:

"You, who have given so much to me, Give one thing more — a grateful heart."

I believe what you disapprove, about not applying passages in the Old Testament to the Messiah, without express authority from the New, is in the twenty-third sermon of the first volume; for, in the first sermon of the second to which you refer, I can find nothing like it. I have met with such trash from some who pretend to spiritualize, and obtruded with so much confidence, that I thought it right to enter my protest against the practice, especially as I think it obtains most among rash and injudicious preachers. And though sometimes wise and good men give a little into spiritualizing — I think it is rather countenanced than justified by their example. For instance, I remember to have heard one Mr. Bull preach a sermon, and a very good one, from Exodus 4:14; but though the sermon was a good one, I thought the points which he enlarged upon were no more deducible from that text, than from the first verse in Genesis. Mr. Bull, however, knew what he was about. But when such men as Mr. Page attempt to preach from Genesis 35:8, that Deborah is the law, the oak under which she was buried, the cross, etc., etc., they make wild work of the Scriptures!

I have allowed the propriety of style of preaching, by way of accommodation, and I think I have not said that we should apply no passages to Jesus unless quoted in so many words in the New Testament; but that when we propose our own sentiments, which are not so supported — we should do it under great modesty, which, perhaps you will readily allow. After all, if, in this point, the observation that theologians differ, should apply to you and me — I have still the comfort of thinking, that there are not many theologians who differ less, or in fewer particulars, than we do.

I like to have the proofs of the subject he plainly in the text; but if another preaches solid scriptural gospel truth from Higgaion, Selah, I am content. My censure is only intended against those who affect to please, and to show their superior sagacity by the singularity, quaintness, and novelty of their conceits — and who think they can discover mysteries in a text, when, perhaps, they do not

understand even the literal sense of it!

It would be better for one to run his head into a stone wall — than to go to heathen without a real call from the Lord, and without receiving from him an apostolic spirit, the spirit of a missionary, enabling him to forsake all, to give up all, to venture all, to put himself into the Lord's hands without reserve, to sink or swim!

I am strongly inclined to hope Mr. Johnson is thus called, and will be thus qualified. He is humble and simple-hearted. I think he would not have thought of this service — had it not been proposed to him; for some time he wished to decline it — but he could not, he dared not. I believe he has now made up his mind, and several incidents have concurred to encourage him and me likewise in the hope that the thing is of the Lord. Your appointment is to reside quietly at home, to preach, and to lecture your pupils. You are not cut out for a missionary; and nothing perhaps would have been done, either in the West India Islands, or in Greenland — if the attachments and feelings of all men had been like yours and mine.

I must have my tea, my regular hours, and twenty little conveniences which I can have when my post is fixed. I would shrink at the thought of living upon seals and train oil for my nutriment. I have not zeal to sell myself to be a slave — for the opportunity of preaching to the slaves; but the Lord inspired the Moravian missionaries with resolution to court hardships like these slaves, so that they might win souls, and he gave them success.

Oh, if Johnson is the man whom the Lord appoints to the honor of being the first to carry the glad tidings into the southern hemisphere — he will be a great and honored man indeed. Let the world admire Columbus, Drake, and Cook. Johnson will in my view be unspeakably superior to them all. I do not think he has those popular talents which are so much run after among us; but I believe he has good plain sense, solidity, humility, and steadiness — these are the truly great talents, these are indispensably necessary, and these only, where he is going. I believe with his simple views, the Lord will not permit him to mistake his will in an affair of such vast importance; and therefore, if he does go — I shall hope for a happy outcome.

If I am not mistaken, sooner or later the gospel must be preached in the South Seas; if so, there must be a beginning. Perhaps this is the time. Perhaps this is the final cause of our attempting a settlement in New Holland. Often when politicians have one thing in view — the Lord has another; and their plans succeed in order to the accomplishment of his.

I find that after all my supposed acquaintance with the human heart, there are windings and depths in it, of which I know no more than of the dark unfathomable caves of ocean! "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9. When I have puzzled and grieved sufficiently about things which I cannot account for nor remedy — then I try to leave them with the Lord. He alone can make the crooked, straight. It is singular indeed — and we may say of this event, as of all that went before it — God moves in a mysterious way!

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform;

He plants His footsteps in the sea

And rides upon the storm!

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never failing skill

He treasures up His bright designs

And works His sovereign will!

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;

The clouds you so much dread

Are big with mercy and shall break

In blessings on your head!

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

But trust Him for His grace;

Behind a frowning providence

He hides a smiling face! His purposes will ripen fast,

Unfolding every hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err

And scan His work in vain;

God is His own interpreter,

And He will make it plain.

William Cowper My regard for Mr. Barham and his family will make me always glad to serve him. You must, however, excuse me from speaking positively about the Testimonium. When he brings it to me, signed by Mr. Rose, I shall be able to judge better; but I do not choose to bind myself by an absolute promise before I see him, and converse with him. You may be sure it would give me great pain to refuse him. But as to finding a third, it is quite out of my reach. I know no minister who has been acquainted with Mr. Barham these three years last past. I believe I have seen him but once or twice myself within that time. The testimonial will express that I truly think him a proper person for ministry. If I should really think so in my heart, I shall be glad to subscribe it with my hand. With love to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, and the Utopians, I remain your affectionate brother and servant,

JOHN OMICRON.

27th Oct., 1786.

Mon Cher Ami, Monsieur Taureau,

How many questions may a curious child ask — which a wise man cannot answer to his satisfaction — especially if the subject is above the child's capacity! Truly, we are children! We stand by the Lord, if I may so speak, while he is working; and at every turn are prone to discover our ignorance — too often, I fear, our presumption — by our inquiries, How is this? and Why is that?

Mr. Latrobe is dead! Surely not! Why, he was a great man — a useful man. Oh! how he will be missed! Who can supply his place? We thought that, if he had been apparently drawing his last breath, the Lord would have restored such a man in answer to prayer. So mere children have talked; and I at one time talked thus childishly myself; at least, I thought so, if I kept my mouth shut.

But, perhaps, from what I have hinted, I can assign the cause of his death better than the surgeons who opened his body. When once we consider a man as great and useful, as one who cannot be spared, and whose loss cannot be easily replaced — we may consider him as standing upon dangerous ground! Do we not provoke the Lord to jealousy, by holding an frail instrument so high? Do we not sometimes render it proper and fit for God to show us — that he stands in no need of a sinful worm? If the Lord is pleased to raise up a servant, to honor him with an eminency of gifts, graces, and usefulness, and then take him suddenly away — we are ready to say, 'What a dark Providence! How mysterious are His ways!' But where is the mystery of all this, if it is only to show us that he can carry on his work very well without him?

One such instance may do more to wean the rest of his servants from that idea of self-importance, to which we are all liable — than a thousand sermons on the subject. And so far as it has this effect — the death of a Latrobe may be more useful than his life.

Dear Mr. Unwin moved in a less extensive sphere — yet the loss of him will likewise be felt in his connections. But the Lord can make up all. He was with me an hour that morning he set off with Mr. Thornton, and he told me that he had seen Mr. Latrobe more than once while he was confined at Teston, and seemed much impressed with what he had seen and heard. Little did he or I then think, that they would both die on the same day! May we be always ready! And let us remember in the midst of our preaching and teaching, that though the Lord is pleased to employ us for a while — he can carry on his designs without our assistance.

Mrs. Unwin the widow, has been very low — but is now better; I breakfasted with her at Clapham yesterday. She set off soon after to a friend's at Leytonstone, and will 'return to Stock in a few days. But how different will her house look now! Recently, it was her home; now, she must soon leave it. Recently, she could find her husband in the rooms or in the garden; but now, the place which knew him, knows him no more. But she has hope in the Lord; and he, I trust, will support her.

God is at all times and in all circumstances equally near to those who trust in him. But what avail to have a good house well furnished, large and pleasant gardens, etc., when one unexpected stroke can so suddenly throw a gloom upon the whole, and change our Eden into a wilderness. Having food and clothing, and moderate conveniences, let us be content, let us be thankful. Many have not so much. None can properly make use of more than what we have.

Mrs. Newton hopes your head is better, and your spirits pretty good. If not, send her word how you are, and how you feel, that she may sympathize with you.

Mr. R___. has indeed had some skeptical qualms about his situation in the church, and some thoughts of seceding or dissenting from us — but I hope they are blown over. I shall be sorry if he scruples himself out of a sphere of usefulness. But I never heard that he wavered as to the doctrines of the gospel. I hope it is no more than what I have mentioned, misrepresented or misunderstood. But I cannot answer for him, nor even for myself — unless I am upheld. We are all poor weathercocks — if left to ourselves. I have always thought him an upright good man, though not the most judicious. My love and our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.

Pray for us; and believe me to be your affectionate

John Newton

22 Dec, 1786. Be so good as to send the inclosed immediately by some careful hand at your market. Should it not be received tomorrow, several poor folks at Olney will miss their Christmas dinner. My dear Taureau,

You have already heard from Mr. Neale, and are prepared to receive Robert Cottam, whom I introduce to you by this line. He is a pretty looking and pretty spoken lad. I hope you will like him, and that, by the Lord’s blessing, you will have the honor of forming him to the good work of the ministry. My dear wife has been quite ill; is still poorly; and I am not so well as usual. A cold, hoarseness, and a touch of the fever, made me feel the service of yesterday; but I got well through.

I hope this will find you an athletic in health and spirits; laboring mightily, cheerfully, and successfully for the Lord. Love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy.

Yours always,

OMICRON.

15th Oct.

Dear Mr. Taureau,

I am now monstrous busy; but my dear wife says, I must tell you that, because you said you liked hams, she sent you last week the only one she had in the house, per Newport wagon, carriage paid. She hopes it arrived safe, and will prove good.

It is pretty well with us at present — very well indeed, considering we are sinners. We have a measure of health, at least, by intervals. We have food, clothing, and fire. We have hams for ourselves, and can spare one to send to Newport. We have the Bible, the Gospel, the throne of grace, the means of grace, the hope of glory. Ah! what cold language is it for such sinners, so favored, to say, "It is pretty well with us!" Whereas we ought to say, "His mercy is greater than the heavens!" With our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, I remain your affectionate

John newton My dear friend,

You have behaved like a mighty good Bull, as you are, in trotting over twice to Weston. I could not see you at Newport while you were in London, nor while I myself was at Northampton. A great object with me was Creaton, where I preached twice on Wednesday. Surely the Lord dwells in that place. But who that judges by outward appearances, would look for Him in so small and obscure a village? Yet that little village is more truly glorious than all the Babylons and Romes that ever existed — though a detail of the madness, tyranny, and profligacy of those cities engages the attention of the learned, and is dignified with the name of history.

I have had eight doses from Dr. Pulpit this week, and am to take the ninth this evening. They agree perfectly well with me, only that their operation, together with the warmth of the weather, have left me a little in the lazy way.

We intend visiting you and Mrs. Bull on Tuesday next. I shall be sorry to leave Mrs. Newton behind me, and therefore, if her headache, which cannot be foreseen until it comes, should disable her from waiting on you then, I shall defer it until Wednesday. But I hope the Lord will permit us to be with you on Tuesday, provided that day be convenient to you, and we mean to be at Newport about noon.

01.01. Letters to William Bull, from 1773 to 1805. contd

My dear friend, Your kind letter must be answered, whoever else waits. I should have written more early in the week — but for a strange notion which got into my head, that Mr. Thornton's intended journey into the north would bring you to London. I found out today, by my own sagacity, that it is not unlikely he may call and take you up in his way. Our dear Betsey is, we hope, upon the recovery; but the transition from health to sickness is usually more rapid — than the return from sickness to health. I think she gains strength, though slowly; she sleeps more, and better; and though the enemy still shoots his fiery darts at her, I think they neither fly so fast, nor wound so deeply, as they did. If the Lord is pleased to restore strength to her nerves, and to raise her spirits, which have been much depressed, I hope she will soon find herself upon peaceful ground, and that she will live to praise him. After what she has gone through, it seems almost miraculous that she is as well as she is; and perhaps the gradual and slow progress of her recovery may give a better hope that it will be complete and permanent, than if it had been more speedy.

Mrs. Newton has been much exercised; sometimes I have feared she would be overdone — but the Lord has mercifully renewed her strength; and I do not know that her health, upon the whole, has been much worse, during the last trying month, than for any equal space of time since our return from Weston. But we are growing older, and may expect that as years increase — infirmities will increase also. To those who are not cut off by a sudden stroke, or by some violent acute illness — sooner or later, days will come which the flesh will account evil days, in which little comfort will be found — but what the Lord is pleased to afford immediately from himself. We are in his hands — and they are merciful hands.

Many a time he has known our souls in adversity; heard our prayers, and granted us relief from pain and sickness, from sorrow and perplexity. And though we are unworthy of his goodness, and have been unfaithful stewards of his manifold blessings — yet his word still gives us encouragement to trust in him, and call upon him as long as we live. May his Holy Spirit give us liberty and humble confidence to improve the liberty his promise allows — of casting all our cares upon him, with a persuasion that he cares for us. May his grace be sufficient for us, and our strength according to our day — and then all shall be well. Time is short, and the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed. A happy end will make amends for all the difficulties we can meet along the way. Oh that we could learn to live with the Lord by the day, and leave the unknown to tomorrow, and all its need, with him. The trials of yesterday are gone — to return no more. Those of tomorrow — are not yet come. The Lord mercifully parcels out to us our lot of afflictions by minutes and moments — that we might not be overburdened. But we, foolishly looking back to the past, and forward to the future — load ourselves with an unnecessary and unprofitable weight! It is no wonder, therefore, that we are often weary! The heaviest part of our trials is owing, not so much to the dispensations which cause them, as the self-will and unbelief of our hearts. And our relief depends more upon the cure of our wrong inward dispositions, than upon any change of our outward circumstances. At my first setting out in life — my wickedness and folly plunged me into a variety of wretchedness. But since the

Lord was pleased to find and call me out of the waste howling wilderness — my path has been comparatively smooth, and my lot has been a highly favored one. He led me about into various places and situations; in every place he did me good, and gave me favor among my fellow-creatures; and every change his Providence appointed me, was for the better, both as to personal comfort and to usefulness. Vile as my heart has been — he has preserved my character, he has kept me from gross errors in judgment — and from gross miscarriages in conduct. He has preserved to me my dear wife, and preserved our mutual affections unabated for near thirty years since he first joined our hands and hearts. At present I am happy in many kind friends, and endeared connections — happy in the exercise of my ministry, among a numerous, affectionate, and attentive people, many of whom are of the first rank for real grace and practical godliness. As yet, my bow abides in strength, and he has not yet taken his holy word out of my lips. Shall I not then praise him for all that is past? Ought I not to trust him for all that is to come? I have indeed occasionally had my trials, and some of them have been sharp; but their sharpness, as I have hinted, has been chiefly owing to my lack of faith and submission. I have reason to praise him for my trials, for, most probably, I would have been ruined without them.

I am not willing to close our correspondence as soon as you speak of. I shall hope to hear from you when you are in the north, and will endeavor to pay you in the same way. May the Lord, the good Shepherd, be sun and shield to you and to dear Mr. Thornton, throughout your journey, and bring you home full of grace and peace. Remember our love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy. I trust you continue to pray for your affectionate friends, John and Mary Newton

16 Jan. 1789. My dear friend,

I thank you again. The prayers, advice, and sympathy of Christian friends, compose a cordial very acceptable in an hour of trouble. Though our effectual help be in the Lord alone, such friends are not like Job’s miserable comforters, they are his instruments to us for good. I thank him for them (for who would smile upon me unless he gave me favor in their sight), and I thank them for their kindness. Our dear child Betsey has passed through so many changes, that I knew not what to say all last week, particularly on Saturday; we were hourly expecting her death. When I went to church on Sunday morning, I no more expected to find her alive at my return, than to find her well — yet she is living still, and apparently not so likely to die soon, as she was for many days past. Neither do I see any favorable symptoms to warrant the expectation of recovery. But I have little to do with appearances and symptoms. She is in the hands of Him who loves her better than I can. He does all things in wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness. We are allowed to trust in God, who raises the dead. I cannot be sufficiently thankful, that she is freed from the dreadful assaults of the enemy. I have not asked for her life — I dare not; but I have found liberty to pray that she might be in a measure composed, and she is as much so as can be expected, considering the nature of her malady, and her great weakness. When you are inclined to trot over to Weston, you will take, perhaps, my letters with you, and then you will probably see one that I send today to Mrs. Unwin which may contain some particulars not to be found in yours.

I cannot say that I was sorry to hear of Mrs. Wilberforce’s death, though I loved her, and believe she loved me, and though she will be missed by her family and dependents greatly. Yet she suffered so much, that I was rather glad than sorry to hear that she was entered into the rest and joy of her Lord. May the same grace enable us to persevere, and make us willing if such be our

Lord’s pleasure, to suffer afflictions for a while — since they are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.

Through mercy I am enabled to go through my public services with liberty and comfort. The doctor is just come down stairs, and says dear Betsey is certainly better at present. With love to Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and your family, Your affectionate and obliged brother,

OMICRON.

30th Dec. My dear Sir,

Whether you returned to Clapham with Mr. Thornton yesterday, or stopped at Newport — as yet I know not. The latter is possible — but in either case you will receive this, to congratulate you on the completion of your journey, to thank you for your letter from York, and to express my hope that you found Mrs. Bull, and all at home, well and in peace.

Dear Betsy is very much recovered. She has not fully regained her strength — but her health is greatly restored, and her spirits are better. The Lord enabled her to go to church on Sunday, in the evening, and she has been there twice since. She has been several times abroad in a carriage, and walking in Draper’s Garden near us. Tomorrow she goes, if the Lord pleases, to spend a few days with a friend at Stoke Newington, for a little change of air, and better opportunity of exercise. When she first appeared at church I preached from Psalms 116:1-2, as a thanksgiving sermon. I am persuaded that many of the congregation had prayed earnestly for her, and were glad to see her again. A revival from the state in which she lay for several days, seemed a kind of resurrection. Such proofs of His power and goodness in answer to prayer, justly demand returns of gratitude, love, and praise; and give us fresh encouragement to call upon him as long as we live.

I hope we shall not call upon him only when we are in trouble — but keep closer to him, and more sensibly dependent upon him, if he sees fit to afford us an interval of ease and prosperity. And we may expect more changes; clouds will return, new troubles will arise — but, blessed be his name, we know where to apply for help in every time of need. He who has delivered, and who does deliver, will support and deliver to the end.

Pray for me, my friend, that the late dispensation, which was not joyous but grievous, may be sanctified to myself and to my dear Mrs. Newton. Though the Lord mercifully upheld me in my public line, I was conscious of a languor in my private walk, and in the inward frame of my spirit before him, which must have stopped my mouth from complaining, had he sent a still more severe visitation to arouse me. It is a mercy not to be deserted and put to shame before the people. But the exercise of gifts and of grace — are different and distinct things. Pray that I may not have suffered in vain — but may have reason to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Pray likewise for the dear child. She likewise is afraid lest she should lose the sense of what the Lord has shown her and done for her. Those jealous fears which arise from a sense of our own weakness, and the snares and dangers that surround us, and which urge us to cry to him, who alone is able to keep us from falling, "Hold me up — and I shall be safe!" are rather to be encouraged than suppressed. In this sense it is said, "Happy is the man who fears always." But I have a well-grounded hope, that she has been drawn by his grace, truly to yield and entrust herself to him, and that he has taken such fast hold of her heart, that nothing shall be able to

separate her from his love. He will permit neither force nor fraud, to pluck those out of his hands, whom he has once enabled simply and sincerely to commit their all to him.

Mrs. Newton continues much as usual. She had been confined from church some weeks before Betsey's illness, and has not been there yet. But she is not confined to her bed, nor often to her room. Last Thursday we entered the fortieth year of our joint reign. At our time of life — it is less to be wondered that one of us should be ailing, than that either of us should be well. My health hitherto seems as firm as ever, and I feel little abatement of my powers either of body or mind, so far as concerns my ministry; which ought to be, and I hope is, the chief consideration which makes health or life valuable in my view. But at the age of sixty-four — I cannot expect to get on thus well, for a great while. But it does not matter, my times are in His hands who does all things well. Only may he enable me to live to him while I do live, and to serve him while I can do anything; and when he calls me or disables me — to retire with a good grace and a good hope, rejoicing that I am no longer needed, and that he has other instruments coming forward to carry on his merciful designs, I hope with greater zeal and success than I knew in my best times.

Mr. Atkins, the blind man, desired me to speak to Mr. Thornton, on behalf of the youth (Cottam, I think, you call him), whom Mr. Neale sent to Newport. I thought I would — but upon second thoughts, which are sometimes best, it seemed better to refer the business to you. I truly believe Atkins is a good and benevolent person. He respected this young man (who had lived some time with him) and wished to assist him in his views to the ministry. John Ryland, according to the known warmth of his spirit, pushed him on. "Never talk of prudence, trust in God, he will incline your friends to assist you in the necessary expense. Faith jumps over mountains — or removes them, etc." Mr. Atkins hastily followed his advice, and he found friends to assist him at first — but they have dropped, and they have left poor Atkins in a difficulty. He is unwilling to desert the young man, and unable to support him. If you think the young man deserving, and choose to mention him to Mr. Thornton, as he is under your care, I judge it will come with more propriety from you. Let me know your mind when you are at leisure.

We all join in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy.

I have not time to treat on the particulars of your letter.

Dear Taureau, My dear wife thanks you for your kind concern about her; and so do I. Though she has now and then, and here and there, a pain or illness — she is, in the main, and upon the whole, tolerable; and, compared with what she was at this time last year, we have great cause for thankfulness.

I have already written more than the three lines you asked for; but when writing to you, would time permit, I would send three sheets. I will at least keep on until the barber or the breakfast stops me. This is Mrs. Newton's birthday. For many years I used to keep the anniversary of her birth and my own, and of our marriage, as fast days. Not that I was sorry that we were born, or sorry that the Lord brought us together; but I observed it as a day of solemn prayer and praise. How very different must the history of my life have been, if she had not been sent into the world after me! Then, most probably, I should neither have known Guinea nor Woolnoth. She is evidently the human hinge on which my whole life has turned. She was the occasion, though not the cause, of that series of foolish conduct on my part, which plunged me into the misery of African bondage;

and when I was there, I was so infatuated and degraded in my spirit — so riveted to my chains, that I think nothing but the attachment I felt for her, which remained when every other moral or prudential sentiment was effaced from my mind, could have induced me to return.

You will find an abridgment of my life thus far in Deuteronomy 32:10-15, "In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him. He made him ride on the heights of the land and fed him with the fruit of the fields. He nourished him with honey from the rock, and with oil from the flinty crag, with curds and milk from herd and flock and with fattened lambs and goats, with choice rams of Bashan and the finest kernels of wheat. You drank the foaming blood of the grape. Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior."

You may find another in Isaiah 42:16, "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them." I meet with several passages in the Psalms, likewise, which seem so suitable to my case, as if written on purpose, particularly in the 71st Psalm, which came in the course of my reading this morning. I have been a wonder to many — and may well be a wonder to myself! The 12th will be our wedding anniversary. Just forty years ago we joined hands, and entered together upon the world's wilderness. We knew not the right path across it — but seemed disposed to take the first that offered. But we had not wandered far, before the Lord, whom we little thought of, was pleased to give us some sense of our need of a guide; and from that time, he has taken upon himself the care and cost of our journey. He himself has been our guard and guide, our sun and shield, our physician and provider, our Counselor and our comforter. Oh that we had more regarded his counsel, and more prized his comforts!

Very different has been the path by which he has led us, from that which we would have chosen, if permitted, for ourselves. Many situations we have been in, many changes we have seen; but having obtained help from God — we continue to this day.

Again we are spared to set up a new Ebenezer. The greater part of our journey is accomplished: how much farther we have to go, He knows — we know not. But I humbly hope he will still be our guide and guard, even unto death. The shadows of evening are lengthening upon us; the night comes; I hope it will be but a momentary night, ushering in an everlasting day.

Pray for us: I will try to pay you in kind. But I must break off. Mrs. Newton and Catty join with me in love to you, Mrs. Bull, and Tommy. The Lord bless you and yours abundantly. Amen.

I am yours truly affectionate,

John Newton

2nd Feb., 1790. My dear Mr. Taureau,

How vain are all things here below! So we read, so we preach. Is it a wonder that we find it so? The Lord gives, or rather lends; when he recalls his own, shall we not say, "Blessed be the name

of the Lord!"

Perhaps we both need a cordial. If writing should prove one to me, and reading what I write should comfort you, I shall be glad. Well then, to begin, if possible, at the right end, I will tell you though you know it, that the Lord reigns; and that this Lord is our Lord. He to whom we have been invited, and enabled to commit all our concerns — has all power, and does what he pleases among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. Consequently he is both able to help us, and to shield us from harm.

Again, his goodness is equal to his power, and his goodness has extended unto us. Were we not cast upon him from the birth? Did he not care for us in infancy, childhood, and youth? He not only spared — but preserved us, when we were sinning against him. Where would we have wandered — if he had not stopped us, and led us into his own fold? From that time, what a good Shepherd he has been to us! Yes long before, for he laid down his life for his sheep. His blessing has signally been with you and me, in our personal, domestic, and public concerns. He has given us many comforts, and some usefulness. He has led us about, permitted us to speak of his name in many places, and honored us with the friendship of some of his most favored people.

Once more, his wisdom is perfect. He does all things well; in time, manner, and circumstance. He does not indeed always inform us of his reasons — but we have good ground to be sure that they are always worthy of himself. If then he is wise, good, and almighty — to wish the slightest alteration in his plan and management, must be equally presumptuous and foolish! Lord, help us to say, "May Your will be done!"

We ascribe the death of believers to falls or fevers, etc. These are but the second causes. You will find the true cause in John 17:24, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory!" When the hour comes that he will have them with him to behold his glory — should we wish to delay them if we could? "But some of them have been so useful!" Surely they will not be useless where they are going; though we know not particularly the services appointed them there. I cannot doubt — but they will be much more noble, extensive, and important than anything they could attempt while here.

Mr. Thornton has been long a burning and shining light; he is eclipsed by his present decline — but death will not extinguish him. God will never lack instruments to promote his own cause, and to comfort his own people. I think it probable that no one man in Europe, in private life, will be so much missed at first; but I trust his place will be well supplied, even by those of his own family.

You know something of my peculiar obligations to him. I hope my respect and affection were in some degree proportionable. To him, under the Lord, I owe all my situation and comfort as a minister. It was a pleasure to me if I only saw him passing by. I believe I shall see his face no more here — but hereafter. Oh what a hope! what a prospect!

Mrs. Newton has been at no time worse than yesterday. She has had a better night than I could have expected, only, as we have so many tokens of the Lord’s compassion in this affliction. We are in his hands — He knows what I feel, and what, with submission to his will, appears desirable to me; but he knows likewise, and has in some degree apprised me of my utter unfitness to choose for myself, Lord, I would, I do submit. With our united love to Mrs. Bull and Tommy, I remain, your very affectionate,

John Newton My Dear Brother Bull, The pork came safe last week; thank you, for it. Mrs. Newton was pleased with your kindness, and ate two or three bites of it the two days following. It is the only meat she has eaten for some weeks, except a bite of pork yesterday, for a similar reason — because Judith sent it. More pork is come from you today. I thank you for this likewise; and my dear wife has again talked of eating a bit, because it is yours.

She has outlived the doctor's expectation four or five days; but he thinks she can hardly hold out above a day more. She lies for the most part very quiet; sleeps a good deal; seldom has much pain; but the extreme weakness of her body seems to have given the enemy some advantage. Her mind is locked up, and there is no drawing one comfortable word from her concerning herself. But her patience under the Lord's hands has been wonderful; and she discovers no symptoms of terror, or great distress. If the Lord is pleased to smile upon her, that she may smile upon and in death, when it approaches, I hope I shall be thankful. I humbly ask this as what seems to me very desirable; and I rather hope it will be so; but I have no right nor reason to claim it.

I trust I have sufficient warrant to say, that she knows herself to be a sinner, and knows Jesus to be the Savior. I cannot doubt but she has many a time, in the course of this long trial, committed herself to him. During her confinement, she studied the Bible with such attention, that she has marked almost every important passage in it from Genesis to Revelation with a pencil. She has gone through Dr. Watts' Hymns and Psalms, and the Olney Hymns, in the same manner; so that very few are left unmarked, and frequently there is a cross annexed to every verse. Our affliction, though heavy to the flesh, has been attended throughout with many merciful alleviations. And to this minute, though she is so extremely weak, her spirits are good.

Through the Lord's mercy, "my mind is calm and resigned. I have not one allowed wish to alter his appointment, were it possible. His choice and his hour must be the best. Instead of complaining that she is to be taken from me now — what reason have I for admiration and praise, that she has been spared to me so long, when I have justly deserved to forfeit her every day of my life, since he first gave her, or, rather, lent her to me! How few in the married state live together upwards of forty years! Still fewer, who preserve their mutual affection unabated for so long a term! Had not his blessing cemented us, we might, yes, we would have been weary of each other long ago. I hope to say, He has done all things well. At my time of life, if I weep, it ought to be as though I wept not: the end of my own pilgrimage cannot be very distant. May we meet again then, in his presence to stand among the redeemed before the throne; and we shall be done with sickness, pain, sorrow, and sin, forever! The Lord is very gracious to me. My health was never better. My feelings at times have been severely painful — but they have not affected my appetite nor my sleep; nor, so far as I can judge for myself, been any hindrance to my public service. Yesterday was a day of trial — but it was a day of liberty likewise. I think I have seldom had more liberty in the pulpit, especially in the forenoon, when I preached from 2 Corinthians 12:9. The letters from Bath give but little hopes of Mr. Thornton's recovery; the physician says, It is possible. Lady Balgonie's account is rather more favorable than Mr. Henry's, though both written about the same time. I cannot say, that I expect to see him again in this world. There, my heart has another wound. My best friend and benefactor, to whom, under the Lord, I owe all that I have or am; but what is my private loss, compared with that of the public! But it is the Lord's doing. If it be his pleasure to have his servant with him where he is, to behold his glory — we cannot detain him, nay, we ought not to desire it.

Now, I wish you a good night. I know not what the morrow may bring forth; I know not — but the Lord knows.

Tuesday is come, it is much like Monday. She is still living. Both her body and mental state are much as yesterday. Her stay cannot be long; but I still pray, and hope, and trust — that the Lord will break the force of the temptation, and bring her out of the pit, and put a new song in her mouth, before she goes. He can put it into her heart, whether I hear her sing it or not; but if he is pleased to show her a token for good, so that she can show it to us, I hope I shall not be unthankful. The treasures of both the Indies would be a trifle in my view, compared with the granting of this desire. She seems not to be so much harassed concerning her own interest in particular, as concerning the truths themselves, which she has formerly known and believed, and are the very foundations of hope. I am distressed — but not forsaken. The Lord is here. His mercy is great, his power infinite. He can break her fetters by a word, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and give us the oil of joy for mourning. She would send her love, if she knew of my writing; I am sure she loves you.

Love to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, etc., from

John Newton 26 October, 1790. My dear friend,

I hope the receipt of this will not cause your spirits to droop, or your head to hang down, when I, who am most nearly interested, can begin with telling you, all is well. I am supported, I am comforted, I am satisfied. The Lord is good indeed! I can think without regret, of the day when the Lord first joined our hands, (excepting when I reflect on my folly and idolatry); and now I feel not much more regret, when I think of the day which separated us for a season. I trust we shall soon meet to part no more.

Perhaps the papers have already informed you of her release from her sufferings on Wednesday evening. For three days before, she gave little sign of life — but by breathing. Her departure was so gentle, that she was gone before we were well aware, though we had our eyes fixed upon her. This event, when it took place, was not an addition to my trial, rather a great deliverance. It freed my heart from a thousand pains and anxieties, which I could not wholly avoid, when I thought of the trying situation in which she had long lain. The dark cloud which hung over her was mercifully dispersed, above a month before her death. Though she had not spirits, or freedom to speak much to me, it was evident from that time, that the frame of her spirit was gracious. Her patience was most exemplary, not one complaining expression passed her lips. She was rather ingenious, when her sufferings were the greatest, to fix upon something for which she had cause to be thankful, that she was preserved from agonizing pain; that the Lord laid no more upon her than he enabled her to bear; and though she could not move her body, she still had the use of her hands. These she spoke of as great mercies. Her reluctance to dying was entirely removed. She spoke of it with great composure; and having mentioned some domestic affairs to me, and given some directions about her funeral, particularly desiring that Mr. Foster might bury her, she said, "Now I have done with this world," though she lived nearly a month afterwards.

I trust I am well warranted to consider her now as a happy spirit before the throne. It cannot be long at my years, before I shall be summoned to follow her! Had she gone to Newport one day, and had I gone after her the next day, and found her safe at your house, the separation of a single

day would have been no great matter. A thousand years are as one day to the Lord, because he inhabits eternity, and, for a like reason, they should be so to us, since we are designed for an eternal state, and hastening to it. But I trust what has taken place will not make me weary of living, until the Lord's hour shall arrive. His time is, and must be, the best. I am his, and not my own. My principal tie to the earth is broken — but opportunities of preaching the gospel, of proclaiming the Savior's glory and grace, and being some way instrumental to the good of my fellow-creatures, ought to engage me as a stronger tie to be willing to live, while he has anything for me to do, or to bear for his sake — though it could be to the age of Methuselah. The eternal rest that remains for the godly — will make amends for all! And eternity, itself, will hardly afford us such opportunities as we enjoy now, of acting for God, and exercising those graces which were more eminently the mind that was in Christ Jesus, while he submitted to the evils of life, and endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, for our sakes.

Oh the promised Comforter! If his influence was so great as to make it expedient and desirable for the disciples to lose the personal presence of their Lord, because otherwise the Comforter would not come; how much more should we think it sufficient to make us amends for the removal of any mere creature, however dear! Can our attachment be stronger to our friends, than that of the disciples was to their dear Lord who conversed with them so kindly, was their teacher, friend, and provider? Yet, when they saw him ascend — they departed rejoicing. If they could be happy and comfortable without him, cannot the same Comforter make us so, though we no longer see the wife, or child, or the friend whom we loved?

Yes, he is all-sufficient. It befits me to bear testimony to his goodness. Doubtless, I feel the wound still — but it was made by a faithful friend, who will perfectly heal it, in his due time. And, in the mean time, I am not disqualified either for the duties of my ministry, or the comforts of society. The Lord bless you, and Mrs. Bull, and Tommy, and all dear to you, your heart, your house, your church and congregation, and all your stated and occasional services. Amen. Dear Miss Catlett joins in love; the stroke made more impression upon her spirits, than upon mine; but through mercy she is pretty well again. All our family are well. We shall all be glad to see you when you come to town.

I am always, your affectionate brother,

John Newton

18th Dec. 1790. My dear friend,

I am much as when you saw me; through mercy, no worse; and I think not a whit better, if by better is meant being less sensible of my loss. In this sense, I hardly expect, nor do I indeed desire, to be better than I am. She is always present to my waking thoughts, and I cannot wish to forget her. Innumerable calls for thankfulness, and causes for humiliation, are connected with the remembrance of her — for she was the Lord's chief earthly blessing to me; and, through the evil of my heart, proved the occasion of disclosing the strongest proofs of my ingratitude and depravity. How often has the gift hidden the Giver from my sight! How often has my excessive idolatrous affection been a snare to us both! That she was spared to me so long, and that at last her removal should be made so tolerable to me, are striking instances of that goodness of the Lord to me, which has run like a thread through my life, and has made my history singular, if not unique in the

annals of mankind.

Thoughts of her are always with me, as I have said, excepting when I am asleep, or perhaps some times when I am in the pulpit; yet I am by no means uncomfortable. My health and spirits are good: I eat and sleep well. I preach, write, and converse as usual. I hope in spirituals I have been rather a gainer by my loss than otherwise. I think, likewise, that in the time of my trial and since, there has been an additional blessing going forth in the public ordinances. The church is more thronged than formerly, and there seems an attention and earnestness in the hearers, which is very encouraging.

I thank you for wishing me fifteen years more, because I know you meant well. I can only say that I desire to leave my times and my all in my Lord's hands. His I am, and, I trust, him I desire to serve. I am a sentinel upon my post, which I would not wish to quit, until my Commander is pleased to relieve me. I have not lost my relish for the many comforts and mercies which are still afforded me; yet, methinks, I see nothing pertaining to this world worth living a single day for. I may say it to my shame, I seem dead to the world — but, alas! not so much by the cross of Christ, as by the death of a wife! While she lived, and was in tolerable health, I was too much content with setting up my tabernacle here.

If I am not short of creature comforts, I am at the same time delivered from a thousand cares and anxieties, which so long as she had lived, would probably have cleaved to me, as close as my skin to my flesh.

It will, however, be well worth while to live while the Lord is pleased to enable me — for the preaching of the gospel, and to own me in it. And should he see fit to lay me aside, I hope still to be willing to live my appointed time. May his grace make me so! If I could exercise submission, patience, and thankfulness — I might be still useful, even if bedridden. I have no notion of a minister outliving his usefulness, provided he is preserved in a right spirit. Might not I sit quiet in a corner, and rejoice to see others coming forward to serve the Lord better than myself, when I could serve him no more? Might not I bear private testimony to his goodness, and his truth — when I could no longer speak for him in public? I have observed sometimes that caprice, peevishness, jealousy, and other evils have stained the old age even of good men. My chief prayer now respecting myself is, that I may be preserved from indiscretion and folly; and that if it pleases the Lord, my evening of life may be consistent with my profession, and that I may set without a cloud. When I think how signally he strengthened me of late, so as to preach when my dear wife lay dead, and to preach her funeral sermon, in answer to my prayers — I feel encouraged to hope that he will hear me in these petitions also.

I trust he will likewise hear my heart-prayers for you, for Mrs. Bull, Tommy, your house, and your ministry. Then it will be well with you in all respects. Betsey is pretty well, and a great comfort to me. I am sure she means her love — but is not at home to send it. I shall be very glad when you can contrive to smoke a pipe with your affectionate and obliged friend and brother,

John Newton 30th March, 1791.

Mon Cher Taureau, As to the Colchester business, it was settled when you were here. I was fully satisfied then, and therefore cannot be more so now. I sit down to write upon a more important subject. Mrs. Neale told me when I was there on Thursday evening, that Tommy was doing poorly. I entered plump into your feelings, and therefore now I must write. Whoever waits — Mr. Bull must

be served. But what can I say to you? Were you a stranger to the strong topics of consolation, with which the good Word of God abounds — I could soon fill my paper. I would tell you:

that all your concerns are in the hands of Him who is infinitely wise, good, and powerful;

that to him belong the issues from death;

that diseases come and go at his command;

that he does all things well;

that he can sweeten the most bitter medicines;

that his wisdom prescribes for our good;

that he is so near, so kind, so all-sufficient, as to enable us to rejoice under our heaviest trials;

that the time is short;

that the Lord will make amends for all, etc, etc. But to write in this strain to you, would be, as they say, to carry coals to Newcastle. For all this, and more than I can tell you, you already know. Yet the Lord, who is the only Comforter, is often pleased to use us as His instruments to comfort one another. I may, if he pleases, drop some hint, which may touch your heart, not because it comes from me — but from Him; and, therefore, I will write on.

One thing, indeed, you could only know from me — but this likewise, I have told you before — yet I will tell it you again. I have not only read these gracious promises, and believe them to be true — but I have tried them, and found them to be true. I never was, strictly speaking, a father, though I think I have come tolerably near the feelings of one; but I have been a husband, and I think, in that relation, I have known all the tender feelings, both pleasing and painful, of which the human heart is susceptible. I have often thought that though I loved my friends well while living, and wished them to live as long as possible — yet if the Lord saw fit to remove them, and I had hope that they died in the faith — that I could pretty well make up my own loss, by considering to whom they were gone, and how they were employed, when I could see them no more. Thus the removal of Mrs. Barham, Mr. Thornton, and others, though dear to my heart, cost me little more than a sigh upon my own account. I thought, now they are safe and happy — now neither sin, sorrow, nor Satan, can touch them. They are escaped from the turbulent, tempestuous sea of this world, and are entered into the haven of eternal rest! These, and such kind of considerations, perfectly reconciled me to part with them for a time, expecting, before very long, to receive them again forever. But when my foreboding mind has anticipated the possibility of surviving my dear wife, the question: "How I could bear it? how I could ever expect to see another cheerful hour?" involved a difficulty which could only be solved by referring it to the mighty power of God — of Him that raised the dead. I did indeed hope that he would grant me grace to be silently submissive to his will — but that I would be able to watch hours by her bed-side for her last breath; that I would think, write, and speak of her with so much composure after she was gone; that I should sleep soundly in the room, in the very bed, where she suffered so much and so long; that I should still prefer my home to any other house, and still retain a relish for all my remaining comforts — was more than I knew how to hope or to conceive. At length, the trial which I most dreaded came upon me. Suspense was long; sensations were keen. My right hand was not chopped off at a stroke. It was sawn off by slow

degrees; it was an operation of weeks and months; almost every following week more painful than the preceding. But did I sink? did I despond? did I refuse my food? did sleep forsake my eyes? was I so troubled in mind or weakened in body that I could not speak? Far, far from it. The Lord strengthened me — and I was strong. No part of my public service was interrupted; and, perhaps, I never preached with more energy than at that period. It was the Lord's doing, and it was marvelous in my own eyes, and in the eyes of my friends. Indeed, some who knew me not, said it was overdone, and charged me with a lack of feeling. Indeed, I felt as much as I could well bear — but not too much; and to this hour I only stand — because I am divinely upheld. Were I left a little to myself, there is enough in my heart still to make me very wretched under a sense of my loss.

However, I hope and pray with respect to Tommy — that his sickness may not be unto death — but to the glory of God, and his and your future comfort. Give my love to him, and assure him that I shall be often with him in spirit. My love to Mrs. Bull; and I sympathize with her likewise in her part of this trial, and in all her trials, so far as I know them. My dear daughter Betsey joins me in love and best wishes. She knows that you thought of her, and prayed for her, when she was brought near unto death. When I think how near death she was — I do not give up any case as desperate, while life remains. The Lord our God can do great things in answer to prayer; but we are sure he will do all things well, for those who love him. Put your trust in him, and you shall not be disappointed.

I heard with great pleasure that Mr. C.'s son is respited. How different is his trial from yours! The Lord has given you, or lent you — a dutiful, hopeful, and affectionate son; and if it be most for his good and yours — he shall be long continued to you.

Believe me to be your affectionate and obliged friend and brother,

John Newton My dear friend,

It is time to thank you for your pork, and especially for your letter; likewise, to answer your kind inquiries in the affirmative, by saying that, through the Lord's mercy, we are all favored with health and peace; and all join in love to you and yours.

Since the termination of my great trial, I have been remarkably favored indeed. I have hardly had any trial, either from within or without, the inward warfare excepted — of the size of a button. My health, spirits, and my strength for public service, have suffered no considerable abatement, my table is well spread, my appetite good, and my sleep sound and refreshing. But my clock, which struck sixty-six last August, reminds me that it will not always, nor probably long — be thus with me. But it does not matter. Not only the precious promises — but the long experience I have had of the Lord's mercy and goodness, encourage me to trust him for the uncertain remainder of my span; that as he has done me good all the way, led me about, and kept me as the pupil of his eye, so he will be with me to the end, even unto death. Did he not redeem and deliver me from being a slave in Africa, take me up from the dunghill of sin and misery, put me among the princes, even his own children; tame the fierce tiger in my heart, and give me a name, a place, and service in his house? Has he not preserved me from gross errors, from gross misconduct, from the wiles and power of my enemy, though that devouring lion was always watchful, and often found me asleep? Has he not known my soul in adversity, and helped me when the help of creatures would have been utterly in vain? And does he not still invite me to cast my care upon him, and assure me that

he cares for me?

I am little aware of what is yet in my heart; I know that after all this, I am still capable of distrust and repining. But he permits me to cry to him to hold me up; and as I know him to be a hearer of prayer, I trust I shall be kept in safety.

It is true, I still miss my right hand as sensibly as on the first day. But when it was taken from me, I was at once freed from a thousand anxieties, which otherwise would have pained me to this hour. I think, when she died — the world died with her. May the Lord prevent it rising again in my heart!

Yes, we hope for a transition in due time, from a throne of grace, to stand upon a throne of glory; to see Him who sits upon it, the Lamb who was slain, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood! Him, whom having not seen, we have obtained grace to love. Indeed, he is to be seen now — but only with the eye of the mind. He is the sun of the soul — and without him we should be like the earth if deprived of the light of the sun in the skies. There is a spiritual sunshine of which I can speak but faintly from experience; but I would be thankful for daylight, by which I can see my way, and get a glimpse of my journey's end. Hereafter there will be a morning without clouds — a noon without night — a long, an everlasting day. Eternal sunshine!

Mr. Adams has been apparently near death; but by blistering his legs, they have drawn off much water, and relieved him greatly. His appetite recovers, and he can now sleep four or five hours at a time, which he could not lately. The doctors think he may possibly live some time — but they do not think he will ever be well. I saw him today. He is in a comfortable frame, willing either to live or die, as the Lord shall appoint.

Mr. S___ is in town; has been with me two or three times. I believe he is a good man, and I must love him. As he said nothing upon the subject of the letter which I showed you; neither did I. The best way of managing some things — is to forget them. Let them die in silence. The fire in my study would have been out before now, if I had not stirred it up. I told you that what was said or written made no impression upon me, and you believed me. What need, then, of any further debate?

Sometimes when I read books or letters, I am almost ready to think the writers were angels; but I suppose, if I lived with them, I would find them flesh and blood, like myself. If I was more sensible of my own inconsistency — I would less wonder at that which I observe in others. Wonderful is the patience of the Lord, who can bear with us all at once! We, alas! can hardly bear with each other one at a time. When I was assured that Mr. Wilberforce would renew his motion in the House this session, I preached (as I did last year) about the slave trade. I considered it not in a political, but in a moral view, from Jeremiah 2:34. I think myself bound in conscience to bear my testimony at least, and to wash my hands from the guilt, which, if persisted in, now that things have been so thoroughly investigated and brought to light, will, I think, constitute a national sin of a scarlet and crimson dye. A motion since made in the Common Council for a petition to Parliament on the subject, has been negatived. If the business miscarries again, I shall fear not only for the poor slaves — but for ourselves. For I think if men refuse to vindicate the oppressed — the Lord will take their cause into his own hands. And the consequences may be dreadful both abroad and at home, whatever mischiefs may arise from hurricanes, insurrections, etc. etc., I shall attribute to this cause. In the mean time, I would retreat under the thought that the Lord reigns. He has wise

reasons, though often inscrutable to us — both for what he appoints, and for what he permits! Hereafter we shall know more. In the mean time, may we be found among those who are secured by a mark, because they sigh and mourn for what they cannot prevent. Ezekiel 9:4-6. With love to all your house, and to Mr. and Mrs. Greatheed, and my prayers that the Lord may bless you indeed, and give you peace always by all means.

I remain, your affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton 24th March, 1792. My dear Monsieur Taureau,

Mr. Bacon has found a student for you, his name is James Higgs. He has already been a preacher three years in the Tabernacle line. Mr. Bacon heard him occasionally during his residence at Hampstead, last summer, thought he had right views, a good spirit, and promising natural abilities. But he wishes for such improvement as he thinks your tuition might afford him. He is in some business — but would prefer devoting himself entirely to the ministry, and with a view of some time undertaking a stated and pastoral charge.

He is already twenty-eight years of age. He breakfasted with me this morning. I seem to like him very much. His knowledge of Latin and Greek are equal; that is, he knows not a tittle of either — neither did John Bunyan. I suppose it is too late to make him a nice classical scholar. But he may pick up with you many useful things in his mother tongue. He seems to be humble, modest, and sensible. And perhaps you may provide for the future service of souls, by helping him forward.

I told him I would write to you today, and that perhaps I might have an answer by Saturday. If you give him encouragement he will come down to Newport to see you, and to let you see him. For I advised it as best, that you should converse together, and know each other's minds, before anything was finally determined.

I have nothing to add to my former letter — but more love and good wishes to you and yours, and to tell you we are still favored with health and peace. The abolition business comes on next Monday. Help us with your prayers, that He who has all hearts in his hands may give a happy outcome. On one side humanity, conscience, and the sense of the nation, are engaged — against personal interest and political influence on the other. But personal interest is blind, and mistakes its own cause. However, the battle is the Lord's. I preached on the subject on the evening of the 18th, from Jeremiah 2:34, and charged all who do not express their detestation of this slave traffic, now things are so thoroughly investigated, and notorious — with blood-guiltiness. Lord, lay not the sin to our charge.

I am in mighty haste; but whether in haste or leisure, always your affectionate

John Newton My dear Sir And Brother,

I wished to wait upon you in the shape of a short letter (I have less time than ever for long ones) while Mr. and Mrs. Neale are with you, that I might meet you all together. If they stay their proposed time, I am not yet too late. I tried hard to smoke a pipe with you, when in town — but you were not at leisure one time, and the next not at home. Had it been necessary, without doubt we should have met. May we meet in glory! I trust we shall. He who has invited and inclined us to seek him, will not disappoint the hope he himself has raised, nor the taste to which only he could form such minds as ours. Such a state of happiness as the Word of God describes — a state of

wonder, love, and praise, surrounding and admiring Him who sits upon the throne — would not have pleased me once. I would have preferred a pig-sty to it! Now I hope I can say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" And you can say the same. Let us, then, rejoice, and lift up our heads. He has said, Surely I come quickly. No one has more reason to be willing to live than I. I am still strengthened for the comfortable exercise of my ministry, am heard with acceptance, have many kind friends, abound in all temporal accommodations, and have a pleasant home. It is true she is gone; but it is true the Lord, who can do all things, enables me to go on tolerably well without her, and her death freed me from many anxieties and cares.

Yet were it not for his will, and what belongs to my profession and my ministry — I think I would now feel but little attachment to this poor world. It is thought a great matter when the same play will fill the theater for thirty or forty nights running. The drama of human life, presented to my view, not for days — but for months and years, affords so little variety, more than variety of woe and wickedness — that I seem to have seen enough of it. But if the Lord is with me, I shall thankfully wait his appointed time. All is adjusted by infinite wisdom and love. Do you ask how I am employed? I am making extracts from love letters — not to a sweetheart — but to a wife. I have quires of these by me, which I wrote when at sea, and at other intervals of absence from home. Perhaps I shall find enough to make a Cardiphonia volume, which may bear reading when I am gone hence. This job cannot be performed by a substitute: it will engross most of my little leisure from other business, and will, therefore, I hope, be accepted as a plea, if I should be tardy in correspondence. This is a voluntary offering, for I do not owe you a letter, and yet I am a little mercenary, for I mean by it to draw a return letter from you. Our love to your guests, to Mrs. Bull, Tommy, and all your family; not forgetting the silent young gentleman, with whom I was much pleased when I saw him at Newport. The Lord bless you all. Amen.

I am yours indeed,

John Newton

19th Oct.,1792.

Mon Tres Cher Monsieur Taureau, Your very kind letter deserved a more early acknowledgment — but I thought I would wait until I could tell you, as I do now, that my book is finished. I sent part of it to the press a two weeks ago, and have had two printed sheets to revise. I have since been writing a preface and an appendix. I put the last hand (as I hope) to the whole this morning, and the first letter I attempt, after feeling myself a little at liberty, is to you. I hope and desire your prayers, that the Lord may be pleased to breathe his blessing upon the publication. I am not a proper judge of a work in which I am so nearly concerned. In some respects, it will be new; in some parts it may be amusing: but, oh that it may be useful! I am to be pitied, if I have employed a chief part of the winter in picking straws.

It will appear in two volumes, about the size of Cardiphonia — but not so much print. The type must be larger, the paper finer, and the page less crowded, to induce those who think themselves the better sort of folks (for whom I chiefly intend it) to read it. Many people judge of books as they do of men — by their dress and appearance. My patience has usually been tried on former occasions, by delays of the printers, I am promised, however, that it shall come abroad before

August; about which time, if all is well, and the Lord favors my design, I have thoughts of visiting Southampton. This morning Mr. Cleaver called on me, to inform me that a minister or preacher in the Dissenting line is wanted, at or near Newport, in Essex, where he lives. He says that about £90 per annum is already subscribed by seven people, and more will probably be added, if they can meet a man of sound doctrine and sound life. He was advised to apply to me, that I might apply to you. I told him that I knew you had several olive plants in your nursery, which I hoped would prove fruitful. But whether any of them were fit for transplanting, or whether they would choose to grow in the Newport soil, I knew not; any more than what the soil of Newport is: but that I would mention it in a letter I had began to you. I have now fulfilled my promise.

Through mercy, I and my dear family are still preserved in health and peace; and I hope it is tolerably well with my family, or rather the Lord's, in Lombardstreet. I trust he sometimes visits us. I love my friends. I hope I love more than my known friends. But my chief willingness to live another day in such a world as this, is upon the account of these two families. I have now no other strong tie to this life. My presence is not so needful to any other friends (whom I hope one day to meet in a better place) as to these. My times are in the Lord's hands. This is a comfortable thought. He appointed the time and manner of my coming into the world — and he likewise appointed the time and manner of my leaving it. What I have known of his wisdom and goodness as to the former, warrants and requires me to commend the latter also to him. And I may be thankful that there is no need for wasting my time, by any cares or contrivances of my own. Yet when I began to write my sermons upon the "Messiah," I could not help feeling and expressing a desire that I might live to finish them. This desire, the Lord has granted. I felt and prayed to the like purpose while I was preparing, "The Letters to a Wife." I have been divinely indulged a second time. I hope I shall not always go on framing excuses for wishing to stay here. May the Lord make me always willing to stay my appointed time. But I long to feel a prevailing and abiding desire to depart and be with him, which is far better!

We return joint love to you and Mrs. Bull, and to Tommy, who, I think, is now big enough to be Mr. Thomas; or, Rev. Thomas is in my mouth. However, go by what name he may, I pray the Lord to bless him, and to make him a comfort and a blessing to you and to many.

I trust you will likewise continue to pray for us. This mutual prayer is one valuable branch of the communion of the saints. This clause, as it stands in our creed, is repeated daily by many who know no more of the meaning of it, than a goose does of algebra. Nor should we have been wiser than they, if the Lord had not condescended to be our teacher. May all the praise be ascribed to him, by you and by your very affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

23 April, 1793. My dear Friend

I thank you for your kind letter, which I accept as a full compensation for any or all the censures I may meet from snarling critics. I cannot expect that any publication will be approved by those who have not feelings to qualify them for understanding it. But yours is not the only encouragement I have received.

I thank you likewise for your punctual remembrance of my memorable day. It did not return unnoticed, nor unfelt by me. Though, in this respect, every day since she left me has been nearly

alike. Thoughts of her are constantly with me, as at first; but, through mercy, it gives me no pain. I am perfectly satisfied of the wisdom and goodness of the Lord in all his appointments, and particularly in that bereavement. I know that in very faithfulness, he has afflicted me. I hope it has been good for my soul. And perhaps, in some respects, my last three years have been the best and happiest of my life.

What I say to my people, is usually drawn more from my own experience, than from great books, (the great book of God alone excepted), and as the fifteenth of December fell this year on a Lord's-day, I preached from 1 Peter 1:24-25. It was something to the purpose of my former funeral sermon, from Habakkuk 3:17-18. How striking is the contrast between the transient state of grass and flowers, of fig trees and flocks — and the abiding word of the Lord! How much is contained in scripture particles! An although, a but, or a nevertheless — is often worth a world of help, in an hour of trouble. The longer I live, the more I pity those who, when deprived of their earthly comforts, can find no cheering resources in the sure Word of God. It is no wonder that so many defy the Lord, like Pharaoh, or that so many sink under their burden, and die of a broken heart. The natural outcome of heavy troubles — is wild rage, dark despair, or despondency — unless they are sanctified. But when the Lord employs them as a means of grace, though not joyous for the present — but grievous, they afterwards yield the fruit of righteousness and peace. My health and spirits are good, my needs well supplied, my friends kind, my powers for public service not yet sensibly impaired, my auditory at peace among themselves, affectionate to me, and I hope in the main, in a thriving state. The ordinances are, I trust, accompanied with an unction — and though I see and feel enough to abase me in the dust before the Lord — yet, through mercy, I have peace of conscience through the great Savior. What more do I desire? Blessed be God, I have not a wish — but for more of his presence and image, for grace to serve him while I can, and that I may be found ready to meet his will in future life, and at the prospect of death. Tonight I am neither weary of life — nor afraid to die. I cannot answer for tomorrow; in myself I am unstable as water, and changeable as a weathercock. But he permits me to live with him day by day, and to leave tomorrow to his care.

I hope January will bring you to town, and therefore I content myself with what, when writing to you, I deem a short letter. I am much engaged at present, and therefore I chiefly write to prevent you from thinking me negligent or ungrateful. Dear Miss Catlett is well, and joins me in love to Mrs. Bull, my reverend friend Tommy, and all in your house. May the presence of the Lord dwell in it, fill your heart, and crown your ministry with his blessing.

Let us work while it is day — for the night comes. Let us watch while it is night — for the morning is at hand, the day is about to dawn to which no night shall follow, and when our sun shall no more set. A few hills and dales more — and we shall be at home! There the wicked shall cease from troubling, and there the weary shall be at rest!

I am truly and always your affectionate friend and brother,

OMICRON.

10th Dec, 1793. My dear friend,

I believe I thanked you for your last kind letter — but I am not sure. I know I intended it. For fear of the worst, I write again.

It may be some time before my leg is quite well. But it is well enough for the present, as it does not interfere with necessary duty. I walked to church last Wednesday, and home again, and hope to do so again today. When the distance is greater, or the streets very dirty, I have a carriage in waiting.

If I wrote, I told you that my texts on the Fast-day, were Jonah 3:9 and Job 34:29. My forenoon sermon is gone to the press. On such occasions I choose to print not what I might have said — but what I did say, and therefore I wrote it from beginning to end. I held it up boldly, and read it in the face of the congregation. I afterwards transcribed it, that it might be printed from a fair copy. This business superadded to the necessities of life, engrossed my whole leisure until it was printed. My illness gained me little time, I had so many kind friends calling upon me from morning until night. But I remember when it was otherwise — when I had not one friend in the world to interrupt me, or to look upon me. Who has given me all these friends?

Though, perhaps, many infidels have been converted, and many profligates reclaimed by the power of grace — I have reason to think my case upon the whole, is a unique in the annals of the church, considering what I was and where I was — when the Lord interposed to save me from the misery into which I had plunged myself, and from the destruction which I courted; and what he has done for me, and how he has borne with me since. He has made me a wonder to many. Why am I not more a wonder to myself? That 71st Psalm, now I am old, I call my own. It seems written purposely for me.

I have seen great and sore troubles; I have been brought up as from the depths of the earth; and I am permitted to hope, that now I am old and gray-headed, that He will not forsake me. He justly might forsake me at last, if his justice were not on the side of his mercy by the gospel — for I have been vile and ungrateful through life. What I most value in this life — will forsake me. My senses and faculties will fail. My friends are successively dropping off like leaves from the trees in autumn. Ah, when I stand like a naked trunk upon a hill, exposed, defenseless, to every storm; if the Lord was to forsake me likewise, what could I do? But he will not. He cannot disappoint the hope which only himself could raise in my heart, Psalms 119:49. And, through mercy, poor as I am, it is the leading desire of my soul, while I remain here — in his strength to go forth, and make mention of his salvation and his righteousness from day to day.

Though I am comfortably accommodated on every side, and have not a single wish as to temporals, I see that to live in such a world as this, abstracted from a regard to his will and service — would be a dull and tasteless affair for me. I thank him that I seem willing to wait my appointed time; but it is a pleasure to think I am not to remain here always, nor very long. The when and the where — I desire to leave to him. My times are in his hands; and as he has graciously promised to care for me — I have no need to care for myself. But I must attend my church. I shall send you my Fast-Sermon, when published. My love to Mrs. Bull, the Rev. Thomas, and all your house. Miss Catlett, who is well, joins with me. May the Lord bless you all. Poor dear Mr. Cowper. Let us pray for him! and pray for Your affectionate and obliged,

John Newton 5th March, 1794. My dear friend, When I read your complaints of a cough and hoarseness, etc., I pitied you a little, for though I believe you may be poorly, you have accustomed me to think that you are, at least, no worse than you describe yourself to be. I hope when the Lord shall be pleased to send the frost quite away, you will find relief. This severe weather must be

trying to valetudinarians (editor’s note: a valetudinarian is one who is overly concerned about his health).

I sympathized with you in the death of your student. (Mr. Thomas James, an amiable and promising young man, cut off, Feb. 3rd, 1795, at the age of twenty, while pursuing his ministerial studies.) But now that the Lord has declared his will — by the event, I hope you will think it rather a subject for joy than sorrow, that your young plant is safely housed, where no storms or changes can affect him! But when I came to your son’s dangerous return from Bedford, and the many circumstances which concurred to heighten and lengthen your anxiety; I pitied you very much. A state of suspense in a point where the heart is much interested — is very painful. I know, by repeated experience, how busy imagination is at such a time in contriving and foreboding the worst that can happen! I joined with you in praising the Lord for his preservation. I, likewise, join in your prayers, that a life so spared — may be wholly devoted to the Lord, and prolonged for a blessing to many.

Though rubs and alarms of this kind are not joyous — but grievous for the time — yet afterwards sanctified reflection upon them may do us good. They quicken our attention to the hand and providence of God, and bring us to a closer dependance upon him. When the comfort we feared to lose, is returned to us again — we feel it doubly; and we are likewise reminded of the precarious tenure by which we hold all earthly things! Blessed be the name of our Lord, it is not so with our spiritual concerns. Our best blessings are in safe and sure hands. Neither frosts, nor floods, nor flames, nor heights, nor depths — can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Psalms 116:1-2, there is a process described, which, perhaps, has been verified to you and to me more than once. "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live."

Trouble excites prayer,

prayer brings deliverance,

deliverance produces praise,

and likewise teaches and encourages us where to go for help next time — yes, as long as we live.

We do not come to the Lord upon a mere perhaps whether he will hear us or not, for he has heard us often. Nor can we, nor need we say, that if he will help us but this one time — we will not trouble him again. We shall always need his assistance — and he is always ready to afford it. While we live in this poor world, trials of one kind or another will come in quick succession; but as he has delivered, and does deliver — we may humbly trust he will deliver to the end. His good promises, "My grace is sufficient for you," "As your day is — so shall your strength be," are as a plank sufficient to bear us up in safety, in the deepest water.

Mr, Jones, who succeeded you at Surrey, fell in the street on Wednesday, and broke his thigh. And yet I am still upheld, and go out and come home in safety

Farewell for the present. May the Lord be with you, and all yours. We join in love. I am your affectionate and obliged friend and brother,

John Newton 20th Feb., 1795. My dear friend, My ears have been failing for two or three years past — but lately a cold in my head almost wholly sealed them up! For about two weeks, I could not hear a syllable of what passed in company. But the Lord has been pleased to relieve me, and my hearing, though still dull, is tolerable — sufficient for all necessary purposes. So far as my deafness proceeds from increasing years — it would be foolish to expect amendment. May I hear the voice of the good Shepherd speaking to my heart; then I may well submit to an abatement of creature converse!

I may be thankful that I am not mute. He still permits me to make mention of his name with acceptance to my hearers, and I hope with some accompanying impression of his influence. He might justly take the word of his truth utterly out of my mouth, and might have done it long ago; but he is patient and gracious. I trust he knows that the chief thing for which a continuance in this poor world appears to me desirable — is that, while I can speak at all, I may speak of his glory and grace to my fellow sinners!

We are still comfortable at home. Dear Betsey is in good health; and my cold did not prevent me from preaching at Easter seven times in five successive days.

We are comfortable likewise at the church. Though I feel that my memory is decaying, often by the day — it does not yet fail me in the pulpit. Perhaps I never had more liberty and command of thought than at present; and I trust the Lord favors us with his presence.

It is a part of my daily habit to look back to my slavery in Africa, and to retrace the path by which the Lord has led me, for about forty-seven years, since He called me from infidelity and madness! My astonishing unsought deliverance from the hopeless wickedness and misery into which I had plunged myself, taken in connection with what He has done for me since — make me say, with peculiar emphasis, "Oh to grace how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be!" "By the grace of God — I am what I am!" 1 Corinthians 15:10

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,

I have already come;

’Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home! The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,

The sun forbear to shine;

But God, who called me here below,

Will be forever mine!

All in our house join in love to you, to Mrs. Bull, the Rev. Thomas, and all your family. May you and yours be as a garden watered by the Lord, always green and flourishing; and as a spring of water for communicating blessings to many.

I am your affectionate

OMICRON.

22nd April, 1795. My dear friend, Your two guineas are included here. I seem satisfied in my mind, that you paid them to me when you were last in town; and unless you are more certain that you did not, than I can pretend to be that you did — I cannot take them, lest I should cheat you by taking them twice! I cannot be quite positive — but I think if I had not received them, they would sometimes have occurred to my mind as unpaid. When this comes to hand, you may take it for granted that I have paid the money to your account. So much for gold and silver.

You wonder I do not mention my dear departed wife when I write. Indeed it would be a gratification to me to make her the top of a paragraph in every letter I write to my friends who knew her, or to talk of her to them by the hour. My feelings on this head are little less lively and abiding now than they were, when I had lived but a week after her. But I cannot command my sensibility, unless I was conscious that my thoughts of the Savior were at least equally constant and equally warm. He is the best friend, he was the greatest Sufferer. And that I am capable of thinking more of her than of Him — is certainly both an effect and a proof of my depravity. On the other hand, I cannot wish to forget her quite yet, because there is no other earthly object in my memory so well suited to excite gratitude to the Lord, and that humiliation of heart which becomes a chief sinner.

I find it difficult to draw the line between too much — and too little. Indeed, everything is difficult and impracticable to me if left to myself; but so far as the Lord is pleased to strengthen me, I can do and bear all things that occur in the path of duty.

However, it is still a truth, that, whether I show it or not, at all times and in all places (except now and then in the pulpit) — I miss my right hand. The Lord made me willing to part with it. I feel not the remotest wish to have it (if possible) again — but I still miss it. The idea of my dearest wife is seldom absent from my mind for five successive minutes. The time is short. I hope to meet her again to unspeakable advantage, and I am perfectly satisfied. I am rather pleased than otherwise — that she is gone before me. For, as the aspect of the times is stormy, and I know not what the Lord may do with us, I find comfort in thinking that she is safely arrived in the haven of rest. As dear Mrs. Thornton observed to me upon the death of my dear Eliza, "I have now one care less upon earth — and one more treasure in heaven." As to my own continuance or removal from this poor earth, I have nothing to do with it. Through mercy, I have no more desire — than I have right to choose. I shall live — while infinite wisdom and goodness see fit; and when He appoints — I shall depart. I hope both you and I are, in a measure, useful in our places — but, certainly, neither of us are necessary. If I had never been born, or if I had perished in my sins — God would not have lacked instruments to carry on his work. I know that dying times require dying strength; and I rely on his promise for it when needed. At present, while I am in health, the when, the how, and the where and the when of my death — does not cost me a moment’s anxiety! Only may he enable me to be faithful while I live — and waiting and ready for my summons. I hope to die like the thief upon the cross. I have no hope, no comfort in myself! But he remembered me in my low estate, and I

trust will remember me to the end.

I chiefly admire in Riccaltoun, his Essays on the Human Constitution, and his Commentary on Galatians 1:1-24. Indeed, I admire him throughout, as the most original thinker and writer that I have met with. Some of his sentiments are rather singular and new; but when I suspend my full assent, I am not able to refute his arguments. The account of him which I published in the magazine is likely to be useful to his son, who is a man of good character, with a large family, and much encumbered by engagements he entered into in behalf of his father. A friend, not far from St. Paul's, sent me £10 for him, and the Edinburgh ministers are talking of a subscription for him. My correspondent says, they wonder that a minister of the church of England should be his first advocate, and that they appreciate it.

Next to the hope of perfect happiness hereafter, the chief mercy in this life, seems to be honored with some usefulness here. With love to Mrs. Bull, Thomas, and your nieces, from myself and Miss Catlett, and my prayers for your peace and comfort in all things, I remain your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

2nd May. My dear friend, A pig came to our house on Monday; and, though he neither brought an introductory letter, nor could tell us who sent him — we, being something in the habit of receiving strangers, bid him welcome. In return, he entertained us. Mr. Bacon and Mrs. Gardener were very agreeably at dinner. I can only thank you now for both pig and letter.

Though your spirits are weak, I am glad to find that your faith and resignation are strong. Yes, all will be well in the end; and all is well along the way, if we can but think so, and be satisfied that the infinite wisdom and love, to which we have committed ourselves, upon the warrant of his faithful promise, will assuredly take care of us, and lead us in the right path. We are not to expect that the Lord will miraculously interpose to change our constitutions, or to overrule the connections he has established between causes and effects; nor is it needful. If he is pleased to give strength according to the day, and to support us under our appointed trials — it is upon the whole, better for us than if we were quite exempted from them, for

"Trials make the promise sweet,

Trials give new life to prayer,

Trials lay us at his feet,

Lay us low and keep us there!"

I thank you for promising to remember me on my anniversary. My wife is still continually present to my mind, as at the first. Yet I hope I may say, to the praise of the Lord's goodness, the wound is healed. The remembrance of the event is not painful. And if sometimes a sigh escapes me, it proceeds from a certain tender feeling, which I am unable to describe — but I cannot call it sorrow. I rather account the last five years since her death, taking all things together — the happiest part of my life. The comforts arising from our union and affection, I still think were more valuable than any of the world's poor playthings. Yet I paid dearly for them in anxieties and inquietudes from which a single day was seldom free. And, too, too often the gift hid the Giver from my eyes! By her removal

I was relieved at once from a thousand cares and snares which had beset and followed me through life. I am thankful that she was spared to me so long; for, though I have often thought that, if she had left me twenty or thirty years sooner, I would not have entered into a new connection, I might have thought otherwise if put to the trial; but, at the age of sixty-five, a second marriage would have been ridiculous, though my regard for her and her memory had been much less than it was. And though the loss could not be made up in kind, it is as well repaid as the nature of the case will admit. No widower can be more happy in domestic life, than I am. Such is the attention and kindness of my dear child and my affectionate servants, that nothing occurs at home to ruffle my thoughts the year round. My needs are all supplied. I am surrounded with friends. My ministry is comfortable to myself, acceptable, and I hope useful, to my hearers: in a word, I can think of nothing which I have not — worth wishing for, if a wish could bring it. Surely, the Lord has dealt wonderfully and bountifully with me! My health, likewise, is so remarkably confirmed, that I scarcely know — but by the date of the year, that I grow older. I feel no inconvenience from the changes of wind or weather; and though I have taken no journey into the country this year, I am as well as usual. The air of Coleman-street agrees as well with me as the air of Hampshire. Thus my health continues; but it will not, it cannot be so always, nor, perhaps, long. But this is no concern of mine. My times are in His hands — who has led me, and done me good thus far; and he helps me to trust the rest to him. I have only to pray, that while I do live — I may live to him; and that when he shall call me hence — I may be found waiting and willing, and that in the mean time, he may preserve me from staining the decline of my life, by any gross impropriety or folly. I still feel evil enough within me, to convince me that, unless he holds me up — I cannot be safe — no, not for an hour. My dear Betsey joins me in love to you and yours. She likewise has been favored with health until lately. I hope she is mending, though slowly; she has been confined to the house seven weeks, cannot yet go to church, which I believe is a chief part of her trial, for the Lord has taught her to love to be where his people are met in his name. I trust her illness will be sanctified, and in his best time removed.

We hope one day soon, to be done with sin, sorrow, and pain, and to join with those who are singing before the throne the praises of Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. When we meet there, we shall part no more. Give our love to Mrs. Bull, the Reverend Thomas, and all friends, particularly to Mr. and Mrs. Greatheed. May grace, mercy, and peace be with you, and your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

15 Dec. 1795. My dear friend,

I may say, as Isaac, "I am old, and know not the time of my death!" Nor am I anxious to know it. My judgment accords with what you say of the grave; but I believe you can contemplate the subject with more sensible pleasure than I do. To me, at present, the passage seems dark; yet I am not startled, because I humbly hope that the Lord will be with me there, and then I am sure it will be broad light all around me. His people generally find it so, if their last illness leaves them in possession of their senses, and declare it to be so, if they can speak.

While the frail tabernacle is being taken down, a light of a different kind from what they experienced in health, seems to break in: they see invisibles, and hear unutterables, and breathe the air of the heavenly state, before they leave the body. What is death to a believer? Not that

spectre and skeleton which a terrified imagination represents it. To a believer, death is a messenger to open the gate into eternal life! Or rather, it is the hour when the Savior, who is now preparing a place for his people, will come, according to his promise, to receive them to blessed himself!

Through mercy, I do not feel myself afraid or unwilling to die. But the prospect of death is at some distance; and I believe — were death actually to stare me in the face this minute, I would tremble! Death is a great, unknown, untried transition. I often attempt to realize the moment after death; but my thoughts are overwhelmed. I can form no conception how I shall be, and what I shall meet — when I cease to breathe, and while those around my bed, if I die in a bed, are saying, "He is gone!" But though I am at a loss for particulars, I have a book which informs me of as much as is needful to know: that those who die in the Lord are gloriously blessed; that they shall be like him, and with him, forever; that all tears shall be wiped from their eyes, and they shall weep no more, for sin and sorrow shall not be able to follow them. I thank the Lord for this precious book, and for enabling me to believe what I read in it. Otherwise, how miserable must I be now, flesh and heart are upon the point of failing! But I have not much time to run on. I wish you much of that holy unction, that oil of joy, which is the best cordial for low spirits, and wonderfully strengthens weak nerves.

Betsey's illness is not removed — but it is so far relieved, that she was twice at church yesterday, after more than eight weeks of confinement to the house. This is a chequered life — but the suspension of our common comforts is designed to make us more sensible of their value, and more thankful for them when restored. For unless we meet with some interruptions, we are too apt to look upon them as matters of course. The Lord bless you all — father, mother, son, nieces, tutors, and students, servants, and all. May your house be a church, and your heart a well-watered garden for yourself, and a spring of living water for your people. Amen.

I am always your affectionate and obliged,

John Newton My dear Brother Bull,

I am a little balked that the time of your coming to town and my leaving it so nearly coincided, that I could but just see you. But as I know the ways of man are not in himself, and believe both your movements and mine are under a wise and gracious guidance — I hope it was all right. A baulk has done me good before now. If we live until the Christmas vacation, I hope to be made amends.

We spent ten weeks pleasantly abroad, and returned safely, and found all well at home, the 14th of September. We go on now in our old track; we had a nice time at Reading. I believe Mr. Eyre accepted the living of St. Giles' the very day I went there, and he was expected almost every day while I stayed — but did not come until I had left it. The people were hungry, the Lord made me able and willing. The time was short, so we made the most of it. I never preached so often in an equal space; five times in the church; twice in Mr. Young's school; every morning at Mr. Rings, and every evening in a large room of one or other of our friends. I call it all preaching, for the rooms were crowded, and I spoke nearly as long and as loud, as if I had been in a church. I trust the Lord was with us, and I trust he will be with them. I have found good individuals in many places. But perhaps I have no where met with a body of professors so compact and united, so lively and yet so solid, judicious, and free from wild fire, as the bereaved people at Reading. The two dissenting ministers likewise, Mr. Douglas, and Mr. Holloway, are such as I have seldom seen. They were

generally present with their wives at all our meetings, when not engaged themselves. I stayed with them a two weeks, and left them with regret.

Mr. Gunn fully supplied my place at St. Mary's; he is a nice curate. He pleases the people, and he pleases me. Though very popular, he is very humble, and remarkably punctual and attentive. The Lord has granted my desire. Expecting to be laid aside soon, or at least thinking it very probable at my time of life — I have long wished and prayed for an assistant who might keep the people together and in peace, while the pulpit remains mine. I thought myself suited first with Buchanan — but he soon went to India. Then Benamor seemed just the thing — but in one month he was translated to nobler employment in a better world; but now I hope Mr. Gunn will answer my wishes. And though he seems more troublesome than any of us to the clergy in general, the Lord Bishop of London licensed him to my curacy without the slightest hesitation.

Indeed, I have reason to hope that the Lord favors us with his presence and blessing at St. Mary's. The church is often nearly full on a Wednesday, quite crowded on the Lord's-day, and we have a large and increasing number of inquiring young people. While we go on thus, though I have seen enough of the world for myself, and know that while I remain here I must groan under a body of sin — I have great cause to be thankful that my life and health are prolonged. We may be glad to work while it is day, for the night comes. And I apprehend eternity itself, will not afford such an opportunity of preaching and exemplifying the gospel of the grace of God, to the glory of his name and the salvation of souls — as we are favored with here. Every added day of life, if is improved — is of great value, and an over-balance for all the trials we meet with in our earthly pilgrimage.

I told you I had a young man in view to send to Cambridge, and that I meant to send him to you for a time. His name is Morris; he was with us the last time you drank tea with us. And from what he then saw and heard, he longs to be with you. I hope you will be able to receive him on your foundation. At any rate, he must be in your house. I have no doubt of your liking him when he comes. I cannot see into the heart; but so far as I can judge from repeated conversations, I have no doubt of his being truly serious and gracious. He seems likewise to have strong natural abilities, and I believe would make a tolerable preacher at present.

Admiral Duncan and his brave tars have much praise for the late victory; and the gratitude of the nation at large is shown by celebrations, gluttony, drunkenness, and singing "Rule Britannia." Had the Dutch fleet been permitted to reach Brest, I think it probable that an invasion would have been attempted. I hope some people give the praise to the Lord Almighty, who disappoints the designs of our enemies, and does not yet take vengeance of such a nation as this. He has a remnant among us, and therefore He still seems to say, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.

Company comes in one upon another: I can only add my love and dear Betsey's to you, Mrs. Bull, and my brother Thomas; and my prayers that the Lord bless tutor, students, family, church, and congregation, in body soul, and spirit. Pray for us.

I am your very affectionate friend, brother, and much obliged and obsequious servant,

John Newton 28th Oct., 1797. My dear Friend And Brother,

I am sensible that you have many infirmities: so it has been ever since I knew you — yet you are still alive, and I think still likely to live a good while. It seems probable that I shall die before you —

but that will be as the Lord shall appoint. May it be our care and prayer — to live to him while we do live, and leave the rest to him who does all things well.

I am certainly favored with a measure of health and strength, which is not common at my years. I never could preach with more ease and liberty than at present — yet I feel I grow older; the shadows of the evening are advancing upon me. I willingly leave the how and the when and the where of my death, to the Lord. I would only pray (and I hope you will pray for me) that when the summons shall arrive, it shall find me ready, willing, and waiting.

Yesterday and today I have not been quite well. I thank the Lord I am better again. When he sees it needful — he gives us some intimations of our frail state. Mine, indeed, have been few and slight. My judgment is satisfied, that when the Lord shall call me home — it will be unspeakably better to depart and be with Jesus. I have no painful doubts about the event. Surely I know whom I have believed. Surely I have committed my soul, my all, to him. I do it daily and hourly. And I am sure that the good word on which he has caused me to hope — shall stand firm when the frame of nature shall be dissolved. And yet, somehow, clouds and veils hang over the prospect. When I think of the moment after death, my mind is startled at the change that will take place, so new, so inconceivable. But the Lord has said, As your day is — so shall your strength be, I humbly hope, therefore, I shall find a dying strength reserved for a dying hour.

He bids me cast this last care, as well as all my other cares, upon him, and he promises to care for me; therefore, I would say, Welcome, life, with all its trials! Welcome, death, with all its apparent gloom! May the Lord support you under all your infirmities. In this uncertain state, we know not whether we shall meet upon earth; but I trust we shall soon meet where sin, sorrow, pain, and care, shall never intrude. Oh for the ear of faith, to listen to the songs of the harpers! As loud as from numbers without number — sweet as from blessed voices! My dear Miss Catlett joins in love and best wishes to you, Mrs. Bull, and Thomas; and always I am your very affectionate

John Newton

8th Nov., 1797. My dear Sir and Brother,

All is well, and I ask your pardon; I ought to have been more explicit. Is is true that I have liberty to appropriate a part of Mrs. Ekin’s money to prepare a young man for the college, as well as to support him there. And I am ready to do so; only, as you desired me to procure a foundation student, if I could, I thought I might as well propose one of my own as a stranger, and the saving might enable me to send one more to the university. It will be time enough to talk of the foundation when there is a vacancy; nor shall I then wish for it, if it interferes with your intentions in favor of another. But if there should be a vacancy, and while you have no one in prospect whom you prefer, I shall be thankful for the help.

Mr. Morris had left London before your first letter came, and has not yet returned. I believe him to be a valuable and promising young man — but I have only seen him a few times at breakfast. You will be a better judge than I when you have him under your roof. If he behaves well, you will encourage him now and then by a smile, or a kind word, by mentioning him as my friend. I do not mean to ask anything extraordinary out of the common line for him — but only such little notices and attentions, as, though they cost nothing, are much prized by a generous and feeling spirit.

I thank the Lord I am as well as an old man can be. I think and I hope that the Lord bears testimony to the word of his grace at St. Mary's more than ever, which makes health doubly valuable. May he make me willing to resign it at a moment's warning; and to sit quiet in my chair or my bed, and rejoice that his work is prospering without me, and that others are serving him better when I can serve him no longer! A sentence in Dr. Cotton Mather's life struck me more than fifty years ago, and has been often upon my mind from that time — "My usefulness was the last idol I was willing to part with — but now I can part with that, and am content to be laid aside and forgotten, so that he may be glorified."

God would not have lacked instruments — though I had left my bones in Africa, or had been food for the sharks! Oh for grace to retire at his bidding, like a thankful guest from a full table! I have had a long and highly favored day. But the night is surely coming; pray for me, that my decline of life may not be stained with foolishness, impatience, jealousy, or anything that might disparage my profession or ministry. The dark prospect of the times affects me much, as it does you. And, like you, I have often questioned — how shall I behave if such and such things should take place? This seemingly humble diffidence, I am afraid, implies a supposition that I can do pretty well at present, and while things remain no worse than they are. Whereas, I am satisfied in my better judgment, that the Almighty power which sustains the stars in their orbits — is equally necessary to carry me with safety, honor, and comfort through the smoothest day of my life. Let it suffice that he knows where we are, and what we are — and can increase our strength according to our days, to any assignable degree. We do not need shoes of iron and brass — while we walk upon a soft carpet; but should the road become very rough and thorny, these shoes are always at hand — and if we ask for them, we shall have them. Faithful is He that has promised, who also will do it.

Wednesday brought news of the death of my brother at Leith. Our branch of the noble family of Newtons will soon be extinct, for I am the only survivor. He was a sober, moral man, an excellent sea officer, and much respected and approved in his post. He was friendly to the gospel, and constantly attended it. I do not know how far he was wrought upon by it; but his deportment upon his dying bed gives us hope that the Lord prepared him for the change, though he said but little. His widow is a gracious woman, and I doubt not but He who ever lives — will still be a husband to her. This is one attendant of old age — to see our friends and relatives drop off before us, like leaves from the trees in autumn, until we are left naked trunks. But Jesus lives. With more love from us to Mrs. Bull and Thomas, and our best wishes and prayers for you all, I still remain and hope always to be, Yours affectionately,

John Newton

11th Nov. 1797. My dear friend,

Though I have but little time for writing, I must thank you for your letter. I am very glad Mr. Morris pleases you. I had no doubt but you would think him a promising plant. He informed me himself of the advice you gave him. I am in hopes that my letter will confirm both, and make him willing to do nothing in the preaching way, without your express direction. I think you might exert your authority in this case, were it needful, without any fear of grieving the Holy Spirit; but I trust a little persuasion will suffice. He must not be a village preacher, if he means to go to Cambridge.

I preached yesterday from Hosea 11:8-9. The church was very full, and I hope we had the Lord's presence. In the morning, my apprehensions how the day might close, were rather dark; as I know there is much discontent abroad, and many people busy in fomenting it, and making bad worse. I was afraid lest such a concourse of people might lead to some riotous proceedings; but through the goodness of Him who rules the winds and the seas, all went off very smoothly. I hope the Lord smiled upon the design.

I would relieve all your complaints, if I could. The Lord, who loves you much better than I do, easily could — but he does not; accordingly, he sees it best for you to have them. Infirmities must ordinarily increase with increasing years. I seem, at present, to be an exception to the general rule; but my time cannot be very distant. Oh, to be able to say, from the heart, in the hour of trial, "How weak this prison where I dwell, How frail this tottering wall, The breaches cheerfully foretell. The house must shortly fall!" The Lord, who can exempt us from troubles, can do much more; he can support and can comfort us under them. He could have prevented the three young Hebrews from being cast into the furnace, or kept Daniel out of the den; but his power and faithfulness were more signally displayed by suppressing the effect of the flames, and by shutting the mouths of the lions. Is he not all-sufficient? Has he not promised us strength according to our day? Let us boldly venture upon his word, which cannot fail.

John Newton

20th Dec. 1797. My dear friend,

I am sorry that you are weak and poorly; but knowing that you often touch the mournful string, I am willing to hope you are a little better than you think yourself.

If we take the report of sense — the times are dark indeed. But what says faith? What would become of us if the Scriptures were not true? And if they are true, there must be such dark times, because they are foretold, and not one jot or tittle can fail. Perhaps dark times are the brightest; for they are usually seasons when the Lord's people are stirred up, and when many who would not hear him in prosperity, are glad to seek him. I think the gospel is spreading among us, and I hope the prayers of the true remnant will so far prevail, that our enemies will not be permitted to swallow us up. They are at war not with us only — but with our God. He is taking his own wise measures, to plead his own cause, which ought to be the dearest concern of our hearts: surely we cannot wish him to lose it? Yes, the times are dark; for though his hand is lifted up, they will not see it. Dissipation and folly are as rampant — as if the nation were in perfect peace and security. Can we assign any reason why such a nation as this, which has abused greater light and privilege than any in Europe, should be exempted from the general shaking? Do not think that my faith is very strong. While I smoke my pipe peaceably, I can talk or write, according to what I read in the Bible; but were the French actually permitted to come, if I was left to myself, perhaps I might flee into the woods, or creep into a cupboard. However, I am aiming to rely upon Him, who has said, "As your day is — so shall your strength be." The Lord is faithful, and if this promise is fulfilled, we shall do very well. Why should not we take joyfully the confiscation of our goods, and count it an honor to lay down our lives for his sake if called to it, as others have done before us? They were no better in themselves than we, nor had they a better gospel than ours. Is not He who supported them — able to support us also? Their feet were as tender as ours; but when the way was very rough, he gave them shoes of iron and brass; and I trust there are more such shoes upon the shelf for our

use likewise, if we should need them.

I cannot be poorer than I was when the Lord brought me from African Egypt, from being a slave of slaves. Nor can I be in more apparent danger than I have often been at sea in a storm; even the French are not more irresistible or more inexorable than the raging billows in a tempest. The Lord has delivered me from the paw of many a lion, and of many a bear; why then should I be afraid of this atheistic Philistine, who has defied not only the armies of the living God — but the living God himself?

Indeed, I trust they will not be allowed to execute all their malicious rage and threatenings against us. But they will probably alarm us. And then, like Israel at the Red Sea, we shall cry to the Lord, and I hope like them we shall be heard and preserved. He could have easily prevented Pharaoh and his army from following them; but, had he done so, Israel would not have known that glorious display of his power and goodness on their behalf in dividing the waters and drowning their enemies.

All these things shall eventually promote the glory of his name, the good of his church, and the spread of the gospel. The French, like the Jews when they crucified the Messiah, will only execute what God has already appointed to be done. I wish to watch, and pray, and mourn for the abounding of sin, and the abounding woes with which sin has filled the world. Nor would I forget my own sins, which contribute to fill the national cup; for the rest, I know that He does and will do all things well. And when you and I shall meet on one of the green and flowery mounts, which Dr. Watts speaks of — we shall see it more clearly. Until then may His peace rule in our hearts. Give our joint love to Mrs. Bull, brother Thomas, Mr. Morris, and to all your family. Pray for us. We shall be glad to see you in London. May the Lord be a sun and a shield to you and to us.

I am yours very affectionately and obliged,

John Newton 26th April, 1798. My dear Old friend,

Though the flame of our affection is not much supported by the fuel of frequent letters and converse, I trust it still burns brightly, for it is fed from a secret, invisible, and inexhaustible source. If two needles are properly touched by a magnet, they will retain their sympathy for a long time. But if two hearts are truly united to the Heavenly Magnet, their mutual attraction will be permanent in time and to eternity, Blessed be the Lord for a good hope — that it is thus between you and me. I could not love you better if I saw you or heard from you every day.

Dear Miss Catlett, and I, and all the dear family we are with, consisting of about twenty people, are well. We lie down and rise up, go out and come in, in peace and safety. What a wonderful mercy, in such a world as this, when so many are suffering and falling around us, and we, though upon the same field of battle, remain unhurt! The calendar tells me that if I live until next Monday, I shall enter my seventy-sixth year. I believe you will pray for me on that day. My eyes, ears, and legs likewise admonish me that I grow older. My writing days seem almost over, as I cannot see well to write; but I make an effort to send you one letter more, which may probably be the last you will receive.

I have requested your prayers; shall I tell you what to ask for? You need not pray for my sudden death, for I have as little reason as most people to be weary of life, and, through mercy, I feel at

present quite willing to live my appointed time. Nor need you pray for my long continuance here, for I see little except my profession and ministry worth living for another day. But pray that I may be enabled to leave the time and manner of my death entirely in the Lord's hand. That if he sees fit to summon me suddenly, I may be willing to go without delay; and that if he is pleased to lay me aside, I may be as willing to retire and wait his time.

Pray likewise for me, that no gross imprudence or misconduct may stain the latter part of my life — but that I may be enabled to exemplify in myself what I have labored to inculcate upon others from the pulpit. I have observed in some good men and good ministers, improprieties in their latter days, which I have been willing to ascribe rather to the infirmities of old age, than to a defect in real grace. I pray daily to be preserved from these, and I request your assistance. I have known good men, in advanced life, to be garrulous, peevish, dogmatic, self-important, with some symptoms of jealousy, and perhaps envy, toward those who are upon the increase — while they feel themselves decreasing. Do, my friend, pray earnestly that it may not be so with me — but that I may retire, if laid aside, like a thankful guest from a plentiful table, and may rejoice to see others coming forward to serve the Lord, (I hope better and more successfully,) when I can serve him no longer. May I never forget that the Lord brought me from Africa, where I was the slave — the scorn, and the pity of black slaves — what he has done for me since, and what a long and highly favored day I have had since he was pleased to put me into the ministry. Such likewise shall be my desire and prayer for you, if you should be spared to old age; for as yet I consider you rather as a youngish man.

I know, what as yet you know not, that the loss of a good wife, after a connection of many endeared years, can only be made up by the Lord himself. But when he removed mine, he left one in Miss Catlett, the best substitute the nature of the case would admit. Her tenderness and attention make my heart shrink sometimes, when I think what a trial she will have if it should be her lot to close my eyes. Do join me in prayer for her, that He to whom all things are easy, may give her strength according to her day.

Give our love to Mrs. Bull, brother Thomas, and all who are dear to you. Love to Miss Neale, Mrs. Tipgin, and more than I can name, who come often to visit. I shall expect to hear from you likewise. The Lord bless you and yours, in body, soul, and spirit. Amen.

I am your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

Aug. 1st, 1800. My dear friend, My head, hands, and heart have been so full, that I could not write when I wished. I can answer your kind inquiries about my dear Eliza in few words. Her present state is very similar to dear Mr. Cowper's during the first two or three years of his illness. She is in a deep melancholy, and her distress is probably aggravated by the dreadful suggestions of that enemy who, when he is permitted, is always ready to worry those whom he may not destroy. In all that concerns herself she is quite deranged; but I thank the Lord she is mild and quiet, and can pay some attention to what passes around her. She expects to die every hour, though her bodily health is not amiss; and she thinks that the moment after death will sink her into the pit without hope, for that all her religious profession was but hypocrisy, and that now the Lord had detected her, and cast her off forever. Do you ask how I feel for her and myself? Through mercy, I can say, Though

cast down, not destroyed. My trial is great — but the all-sufficient Lord is my support. I am sure this affliction did not spring out of the ground. I trust the outcome will be to his glory and our good. I am enabled to preach as usual, and when thus employed, I am helped in a good measure to leave my own personal cares behind me for the time, though they often return with weight when the service is ended.

How often have I made a surrender of myself and my all to the Lord? How often have I aimed to say, I hope with sincerity: Lord, when, and where, and what you will! He is now pleased to take me at my word. I have told many that the post of trial, if supported in a right spirit, as befits a sinner and a believer, is a post of honor. This honor is now assigned to me. May his grace be sufficient for me! May he give me strength according to my day! I humbly hope he will; and then the hard — will be easy, and the bitter bud — will produce a sweet flower. He has designs by this dispensation, which, though beyond my reach, I am sure must be worthy of his wisdom and love. I am a short-sighted creature; I cannot tell what worse things this trial may prevent, or what blessings it may produce. My chief desire for myself is, that He may preserve me from dishonoring my profession by despondence, impatience, or any wrong tempers.

I scarcely know a person of her years, who has given more satisfactory, uniform, and abiding proofs of a real state of grace, than my dear child. Her walk has long been not only unblamably — but highly exemplary. About a month before this awful gloom overwhelmed her, though she was then very disconsolate, the Lord was pleased suddenly to break in upon her mind with such power, light, and love, as she said she had never before experienced, nor ever expected. Then her apprehensions of dying were overborne, and she was heartily willing, had such been the Lord's pleasure, to have gone home. Though short, it was a precious view. It lasted but about a quarter of an hour. Now, she says it was a delusion. But it was a cordial to me, as showing me how easily and quickly the Lord can say to the troubled mind, 'Peace, be still!' For His time, which must be the best time, I am now to wait. You and yours, I know, will pray that I may be enabled to wait with faith, hope, patience, and resignation. I trust all will be well at last, and if so, all must be well now.

I believe either you or my good friend, Mr. Thomas, have seen dear Mr. Ring's cottage. It is a delightful spot. There my dear Eliza is under the care of faithful Dr. Crabb. There she has every advantage that fine air, extensive prospects, convenient walks, and the best medical advice can afford; and there she must be for a season, until we see more of the Lord's will. She is in safe hands.

I could write on, (though my eyes are very weak;) but Mr. Ring wants to write on the other side. A letter from you now would be great charity. Collect all the prayers for us that you can; and may the Lord bless you and yours, in your heart, house, ministry, and make you a blessing to many. My warm love to you all.

I am your affectionate and obliged

John Newton

20th May, 1801. My dear friend, At length I have the pleasure of a letter from you to answer. My poor weak eyes will try to thank you for it — but they cannot allow me to write much at one sitting.

I have paid three visits to my dearest Eliza. The first was an interesting interview indeed. But I trust the Lord was with us. We behaved pretty well. We were mutually afraid of overdoing each other. This suppressed, in a measure, many emotions on both sides, for I had not seen her for about eight months. The second and third time we were calm. Her derangement still continues — but my great trial is alleviated by many mercies. The horrors which once overwhelmed her mind are removed. She long thought that the Lord had detected and would punish her as a hypocrite, and that death, which she hourly expected, would sink her down to be a companion with Judas.

But, now, through mercy, when her mind is diverted from her own case, she is, in all other respects, as composed and correct as at any former time. She and her three friends are always together, and she attends the sick and distressed like a nurse; her benevolent feelings are all revived, and she goes about doing good according to her power, as she did before the storm came upon her. On the Lord's day evening, she is usually a sort of chaplain to those (of her ward) who will attend, and I suppose has sometimes a dozen hearers. To them she reads a chapter, and often throws in a word of her own by way of explanation. She then reads a sermon, and gives out a hymn. I hope the Lord has sent her for the good of others. She has, in some cases, been very useful, as I shall tell you, if I live to see you, when you come to town. She is respected, beloved, and kindly treated by all in the house, and many of the rules of the place are dispensed with as much as possible in her favor.

Yet my trial is great. But I know it did not spring out of the ground. I believe not a sparrow, or even a hair from our heads, can fall without His notice. I believe that no creature can give us either pleasure or pain — but as instruments of his will; and that those who fear and love him, will, sooner or later, number their sharpest trials among their chief mercies. And, as I am well satisfied that her soul is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord, and as I believe, though a chief sinner, I am, I trust, pardoned and accepted in the beloved — I aim to resign her and myself into his hands, and to hope that all will work for his glory and our final benefit. He has made me in a degree willing — but I find the flesh is weak. But this he knows likewise. He knows what I feel, and, through mercy, I am supported, though not by sensible comforts, or lively frames. But I am enabled to trust in his written Word.

It is some addition to my trial, that I cannot fill up my time with writing and reading as formerly. But he knows this also; and should I be quite blind, I ought to be thankful that I had the use of them seventy-six years, and not to complain that they failed at last. Lord, I and all I have is yours. You can take nothing away — but what you first gave. My memory, likewise, is so faint, that I often forget what I said or did two hours before. Yet it seldom fails me when in the pulpit, or when expounding in the houses of my friends. Perhaps I never preached longer, louder, or more frequently than at present. Perhaps I was never heard with more attention or acceptance. (Phillip, 1:29.) If he enables me to suffer as a Christian, this post of trial may be a post of honor, and may encourage others in their affliction to trust in him when they see his faithfulness and goodness in my case. He does, he will do, all things well. May I say from my heart, Not my will — but your be done.

Mr. Raban's death seems to have been very sudden. I should like to hear more about it. I have written to his widow. May we be always ready.

Love to Mrs. Bull, to brother Thomas, to your students, and to all who love the Savior. My eyes have let me run on longer than I expected. Perhaps because I am writing to you. I am, indeed. Your very affectionate and obliged,

John Newton

4th June, 1802. My dear friend,

If my eyes will give me permission, I must thank you, however briefly, for your very kind letter of the third. As my anniversary was on a Wednesday, I preached about Mr. Self, from the case of the demoniac in Mark 5:1-43, which so nearly resembled my own, and particularly from verses 18, 19.

I am now two days into my seventy-eighth year. My health and strength are remarkable for my age; but I feel some symptoms of declining years. The day of opportunity wears away, and the night is approaching when no man can work. But while the Lord enables me to preach, and the people are attentive and willing to hear me in my poor broken way — I ought to be willing to live to the age of Methuselah, if I might but promote his glory, and be any way useful to my hearers. I am bought with a price; consequently, I am not my own. I wish to say from my heart, Lord, grant that the short uncertain remnant of my time may not discredit my profession, by pride or any evil tempers; and that when the summons shall come, it shall find me ready and waiting to go. To this purpose I have been permitted and encouraged to pray for many years past, and our God is a hearer of prayer. My dear child joins with me in love to you and yours, and in thanks for your kind prayers and wishes on our joint behalf. I have much to be thankful for on her account. The Lord has done great things for us, and I am waiting and praying for complete relief. But, however he may dispose of us while here, I am sure that he does all things well, and that his choice for us will be eventually better than anything we can choose for ourselves. If there is any alteration since you saw her, I think it is for the better, and I am not without hope that a full deliverance is gradually approaching; but I trust we are both under the direction of infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, and there I would leave it, and say, (Oh that I may say it from my heart!) Not my will — but may yours be done!

Now my eyes bid me hasten to a close. The Lord bless you, in your person, family, and ministry, and return you sevenfold into your own bosom, all that you have desired and prayed for us. Love to Mrs. Bull. Brother Thomas Bull made us a kind and very acceptable visit yesterday, an hour and a half long.

I am your very affectionate,

John Newton 5th August, 1802.

(Editor’s note: Miss Catlett, after this, returned home, gradually recovered, and was, some time previous to Mr. Newton’s death, married to Mr. Smith.) My very dear Bull,

You will not expect me to write much; but I must tell you that I have seen your letter to Mrs. Neale. It awakened my most tender sympathy for you and yours, and my concern was mingled with joy to find the Lord so graciously supported you. Faithful is he who has promised. For lack of eyes, I refer you to Matthew 7:24-27, which occurred in my reading this morning. How shall the house upon the rock be proved to be upon a sure foundation, if it was not assaulted by the same rain, storms, and floods which swept away that which was built upon the sand?

I could fill the sheet — if I could see; but I cannot. My dear Miss Catlett cordially joins in all that I mean, when I subscribe myself, your affectionate and sympathizing friend and brother,

John Newton 9th March, 1804.

Time — how short! Eternity — how long!

01.01. Little trials

Little trials October 15, 1774. My dear friend,

I think the greatness of trials is to be estimated rather by the impression they make upon our spirits, than by their outward appearance. The smallest will be too heavy for us if we are left to grapple with it in our own strength, or rather weakness. And if the Lord is pleased to put forth his power in us, he can make the heaviest trial light. A lively impression of his love, or of his sufferings for us, or of the glories within the veil, accompanied with a due sense of the misery from which we are redeemed; these thoughts will enable us to be not only submissive—but even joyful, in tribulations. When faith is in exercise, though the flesh will have its feelings, the spirit will triumph over them. But it is needful that we should know that we have no sufficiency in ourselves, and in order to know it, we must feel it; and therefore the Lord sometimes withdraws his sensible influence, and then the buzzing of a fly will be an overmatch for our patience. At other times he will show us what he can do in us and for us; then we can adopt the Apostle's words, and say—I can do and suffer all things, through Christ strengthening me. He has said, My grace is sufficient for you.

It is observable, that the children of God seldom disappoint our expectations under great trials; if they show a wrongness of spirit, it is usually in such little incidents that we are ready to wonder at them. For which, two reasons may be principally assigned. When great trials are in view, we run simply and immediately to our all-sufficient Friend, feel our dependence, and cry in good earnest for help; but if the occasion seems small, we are too apt secretly to lean to our own wisdom and strength, as if in such slight matters we could make shift without him. Therefore in these we often fail.

Again: the Lord deals with us as we sometimes see mothers with their children. When a child begins to walk, he is often very self-important: he thinks he needs no help, and can hardly bear to be supported by the finger of another. Now in such a case, if there is no danger of harm from a fall, as if he is on a plain carpet, the mother will let him alone to try how he can walk. He is pleased at first—but shortly, down he goes! A few experiments of this kind convince him that he is not so strong and able as he thought, and make him willing to be led. But was he upon the brink of a river or a precipice, from whence a fall might be fatal, the tender mother would not trust him to himself—no not for a moment! I have not room to make the application, nor is it needful. It requires the same grace to bear with a right spirit a cross word—as a cross injury; or the breaking of a china plate—as the death of an only son.

01.01. O for a warmer heart

O for a warmer heart May 19, 1775 My dear Sir,

I hope you will experience the Lord present with you—at all times and in all places. When it is so, we are at home everywhere; when it is otherwise, home is a prison, and abroad a wilderness. I know what I ought to desire, and what I do desire. I point him out to others as the all in all; I esteem him as such in my own judgment; but, alas! my experience abounds with complaints. He is my sun; but clouds, and sometimes walls, intercept him from my view. He is my strength; yet I am prone to lean upon broken reeds. He is my friend; but on my part there is such coldness and ingratitude as no other friend could bear with! But still he is gracious, and shames me with his repeated multiplied goodness to me. O for a warmer heart, a more simple dependence, a more active zeal, a more sensible deliverance from the effects of this body of sin and death!

He helps me in my endeavors to keep the vineyards of others; but, alas! my own vineyard does not seem to flourish as some do around me! However, though I cannot say I labor more abundantly than they all, I have reason to say, with thankfulness, "By the grace of God, I am what I am!" My poor story would soon be much worse, did not he support, restrain, and watch over me every minute! Let me entreat your praises and prayers, on the behalf of me and mine; and may the Lord bless you and yours with an increase in every good.

01.01. On eating and drinking

On eating and drinking

April 11, 1795

"Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do—you must do all for the glory of God!" 1 Corinthians 10:31 "There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every day." Luke 16:19 A sinner, considered as such, is not only destitute and incapable of spiritual blessings—but has forfeited all right to the comforts, and even the necessities, of the present life. It is of mere mercy that he is permitted to breathe the air, or walk upon the ground. But Jesus the Savior has not only brought life and immortality to light, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe in his name—but he has removed the curse which sin had entailed upon the lower creation. And now, to them, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if received with thankfulness and moderation; for all is sanctified to their use by the Word of God and prayer. But these, which, in distinction from the communications of his grace, we call common mercies, are equally derived from his bounty, and the effects of his mediation.

We are therefore bound by gratitude, as well in the ordinary actions of life, as in those of the most importance, whether we eat or drink—to do all with a regard to his love, and with a view to his glory.

It is to be feared, that this apostolic rule is too much disregarded by many professors of the gospel. However they may seem to differ from the world, by a stated and orderly attendance upon the ordinances, they are not easily distinguished upon many other occasions; particularly at their meals. The people of the world can scarcely exceed them in the cost, care, profusion, and variety with which their tables are covered. I am willing to allow some regard to a person’s situation in life; but perhaps the excess is more frequently observable among people in trade, or, as we say, in the middle classes, than at the tables of the opulent. A friend of mine, since deceased, told me, that, when he was a young man, he once dined with the late Dr. Butler, at that time Bishop of Durham; and, though the guest was a man of fortune, and the interview by appointment, the provision was no more than a simple meal. The Bishop apologized for his plain fare, by saying, "That it was his way of living; that he had been long disgusted with the fashionable expense of time and money in entertainments, and was determined that it should receive no countenance from his example." The economy of this truly venerable prelate was not the effect of stinginess; for I have been assured, that, though he was some time possessed of the princely revenue of Durham, he might be said to die poor, leaving little more money than was necessary to discharge his debts, and pay for his funeral. But we may accommodate to him, what the apostles said of themselves on another occasion, "He did not think it fit to leave the Word of God, and to serve tables." And at the tables of some gentlemen of very respectable characters and affluent fortunes, who do me the honor to notice me, I have often seen little more than I would have thought it right to have had at my own, if they had favored me with their company. It is at least certain, that the waste and parade of which I complain, are by no means confined to those, who, according to the common phrase, can best

afford it. When ministers of the gospel are invited, they may sometimes have reason to suppose, that some part of the reception they meet with, may be intended as a mark of regard and attention to them; and it has the appearance of ingratitude to blame our friends for their kindness. But some of us would be better pleased to be treated less sumptuously, and in a way more conformable to the simplicity of our Christian profession! We would not wish to be considered as avowed epicures, who cannot dine well without a variety of delicacies—and, if we could suppose, that such cost and variety were designed to remind us how much better we fare abroad than at home—we might think it rather an insult than a compliment. I have known, in some families, the mistress of the house has been, like Martha, too much encumbered with cares and anxieties in making preparation for her friends. They could not see her so soon as they have wished, and, when she has appeared, she could not wholly conceal the discomposure she has felt from some unexpected incident, which has more or less disconcerted the projected arrangement of her feast.

Such things may be common among those who live without God in the world; but they should be carefully avoided by those who make a profession, that, whether they eat or drink—they do all for his glory. Often we cannot avoid the thought, "This dish, unnecessary in itself, or unnecessarily expensive, might have been well spared, and the money given to the poor!" For there is not a day, in which some of the dear people of God do not find a difficulty in providing bread for their children.

Perhaps there is no one circumstance in the history of our Savior so little laid to heart, so generally overlooked, by those who acknowledge him as their Master and their Lord—as that state of poverty to which he submitted, while upon earth. He had no home, he had not a piece of silver to pay his tax; he was hungry when he went to the fig-tree; and when he sat, like a weary, obscure traveler, by the well-side, he was thirsty; he asked for a little water, and seemed upon the point of being refused. He wrought no miracle solely for his own relief; but he felt for the necessitous, and miraculously fed them by thousands; not with dainties, which would have been equally easy to him—but, finding a few loaves and fish among them, he satisfied their needs without changing their diet. Yes, after his resurrection, when he had taken possession of all power and authority both in heaven and in earth, he condescended to dine with his disciples upon broiled fish and bread, which he likewise provided for them.

Alas! the rich followers of this poor Savior have more reason to be ashamed of their gorgeous apparel, their fine houses, their elegant furniture, and their sumptuous feastings, than to value themselves upon such trifles! They are unavoidable appendages to people in some situations; but, I believe, those who have drank deeply into our Lord’s spirit, account them rather burdens than benefits.

I know several people, whose ability to do much more in this way if they pleased, than they do, is not disputed; and whose acknowledged benevolence and bounty secure them from the suspicion of being restrained by covetousness. I have often wished that a number of these would form themselves into a society, for the express and avowed purpose of discountenancing, by their example and influence, that sinful, shameful conformity to the world, which spreads like a gangrene, is the reproach of the gospel, and threatens the utter extinction of vital religion in multitudes who profess it.

Chapter 46

01.01. Our common mercies

Our common mercies

April, 1773

Dear sir, For the past five or six weeks—I have been a good deal sickly. The ground of my illness was a cold, attended with a slight fever, and for some time with a cough, which made me feel some inconvenience in preaching. This was followed by a deafness, so great as to cut me off from conversation; for I could not hear the sound of a voice, unless it was spoken loud in my ear. But the Lord has mercifully removed the fever and cough, opened my ears, and I am now nearly as well as usual. I had cause to be thankful, especially for two things, under this dispensation:

First, that I was enabled, though sometimes with a little difficulty, to go on with my public work. It is a singular favor I have to acknowledge, that for the space of almost nine years, since I have been in the ministry, our Sunday and weekly services have not been once suspended; whereas I have seen many of the Lord's servants laid aside for a considerable space, within that time. My other great mercy was, that the Lord was pleased to preserve me in a peaceful, resigned frame; so that when I was deaf, and could not be certain that I should recover my hearing any more—I was in general as cheerful and easy as at other times. This was the effect of his goodness—for though I know enough of his sovereignty, wisdom, and faithfulness, of his right to do what he pleases, and the certainty that he does all things well—to furnish me with arguments enough to prove that submission to his will is our absolute duty—yet I am sensible, that when the trial actually comes, notwithstanding all the advice I may have offered to others—that I would myself toss like a wild bull in a net; rebel and repine; forget that I am a sinner, and that God is sovereign! This, I say, would always and invariably be the case—unless he was graciously pleased to fulfill his Word, that strength shall be given to me, according to needs of the day.

I hope my deafness has been instructive to me. The exercise of our senses is so easily and constantly performed, that it seems a thing of a matter of course; but I was then reminded how precarious the tenure is, by which we hold those blessings which seem most our own, and which are most immediately necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of life. Outward senses, mental faculties, health of body, and peace of mind, are extremely valuable; but the continuance of them for a single moment depends upon him who—if he opens none can shut, and when he shuts none can open. A single moment is more than sufficient to deprive us of what we hold most dear, or to prevent us from deriving the least comfort from it if it is not taken away.

I am not presuming to give you information; but only mentioning the thoughts which were much upon my mind while I was incapable of conversation. These are indeed plain and obvious truths, which I have long acknowledged as indisputable; but I have reason to be thankful when the Lord impresses them with fresh power upon my heart, even though he sees fit to do it by the medium of afflictions. I have seen of late, something of the weight and importance of that admonition, "This is what the Lord says—Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his

strength, or the rich man boast of his riches—but let him who boasts boast about this—that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight." Jeremiah 9:23-24. This is a passage which, though addressed to the wise, the mighty, and the rich—is of universal application. For SELF, unless corrected and mortified by grace—will find something whereof to boast, in the lowest characters and situations. And indeed, when things come to be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, the lunatics in Bedlam, some of whom boast in their straw or their chains, as marks of splendor or ensigns of royalty—have as much reason on their side, as any people upon earth who boast in themselves. This alone is the proper ground of glory and joy—a true knowledge of the true God. Then all is safe at present, and all will be happy forever. Then, whatever changes may affect our temporal concerns—our best interests and hopes are secured beyond the reach of change; and whatever we may lose or suffer during this little span of time—will be abundantly compensated in that glorious state of eternity which is just at hand!

01.01. Our divine Shepherd

Our divine Shepherd November 5, 1774

Dear sir,

I have not very lately had recourse to the expedient of descanting upon a text, but I believe it the best method I can take, to give my thoughts upon a few obvious topics, which I suppose uniformly present themselves to my mind when I am about to write to you. Just now, that sweet expression of David occurred to my thoughts, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Permit me, without plan or premeditation, to make a few observations upon it; and may you feel the peace, the confidence, the blessedness, which a believing application of the words is suited to inspire.

David had a divine Shepherd, whose wisdom and power were infinite; and might therefore warrantably conclude he should not lack, and need not fear. And we also may conclude the same, if our Shepherd is the Lord. Besides, the very nature of the Shepherd's office respecting the state of such frail creatures as we are, requires those attributes, for the due discharge of it, which are incommunicably Divine. He must intimately know every individual of the flock. His eye must be upon every one, and his ear open to their prayers, and his hand stretched out for their relief, in all places and in all ages. Every thought of every heart must be open to his view; and his wisdom must penetrate, and his arm control and over-rule, all the hidden and complicated machinations of the powers of darkness. He must have the administration of universal providence, over all the nations, families, and peoples upon earth, or he could not effectually manage for those who put their trust in him, in that immense variety of cases and circumstances in which they are found.

Reason, as well as Scripture, may convince us, that he who gathers the outcasts of Israel, who heals the broken in heart, who upholds all that fall, raises up all that are bowed down, and upon whom the eyes of all wait for their support—can be no other than He who counts the number of the stars, and calls them all by their names, who is great in power, and whose understanding is infinite! To this purpose likewise, the prophet Isaiah describes this mighty Shepherd, Isaiah 40:9-17, both as to his person and office. But is not this indeed, the great mystery of godliness? How just is the Apostle's observation, that no man can say, Jesus Christ is the Lord—but by the Holy Spirit! How astonishing the thought—that the Maker of heaven and earth, the Holy One of Israel, before whose presence the earth shook, the heavens dropped, when he displayed a faint emblem of his majesty upon Sinai, should afterwards appear in the form of a servant, and hang upon a cross, the sport and scorn of wicked men!

I cannot wonder, that to the wise men of the world this appears absurd, unreasonable, and impossible; yet to right reason, to reason enlightened and sanctified, however amazing the proposition be—yet it appears true and necessary, upon a supposition that a holy God is pleased to pardon sinners in a way suited to display the solemn glories of his justice. The same arguments which prove that the blood of bulls and goats is insufficient to take away sin, will conclude against the utmost doings or sufferings of men or angels. The Redeemer of sinners must be mighty; he

must have a personal dignity, to stamp such a value upon his undertakings, as that thereby God may appear just, as well as merciful, in justifying the ungodly for his sake; and he must be all-sufficient to bless, and almighty to protect—those who come unto him for safety and life.

Such a one is our Shepherd. This is He of whom we, through grace, are enabled to say—we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. We are his by every tie and right: he made us, he redeemed us, he reclaimed us from the hand of our enemies; and we are his by our own voluntary surrender of ourselves; for though we once slighted, despised, and opposed him—he made us willing in the day of his power! He knocked at the door of our hearts; but we (at least I) barred and fastened it against him as much and as long as possible—but when he revealed his love, we could stand out no longer. Like sheep, we are weak, destitute, defenseless, prone to wander, unable to return, and always surrounded with wolves; but all is made up in the fullness, ability, wisdom, compassion, care, and faithfulness of our great Shepherd. He guides, protects, feeds, heals, and restores, and will be our guide and our God—even until death. Then he will meet us, receive us, and present us unto himself—and we shall be near him, and like him, and with him forever.

Ah! my friend, what a subject is this! I trust it is the joy of your heart. Placed as you are by his hand in a superior rank, you see and feel that the highest honors, and the most important concernments that terminate with the present life—are as trivial as the sports of children, in comparison with the views and the privileges you derive from the glorious Gospel. And your situation in life renders the grace bestowed upon you—the more conspicuous and distinguishing. I have somewhere met with a similar reflection of Henry the Fourth of France, to this purpose, that, though many came into the world the same day with him, he was probably the only one among them, who was born to be a king. Your Lordship is acquainted with many, who, if not born on the same day with you, were born to titles, estates, and honors; but how few of them were born to the honor of making a public and consistent profession of the glorious Gospel! The hour is coming, when all honors and possessions—but this which comes from God alone, will be eclipsed and vanish, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind." How miserable will they then be, who must leave their all! But grace and faith can make the lowest state of life supportable, and make a dismissal from the highest state of life desirable. Of the former I have many living proofs and witnesses around me. Your Lordship, I trust, will have sweet experience of the latter, when, after having fulfilled the will of God in your generation, you shall be called (I hope in some yet distant day) to enter into your Master’s joy. In the mean time, how valuable are life, talents, influence, and opportunities of every kind—if we are enabled to improve and lay out all for him who has thus loved us, thus provided for us! As to myself, I would hope there are few, who have so clear a sense of their obligations to him, who make such unsuitable and languid returns as I do. I think I have a desire to serve him better; but, alas! evil is present with me. Surely I shall feel something like shame and regret for my coldness, even in heaven; for I find I am never happier—than when I am most ashamed of myself upon this account here.

Chapter 48

01.01. Our imperfect knowledge of Christ's love

Our imperfect knowledge of Christ’s love

April 29, 1776. My dear Miss M,

I thank you for your last letter; and I rejoice in the Lord’s goodness to you. To be drawn by love; to be exempted from those distressing terrors and temptations which some are beset with; to be favored with the ordinances and means of grace, and connected with those, and with those only, who are disposed and qualified to assist and encourage you in seeking the Savior—these are special privileges, which all concur in your case. He loves you, he deals gently with you, he provides well for you, and accompanies every outward privilege with his special blessing; and I trust he will lead you on from strength to strength, and show you still greater things than you have yet seen.

Those whom he teaches, are always increasing in knowledge, both of themselves and of him. The heart is deep, and, like Ezekiel’s vision, presents so many chambers of imagery, one within another, that it requires time to get a considerable acquaintance with it, and we shall never know it thoroughly. It is now more than twenty-eight years since the Lord began to open mine to my own view; and from that time to this, almost every day has discovered to me something which until then was unobserved; and the farther I go, the more I seem convinced that I have entered but a little way. A person who travels in some parts of Derbyshire may easily be satisfied that the country is cavernous; but how large, how deep, how numerous the caverns may be, which are hidden from us by the surface of the ground, and what is contained in them—are questions which our most discerning inquirers cannot fully answer. Thus I judge of my heart—that it is very deep and dark, and full of evil; but as to particulars, I know not one of a thousand! And if our own hearts are beyond our comprehension, how much more incomprehensible is the heart of Jesus! If sin abounds in us—grace and love superabound in him! His ways and thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth; his love has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, which passes all knowledge! The riches of his grace are unsearchable riches! Ephesians 3:8, Ephesians 3:18, Ephesians 3:19. All that we have received or can receive from him, or know of him in this life, compared with what he is in himself, or what he has for us—is but as the drop of a bucket—compared with the ocean; or a single ray of light—compared with the sun. The waters of the sanctuary flow to us at first almost ankle deep—so graciously does the Lord condescend to our weakness; but they rise as we advance, and constrain us to cry out, with the Apostle, O the depth! We find before us, as Dr. Watts beautifully expresses it, A sea of love and grace unknown,

Without a bottom or a shore!

O the excellency of the knowledge of Christ! It will be growing upon us through time—yes, I believe through eternity! What an astonishing and what a cheering thought—that this high and lofty One should unite himself to our nature, that so, in a way worthy of his adorable perfections, he might by his Spirit unite us to himself! Could such a thought have arisen in our hearts, without

the warrant of his Word (but it is a thought which no created mind was capable of even conceiving until he revealed it), it would have been presumption and blasphemy! But now he has made it known, it is the foundation of our hope, and an inexhaustible spring of life and joy. Well may we say, Lord what is man, that you should thus visit him!

01.01. Our life is a warfare

Our life is a warfare

March, 1779.

Dear Madam, Our experiences pretty much tally. They may be drawn out into books—but the sum total may be comprised in a short sentence; "Our life is a warfare." For our encouragement, the Apostle calls it a good warfare. We are engaged in a good cause, fight under a good Captain, the victory is sure beforehand, and the prize is a crown—a crown of eternal life. Such considerations might make even a coward bold. But then we must be content to fight; and, considering the nature, number, situation, and subtlety of our enemies, we may expect sometimes to receive a wound. But there is a medicinal tree, the leaves of which are always at hand to heal us.

We cannot be too attentive to the evil which is always working in us, or to the stratagems which are employed against us; yet our attention should not be wholly confined to these things. We are to look upwards likewise to him, who is our head, our life, our strength. One glance of Jesus will convey more effectual assistance—than poring upon our own hearts for a month! The one is to be done—but the other should upon no account be omitted. It was not by counting their wounds—but by beholding the brazen serpent, the Lord's instituted means of cure—that the Israelites were healed. That was an emblem for our instruction.

One great cause of our frequent conflicts is, that we have a secret desire to be rich—and it is the Lord's design to make us poor. We want to gain an ability of doing something—and He suits his dispensations, to convince us that we can do nothing. We want a stock of power in ourselves—and He would have us absolutely dependent upon Him. So far as we are content to be weak—that His power may be magnified in us—so far we shall make our enemies know that we are strong, though we ourselves shall never be directly sensible that we are so. Only by comparing what we are, with the opposition we stand against—we may come to a comfortable conclusion, that the Lord works mightily in us. Psalms 41:11.

If our views are simple, and our desires towards the Lord—it may be of use to consider some of your faults and mine, not as the faults of you and me in particular—but as the fault of that depraved nature, which is common with us to all the Lord's people, and which made Paul groan as feelingly and as heartily as we can do. But this consideration, though true and Scriptural, can only be safely applied when the mind is sincerely and in good earnest devoted to the Lord. There are too many unsound and half-professors, who eagerly catch at it, as an excuse for those evils they are unwilling to part with. But I trust I may safely recommend it to you. This evil nature, this indwelling sin, is a living principle, an active, powerful cause; and a cause that is active will necessarily produce an effect. Sin is the same thing in believers as in the unregenerate; they have, indeed, a contrary principle of grace, which counteracts and resists it, which can prevent its out breaking—but will not suppress its rising. As grace resists sin, so sin resists grace, "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." Galatians 5:17. The proper tendency of each is mutually weakened on both sides; and between the two, the poor believer, however blameless and exemplary in the sight of men, appears in his own view the most inconsistent character under the sun! He can hardly think it is so with others, and judging of them by what he sees, and of himself by what he feels—in humility he esteems others better than himself. This is the warfare. But it shall not always be so. Grace shall prevail. The evil nature is already enervated, and before long it shall die the death. Jesus will make us more than conquerors!

Chapter 50

01.01. Questions on salvation

Questions on salvation November 17, 1775. My dear Friend, At length I take up your letter of August 14, with design to give a more explicit answer. My delaying hitherto has been unavoidable; I am sorry to have your patience put to so long a trial; and would be more sorry—but that I consider, that in my former papers, sermons, Omicron's Letters, etc. you already possess the whole (in substance) of what I have to offer. My present part is but to repeat what I have elsewhere expressed, only with some variety and enlargement.

You yourself well state the situation of our debate, when you say, "Nor in truth do you offer any arguments to convince me, nor does it seem very consistent on your grounds so to do. And if this important change is to be brought about by the intervention of some extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit, and cannot be brought about without it—I do not see anything farther that I have to do, than to keep my mind as much unbiased as I can, and to wait and pray for it."

I think my letter from London was to the purpose of these your own words, though you seemed dissatisfied with it. While we see through a different medium, it will be easy for you to answer every text I might adduce in support of my sentiments, as you have those I have already brought, "That you understand them otherwise." In order to support my sense of one text, I could perhaps quote and argue from twenty more, and still "You would understand them otherwise." The life of man, yes of Methuselah, would hardly suffice to prove and defend all that might be alleged on both sides in this way; and at last we would leave off as we began, more fully confirmed in our own opinions—unless the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, should be pleased to show the person who maintained the wrong side of the argument, where his mistake lay. However, I mean to take some notice of your queries as they offer themselves. The first which occurs is complicated. The substance I think is, whether such belief and aims as you possess will stand you in no stead, unless you likewise believe irresistible grace, absolute predestination, etc. You may have observed, I have several times waived speaking about predestination or election—not that I am ashamed of the doctrine, because, if it indeed is absurd, shocking, and unjust—the blame will not deservedly fall upon me, for I did not invent it—but upon the Scriptures, where I am sure it is laid down in as plain terms—as that God created the heavens and the earth.

I cannot but wonder, that people professing any reverence for the Bible, should so openly and strongly declare their abhorrence of what the Bible so expressly teaches—namely, that there is a election of people by the grace and good pleasure of God—where by nature there is no difference; and that all things respecting the salvation of these people is infallibly secured by a Divine predestination.

I do not offer this as a rational doctrine (though it be highly so to me)—but it is Scriptural, or else the Scripture is a mere nose of wax, and without a determinate meaning. What ingenuity is needful to interpret many passages in a sense more favorable to our natural prejudices against God's sovereignty! Matthew 11:25-26, and Matthew 13:10-17; Mark 13:20-22; John 17:1-26; John 10:26; Romans 8:28-30, and Romans 9:13-24, and Romans 11:7; Ephesians 1:4-5; 1 Peter 1:2. Were I

fond of disputing, as I am not, I think I could put a close reasoner hard to it, to maintain the truth of Scripture prophecies, or the belief of a particular providence, unless he would admit a Divine predestination of causes and events as the ground of his arguments. However, as I said, I have chosen to waive the point; because, however true and necessary in itself, the knowledge and comprehension of it is not necessary to the being of a true Christian, though I can hardly conceive he can be an established, consistent believer without it. This doctrine is not the turning point between you and I. The nature of justification, and the method of a sinner's acceptance with God, are of much more immediate importance; and therefore, if I am to speak plainly, I must say, that I look upon your present sentiments, attainments, and advances, as you describe them, to constitute that kind of gain the Apostle speaks of, and concerning which I hope you will one day be of his mind, and be glad to account it all loss, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, "not having your own righteousness, which is of the law—but the righteousness which is of God by faith," Php 3:4, Php 3:7-10.

For, as you tell me, that you never remember a time when you were not conscious before God of great unworthiness, and intervals of earnest endeavors to serve him, though not with the same success—yet something in the same way as at present; this is but saying, in other words, you never remember a time when old things passed away, and all things became new—and yet the Apostle insists much upon this, 2 Corinthians 4:6, and 2 Corinthians 5:17. The convictions of natural conscience, and those which are wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, are different, not only in degree—but in kind; the light of a glow-worm and of the sun do not more essentially differ. The former are partial and superficial, leave us in possession of a supposed power of our own, are pacified by some appearances of an outward change, and make us no further sensible of the necessity of a Savior than to make our doings and duties (if I may so express myself) full weight, which perhaps might otherwise be a little deficient when brought to the balances of the sanctuary. But truly spiritual convictions give us far other views of sin—they lead us to a deep and solemn consideration of the root, our total absolute depravity, and our utter apostasy from God, by which we are incapable of doing good, as a dead man is of performing the functions of life! They lead us to the rule and standard—the strict, holy, inflexible law of God, which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart; requires perfect, universal, persevering obedience; denounces a curse upon every failure, Galatians 3:10; and affords neither place nor strength for repentance. Thus they sweep away every hope and refuge we had before, and fix upon us a sense of guilt and condemnation, from which there is no relief, until we can look to Jesus, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent—which was not to give efficacy to medicines and plasters of their own application—but to heal them completely of itself by looking at it! John 3:14-15, and John 6:40; Isaiah 43:22.

You wish me to explain my distinction between faith and rational assent; and though I know no two things in the world more clearly distinct in themselves, or more expressly distinguished in Scripture—yet I fear I may not easily make it appear to you. You allow faith, in your sense, to be the gift of God; but, in my sense, it is likewise wrought by the operation of God, Colossians 2:12, and the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. Ephesians 1:19. It is that same energy of the power of his strength, by which the dead body of Jesus was raised from the dead. Can these strong expressions intend no more than a rational assent, such as we give to a proposition in Euclid? I believe fallen reason is, of itself,

utterly incapable even of assenting to the great truths of Revelation; it may assent to the terms in which they are proposed—but it must put its own interpretation upon them, or it would despise them. The natural man can neither receive nor discern the things of God. And if any one would be wise, the Apostle's first advice to him is, "Let him become a fool, that he may be wise; for the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God."

Indeed, when the heart is changed, and the mind enlightened; then reason is sanctified, and, if I may so say, baptized. It renounces its curious disquisitions, and is content humbly to tread in the path of Revelation. This is one difference: assent may be the act of our natural reason; but faith is the effect of immediate Almighty power.

Another difference is, Faith is always efficacious. Whereas assent is often given where it has little or no influence upon the conduct. Thus, for instance, everyone will assent to this truth, All men are mortal. Yet the greatest part of mankind, though they readily assent to the proposition, and it would be highly irrational to do otherwise, live as they might do—if the reverse were true! But those who have Divine faith, feel, as well as say, that they are pilgrims and sojourners upon earth.

Again: faith gives peace of conscience, access to God, and a sure evidence and subsistence of things not seen; Romans 5:1-2; Hebrews 11:1 : where as a calm, dispassionate reasoner may be compelled to assent to the external arguments in favor of Christianity, and yet remain a total stranger to that communion with God, that Spirit of adoption, that foretaste of glory—which is the privilege and portion of believers. So likewise, faith overcomes the world, which rational assent will not do. To sum up all in a word, "He who believes shall be saved!" But surely many who give a rational assent to the Gospel, live and die in those sins which exclude from the kingdom of God, Galatians 5:19-21. Faith is the effect of a principle of new life implanted in the soul, that was before dead in trespasses and sins; and it qualifies, not only for obeying the Savior's precepts—but chiefly and primarily for receiving from and rejoicing in his fullness, admiring his love, his work, his person, his glory, his advocacy. Faith makes Christ precious; enthrones him in the heart; presents him as the most delightful object to our meditations—as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and strength; our root, head, life, shepherd, and husband. These are all Scriptural expressions and images, setting forth, so far as words can declare—what Jesus is in himself and to his believing people. But how cold is the comment which rational assent puts upon very many passages, wherein the Apostle Paul endeavors (but in vain) to express the fullness of his heart upon this subject! A most valued friend of mine, a Clergyman now living, had for many years given a rational assent to the Gospel. He labored with much earnestness upon your plan; was very exemplary in his whole conduct; preached almost incessantly (two or three times every day, for years), having a parish in the remote parts of Yorkshire, of great extent, and containing five or six different hamlets at some distance from each other. He succeeded likewise with his people so far as to break them off from outward irregularities; and was mentioned, in a letter to the Society for propagating the Gospel (which I have seen in print) as the most perfect example of a parish pastor which this nation, or perhaps this age, has produced. Thus he went on for many years, teaching his people what he knew, for he could teach them no more. One day, reading Ephes. 3 in his Greek Testament, his thoughts were stopped by the a word in Ephesians 3:8. He was struck, and led to think with himself to this purpose: The Apostle, when speaking of the love and riches of Christ, uses remarkable expressions; he speaks of heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, and unsearchables, where I seem to find everything plain, easy, and rational. He finds

mysteries where I can perceive none. Surely, though I use the words Gospel, faith, and grace, with him—my ideas of them must be different from his. This led him to a close examination of all His Epistles, and, by the blessing of God, brought on a total change in his views and preaching. He no longer set his people to keep a law of faith; to trust in their sincerity and endeavors, upon some general hope that Christ would help them out where they came short; but he preached Christ himself, as the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. He felt himself, and labored to convince others, that there is no hope for a sinner but merely in the blood of Jesus; and no possibility of his doing any works acceptable to God, until he himself is first made accepted in the Beloved. Nor did he labor in vain. Now his preaching effected, not only an outward reformation—but a real change of heart, in very many of his hearers. The word was received, as Paul expresses it, not with a rational assent only—but with demonstration and power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. And their endeavors to observe the Gospel precepts were abundantly more extensive, uniform, and successful, when they were brought to say, with the Apostle, "I am crucified with Christ! Nevertheless I live—yet not I—but Christ lives in me; and the life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God."

Such a change of views and sentiments, I pray God—that you may experience. These things may appear uncouth to you at present, as they have done to many who now bless God for showing them what their reason could never have taught them. My divinity is unfashionable enough at present—but it was not so always; you will find few books, written from the area of the Reformation, until a little before Laud's, that set forth any other. There were few pulpits until after the Restoration from which any other was heard. A lamentable change has indeed since taken place; but God has not left himself without witnesses. You think, though I disclaim infallibility, I arrogate too much in speaking with so much certainty. I am fallible indeed; but I am sure of the main points of doctrine I hold. I am not in the least doubt, whether salvation is by faith or by works; whether faith is of our own power or of God's operation; whether Christ's obedience, or our own, is the just ground of our hope; whether a man can truly call Jesus Lord—but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. I have no more hesitation about these points, than I should have were I asked whether it was God or man who created the heavens and the earth!

Besides, as I have more than once observed, your sentiments were once my own; so that I, who have traveled both roads, may have perhaps some stronger reasons to determine which is the right, than you can have, who have only traveled one.

I now come to the two queries you propose, the solution of which you think will clearly mark the difference of our sentiments. The substance of them is,

1st, Whether I think any sinner ever perished in his sins (to whom the Gospel has been preached) because God refused to supply him with such a proportion of his assistance as was absolutely necessary to his believing and repenting; or without his having previously rejected the incitements of his Holy Spirit? A full answer to this would require a sheet. But, briefly, I believe, that, all mankind being corrupt and guilty before God, he might, without impeachment to his justice, have left them all to perish, as we are assured he did the fallen angels. But he has been pleased to show mercy—and mercy must be free. If the sinner has any claim to it—so far it is justice, not mercy. He, who is to be our Judge, assures us, that few find the gate which leads to life, while many throng the road to destruction. Your question seems to imply, that you think God either did

make salvation equally open to all, or that it would have been more becoming his goodness to have done so. But he is the potter—and we are the clay. His ways and thoughts are above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. The Judge of all the earth will do right. He has appointed a day, when he will manifest, to the conviction of all—that He has done right. Until then, I hold it best to take things upon his Word, and not too harshly determine what it befits Jehovah to do. Instead of saying what I think, let it suffice to remind you of what Paul thought, Romans 9:15-21.

But, farther, I say, that unless mercy were afforded to those who are saved, in a way special to themselves, and which is not afforded to those who perish—no one soul could be saved. For fallen man, universally, considered as such, is as incapable of doing the least thing towards his salvation, until saved by the grace of God—as a dead body is of restoring itself to life. Whatever difference takes place between men in this respect, is of grace, that is—of God, undeserved. Yes, his first approaches to our hearts are undesired too; for, until he seeks us, we cannot, we will not seek him, Psalms 110:3. It is in the day of his power, and not before—that his people are made willing. Where the Gospel is preached, those who perish, do willfully resist the Gospel light, and choose and cleave to darkness, and stifle the convictions which the truths of God, when his true Gospel is indeed preached, will, in one degree or other, force upon their minds. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the love of other things, the violence of sinful appetites, their prejudices, pride, and self-righteousness either prevent the reception, or choke the growth of the good seed. Thus their own sin and obstinacy is the proper cause of their destruction. They will not come to Christ—that they may have eternal life. At the same time, it is true that they cannot, unless they are supernaturally drawn by God; John 5:40; John 6:44. They will not and they cannot come. Both are equally true, and they are consistent. For a man's cannot, is not a natural inability—but a moral inability. It is not an impossibility in the nature of things, as it is for me to walk upon the water, or to fly in the air—but such an inability as, instead of extenuating, does exceedingly enhance and aggravate his guilt. He is so blinded by Satan, so alienated from God by nature and wicked works, so given up to sin, so averse from that way of salvation which is contrary to his pride and natural wisdom—that he will not embrace it or seek after it! And therefore he cannot receive it, until the grace of God powerfully enlightens his mind, and overcomes his obstacles. But this brings me to your second query,

II. Do I think that God, in the ordinary course of his providence, grants his assistance in an irresistible manner, or effects faith and conversion without the sinner's own hearty consent and concurrence? I rather choose to term grace invincible, than irresistible. For it is too often resisted, even by those who believe; but, because it is invincible, it triumphs over all resistance, when God is pleased to bestow it. For the rest, I believe no sinner is converted without his own hearty will and concurrence. But he is not willing—until he is made so. Why does he at all refuse? Because he is insensible of his lost and dreadful condition. He does not know the evil of sin, the strictness of God's law, the majesty of God whom he has offended, nor the total apostasy of his heart! He is blind to eternity, and ignorant of the excellency of Christ! He thinks that he is whole, and sees not his need of this great Physician! For salvation, he relies upon his own wisdom, power, and supposed righteousness.

Now, in this state of things, when God comes with a purpose of saving mercy, he begins by convincing the person of sin, judgment, and righteousness; causes him to feel and know that he is a lost, condemned, helpless creature; and then reveals to him the necessity, sufficiency, and

willingness of Christ to save those who are ready to perish, without money or price, without doings or deserving. Then he sees faith to be very different from a rational assent; finds that nothing but the power of God can produce a well-grounded hope in the heart of a convinced sinner; therefore looks to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of faith, to enable him to believe. For this he waits in what we call the means of grace; he prays, he reads the Word, he thirsts for God as the deer pants for the water-brooks. And, though perhaps for a while he is distressed with many doubts and fears, he is encouraged to wait on, because Jesus has said, "Him who comes unto me, I will never cast out." The obstinacy of the will remains while the understanding is dark—and ceases when that is enlightened. Suppose a man walking in the dark, where there are pits and precipices of which he is not aware. You are sensible of his danger, and call after him; but he thinks he knows better than you, refuses your advice, and is perhaps angry with you for your importunity. He sees no danger, therefore will not be persuaded there is any. But if you go with a light, get before him, and show him plainly, that if he takes another step, that he will fall to his death—then he will stop of his own accord, blame himself for not minding you before, and be ready to comply with your farther directions. In either case, man's will acts with equal freedom—the difference of his conduct arises from conviction.

Something like this is the case in our spiritual concerns. Sinners are called and warned by the Word; but they are wise in their own eyes, and take but little notice—until the Lord gives them light, which he is not bound to give to any, and therefore cannot be bound to give to all. Those who have it, have reason to be thankful, and subscribe to the Apostle's words, "By grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

I have not yet half done with the first sheet! I shall consider the rest at leisure; but send this as a specimen of my willingness to clear my sentiments to you as far as I can. Unless it should please God to make what I offer satisfactory, I well know before-hand what objections and answers will occur to you; for these points have been often debated; and, after a course of twenty-seven years, in which true religion has been the chief object of my thoughts and inquiries, I am not entirely a stranger to what can be offered on either side. What I write, I write simply and in love; beseeching Him, who alone can set a seal to his own truth, to guide you and bless you. This letter has been more than a week in hand; I have been called from it I suppose ten times, frequently in the middle of a period or a line. My leisure, which before was small, is now reduced almost to nothing. But I am desirous to keep up my correspondence with you, because I feel an affectionate interest in you, and because it pleased God to put it into your heart to apply to me. You cannot think how your first letter struck me—it was so unexpected, and seemed so improbable, that you should open your mind to me, I immediately conceived a hope that it would prove for good. Nor am I yet discouraged. When you have leisure and inclination—write. I shall be always glad to hear from you, and I will proceed in answering what I have already by me, as fast as I can. But I have many letters now waiting for answers, which must be attended to.

I recommend you to the blessing and care of the great Shepherd; and remain, etc.

01.01. Reading the Bible

Reading the Bible by John Newton

"Your Words were found, and I ate them. Your Words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart!" Jeremiah 15:16

Books and letters written in a proper spirit, may, if the Lord is pleased to smile upon them, have their use. Indeed, the truths essential to the peace of our souls are so simple, and may be reduced to so few heads, that while each of them singly may furnish a volume drawn out at length, they may all be comprised in small compass. But an awakened mind which thirsts after the Savior, and seeks wisdom by reading and praying over the Scripture, has little occasion for a library of human writings. The Bible is the fountain from whence every stream that deserves our notice is drawn; and, though we may occasionally pay some attention to the streams—we have personally an equal right with others to apply immediately to the fountain-head, and draw the water of life for ourselves! The purest streams are not wholly freed from the tinge of the soil through which they run; a mixture of human infirmity is inseparable from the best human composition. But in the fountain—the truth is unmixed!

Again, men teach us by many words; and if they would give us their full views of the subject, require us to read a whole volume, the life and substance of which is perhaps expressed with greater force and greater advantage in the Scripture by a single sentence—which is rather diluted than explained, by our feeble expositions. A volume may be easily written upon the grace of humility, and to show the evil and folly of a self-seeking spirit. But if the author should introduce this subject with our Savior's words, "The Son of Man came not into the world to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many;" whoever was duly impressed with that short introduction, would have no great occasion to read the rest of the book! The preaching of the Word of God being an instituted means of grace, ought to be thankfully and frequently improved. And human books that have a savor and unction may likewise be helpful, provided we read them with caution, compare them with the Scripture, and do not give ourselves implicitly to the rules or decisions of any man or set of men—but remember that one is our Master and infallible Teacher, even Christ. But the chief and grand means of edification, without which all other helps will disappoint us, and prove like clouds without water—are the Bible and prayer—the Word of grace and the Throne of grace. A frequent perusal of the Bible will give us an enlarged and comprehensive view of the whole of true religion—its origin, nature, genius, and tendency—and preserve us from an over-attachment to any system of man's compilation. The fault of the several doctrinal systems, under which, as under so many banners, the different denominations of Christians are ranged, is, that there is usually something left out which ought to have been taken in—and something admitted, of supposed advantage, not authorized by the Scriptural standard. A Bible Christian, therefore, will see much to approve in a variety of forms and parties; the providence of God may lead or fix him in a more immediate connection with some one of them—but his spirit and affection will not be confined within these narrow enclosures. He

insensibly borrows and unites with which is excellent in each, perhaps without knowing how far he agrees with them, because he finds all in the written Word of God.

I know not a better rule of reading the Scripture, than to read it through from beginning to end; and, when we have finished it once, to begin it again. We shall meet with many passages which we can make little improvement of, but not so many in the second reading as in the first, and fewer in the third than in the second—provided we pray to Him who has the keys to open our understandings, and to anoint our eyes with his spiritual eye-salve! The course of reading today, will give some light for what we shall read tomorrow, and throw a farther light upon what we read yesterday. Experience alone, can prove the advantage of this method, if steadily persevered in. To make a few efforts, and then give up—is like taking a few steps and then standing still, which would do little towards completing a long journey. But, though a person walked slowly, and but a little way in a day—if he walked every day, and with his face always in the same direction, year after year—he would in time travel over the globe! By thus traveling patiently and steadily through the Scripture, and repeating our progress—we would increase in Scriptural knowledge to the end of life! The Old and New Testament, the doctrines, precepts, and promises, the history, the examples, admonitions, and warnings, etc. would mutually illustrate and strengthen each other—and nothing that is written for our instruction would be overlooked. Happy would I be, could I fully follow the advice I am now offering to you. I wish you may profit by my experience. Alas, how much time have I lost and wasted, which, had I been wise—I would have devoted to reading and studying the Bible! But my evil heart obstructs the dictates of my judgment, I often feel a reluctance to read this book of books, and a disposition to hew out broken cisterns which afford me no water, while the fountain of living waters are close within my reach!

01.01. Saving knowledge

Saving knowledge

August 11, 1775 My dear Friend,

I thank you for your letter. Your objections neither displease nor weary me. While truth is the object of your inquiry, the more freedom you use with me the better. Nor do they surprise me; for I have formerly made similar objections myself. I have stood upon your ground—and I continue to hope you will one day stand upon mine! As I have told you more than once, I do not mean to dictate to you, or to wish you to receive anything upon my recommendation; but, in the simplicity of friendship, I will give you my thoughts from time to time upon the points you propose, and leave the outcome to the Divine blessing. The term Arminian, as at present applied, is very indiscriminate, and takes in a great variety of people and sentiments, among whom, I believe, there are many who hold the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. I am far from supposing that God will guide every sincere person exactly to adopt all my sentiments. But there are some sentiments which I believe essential to the very state and character of a true Christian. And these make him a Christian; not merely by being his acknowledged sentiments—but by a certain peculiar manner in which he possesses them.

There is a certain important change which takes place in the heart, by the operation of the Spirit of God, before the soundest and most orthodox sentiments can have their proper influence upon us. This work, or change, the Scripture describes by various names, each of which is designed to teach us the marvelous effects it produces, and the Almighty power by which it is produced. It is sometimes called a new birth, John 3:3; sometimes a new creature, or new creation, as 2 Corinthians 5:17; sometimes the causing light to shine out of darkness, 2 Corinthians 4:6; sometimes the opening the eyes of the blind, Acts 26:18; sometimes the raising the dead to life, Ephesians 2:5. Until a person has experienced this change, he will be at a loss to form a right conception of it. This is not being convinced of a mere opinion—but receiving a principle of Divine life and light in the soul. And until this is received, the things of God, the truths of the Gospel, cannot be rightly discerned or understood by the utmost powers of fallen man, who, with all his wisdom, reason, and talents, is still but what the Apostle calls the natural man, until the power of God visits his heart! 1 Corinthians 2:14. This work is sometimes wrought suddenly, as in the case of Lydia, Acts 16:14; at other times very gradually. A person who before was a stranger even to the form of godliness, or at best content with a mere religious form, finds new thoughts arising in his mind, feels some concern about his sins, some desire to please God, some suspicions that all is not right. He examines his views of religion, hopes the best of them, and yet cannot rest satisfied in them. Today, perhaps, he thinks himself fixed; tomorrow he will be all uncertainty. He inquires of others; weighs, measures, considers; meets with sentiments which he had not attended to; thinks them plausible; but is presently shocked with objections, or supposed consequences, which he finds himself unable to remove. As he goes on in his inquiry, his difficulties increase. New doubts arise in his mind; even the Scriptures perplex him, and appear to assert contrary

things. He would sound the depths of truth by the plummet of his reason—but he finds his line is too short! Yet even now the man is under a guidance, which will at length lead him right. The importance of the subject takes up his thoughts, and takes off the relish he once had for the things of the world. He reads, he prays, he strives, he resolves. Sometimes inward perplexities and outward temptations bring him to his wit's end. He almost wishes to stand where he is, and inquire no more—but he cannot stop. At length he begins to feel the inward depravity, which he had before owned as a mere opinion. A sense of sin and guilt cut him out new work. Here reasoning will stand him in no stead. This is a painful change of mind; but it prepares the way for a blessing. It silences some objections better than a thousand arguments; it cuts the web of his own wisdom and attainments; it makes him weary of working for life; and teaches him, in God's due time, the meaning of that text, "To him who works not—but believes in him who justifies the ungodly—his faith is counted for righteousness."

Then he learns, that Scriptural faith is a very different thing from a rational assent to the Gospel; that it is the immediate gift of God, Ephesians 2:8; the operation of God, Colossians 2:12; that Christ is not only the object—but the author and finisher of faith, Hebrews 12:2; and that faith is not so properly a part of that obedience we owe to God, as an inestimable benefit we receive from him for Christ's sake, Php 1:29; which is the medium of our justification, Romans 5:1, and the principle by which we are united to Christ (as the branch to the vine), John 17:21. I have described a path in which I have known many led, and in which I have walked myself. The Gospel, my dear sir, is a salvation appointed for those who are ready to perish—and is not designed to put them in a way to save themselves by their own works. It speaks to us as condemned already, and calls upon us to believe in a crucified Savior—that we may receive redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. And the Spirit of God, by the Gospel, first convinces us of unbelief, sin, and misery; and then, by revealing the things of Jesus to our minds, enables us, as helpless sinners, to come to Christ, to receive him, to behold him; or, in other words, to believe in him, and expect pardon, life, and grace from him; renouncing every hope and aim in which we once rested, "and accounting all things loss and rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." John 6:35; Isaiah 45:22; with John 6:40; Colossians 2:6. In some of my Omicron's Letters, you will find my thoughts more at large upon these subjects than I have now time to write them. You will see in it the sentiments of a man of great learning, sound reasoning, an amiable and irreproachable character, and how little he accounted of all these advantages when the Lord was pleased to enlighten his mind.

Though we have not exactly the same view of human depravity—yet as we both agree to take our measure of it from the Word of God, I trust we shall not always differ about it. Adam was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, Ephesians 4:24. This moral image, I believe, was totally lost by sin. In that sense, he died the day, the moment, he ate the forbidden fruit. God was no longer his joy and delight; he was averse from the thoughts of his presence, and would (if possible) have hid himself from him. His natural powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man by nature, is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, etc. sufficiently proclaim that the Hand that made him is Divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, majestic though in ruins. He can reason, invent, and by study, attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators, etc. are astonishing. But man cannot know, love, trust, or serve

his Maker—unless he is renewed in the spirit of his mind.

God has preserved in him likewise, some feelings of benevolence, pity, some sense of natural justice and truth, etc. without which there could be no society. But these, I apprehend, are little more than instincts, by which the world is kept in some small degree of order. But, being under the direction of pride and self, do not deserve the name of virtue and goodness, because the exercise of them does not spring from a principle of love to God, nor is directed to his glory, or regulated by the rule of his Word—until a principle of grace is superadded.

You think that I will not say, "that God, judicially in punishment of one man's sin, added these corruptions to all his posterity." Let us suppose, that the punishment annexed to eating the forbidden fruit, had been the loss of Adam's rational powers, and that he should be degraded to the state and capacity of a brute. In this condition, had he begotten children after the Fall in his own likeness, his nature being previously changed, they must have been, of course, brutes like himself; for he could not convey to them those original powers which he had lost. Will this illustrate my meaning?

Sin did not deprive him of rationality—but spirituality. His nature became earthly, sensual, yes devilish; and this fallen nature, this carnal mind, which is enmity against God—is not subject to his law, neither indeed can it be, Romans 8:7—we universally derive from him. Look upon children—they presently show themselves averse from good—but are exceedingly propense to evil. This they can learn even without a master; but ten thousand instructors and instructions cannot instill good into them, so as to teach them to love their Creator—unless a Divine power acts in their hearts. This is just as it is with the earth, which produces weeds spontaneously. But if you see a fruit filled garden—you are sure that it was planted or sown there, and did not spring from the soil by itself.

I know many hard questions may be started upon this subject; but the Lord in due time will clear his own cause, and vindicate his own ways. I leave all difficulties with him. It is sufficient for me that Scripture asserts, and experience proves, that it is thus in fact; Romans 3:9-21; Job 14:4.

Thus, we have not only forfeited our happiness by transgression—but are by our depravity, incapable of it—and have no more desire or taste for such a state as the Scripture describes heaven to be, than a man born deaf can have for a concert of music. And therefore our Lord declares, that, unless a man is born again—he not only shall not—but cannot see the kingdom of God! Hence a twofold necessity of a Savior: his blood for the pardon of our sins; his life, Spirit, and grace, to quicken our souls, and form us anew for himself, that we may feel his love, and show forth his praise.

Paul, before his conversion, was not sincere, in the sense I hope you to be. He thought himself in the right, without doubt, as many have done when they killed God's servants, John 16:2. He was blindly and obstinately zealous. He did not enter into the merits of the Christian cause, or inquire into facts with that attention which sincerity would have put him upon. You think that his sincerity and zeal were the very things that made him a chosen instrument: he himself speaks of them as the very things that made him peculiarly unworthy of that honor, 1 Corinthians 15:9; and he tells us, that he was set forth as a pattern of the Lord's long-suffering and mercy—that the very chief of sinners might be encouraged, 1 Timothy 1:15-16. Had he been sincerely desirous to know

whether Jesus was the Messiah, there was enough in his character, doctrines, miracles, and the prophecies concerning him—to have cleared up the point. But he took it for granted he was right in his opinion, and hurried blindly on, and was (as he said himself) exceedingly mad against them.

Such a kind of sincerity is common enough. People believe themselves right, and therefore treat others with scorn or rage. They appeal to the Scriptures—but first lay down their own preconceived sentiments for truths, and then examine what Scriptures they can find to countenance them. Surely a person's thinking himself right, will not give a sanction to all that he does under that persuasion.

Ignorance and obstinacy are in themselves sinful, and no plea of sincerity will exempt from the danger of being under their influence: Isaiah 27:11; Luke 6:39.

It appears to me, that, though you will not follow any man implicitly, you are desirous of discovering your mistakes, supposing you are mistaken in any point of importance. You read and examine the Word of God, not to find weapons with which to defend your sentiments at all events—but to know whether they are defensible or not. You pray for God's light and teaching; and in this search you are willing to risk, what men are commonly much afraid of hazarding—character, interest, preferment, favor, etc. A sincerity of this kind I too seldom meet with; when I do, I account it a token for good, and am ready to say, "No man can do this—unless God is with him." However, sincerity is not conversion; but I believe it is always a forerunner of it.

I would not be uncharitable and censorious, hasty and peremptory, in judging my fellow-creatures. But if I acknowledge the Word of God—I cannot avoid forming my judgment upon it. It is true, I cannot look into people's hearts; but hearts and principles are delineated to my hand—in the Scripture. I read, that no murderer has eternal life in him; I read likewise, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed;" and therefore I conclude, that there are speculative errors as heinous in their guilt, as destructive in their effects, as murder—and that the most moral, upright man—if he loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, is in the sight of God, the Judge of all—as displeasing to Him as a murderer!

It has pleased God, for the peace and support of society, to put a black mark upon those sins which affect the peace and welfare of our neighbor, such as adultery and murder. But undoubtedly the sins committed immediately against himself must be more heinous than any which offend our fellow-creatures. The second commandment, Matthew 22:39, is like the first; but it depends upon it, and is therefore inferior to it. Men ordinarily judge otherwise. To live regardless of God and the Gospel, is looked upon as a minor fault—in comparison with offenses against society. But sooner or later it will appear otherwise to all. A group of robbers may pride themselves upon the justice, honor, and truth they observe towards one another; but because they are a nuisance to the public good, they are deservedly accounted villains, and treated as such, notwithstanding their petty morality among themselves. Now, such a company of robbers bears a much greater proportion to a whole nation, than a nation, or all the nations of the earth, bears to the great God. Our dependence upon him is absolute, our obligations to him infinite. In vain shall men plead their moral discharge of relative duties to each other—if they fail in the unspeakably greater relation under which they stand to God. Therefore, when I see people living without God in the world, as all do until they are converted, I cannot but judge them in a dangerous state; not because I take pleasure in censuring, or think myself authorized to pass sentence upon my fellow-creatures—but

because the Scripture decides expressly on the case, and I am bound to take my sentiments from thence. The Philippian jailer was certainly a Christian when baptized, as you observe. He trembled; he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did not bid him amend his life—but to believe in the Lord Jesus. He believed, and rejoiced. But the Lord blessed the Apostle’s words, to produce in him that saving faith, which filled him with joy and peace. It was, as I observed before, something more than an assent to the proposition, that Jesus is the Christ. It was a resting in him for forgiveness and acceptance, and a cleaving to him in love. No other faith will purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world.

I feel myself much interested in your concerns; and your unexpected frank application to me, I consider as a providential call, which binds me to your service. I hope our correspondence will be productive of happy effects, and that we shall both one day rejoice in it.

Chapter 53

01.01. Separated from the ungodly world

Separated from the ungodly world May 24, 1774

Dear sir,

What a mercy it is, to be separated in spirit, conversation, and interest—from the ungodly world! Where all are alike by nature—but grace makes a happy and unspeakable difference! Believers were once under the same influence of that evil spirit who still works in the children of disobedience; each pursuing different paths—but all equally remote from truth and peace; some hatching cockatrice eggs, others weaving spiders' webs. These two general heads, of evil and vanity, include all the schemes, aims, and achievements of which man is capable—until God is pleased to visit the heart with his grace. The busy part of mankind are employed in multiplying evils and miseries. The more retired, speculative, and curious, are amusing themselves with what will hereafter appear as unsubstantial, unstable, and useless, as a cobweb! Death will soon sweep away all which the philosophers, the scientists, the mathematicians, the antiquarians, and other learned triflers, are now weaving with so much self-applauded address. Nor will the fine-spun dresses, in which the moralist and the self-righteous clothe themselves, be of more advantage to them, either for ornament or defense, than the web of a spider.

It is given only to a few, to know their present state and future destination. These build upon the immovable Rock of ages for eternity. These are trees springing from a living root, and bear the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. These alone are awake, while the rest of the world are in a deep sleep, indulging in vain dreams; from which likewise they will shortly awake. But, O with what consternation, when they shall find themselves irrecoverably divorced from all their delusive attachments, and compelled to appear before that God to whom they have lived strangers, and to whom they must give an account! O for a thousand tongues, to proclaim in the ears of thoughtless mortals, that important aphorism of our Lord, "Only one thing is needful!" Yet a thousand tongues would be, and are, employed in vain—unless so far as the Lord is pleased to send the watchman's warning, by the power and agency of his own Spirit.

I think the poet tells us, that Cassandra had the gift of truly foretelling future events; but she was afterwards laid under a painful embarrassment, that nobody would believe her words. Such, with respect to the bulk of their hearers, is the lot of Gospel ministers. They are enlightened to see, and sent forth to declare, the dreadful consequences of sin; but, alas, how few believe their report! To illustrate our grief and disappointment, I sometimes suppose there was a dangerous river in the way of travelers, over which there is a bridge, which those who can be prevailed upon may pass with safety. By the side of this bridge watchmen are placed, to warn passengers of the danger of the waters; to assure them, that all who attempt to go through them inevitably perish; to invite, entreat, and beseech them, if they value their lives—to cross the bridge. Methinks this should be an easy task—yet if we should see, in fact, the greater part stopping their ears to the friendly importunity, many so much offended by it, as to account the watchman's care impertinent, and

only deserving of scorn and ill-treatment, hardly one in fifty betaking themselves to the friendly bridge, the rest eagerly plunging into the waters, from which none return, as if they were determined to see who would be drowned first—this spectacle would be no unfit emblem of the reception the Gospel meets with, from a blinded world.

Gospel ministers are rejected, opposed, vilified; they are accounted troublers of the world, because they dare not, cannot stand silent, while sinners are perishing before their eyes. And if, in the course of many sermons, they can prevail but on one soul to take timely warning, and to seek to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life—they may account it a mercy and an honor, sufficient to overbalance all the labor and reproaches they are called to endure. From the most, they must expect no better reception than the Jews gave to Jeremiah, who told the Prophet to his face, "As to the word you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord—we will not hearken to you at all; but we will certainly do whatever goes forth out of our own mouth!"

Surely, if the Lord has given us any sense of the worth of our souls, any compassion towards them, this must be a painful exercise; and experience must teach us something of the meaning of Jeremiah’s pathetic exclamation, "O that my head were waters, and my eyes fountains of tears—that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people!" It is our duty to be thus affected. Our relief lies in the wisdom and sovereignty of God. He reveals his salvation to whom he pleases, for the most part to babes; from the bulk of the wise and the prudent—the gospel is hidden. Thus it has pleased him—and therefore it must be right. Yes, he will one day condescend to justify the propriety and equity of his proceedings to his creatures; then every mouth will be stopped, and none will be able to reply against their Judge. Light has come into the world—but men prefer darkness. They hate the light, resist it, and rebel against it. It is true—all do so! And therefore, if all were to perish under the condemnation, their ruin would be their own act. It is of grace that any are saved; and in the distribution of that grace, God does what he will with his own—a right which most are ready enough to claim in their own concerns, though they are so unwilling to allow it to the Lord of all.

Many perplexing and acrimonious disputes have been started upon this subject; but the redeemed of the Lord are called not to dispute—but to admire and rejoice, to love, adore, and obey! To know that he loved us, and gave himself for us, is the constraining argument and motive to love him, and surrender ourselves to him; to consider ourselves as no longer our own—but to devote ourselves, with every faculty, power, and talent, to his service and glory. He deserves our all—for he parted with all for us. He made himself poor, he endured shame, torture, death, and the curse, for us—that we, through him, might inherit everlasting life! Ah! the hardness of my heart, that I am no more affected, astonished, and overpowered, with this thought!

Chapter 54

01.01. Seriously engaged about trifles

Seriously engaged about trifles

November, 1775

Dear sir, In the midst of the hurries and changes of this unsettled state—we glide along swiftly towards an unchangeable world; and shall soon have as little connection with the scenes we are now passing through, as we have with what happened before the Flood! All which appears great and interesting in the present life, abstracted from its influence upon our internal character, and our everlasting destiny—will soon be as unreal as a dream of the night. This we know and confess; but, though our judgments are convinced, it is seldom that our hearts are duly affected by the thought. And while I find it easy to write in this moralizing strain, I feel myself disposed to be seriously engaged about trifles—and trifling in the most serious concerns—as if I believed the very contrary!

It is with good reason the Lord challenges as his own prerogative, the full knowledge of the deceitfulness, desperate wickedness, and latent depths of the human heart, which is capable of making even his own people so shamefully inconsistent with themselves, and with their acknowledged principles.

I find that, when I have something agreeable in expectation, that my imagination paints and prepares the scene beforehand, hurries me over the intervening space of time, as though it were a useless blank, and anticipates the pleasure I propose. Many of my thoughts of this kind are mere waking dreams; for perhaps the opportunity I am eagerly waiting for, never happens—but is swallowed up by some unforeseen disappointment; or if not, something from within or without prevents its answering the idea I had formed of it. Nor does my imagination confine itself within the narrow limits of probabilities; it can busy itself as eagerly in ranging after dreams and impossibilities, and engage my attention to the ideal pursuit of things which are never likely to happen. In these respects my imagination travels with wings; so that if the wildness, the multiplicity, the variety of the phantoms which pass through my mind in the space of a winter’s day, were known to my fellow-creatures, they would probably deem me, as I am often ready to deem myself—but a more sober and harmless kind of lunatic! But if I endeavor to put this active, roving power in a right track, and to represent to myself those scenes, which, though not yet present, I know will soon be realized, and have a greatness which the most enlarged exercise of my powers cannot comprehend. But if I would fix my thoughts upon the hour of death, the end of the world, the coming of the omniscient Judge, or similar subjects—then my imagination is presently tame, cold, and jaded, travels very slowly, and is soon wearied in the road of truth; though in the fairy fields of uncertainty and folly it can skip from mountain to mountain!

Mr. Addison supposes, that the imagination alone, as it can be differently affected, is capable of making us either inconceivably happy, or inconceivably miserable. I am sure it is capable of making us miserable, though I believe it seldom gives us much pleasure—but such as is to be

found in a fool's paradise! But I am sure, that were my outward life and conduct perfectly free from blame, the disorders and defilement of my imagination are sufficient to constitute me a chief sinner, in the sight of Him to whom the thoughts and intents of the heart are continually open—and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity!

Upon this head I cannot but lament how universally, almost, education is suited, and as it were designed—to add to the stimulus of depraved nature. A cultivated imagination is commended and sought after as a very desirable talent, though it seldom means more than the possession of a large stock of other people's dreams and fables, with a certain quickness in compounding them, enlarging upon them, and exceeding them by inventions of our own. Poets, painters, and even historians, are employed to assist us, from our early years—in forming an habitual relish for shadows and colorings, which both indispose for the search of truth, and even unfit its for its reception, unless proposed just in our own way! The best effect of the Belles Letters upon the imagination, seems generally expressed by the word Taste. And what is this taste—but a certain disposition which loves to be humored, soothed, and flattered, and which can hardly receive or bear the most important truths, if they are not decorated and set off with such a delicacy and address, as taste requires? I say the most important truths; because truths of a secular importance strike so closely upon the senses, that the decision of taste perhaps is not waited for.

Thus, if a man is informed of the birth of his child, or that his house is on fire, the message takes up his thoughts, and he is seldom much disgusted with the manner in which it is delivered. But what an insuperable bar is the refined taste of many, to their profiting by the preaching of the Gospel, or even to their hearing it? Though the subject of a gospel discourse is weighty, and some just representation given of the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of Christ; yet, if there is something amiss in the elocution, language, or manner of the preacher, people of taste must be possessed, in a good measure, of grace likewise—if they can hear him with tolerable patience. And perhaps three fourths of those who are accounted the most sensible and judicious in the auditory, will remember little about the sermon—but the tone of the voice, the awkwardness of the attitude, the obsolete expressions, and the like; while the poor and simple, not being encumbered with this hurtful accomplishment, receive the messenger as the Lord's servant, and the truth as the Lord's Word, and are comforted and edified. But I stop. Some people would say, that I must suppose you to have but little taste, or else much grace, or I should not venture to trouble you with such letters as mine.

Chapter 55

01.01. Seven letters to a Pastor

Seven letters to a Pastor

LETTER 1

Dear Sir, The Lord is pleased, in a measure, to show me the suitableness and necessity of a humble, dependent frame of heart. A ceasing from self, and a reliance upon him in the due use of appointed means, I am far from having attained—but I hope I am pressing, at least seeking after it. I wish to speak the word simply and experimentally, and to be so engaged with the importance of the subject, the worth of souls, and the thought that I am speaking in the name and presence of the Most High God, as that I might, if possible, forget everything else. This would be an attainment indeed! More good might be expected from a broken discourse, delivered in such a frame, than from the most advantageous display of knowledge and gifts without it. Not that I would undervalue propriety and pertinence of expression; it is our duty to study to find out acceptable words, and to endeavor to appear as workmen that need not be ashamed; but those who have most ability in this way, have need of a double guard of grace and wisdom, lest they be tempted to trust in it, or to value themselves upon it. Those who trust in the Lord shall never be moved; and those who abase themselves before him, he will exalt. I am well persuaded that your conduct and views have been agreeable to these sentiments; and therefore the Lord has supported, encouraged, and owned you; and I trust he will still bless you, and make you a blessing to many. He who walks humbly—walks surely.

LETTER 2 August 14, 1770. My Dear Sir,

I know not that I ever had those solemn views of sin which you speak of; and though I believe I should be better for them, I dare not seriously wish for them. There is a petition which I have heard in public prayer—Lord, show us the evil of our hearts. To this petition I cannot venture to set my Amen; at least not without a qualification: Show me enough of yourself to balance the view, and then show me what you please. I think I have a very clear and strong conviction in my judgment—that I am vile and worthless; that my heart is full of evil, only evil, and that continually. I know something of it too experimentally; and therefore, judging of the whole by the sample, though I am not suitably affected with what I do see, I tremble at the thought of seeing more. A man may look with some pleasure upon the sea in a storm, provided he stands safe upon the land himself; but to be upon the sea in a storm, is quite another thing. And yet, surely, the coldness, worldliness, pride, and twenty other evils under which I groan, owe much of their strength to the lack of that feeling sense of my own abominations, with which you have been favored. I say favored; for I doubt not but the Lord gave it to you in mercy, and that it has proved, and will prove, a mercy to you, to make you more humble, spiritual, and dependent, as well as to increase your ability for preaching the Gospel of his grace. Upon these accounts, I can assure you, that, upon a first reading, and until I stopped a moment to count the cost, I was ready to envy you all that you had felt. I often seem to know what the Scripture teaches both of sin and grace—as if I knew them not; so faint and languid are my perceptions, I often seem to think and talk of sin without any

sorrow—and of grace without any joy.

Some people say that they are spiritually awakened by dreams. I do not think, that, strictly speaking, that dreams are able to awaken a dead soul. I suppose people may be terrified by them, and made thoughtful—but they awakened only by the Word. The dreams either sent them to hear the Gospel, or roused them to attend to it; but it was the knowledge of the truth brought home to the heart, which did the business of conversion.

Two people here, who lived like heathens, and never came to church, were alarmed by some terrifying dreams, and came out to hearing forthwith. There the Lord was pleased to meet with them. One of them died triumphing; the other, I hope, will do so when her time comes. Whatever means, instruments, or occasions he is pleased to employ, the work is all his own; and I trust you and I are made willing to give him all the glory, and to sink into the dust at the thought that he should ever permit us to take his holy name upon our polluted lips.

LETTER 3

June 13, 1772. My dear Sir,

You say that your experience agrees with mine. It must be so, because our hearts are alike. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, destitute of good, and prone to evil. This is the character of mankind universally, and those who are made partakers of grace are renewed but in part; the evil nature still cleaves to them, and the root of sin, though mortified, is far from being dead. While the cause remains, it will have effects; and while we are burdened with the body of this death, we must groan under it. But we need not be swallowed up with over-much sorrow, since we have, in Jesus—a Savior, a Righteousness, an Advocate, a Shepherd. "He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust." If sin abounds in us—grace abounds much more in him. Nor would he allow sin to remain in his people—if he did not know how to over-rule it, and make it an occasion of endearing his love and grace so much the more to their souls. The Lord forbid, that we should plead his goodness as an encouragement to sloth and indifference! Humiliation, godly sorrow, and self-abasement, befit us; but, at the same time, we may rejoice in the Lord. Though sin remains in us—it shall not have dominion over us; though it wars in us—it shall not prevail against us. We have a Mercy-seat sprinkled with blood; we have an Advocate with the Father; we are called to this warfare, and we fight under the eye of the Captain of our salvation, who is always near to renew our strength, to heal our wounds, and to cover our heads in the heat of battle. As ministers, we preach to those who have like passions and infirmities with ourselves; and by our own feelings, fears, and changes, we learn to speak a word in season to those who are weary, to warn those who stand, and to stretch out a hand of compassion towards those who are fallen; and to commend it to others, from our own experience, as a faithful saying, "that Jesus came to save the chief of sinners." Besides, if the Lord is pleased to give us some liberty, acceptance, and success in preaching the Gospel, we should be in great danger of running mad with spiritual pride—if the Lord did not permit us to feel the depravity and vileness of our hearts, and thereby keep us from forgetting what we are in ourselves. With regard to your young people, you must expect to meet with some disappointment. Perhaps not every one of whom you have conceived hopes, will stand; and some who do truly belong to the Lord are permitted to make sad mistakes, for their future humiliation. It is our part to watch, warn, and admonish. We ought likewise to be concerned for those slips and miscarriages in others, which we cannot prevent. A minister, if

faithful, and of a right spirit, can have no greater joy than to see his people walking honorably and steadily in the truth; and hardly anything will give him more sensible grief, than to see any of them taken in Satan's wiles!

Yet still the Gospel brings relief here. He is wiser than we are, and knows how to make those things subservient to promote his work, which we ought to guard against as evils and hindrances. We are to use the means—he is to rule the whole. If the faults of some are made warnings to others, and prove in the end occasions of illustrating the riches of Divine grace—this should reconcile us to what we cannot help, though such considerations should not slacken our diligence in sounding an alarm, and reminding our hearers of their continual danger.

LETTER 4 January 26, 1775.

Dear Sir,

I lately read a sermon of Richard Baxter (in the fifth volume of the Morning Exercises), on Matthew 5:16. My mind is something impressed with the subject, and with his manner of treating it. Some of Mr. Baxter's sentiments in divinity are rather cloudy; and he sometimes, upon that account, met with but poor quarter from the staunch Calvinists of his day. But, by what I have read of him, where he is quiet, and not ruffled by controversy, he appears to me, notwithstanding some mistakes, to have been one of the greatest men of his age; and perhaps, in fervor, spirituality, and success, more than equal, both as a minister and a Christian, to some twenty, taken together, of those who affect to undervalue him in this present day. There is a spirit in some passages of his Saint's Rest, and his Dying Thoughts, and other of his practical treatises, compared with which, many modern compositions, though well written and well meant, appear to me to a great disadvantage. But I was speaking of his sermon. He points out the way at which we should aim to let our light shine in the world, for the glory of God, and the conviction and edification of men. The perusal suggested to me some instruction—and much reproof. Alas! my friend, are we not too often chargeable with a sad, shameful selfishness and narrowness of spirit—far, very far different from that activity, enlargement, and generosity of soul, which such a Gospel as we have received, might be expected to produce! For myself, I must plead guilty. It seems as if my heart was always awake and keenly sensible to my own concerns, while those of my Lord and Master affect me much less forcibly, at least only by intervals. Were a stranger to judge of me by what I sometimes say in the pulpit, he might think that, like the angels, I had but two things in view—to do the will of God, and to behold his face. But, alas! would he not be almost as much mistaken, as if, seeing Mr. G. in the character of a tragedy hero, he should suppose him to be the very person whom he only represents! I hope Satan will never be able to persuade me that I am a mere hypocrite and stage-player; but sure I am, that there is so much hypocrisy in me, so many littlenesses and self-seekings insinuating into my plan of conduct, that I have humbling cause to account myself unworthy and unprofitable, and to say, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord."

I have some idea of what a Christian ought to be; and it is, I hope, what I desire to be. A Christian should be conformable to Christ in his spirit and in his practice. That is, he should be spiritually minded, dead to the world, filled with zeal for the glory of God, the spread of the Gospel, and the good of souls. He should be humble, patient, meek, cheerful, and thankful under all events and changes. He should account it the business and honor of his life--to imitate Him who pleased not Himself, who went about doing good. The whole deportment of a Christian should show that the

saving knowledge of Jesus, affords him all he could expect from it--a balm for every grief, an amends for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for everything which he is called to do or suffer, and a principle sufficient to constitute the actions of every day, even in common life--as acts of piety. He should make every event through which he passes, subservient and subordinate to his main design--the glory of Christ.

Gold is the worldly man’s god, and his worship and service are uniform and consistent, not by fits and starts—but from morning to night, from the beginning to the end of the year, he is the same man. He will not slip an opportunity of adding to his pelf today, because he may have another tomorrow—but he heartily and eagerly embraces both; and so far as he carries his point, though his perseverance may expose him to the ridicule or reproach of his neighbors, he thinks himself well paid!

LETTER 5

January, 1776.

Dear Sir,

I may learn (only I am a sad dunce) by small and common incidents—as well as by some more striking and important turns in life, that it is not in man to direct his steps. It is not for me to say, Today or tomorrow I will do this or that. I cannot write a letter to a friend without God’s permission and help, for neither opportunity nor ability are at my own disposal. It is not needful that the Lord should raise a mountain in my way, to stop my purpose; if he only withdraws a certain kind of imperceptible support, which in general I have, and use without duly considering whose it is—then, in a moment, I feel myself unstrung and disabled, like a ship which has lost her masts, and cannot proceed until he is pleased to refit me and renew my strength. My pride and propensity to self-dependence render frequent changes of this kind necessary to me, or I would soon forget what I am, and take the praise to myself.

Therefore, upon the whole, I am satisfied, and see it best that I should be absolutely poor and pennyless in myself, and forced to depend upon the Lord for the smallest things—as well as the greatest. And if, by his blessing, my experience should at length tally with my judgment in this point—that without Him I can do nothing; then I know I shall find it easy, through him, to do all things; for the door of his mercy is always open, and it is but ask and have. But, alas! a secret persuasion (though contrary to repeated convictions) that I have something in myself, too often prevents me going to him for it; and then no wonder I am disappointed. The life of faith seems so simple and easy in theory, that I can point it out to others in few words. But in practice it is very difficult; and my advances are so slow, that I hardly dare say I get forward at all. It is a great thing indeed to have the spirit of a little child, so as to be habitually afraid of taking a single step without God’s leading.

I am glad to know the Lord is still with you; I trust he has not withdrawn wholly from us. We have much call for thankfulness, and much for humiliation. Some here are evidently ripening for glory, and now and then we have a new inquirer. But the progress of wickedness among the unconverted here is dreadful. Convictions repeatedly stifled in many, have issued in a hardness and boldness in sinning, which I believe is seldom found but in those places where the light of the Gospel has been long resisted and abused. If my eyes suitably affected my heart, I should weep

day and night upon this account; but, alas! I am too indifferent! I feel a woeful defect in my zeal for God and compassion for souls; and when Satan and conscience charge me with cowardice, treachery, and stupidity—I know not what to reply! I am generally carried through my public work with some liberty; and because I am not put to shame before the people, I seem content and satisfied. I wish to be more thankful for what the Lord is pleased to do among us—but, at the same time, to be more earnest with him for a farther out-pouring of his Spirit. Assist me herein with your prayers. As to my own private experience, the enemy is not allowed to touch the foundation of my faith and hope; thus far I have peace. But my conflicts with indwelling sin, are very distressing. I cannot doubt of my state and acceptance with God; and yet it seems no one can have more cause for doubts and fears than myself, if such doubtings were at all encouraged by the Gospel; but I see they are not. I see that what I desire and hope for, the Lord promises to do, for his own Name's sake, and notwithstanding all my vileness and perverseness! I cannot question but he has given me (for how else could I have it?) a thirst for that communion with Him in love, and conformity to his image, of which as yet I have experienced but very faint and imperfect beginnings. But if he has begun, I venture, upon his Word—that he will not forsake the work of his own hands. On public affairs I say but little. Many are censuring men and measures; but I would lay all the blame upon sin. It appears plain to me—that the Lord has a controversy with us; and therefore I fear what we have yet seen is but the beginning of sorrows. I am ready to dread the event of this summer; but I remember that the Lord reigns. He has his own glory and the good of his church in view, and will not be disappointed. He knows how, likewise, to take care of those who fear him. I wish there was more sighing and mourning among professors, for the sins of the nation and the churches!

LETTER 6

Dear Sir, No very considerable alteration has taken place since I wrote, except the death of Mrs. L, who was removed to a better world in September. The latter part of her course was very painful; but the Lord made her more than conqueror, and she had good cause to apply the Apostle's words, 2 Timothy 4:7-8. She repeated that passage in her last illness, and chose it for her funeral text. She was a Christian indeed—her faith was great—and so were her trials. Now she is above them all—now she is before the Throne! May the good Lord help us to be followers of those who through faith and patience, have attained to the blessed hope set before them. The number of professors still increases with us; and a greater number of people affords a greater variety of cases, and gives greater scope to observe the workings of the heart and Satan. For seven years I had to say, that I had not seen a person of whom I had conceived a good hope, to go back into the world. But I have met with a few disappointments since. However, upon the whole, I trust the Lord is still with us. The enemy tries to disturb and defile us; and if the Lord did not keep the city—the poor watchman would watch in vain. But the Eye that never slumbers nor sleeps has been upon us for good; and though we have cause of humiliation and sorrow—we have likewise much cause of thankfulness. My health is still preserved; and I hope that the Lord does not allow my desires of personal communion with him, and of usefulness in the ministry, to decline. He supplies me with fresh strength and matter in my public work. I hear now and then of one brought to inquire of the way of salvation. Christ's presence is at times made known to many in the ordinances. To combine zeal with prudence is indeed difficult. There is often too much SELF in our zeal—and too much of the fear of man in our prudence. However, what we cannot attain by any skill or resolution of our own, we may hope in measure to receive from him who gives liberally to those who seek him, and

desire to serve him. Prudence is a much abused word; but there is a heavenly wisdom, which the Lord has promised to give to those who humbly wait upon him for it. It does not consist in forming a bundle of rules and maxims—but in a spiritual taste and discernment, derived from an experimental knowledge of the truth, and of the heart of man, as described in the Word of God. Its exercise consists much in a simple dependence upon the Lord, to guide and prompt us in every action. We seldom act wrong, when we truly depend upon him, and can cease from leaning to our own understanding. When the heart is thus in a right tune and frame, and his Word dwells richly in us—there is a kind of immediate perception of what is proper for us to do in present circumstances, without much painful inquiry—a light shines before us upon the path of duty. And if He permits us in such a spirit to make some mistakes, he will likewise teach us to profit by them; and our reflections upon what was wrong one day, will make us to act more wisely the next. At best, we must always expect to meet with new proofs of our own weakness and insufficiency; otherwise, how would we be kept humble, or know how to prize the liberty He allows us of coming to the Throne of Grace, for fresh forgiveness and direction every day? But if He enables us to walk before Him with a single eye, He will graciously accept our desire of serving Him better if we could; and his blessing will make our feeble endeavors in some degree successful, at the same time that we see defects and evils attending our best services, are sufficient to make us ashamed of them.

LETTER 7 January 11, 1777.

Dear Sir,

We all need, and at the seasons the Lord sees best—we all receive, chastisement. I hope you likewise have reason to praise him, for supporting, sanctifying, and delivering mercy. The coward flesh presently shrinks under the rod, hut faith need not fear it; for it is in the hand of one who loves us better than we do ourselves, and who knows our frame that we are but dust, and therefore will not allow us to be overdone and overwhelmed.

I feel as a friend should feel for Mr. B. Were I able, I would soon send him health. If the Lord, who is able to remove his illness in a minute, permits it to continue, we may be sure, upon the whole—that it will be best for him. It is, however, very lawful to pray that his health may be restored, and his usefulness prolonged. I ask you to give my love to him, and tell him that my heart bears him an affectionate remembrance; and I know the God whom he serves will make every difficult dispensation supportable and profitable to him.

If, as you observe, the Song of Solomon describes the experience of his church, it shows the dark as well as the bright side. No one part of it is the experience of every individual at any particular time. Some are in his banqueting-house, others upon their beds. Some sit under his banner, supported by His arm; while others have a faint perception of him at a distance, with many a hill and mountain between. In one thing, however, they all agree—that He is the leading object of their desires, and that they have had such a discovery of his person, work, and love—as makes him precious to their hearts. Their judgment of him is always the same—but their sensibility varies. The love they bear him, though rooted and grounded in their hearts, is not always equally in exercise; nor can it he so. We are like trees, which, though alive, cannot put forth their leaves and fruit without the influence of the sun. They are alive in winter as well as in summer; but how different is their appearance in these different seasons! Were we always alike—could we always believe, love, and rejoice—we would think the power inherent, and our own. But it is more for the Lord’s

glory, and more suited to form us to a temper befitting the Gospel—that we should be made deeply sensible of our own inability and dependence, than that we should be always in a lively frame.

I am persuaded, that a broken and a contrite spirit, a conviction of our vileness and nothingness, connected with a cordial acceptance of Jesus as revealed in the Gospel—is the highest attainment we can reach in this life. Sensible comforts are desirable, and we must be in a spiritual declension when they do not appear so to us; but I believe there may be a real exercise of faith and growth in grace, when our sensible feelings are faint and low. A soul may be in as thriving a state when thirsting, seeking, and mourning after the Lord—as when actually rejoicing in him; as much in earnest when fighting in the valley—as when singing upon the mount. Nay, dark seasons afford the surest and strongest manifestations of the power of faith. To hold fast the Word of promise, to maintain a hatred of sin, to go on steadfastly in the path of duty, in defiance both of the frowns and the smiles of the world, when we have but little comfort—is a more certain evidence of grace—than a thousand things which we may do or forbear when our spirits are warm and lively.

I have seen many who have been, upon the whole—but uneven walkers, though at times they have seemed to enjoy, at least have talked of, great spiritual comforts. I have seen others, for the most part, complain of much spiritual darkness and coldness, who have been remarkably humble, tender, and exemplary in their spirit and conduct. Surely, were I to choose my lot, it would be with the latter.

Chapter 56

01.01. Six letters to friends

Six letters to friends

Letter 1 To Mr. B. May 1, 1780 My dear sir,

I blame myself, and ask your pardon, for not writing sooner. My sickness occasioned me so many visits from kind friends, that it added little to my usual time of leisure. As the news of your illness and your amendment came together, my sympathy was concern mixed with pleasure; and, having as much that seemed to require immediate attention as I could well find time for, I believe the hope of seeing you soon in town, made me the more easy to let your letter be by unanswered. My arm, I believe, is nearly, if not quite, well, excepting a stiffness in it, from being so long confined in one position. I have it now as much out of the sling as in it. I have been able to wear my coat for a week past; the surgeon, however, thinks it prudent, though not necessary, to keep on my bandage for a few days longer. I believe the arm has advanced as happily, as speedily, and with as little pain, as possible. My spirit has been peaceful; it is a small thing to say resigned, for I have seen it a dispensation full of mercy, and have not been permitted to feel a wish that it had been otherwise. Especially as, through the Lord’s mercy, my wife felt no abiding ill effect from the great terror she was at first seized with, and which I feared might have brought a return of all her nervous complaints. But He is very gracious to us, and she is remarkably well.

I think you must have suffered more than I have done of late. Be assured that our faithful and good Shepherd affords us strength according to our day. He knows our frame, and will lay no more on us than He will enable us to bear. Yes, no more than He will cause to work for our good—He delights in our prosperity. Our comforts of every kind come free and undeserved. But, when we are afflicted, it is because there is a need-be for it. He does not afflict willingly. Our trials are either beneficial medicines, or honorable appointments, to put us in such circumstances as may best qualify us to show forth His praise. Usually he has both these ends in view.

We always stand in need of correction; and, when He enables us to suffer with patience, we are then happy witnesses to others of the truth of his promises, and the power of His grace in us. For nothing but the influence of God’s Spirit can keep us, at such times, either from despondency or impatience. If left to ourselves in trouble, we shall either sink down into a sullen grief—or toss and rebel like a wild bull in a net! Our different posts are, as you observe, by the Lord’s wise appointment; and therefore must be best for us respectively. Mine is full of trials and difficulties! Indeed, I would soon make sad work of it—without His continual help; and would have reason to tremble every moment—if He did not maintain in me a humble confidence, that He will help me to the end.

He bids me, "fear not!" and at the same time He says, "Happy is the man who fears always." How to fear, and not to fear, at the same time, is, I believe, one branch of that secret of the Lord which none can understand but by the teaching of his Spirit. When I think of my deceitful heart, of the treacherous world, of the malicious powers of darkness—what a cause of continual fear—I am on

an enemy’s ground, and cannot move a step but some snare is spread for my feet! But, when I think of the person, grace, power, care, and faithfulness of my Savior—why may I not say, "I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge!"

I wish to be delivered from anxious and unbelieving fear, which weakens the hands, and disquiets the heart. I wish to increase in a humble jealousy and distrust of myself, and of everything about me; I am imperfect in both respects—but I hope my desire is to him who has promised to do all things for me. Your desire for the mortification of self, is, I hope, mine likewise. Yet I would regulate it by the Word of God, so as not to expect more than is promised. I cannot properly expect a perfect exemption from conflict, because I believe it is the will of God I should have something to conflict with while I am here. To be sensible of the motions of sin in me, watchful against them, humbled for them, this I desire; and I believe the more I advance in grace, the more feelingly I shall say, "Behold, I am vile!"

But, desirable and precious as sanctification is, it is not, I trust it will never be, the ground of my hope. Nor, were I as sinless as an angel in glory, could I have a better ground of hope than I have at present. For my acceptance with God, I rely, (oh, that I indeed did,) simply, wholly, and solely, upon the obedience unto death of my Substitute. Jesus is my righteousness, my life, and my salvation. I am still a sinner; but he who knew no sin was made sin for me, that I might be the righteousness of God in him. This right to eternal life, by believing in the Son of God, is, in my view, equal in all who do so believe, and as perfect and sure when they first believe, as at the last moment of life; as perfect and sure in the thief on the cross, as in an apostle or martyr. An infant is as truly alive as a grown person, though all his members and faculties are in a state of weakness. Therefore, with respect to my acceptance, I would put my graces as much out of the question as my actual sins. That Word suited me at first, and will suit me at the end, "To him who works not—but believes on him who justified the ungodly." This morning (May-day) I preached for Mr. R ___ a sermon to young people; it reminded me a little of my annual new-year’s sermon at ___; but, though I had some liberty, I feel a difference between speaking to one’s own children, and those of another. They were my own proper charge, and the concern of their souls was laid upon me with a peculiar weight.

Letter 2 December 3, 1780 My dear sir, The Lord is risen indeed. This is his day, when we are called to meet in his house, and (we in this branch of his family) to rejoice at his table. I meant to write yesterday—but could not. I trust it is not unsuitable to the design and privilege of this day, to give you a morning salutation in his name; and to say, "Come, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!"

If I am not mistaken, I have met you this morning already. Were you not at Gethsemane? Have you not been at Golgotha? Did I not see you at the tomb? This is our usual circuit, yours and mine, on these mornings, indeed every morning; for what other places are worth visiting? what other objects are worth seeing? Oh, this wonderful love! this blood of sovereign efficacy! the infallible antidote which kills sin, cures the sinner, gives sight to the blind, and life to the dead! How often have I known it turn sorrow into joy.

O you Savior and Sun of the soul, shine forth this morning, and cheer and gladden all our hearts! Shine upon me and mine, upon all whom I love, and on all who love you! Shine powerfully on my dear friends at ___, and let us know, that, though we are absent from each other—that you are

equally near to us all.

I must go to breakfast, then dress, and away to court. Oh, for a sight of the King; and, oh, to hear him speak; for his voice is music, and his person is beauty! When he says, "Remember Me!" and the heart hears, what a train of incidents is at once revived!—from the manger to the cross, what he said, what he did, how he lived, how he loved, how he died; all is marvelous, affecting, humbling, transporting! I think I know what I would be, and what I would do—if I could. How near would I get, how low would I fall, how would I weep and sing in the same breath; and with what solemn earnestness would I recommend him to my fellow-sinners. But, alas, when I would do good, evil is present with me. Pray for me, and help me likewise to praise the Lord; for his mercies are new every morning, and every moment.

Letter 3

January 8, 1781 My dear sir,

I understand your views and feelings so well, that my letter will not have such an air of condolence as some people might expect on a like occasion. The first thing that strikes me respecting your personal concern in the late awful calamity, calls rather for congratulation. I see your beloved son preserved in the midst of general ruin; in his preservation I see the immediate, the wonderful hand of the Lord stretched out; I consider it as an answer to your prayers; I humbly hope it is a token of further good respecting him, and that the restraining word, 'Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it,' is applicable to his case. I find, likewise, that but one life was lost on your estate; which, to a mind like yours, I am sure is an alleviating circumstance. For the rest, I am sure you have lost nothing but what he, if he sees it good, can restore with a large increase; nothing that is directly necessary to your peace and comfort, even in the present life; nothing that is worth naming when compared to that which you love above all.

You may still, and I trust you will, find the Lord as near and as gracious; and the light of his countenance as sweet and as cheering as ever. You have an estate in a kingdom which cannot be shaken, out of the reach of earthquakes, hurricanes, and enemies. Indeed, you do not think you have lost anything, in strictness of speech, because you have been taught of God not to consider anything you possess as properly your own. You feel yourself the Lord's servant and steward, and whether he is pleased to enlarge or abridge the talents he has entrusted to your care; your chief solicitude in either case, is to be faithful to every intimation of his will. I believe, that, if the whole produce of Jamaica centered in your warehouses, the Lord would not permit you to forget that you are a stranger and pilgrim upon earth; and I believe, if you were not to receive a pepper-corn from it in future, he would still make you happy in himself.

I judge thus for what he has done for you already—he has given you a taste and a desire which nothing but himself can satisfy; he has shown you the secret of his holy religion; and, by leading you to fix your dependence upon him, has raised you to a noble state of independence with regard to creatures and contingencies, which are all in his hand, and can do us neither good nor harm but of his bidding.

Barbados and Martinico, it seems, have suffered still more. It is observable, that, during the whole summer, while we and the French had large fleets in those seas, the Lord would not permit them to do any considerable harm on either side. He was pleased to take the business into his own

hands, and has shown us how easily he can strike such a blow as shall constrain even enemies to commiserate each other.

Mr. P ___ told me this morning, that it is supposed Jersey is taken. Thus the cloud grows darker. The flames of war are still spreading wider, and difficulties seem increasing on every side. The Lord's hand is lifted up; men will not see—thus far the prophecy is fulfilled. I tremble at what may further concern us in the following clause, "But they shall see!" If he undertakes to make this insensible nation know that he is the Lord, he will certainly accomplish his purpose. What it may cost us before we learn the lesson, who can say? But he will be mindful of those who fear him. That word, "It shall be well with the righteous!" cannot be broken. Hitherto the nation is in a deep sleep, and professors, I am afraid, are sadly slumbering. I can hardly find anywhere around me, (alas, that I cannot find in myself!) a spirit of humiliation and prayer, in any degree answerable to the state of the times. Oh, that the Lord would graciously revive us! We have, indeed, abundance of preaching and abundance of hearers; there are, doubtless, many individuals alive and in earnest; but the bulk of those who avow an attachment to the gospel are too little affected either for themselves or others. My wife is pretty well; she has had but little complaint since P ___ has been ill, who likewise is now getting better. The child scalded her foot on new-year's day, through mercy but slightly—it was a gentle memorial to us how entirely dependent we are on his protection for safety in our smoothest hours. We are frail and feeble creatures, it is not needful to raise a hurricane to destroy us—were he only to withdraw his arm for a moment, some unthought-of evil would presently overwhelm us. It did not prevent her hearing my sermon to young people that night; but she has been confined to the house since. My health continues firm, and I am enabled to preach with apparent liberty, with what effect God only knows; but I am sometimes afraid there is more sound than power. I am well attended, and encouraged to hope that I do not labor wholly in vain. May the grace of our good Shepherd be with us all. Let us praise him for what is past, and cheerfully trust him for what is to come. He knows where and what we are, and numbers the very hairs of our heads.

I am, most affectionately, your much obliged, etc.

Letter 4

March 13, 1781 My dear Miss M ___,

If wishes and purposes were always effectual, I would not have been so long three letters in debt to your house—I would answer all if I could—but perhaps it will take the leisure time of two or three mornings to answer one, and the first must be to you, because it is so seldom I have one from you to answer.

I saw Mr. ___ yesterday; he informed me of Mr. ___ 's death. Indeed, the suddenness of it struck me. The uncertainty of life has been a theme for declaration in all ages—but by how few is it practically laid to heart. Happy are those who know whom they have believed, and are waiting with desire his recall home to himself, that they may see him as he is. I am bound to pray that this bereaving stroke may be sanctified to his family. But Mr. ___ told me something that affected me still more nearly—he says that Mrs. B ___ has been worse this past two weeks. I believe I am foolish and inconsistent—but I cannot help it. When the Lord has taken her to himself, I hope I shall say, "Your will be done!" I hope I shall follow her with my thoughts, and feel some satisfaction

in thinking—Now she is out of the reach of pain and sorrow forever! Now she sees her Savior's face without a veil, and sings his praise without the interruption of a single sigh! Now she is a pillar of the heavenly temple, and shall go no more out. But at present, and while she is continued with us, I feel an anxiety and a desire, which I fear are wrong; I feel unwilling too lose such a friend; and I am sure I feel for those who are more nearly interested in her than myself.

Tell her, that my wife and I are not willing to think any but her own children can exceed us in love and sympathy; that we shall be thinking of her, speaking of her, and, I hope, praying for her daily, and for you all. Well, let the flesh say what it will, we know that all is well. We cannot love her so well as he who bought her with his blood. And, ah, how faint is our tenderness compared with his! He will not let his children feel one pain too many, or too sharp! He will enable them to glorify him even in the fire, and he will soon wipe away every tear.

I am glad to find that the Lord leads you further and deeper into the mysteries of his salvation. As a theory, it may be expressed in a few words—but to live a life of faith on the Son of God as our wisdom, righteousness, and strength, considered as a matter of experience, is what we usually attain to by slow degrees, and at best but imperfectly. We are always capable of further advances, and are frequently obliged to learn over again that which we thought we had learned already. My sentiments on this point seem tolerably clear—but in practice I fall sadly short, and feel that the principles of self and unbelief, are still deeply rooted in me. However, I trust I am in the school of the great Teacher, and I humbly hope he will carry on the work he has begun.

What I want, what I pray for—is a simple dependent spirit, to be willing to put myself entirely into his hands, to follow him without asking questions, to believe him without making objections, and to receive and expect everything in his own time, and in his way. This is the course we take when we consult an earthly physician; we consult him—but we do not pretend to direct him. Thus would I give myself up to my heavenly infallible Physician; but this is one branch of the good, which, when I would do, I find evil is present with me. But it is likewise one part of the sickness I groan under, and which He has in mercy undertaken to cure; and therefore, though I am very sick indeed, I trust I shall not die—but live and declare his wonderful works.

I long aimed to 'be something'. I now wish I was more heartily willing to 'be nothing'. A cipher, a round 0 is by itself a thing of no value, and a million of them set in a row amount to no more than a single cipher. But, place a significant figure before the row, and you may soon express a larger number than you can well conceive. Thus my wisdom is 0, my righteousness is 0, my strength is 0. But, put the wisdom, power, and grace of Jesus before them, let me be united to him, let his power rest upon my weakness, and be magnified in it, in this way I shall be something. Not in and of myself—but in and from Him.

Thus the apostle speaks of being filled with all the fullness of God. What an amazing expression! Thus, so far as we die to self, Christ lives in us. He is the light by which we see; He is the life by which we live; He is the strength by which we walk; and, by his immediate virtue and influence, all our works and fruits are produced. We have no sufficiency in ourselves—but we have all-sufficiency in Him! At one and the same time—we feel a conviction that we can do nothing—and an ability to do all things that fall within the line of our calling. When I am weak—then I am strong.

I am, your very affectionate and obliged servant.

Letter 5

April 12, 1781 My dear Miss M ___ ,

Accept my sincere, though rather tardy thanks for your letter of the 11th of February. I beg you likewise to accept my assurance, that, if time and opportunity were with me in any proportion to my inclination, your letters would be very speedily answered.

I knew you would be a favorable reader of Cardiphonia. Your kind partiality to the writer would dispose you to put the best construction on what you read; and your attachment to the design and principal subject of the letters, would make them welcome to you. We can put up with smaller faults, when a person is disposed to praise those who we dearly love. I trust my pen is chiefly devoted to the praise of Jesus your beloved, and so far as I succeed, I am sure what I write will be acceptable to you.

How can I not praise Him—since He has snatched me as a brand from the burning, and quenched the fire of my sins in His own blood! How can I not praise Him—since He has given me a glance of His excellency? If any do not love Him—it is surely because they do not know Him. To see Him but once with the eye of the soul—is to be convinced that He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely! His person is glory, His name is love, His work from first to last is grace. The moment the sinner is enabled to behold Him—he is seized with greater admiration than the queen of Sheba felt when brought into the presence of Solomon! Those alone are happy, who, as children and servants in His family—stand continually before Him, to wait upon Him, admire Him, and hear His wisdom.

But, all—how faint are my conceptions; how little do I know of him; and how little of that little which I deem my knowledge, is realized to my heart! What trifles are sufficient to hide him from my view, and to make me almost forget that he is nearer to me than any object that strikes my sense? Is it so with you? Let us at least rejoice in prospect of the promised hour, when veils, and clouds, and walls shall be removed, and we shall see him as he is; so see him, as to have all our desires satisfied in him, and fixed upon him, and will be completely transformed into his image. My mind frequently anticipates the pleasure I propose in a visit to B___, but it is not likely to take place as soon as I wished. I had hoped to leave London soon soon—but circumstances are likely to forbid it. My times are in the Lord’s hand, and, if he sees it best for me to be gratified, he will make it practicable, and his providence will likewise determine the fittest season. I wish not to be impatient—but to refer myself to him. This is certain, when he opens the door, and says, ’Go!’ I shall set off with alacrity, for I long to walk upon that lawn, and to sit in that chair, and to converse with those dear friends who have deservedly so much of my heart.

Thank Miss M ___ for her letter. We rejoice to hear that your dear mamma is better. I believe I think of her daily, and often in the day; and this not only for the love I bear her—but for my own relief. My wife is often ill, sufficiently so to awaken my feelings for her. But, when I reflect how the power, grace, and faithfulness of our Lord and Savior, support under much severer trials, it disposes me in some measure to submission, thankfulness, and confidence. He can make those trials that appear to be heaviest, tolerable.

I shall certainly write before I come, when I can fix the time, and then, except something extraordinary interferes to require it, I shall not easily alter my plan; for, if we cannot be with convenience in the same house, it will be worth something to be in the same town, and just to look at Mrs. B. a few minutes occasionally, if she can bear to receive us, and if she can bear no more. For I believe another interview with her, before the Lord sends his chariot and angels to remove her from this land of sorrow—will be the principal and most interesting object of our journey. Our other friends, if we are spared, we may hope to see at some future time. I consider her as in the situation of the apostle when he wrote 2 Timothy 4:6-7 "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

I am preparing materials for two more volumes of Cardiphonia. My present thought is, to have them ready for publication at a time when my pen will no longer be able to move. Whether any circumstances may send them abroad sooner, I know not; but, at my time of life, I ought to consider that period as not likely to be at a very great distance. I do not wish to be impatient for its arrival; but I do wish my willingness to live longer here, was more simply and solely from a desire of promoting my Lord’s service, and the edification of his children—I hope this is not out of my mind—but I am afraid it is shamefully debased by an undue attachment to earthly things, and a lack of spirituality.

Letter 6

June 8, 1780 My dear madam,

I sympathize with my fiends at ___, under the afflictive dispensations with which the Lord has been pleased to visit the town. He has a merciful design—even when he afflicts, and I hope the rod will be sanctified to those who were too negligent under the public means of grace. I am not sorry for your friend’s death, as you say she died in the Lord, for she had but little prospect of temporal comfort. Her death affected me more on account of her husband and family, to whom I hoped she would have been a comfort and a blessing. But we are sure the Lord does all things wisely and well. The moment in which he calls his people home—is precisely the best and fittest season. Let us pray (and we shall not pray in vain) for strength proportioned to our day, then we may have only to wait with patience, as our time likewise will shortly come. The bright, important hour of dismissing from this state of trial is already upon the wing towards us, and every heartbeat brings it nearer. Then every wound will be healed, and every desirable desire be fully satisfied. My wife has some degree of the head-ache today—but her complaints of that kind are neither so frequent nor so violent as when at His mercies to us are great, and renewed every morning.

I have still a quarter of an hour for you; but now, when opportunity presents, a subject is not at hand, and I have no time to ruminate. I will tell you a piece of old news. "The Lord God is a sun and shield," and both in one. His light is a defense; his protection is cheering. He is a shield so long, and so broad, as to intercept and receive every arrow with which the quiver of divine justice was stored, and which would have otherwise transfixed your heart and mine. He is a shield so strong, that nothing now can pierce it, and so appropriately placed that no evil can reach us, except it first makes its way through our shield. And what a sun is this shield! When it breaks forth, it changes winter into summer, and midnight into day, in an instant. He is a sun, whose beams can not only scatter clouds—but the walls which sin and Satan are aiming to build in order to hide it

from our view.

Public affairs begin to look more pleasing, just when they were most desperate. Affairs in America are in a more favorable train. A peace with Spain is supposed. I would hope for some halcyon days after the storm—but for the awful insensibility which reigns at home. But, if the Lord revives his people—we may hope he will hear their prayers. This is a changeable world. The ins and the outs, being fastened upon the same rolling wheel, have each their turn to be uppermost. Really, one is tempted to smile and constrained to weep in the same breath. The Lord bless you and keep you.

I am most affectionately yours.

01.01. Soldiers of Christ

Soldiers of Christ

July 13, 1776. My dear Sir, The Lord, who mercifully called you out of a state of thoughtless dissipation, and has hitherto been with you—will, I trust, sweeten all your trials, and cause his light to shine upon your paths. The Lord is all-sufficient. A lively sense of his love, a deep impression of eternity, a heart filled with zeal for his cause, and a thirst for the good of souls—will, I hope, enable you to make a cheerful sacrifice of whatever has no necessary connection with your peace and his service. And you may rest assured, that whenever He, who loves you better than you do yourself, sees it best for you upon the whole to change your condition—he will bring it about. He will point out the person, prepare the means, and secure the success, by his providence, and the power he has over every heart. And you shall see that all previous difficulties were either gracious preventions, which he threw in the way—to prevent your taking a wrong step; or temporary bars, which, by his removing them afterwards, should give you opportunity of more clearly perceiving his care and interposition in your favor. In the mean time, remember your high calling. You are a minister and ambassador of Christ—you are entrusted with the most honorable and important employment that can engage and animate the heart of man! 1 Timothy 4:15.

Filled and fired with a constraining sense of the love of Jesus and the worth of souls, impressed with an ardor to carry war into Satan’s kingdom, to storm his strong-holds, and rescue his captives; you will have little leisure to think of anything else.

How does the love of glory stimulate the soldier, make him forget and forego a thousand personal tenderness, and prompt him to cross oceans, to traverse deserts, to scale mountains, and plunge into the greatest hardships and the thickest dangers! They do it for a corruptible crown—a puff of breath, an empty fame; their highest prospect is the applause and favor of their prince.

We likewise are soldiers—we have a Prince and Captain who deserves our all. Those who know him, and have hearts to conceive of his excellence, and to feel their obligations to him, cannot, indeed, seek their own glory; but his glory is dearer to them than a thousand lives. They owe him their souls, for he redeemed them with blood, his own blood; and by his grace he subdued and pardoned them when they were rebels, and in arms against him! Therefore they are not their own; they would not desire to be their own. When his standard is raised, when his enemies are in motion, when his people are to be rescued, they go forth, clothed with his panoply; they fight under his eye, they are sure of his support, and he shows them the conqueror’s crown. Oh, when they think of that "Well done, good servant" with which he has promised to welcome them home when the campaign is over, hard things seem easy, and bitter things seem sweet. They count nothing, not even their own lives, dear, so that they may finish their course with joy. May the Lord make us thus minded; give us a hearty concern for his business; and he has engaged to take care of ours; and nothing that can conduce to our real comfort and usefulness shall be withheld.

Chapter 58

01.01. Sun Going Down While Yet Day, the

The Sun Going Down While Yet Day by John Newton "She has given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day" Jeremiah 15:9

Beautifully illustrative of the words of the weeping Prophet is the following account of the death of Miss Eliza Cunningham, written by her uncle, the Rev. John Newton, rector of St. Mary, Woolnoth, London. It has been slightly abridged — but no important matter has been omitted. In May, 1782, my sister Eliza Cunningham was at Edinburgh, chiefly on account of her eldest daughter, then in the fourteenth year of her age, who was very ill of a consumption. She had already buried an only son, at the age of twelve; and while all a mother's care and feelings were engaged by the rapid decline of a second amiable child — she was unexpectedly and suddenly bereaved of an affectionate husband. Her trials were great — but the Lord had prepared her for them. She was a believer. Her faith was strong; her graces active; her conduct exemplary. She walked with God — and he supported her. And though she was a tender and sympathizing friend, she had a happy firmness of temper, so that her character as a Christian, and the propriety of her behavior in every branch of life, appeared with peculiar advantage in the season of affliction. She returned to Anstruther a widow, with her sick child, who languished until October, and then died.

Though my sister had many valuable and pleasing connections in Scotland — yet her strongest tie being broken, she readily accepted my invitation to come and live with us. She was not only dear to me as my sister — but we had lived long in the habits of intimate friendship. I knew her worth, and she was partial to me. She had yet one child remaining, her dear Eliza. We already had a dear orphan niece, whom we had, about seven years before, adopted for our own daughter. My active, fond imagination, anticipated the time of her arrival, and drew a pleasing picture of the addition the company of such a sister, such a friend, would make to the happiness of our family. The children likewise — there was no great disparity between them either in years or stature. From what I had heard of Eliza, I was prepared to love her before I saw her; though she came afterwards into my hands like a heap of untold gold, which, when counted over, proves to be a larger sum than was expected. My imagination paired and united these children; I hoped that the friendship between us and my sister would be perpetuated in them; I seemed to see them like twin sisters, of one heart and mind, habited nearly alike, always together, always with us. Such was my plan — but the Lord's plan was very different, and therefore mine failed.

It is happy for us poor short-sighted creatures, unable as we are to foresee the consequences of our own wishes, that if we know and trust him, he is often pleased to put a merciful negative upon our purposes; and condescends to choose better for us than we can for ourselves. What might have been the outcome of my plan, could it have taken place, I know not; but I can now praise and adore him for the gracious outcome of his plan. I praise his name, that I can cheerfully comply with his word, which says, "Be still, and know that I am God." I not only can bow (as it befits a creature and a sinner to do) to his sovereignty; but I admire his wisdom and goodness, and can say from my heart, "He has done all things well!" My sister had settled her affairs previous to her removal,

and nothing remained — but to take leave of her friends, of whom she had many in different parts of the country. In February, 1783, I received a letter from her, which before I opened, I expected was to inform me that she was upon the road in her way to London. But the information was, that in a little journey she had made to bid a friend farewell, she had caught a violent cold, which brought on a fever and a cough, with other symptoms, which though she described as gently as possible, that we might not be alarmed, obliged me to give up instantly the pleasing hope of seeing her. Following letters confirmed my apprehensions; her malady increased, and she was soon confined to her bed. Eliza was at school at Musselburgh. Until then she had enjoyed a perfect state of health; but while her dear mother was rapidly declining, she likewise caught a great cold, and her life was soon thought to be in danger. On this occasion, that fortitude and resolution which so strongly marked my sister's character, was remarkably displayed. She knew that her own race was almost finished; she earnestly desired that Eliza might live or die with us. And the physicians advised a speedy removal to the South. Accordingly, to save time and to save Eliza from the impressions which the sight of a dying parent might probably make upon her spirits, and possibly apprehensive that the interview might make too great an impression upon her own, she sent this, her only beloved child, from Edinburgh directly to London, without letting her come home to take a last leave of her. She contented herself with committing and bequeathing her child to our care and love, in a letter, which I believe was the last she was able to write.

Thus powerfully recommended by the pathetic charge of a dying parent, the dearest friend we had upon earth, and by that plea for compassion, which her illness might have strongly urged even upon strangers, we received our dear Eliza as a trust, and as a treasure, on the fifteenth of March. My sister lived long enough to have the comfort of knowing, not only that she was safely arrived — but was perfectly pleased with her new situation. She was now freed from all earthly cares. She suffered much in the remaining part of her illness — but she knew in whom she believed; she possessed a peace past understanding, and a hope full of glory. She entered into the joy of her Lord on the tenth of May, 1783, respected and regretted by all who knew her.

I now perceived that the Lord had sent me a treasure indeed. Eliza's person was agreeable. There was an ease and elegance in her whole address, and a gracefulness, until long illness and great weakness bowed her down. Her disposition was lively, her genius quick and inventive, and if she had enjoyed health, she probably would have excelled in everything she attempted, that required ingenuity. Her understanding, particularly her judgment, and her sense of propriety, was far above her years. There was something in her appearance which usually procured her favor at first sight. She was honored by the notice of several people of distinction, which, though I thankfully attribute in part to their kindness to me, I believe was a good deal owing to something uncommon in her. But her principal endearing qualities, which could be only fully known to us, who lived with her, were the sweetness of her temper, and a heart formed for the exercise of affection, gratitude, and friendship.

Whether, when at school, she might have heard sorrowful tales from children, who, having lost their parents, met with a great difference, in point of tenderness, when they came under the direction of uncles and aunts, and might think that all uncles and aunts were alike, I know not; but I have understood since from herself, that she did not come to us with any highly raised expectations of the treatment she was to meet with. But as she found (the Lord in mercy to her and to us having opened our hearts to receive her) that it was hardly possible for her own parents to

have treated her more tenderly, and that it was from that time the business and pleasure of our lives to study how to oblige her, and how to alleviate the afflictions we were unable to remove; so we likewise found, that the seeds of our kindness could hardly be sown in a more promising and fruitful soil.

I know not that either her aunt or I ever saw a cloud upon her countenance during the time she was with us. It is true we did not, we could not unnecessarily cross her; but if we thought it expedient to overrule any proposal she made, she acquiesced with a sweet smile: and we were certain that we would never hear of that proposal again. Her delicacy however was quicker than our observation; and she would sometimes say, when we could not perceive the least reason for it, "I am afraid I answered you peevishly; indeed I did; if I did, I ask your pardon. I would be very ungrateful, if I thought any pleasure equal to that of endeavoring to please you." It is no wonder that we dearly loved such a child.

Wonderful is the frame of the human heart. The Lord claims and deserves it all; yet there is still room for all the charities, of relative life, and scope for their full play; and they are capable of yielding the sincerest pleasures this world can afford, if held in subordination to what is supremely due to him. The hectic fever, cough, and sweats, which Eliza brought with her from Scotland, were subdued in the course of the summer, and there appeared no reason to apprehend that she would die very suddenly. But still there was a worm preying upon the root of this pretty gourd. She had seldom any severe pain, until within the last two weeks of her life, and usually slept well; but when awake she was always ill. I believe she knew not an hour of perfect ease; and those who intimately knew her state, could not but wonder to see her so placid, cheerful, and attentive, when in company, as she generally was. Many times, when the tears have silently stolen down her cheeks, if she saw that her aunt or I observed her, she would wipe them away, come to us with a smile and a kiss; and say, "Do not be uneasy, I am not very ill, I can bear it, I shall be better presently;" or something to that effect. Her case was thought beyond the reach of medicine, and, for a time, no medicine was used. She had air and exercise, as the weather and circumstances would permit. For the rest, she amused herself as she could with her guitar or harpsichord, with her needle, and with reading. She had a part likewise, when able, in such visits as we paid or received; and our visits were generally regulated by a regard to what she could bear. Her aunt, especially, seldom went abroad but at such times, and to such places, as we thought agreeable and convenient to her. For we could perceive that she loved home best, and best of all when we were at home with her. In April, 1784, we put her under the care of my dear friend Dr. Benamor. To the blessing of the Lord on his skill and endeavors, I ascribe the pleasure of having her continued with us so long. But what can the most efficacious medicines, or the best physicians, avail to prolong life, when the hour approaches, in which the prayer of the Great Intercessor must be accomplished, "Father, I will that they whom you have given me may be with me where I am to behold my glory?" This was the proper cause of my dear Eliza’s death. The Lord sent this child to me to be brought up for him; he owned my poor endeavors: and when her education was completed, and she was ripened for Heaven, he took her home to himself. He has richly paid me my wages, in the employment itself, and in the happy outcome.

Dr. Benamor advising a trial of the salt water, we passed the month of August, 1784, with her, partly at Mr. Walter Taylor’s, at Southampton, and partly at Charles Etty’s, of Priestlands, near Symington. While she was with these kind and generous friends, she had every accommodation

and assistance that could be thought of or wished for. And the bathing was evidently useful, so far as to give some additional strength to her very weak and relaxed frame, which assisted her in going more comfortably through the last winter. We were, therefore, encouraged, and advised to repeat our visit to Southampton this autumn. But the success was not the same. Her feet and legs had already begun to swell, and the evening before she took cold, which brought on a return of the fever and cough; and though Dr. Allen was successful in removing these symptoms in about a two weeks, and she bathed a few times, she could not persevere. However, the advantages of situation, air, and exercise, being much greater than she could have in London, and as we were with friends whom she, as well as we, dearly loved, she continued at Southampton six weeks; but she was unable to proceed to Mr. Etty's, who was very desirous of repeating his former kindness. The Lord strengthened her to perform her journey home without inconvenience. She returned the sixteenth of September; then she entered our door for the last time, for she went out no more, until she was carried out to be put into the hearse.

I have thus put together, in one view, a brief account of what relates to her illness, until within the last three weeks of her pilgrimage. I now come to what is much more important and interesting. Her excellent parents had conscientiously endeavored to bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and the principles of religion had been instilled into her from her infancy. Their labors were thus far attended with success, that no child could be more obedient or obliging, or more remote from evil habits or evil tempers; but I could not perceive, when she came to us, that she had any heart-affecting sense of divine things. But being under my roof, she of course, when her health would permit, attended on my ministry, and was usually present when I prayed and expounded the Scriptures, morning and evening, in the family. Friends and ministers were likewise frequently with us, whose character and conversation were well suited to engage her notice, and to help her to form a right idea of the Christian principles and temper. Knowing that she was of a thinking turn, I left her to make her own reflections upon what she saw and heard, committing her to the Lord from whom I had received her, and entreating him to be her effectual teacher. When I did attempt to talk with her upon the concerns of her soul, she could give me no answer but with tears. But I soon had great encouragement to hope that the Lord had both enlightened her understanding, and had drawn the desires of her heart to himself. Great was her delight in the ordinances; exemplary her attention under the preaching. To be debarred from going to hear prayer at our stated times, was a trial which, though she patiently bore, seemed to affect her more than any other, and she did not greatly care what she endured in the remainder of the week, provided she was well enough to attend the public worship. The judicious observations she sometimes made upon what had passed in conversation, upon incidents, books, and sermons — indicated a sound scriptural judgment, and a spiritual taste. And my hope was confirmed by her whole deportment, which was befitting the Gospel of Christ. So that had she died suddenly, on any day within about a year and a half past, I would have had no doubt that she had passed from death unto life. But I could seldom prevail with her to speak of herself: if she did, it was with the greatest self-distrust and caution.

Soon after her return from Southampton, she became acquainted with acute pain, to which she had, until then, been much a stranger. Her gentle spirit, which had borne up under a long and languishing illness, was not so capable of supporting pain. It did not occasion any improper temper or language — but it wore her away quickly. Friday the thirteenth of September, she was down

stairs for the last time, and then she was brought down and carried up in arms.

It now became very desirable to hear from herself an explicit account of the hope that was in her; especially as, upon some symptoms of an approaching mortification, she appeared to be a little alarmed, and of course, not thoroughly reconciled to the thoughts of death. Her aunt waited for the first convenient opportunity of intimating to her the probability that the time of her departure was at hand. The next morning, Saturday the first of October, presented one. She found herself remarkably better; her pains were almost gone, her spirits revived; the favorable change was visible in her countenance. Her aunt began to break the subject to her by saying, "My dear, were you not extremely ill last night?" She replied, "Indeed I was." "Had you not been relieved, I think you could not have continued long." "I believe I could not." "My dear, I have been very anxiously concerned for your life." "But I hope, my dear aunt, you are not so now." She then opened her mind and spoke freely. I cannot repeat the whole; the substance was to this effect: "My views of things have been for some time very different from what they were when I came to you. I have seen and felt the vanity of childhood and youth." Her aunt said, "I believe you have long made a conscience of secret prayer." She answered, "Yes; I have long and earnestly sought the Lord, with reference to the change which is now approaching. I have not yet that full assurance which is so desirable; but I have a hope, I trust, a good hope, and I believe the Lord will give me whatever he sees necessary for me, before he takes me from hence. I have prayed to him to fit me for himself; and then, whether sooner or later, it signifies but little." Here was a comfortable point gained. We were satisfied that she had given up all expectation of living, and could speak of her departure without being distressed.

It will not be expected that a child at her age should speak systematically. Nor had she learned her religion from a system or form of words, however sound. The Lord himself was her teacher. But, from what little she had at different times said to me, I was well satisfied that she had received a true conviction of the evil of sin, and of her own state by nature as a sinner. When she spoke of the Lord, she meant the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, who gathers such lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom. She believed him to be God and man in one person; and that hope, of which she shall never be ashamed, was founded on his atonement, grace, and power. As I do not intend to put words into her mouth which she never spoke, I mention this lest any person should be disappointed at not finding a certain phraseology to which they may have been accustomed. Her apparent revival was of short duration. In the evening of the same day, she began to complain of a sore throat, which became worse, and, before Sunday noon, threatened an absolute suffocation. When Dr. Benamor, who the day before had almost entertained hopes of her recovery, found her so suddenly and greatly altered, he could not at the moment prevent some signs of his concern from appearing in his countenance. She quickly perceived it, and desired he would plainly tell her his sentiments. When he had recovered himself he said, "You are not so well as when I saw you on Saturday." She answered, that she trusted all would be well soon. He replied, that whether she lived or died, it would be well and to the glory of God. He told me that he had much pleasing conversation with her that morning; some particulars of which he had committed to writing — but that he had lost the paper. From that time she may be said to have been dying, as we expected her departure from one hour to another. When the doctor came on Wednesday, she entreated him to tell her how long he thought she might live. He said, "Are you in earnest, my dear?" She answered, "Indeed I am." At that time there were great appearances that a

mortification had actually begun. He therefore told her, he thought it possible she might hold out until eight in the evening — but did not expect she could survive midnight at furthest. On hearing him say so, low as she was, her eyes seemed to sparkle with their former vivacity, and fixing them on him with an air of ineffable satisfaction, she said, "Oh, that is good news indeed!" And she repeated it as such to a person who came soon after into the room, and said with lively emotions of joy, "The doctor tells me I shall stay here but a few hours more." In the afternoon she noticed and counted the clock, I believe, every time it struck; and when it struck seven, she said, "Another hour, and then!" But it pleased the Lord to spare her to us another day.

She suffered much in the course of Wednesday night — but was quite resigned and patient. Our kind servants, who, from their love to her and to us, watched her night and day with a solicitude and tenderness which wealth is too poor to purchase — were the only witnesses of the affectionate and grateful manner in which she repeatedly thanked them for their services and attention to her.

I was surprised on Thursday morning to find her not only alive — but in some respects better. The tokens of mortification again disappeared. This was her last day, and it was a memorable day to us. When Dr. Benamor asked her how she was, she answered, "Truly happy, and if this be dying, it is a pleasant thing to die." She said to me about ten o’clock, "My dear uncle, I would not change conditions with any person upon earth. Oh, how gracious is the Lord to me! Oh, what a change is before me!" She was several times asked, if she could wish to live, provided the Lord should restore her to perfect health? Her answer was, "Not for all the world," and sometimes "Not for a thousand worlds! Do not weep for me, my dear aunt; but rather rejoice and praise on my account." The last time she was asked this question, she said, "I desire to have no choice." We asked her if she would choose a text for her own funeral sermon? She readily mentioned, "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens." "That," said she, "has been my experience; my afflictions have been many — but not too many; nor has the greatest of them been too great; I praise him for them all." But after a pause, she said, "Stay, I think there is another text which may do better; let it be Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. That is my experience now." She likewise chose a hymn to be sung after the sermon. But I must check myself, and set down but a small part of the gracious words which the Lord enabled her to speak in the course of the day. Though she was frequently interrupted by pains and agonies, she had something to say, either in the way of admonition or consolation, as she thought most suitable, to every one she saw. To her most constant attendant she said, "Be sure you continue to call upon the Lord; and if you think he does not hear you now, he will at last, as he has heard me." She spoke a great deal to an intimate friend, who was with her every day, which I hope she will long remember as the testimony of her dying Eliza.

Among other things she said, "See how comfortable the Lord can make a dying bed! Do you think that you shall have such an assurance when you come to die?" Being answered, "I hope so, my dear," she replied, "But do you earnestly and with all your heart pray to the Lord for it? If you seek him — you shall surely find him." She then prayed affectionately and fervently for her friend, afterwards for her cousin, and then for another of our family, who was present. Her prayer was not long — but her every word was weighty, and her manner very affecting; the purpose was, that they might all be taught and comforted by the Lord.

About five in the afternoon, she desired me to pray with her once more. Surely I then prayed from my heart. When I had finished, she said. Amen. I said, "My dear child, have I expressed your meaning?"

She answered, "Oh, yes!" and then added, "I am ready to say, Why are his chariot wheels so long coming? But I hope he will enable me to wait his hour with patience." These were the last words I heard her speak.

Towards seven o'clock, I was walking in the garden, and earnestly engaged in prayer for her, when a servant came to me, and said, "She is gone." Lord, how great is your power! how great is your goodness! A few days before, had it been practicable and lawful, what would I not have given to procure her recovery! yet seldom in my life have I known a more heartfelt joy, than when these words, She is gone, sounded in my ears. I ran upstairs, and our whole little family were soon round her bed. Though her aunt and another person were sitting with their eyes fixed upon her, she was gone, perhaps, a few minutes before she was missed. She lay upon her left side, with her cheek gently reclining upon her hand as if in a sweet sleep. And I thought there was a smile on her countenance. Never, surely, did death appear in a more beautiful, inviting form! We fell upon our knees, and I returned my most sincere thanks to God and my Savior, for his abundant goodness to her, crowned in this last instance by giving her so gentle a dismissal.

Yes, I am satisfied, I am comforted. And if one of the tears involuntarily shed could have recalled her to life, to health, to an assemblage of all that this world could contribute to her happiness — I would have labored hard to suppress it. Now my largest desires for her are accomplished. The days of her mourning are ended. She is landed on that peaceful shore, where the storms of trouble never blow. She is forever out of the reach of sorrow, sin, temptation, and snares. Now she is before the throne! she sees him, whom not having seen, she loved! She drinks of the rivers of pleasure, which are at his right hand, and shall thirst no more.

She was born at St. Margaret's, Rochester, February 6, 1771. She breathed her spirit into her Redeemer's hands, a little before seven in the evening, on the 6th of October, 1785, aged fourteen years and eight months.

I shall be glad if this little narrative may prove an encouragement to my friends who have children. May we not conceive the Lord saying to us, as Pharaoh's daughter said to the mother of Moses, "Take this child and bring it up for me, and I will pay you your wages." How solemn the trust! how important and difficult the discharge of it! but how rich the reward if our endeavors are crowned with success! And we have everything to hope from his power and goodness, if, in dependence upon his blessing, we can fully and diligently aim at fulfilling his will. Happy they who will say at the last day, "Behold, here am I — and the children which you have given me." The children of my friends will likewise see my narrative. May it convince them that it is practicable and good to seek the Lord early! My dear Eliza's state of languor prevented her from associating with young people of her own age, so frequently and freely as she might otherwise have done. But these papers will come into the hands of some such, whom she knew, and whom she loved. To them I particularly commend and dedicate this relation.

Oh! my dear young friends, had you seen with what dignity of spirit she filled up the last scene of her life, you must have been affected by it! Let not the liveliness of your spirits, and the gaiety of

the prospects around you, prevent you from considering that to you likewise days will certainly come (unless you are suddenly snatched out of life), when you will say, and feel, that the world, and all in it, can afford you no pleasure. But there is a Savior, and a mighty One, always near, always gracious to those who seek him. May you, like her, be enabled to choose him, as the Guide of your youth, and the Lord of your hearts. Then, like her, you will find support and comfort under affliction, wisdom to direct your conduct, a good hope in death, and by death — a happy translation to everlasting life.

I have only to add my prayer, that a blessing from on high may descend upon the people and families of all my friends, and upon all into whose hands this paper may providentially come.

John Newton

Chapter 59

01.01. That bitter root, indwelling sin!

That bitter root, indwelling sin!

April, 1772

Dear sir, My two last letters turned upon a mournful subject, the depravity of the heart, which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best-intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to go softly all our days—yet we need not sorrow as those who have no hope. The Lord has provided his people, relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being over-ruled for good, he would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from his hatred to sin, and the love which he bears to his people. As to the remedy—neither our state nor his honor are affected by the workings of indwelling sin, in the hearts of those whom he has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn on account of what they feel. Though sin wars—it shall not reign! And though it breaks our peace—it cannot separate from his love! Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness and perfection, to manifest his favor to such poor defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as in themselves—but as one with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith. They are accepted in the Beloved, they have an Advocate with the Father, who once made an atonement for their sins, and who ever lives to make intercession for them. Though they cannot fulfill the law, he has fulfilled it for them. Though the obedience of the members is defiled and imperfect, the obedience of the Head is spotless and complete. Though there is much evil in them, there is something good, the fruit of his own gracious Spirit. They act from a principle of love, they aim at no less than his glory, and their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon himself.

There is a difference in kind, between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thoughts of his miscarriages, and the highest and most specious attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are supported by Almighty power, and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be as they are now; in a little while, they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down! Then they shall see Jesus as he is—and be like him and with him for ever! The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby his own power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, are more signally displayed. His power, in maintaining his own work in the midst of so much opposition, like a spark burning in the midst of an ocean, or a bush unconsumed in the flames. His wisdom, in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, from his knowledge of the evil of our nature, is encouraged to practice against us. He has overthrown many a fair professor, and, like Goliath, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds there are some against whom, though he thrusts sorely, he cannot prevail. Notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons, they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side. The unchangeableness of the Lord’s

love, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons he bestows upon his people, than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

Hereby the Lord Jesus Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to him alone!

If a mariner is surprised by a storm, and after one night spent in jeopardy is presently brought safe into port; though he may rejoice in his deliverance, it will not affect him so sensibly, as if, after being tempest-tossed for a long season, and experiencing a great number and variety of hair-breadth escapes, he at last gains the desired haven. The righteous are said to be scarcely saved, not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favor cannot be disappointed—but in respect of their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they are brought through! But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, willfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of Jesus—He becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not ascribe anything to themselves—but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished (humanly speaking) a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Savior, their shepherd, and their shield. When they were wandering—he brought them back; when fallen—he raised them; when wounded—he healed them; when fainting—he revived them! By him, out of weakness—they have been made strong! He has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of his excellence, have been occasioned by the humiliating proofs they have had of their own vileness. They would not have known so much of him—if they had not known so much of themselves!

Further, a spirit of humiliation, which is both the strength and beauty of our profession, is greatly promoted by our feeling, as well as reading, that when we would do good, evil is present with us. A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord—he has promised to dwell with those who have it. Experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces, is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature. That we are so totally depraved, is a truth which no one ever truly learned by being only taught it. Indeed, if we could receive, and habitually maintain, a right judgment of ourselves, by what is plainly declared in Scripture, it would probably save us many a mournful hour! But experience is the Lord’s school, and those who are taught by him usually learn that they have no wisdom—by the mistakes they make; and that they have no strength—by the slips and falls they meet with. Every day draws forth some new corruption, which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus by degrees, they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves! They feel the truth of our Lord’s words, "without me—you can do nothing;" and the necessity of crying with David, "O lead me and guide me!"

It is chiefly by this frame of mind, that one Christian is different from another; for, though it is an inward feeling, it has very observable outward effects, which are expressively intimated, Ezekiel 16:63, "You will remember your sins and cover your mouth in silence and shame—when I forgive you of all that you have done, says the Sovereign Lord." That is—the knowledge of God’s full and free forgiveness of your innumerable backslidings and transgressions, shall make you ashamed, and silence the unruly workings of your heart. You shall open your mouth in praise; but you shall

no more boast in yourself, or censure others, or repine at my dispensations. In these respects, we are exceedingly prone to speak unadvisedly with our lips; but a sense of our great unworthiness, and God's great grace and forgiveness, checks these evils. Whoever is truly humbled will not be easily angry, will not be positive and rash, will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners; knowing, that, if there is a difference—it is grace which has made that difference; and that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart!

Likewise, under all trials and afflictions, he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved.

These are some of the advantages and good fruits which the Lord enables us to obtain from that bitter root, indwelling sin!

01.01. The Benefits of affliction

The benefits of affliction

December, 1776 My dear Madam,

I have often preached to others of the benefits of affliction; but my own path for many years has been so smooth, and my trials, though I have not been without trials, comparatively so light and few—that I have seemed to myself to speak by rote upon a subject of which I had not a proper feeling. Yet the many exercises of my poor afflicted people, and the sympathy the Lord has given me with them in their troubles—has made "the benefits of affliction" a frequent and favorite topic of my ministry among them. The advantages of afflictions, when the Lord is pleased to employ them for the good of his people, are many and great. Permit me to mention a few of them; and may the Lord grant that we may all find those blessed ends answered to ourselves, by the trials he is pleased to appoint us.

Afflictions quicken us to prayer. It is a pity it should be so; but experience testifies, that a long course of ease and prosperity, without painful changes—has an unhappy tendency to make us cold and formal in our secret worship. But troubles rouse our spirits, and constrain us to call upon the Lord in good earnest—when we feel a need of that help which we only can have from his almighty arm.

Afflictions are useful, and in a degree necessary, to keep alive in us—a conviction of the vanity and unsatisfying nature of the present world, and all its enjoyments; to remind us that this world is not our rest, and to call our thoughts upwards, where our true treasure is, and where our heart ought to be. When things go on much to our wish, our hearts are too prone to say, "It is good to be here!" It is probable, that had Moses, when he came to invite Israel to Canaan, found them in prosperity—that they would have been very unwilling to move out of Egypt; but the afflictions they were in—made his message welcome. Thus the Lord, by pain, sickness, and disappointments, by breaking our cisterns and withering our gourds—weakens our attachment to this world, and makes the thought of leaving it, more easy and more desirable. A child of God cannot but greatly desire a more enlarged and experimental acquaintance with his holy Word; and this attainment is greatly promoted by our trials. The far greater part of the promises in Scripture, are made and suited to a state of affliction; and, though we may believe they are true, we cannot so well know their sweetness, power, and suitableness, unless we ourselves are in a state to which they refer! The Lord says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you." Now, until the day of trouble comes, such a promise is like a city of refuge to an Israelite, who, not having slain a man, was in no danger of the avenger of blood. He had a privilege near him, of which he knew not the use and value—because he was not in the case for which it was provided. But some can say, I not only believe this promise upon the authority of the speaker—but I can set my seal to it! I have been in trouble; I took this course for relief, and I was not disappointed. The Lord truly heard and delivered me. Thus afflictions likewise give occasion of our knowing and noticing more of the Lord’s wisdom, power, and goodness, in supporting and relieving us—than we would otherwise have known.

I have not time to take another sheet, must therefore contract my homily.

Afflictions evidence to ourselves, and manifest to others, the reality of grace. When we suffer as Christians, exercise some measure of that patience and submission, and receive some measure of these supports and supplies, which the Gospel requires and promises to believers—we are more confirmed that we have not taken up with mere notions; and others may be convinced that we do not follow cunningly devised fables.

Afflictions likewise strengthen us—by the exercise our graces. As our limbs and natural powers would be feeble if not called to daily exertion—so the graces of the Spirit would languish, without something which was provided to draw them out to use.

Lastly, afflictions are honorable, as they advance our conformity to Jesus our Lord, who was a man of sorrows for our sake. Methinks, if we might go to heaven without suffering, we would be unwilling to desire it. Why should we ever wish to go by any other path to heaven—than that which Jesus has consecrated and endeared, by his own example? Especially as his people’s sufferings are not penal—there is no wrath in them. The cup he puts in their hands is very different from that which he drank for their sakes, and is only medicinal to promote their chief good. Here I must stop; but the subject is fruitful, and might be pursued through a quire of paper.

"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons--My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:5-11

Chapter 61

01.01. The Call to the ministry

The call to the ministry

March 7, 1765.

Dear Sir, Your letter of February 19th came to me yesterday. I have read it with attention, and very willingly sit down to offer you my thoughts. Your case reminds me of my own—my first desires towards the ministry were attended with great uncertainties and difficulties, and the perplexity of my own mind was heightened by the various and opposite judgments of my friends. The advice I have to offer is the result of painful experience and exercise, and for this reason perhaps may not be unacceptable to you. I pray our gracious Lord to make it useful.

I was long distressed, as you are, about what was or was not a proper call to the ministry. It now seems to me an easy point to solve—but perhaps will not be so to you until the Lord shall make it clear to yourself in your own case. I have not room to say so much as I could. in brief, I think it principally includes three things:

1. A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service. I apprehend, the man who is once moved by the Spirit of God to this work, will prefer it, if attainable, to thousands of gold and silver; so that, though he is at times intimidated by a sense of its importance and difficulty, compared with his own great insufficiency (for it is to be presumed a call of this sort, if indeed from God, will be accompanied with humility and self-abasement), yet he cannot give it up. I hold it a good rule to inquire in this point—whether the desire to preach is most fervent in our most lively and spiritual frames, and when we are most laid in the dust before the Lord? If so, it is a good sign. But if, as is sometimes the case, a person is very earnest to be a preacher to others, when he finds but little hungering and thirstiness after grace in his own soul—it is then to be feared his zeal springs rather from a selfish principle—than from the Spirit of God.

2. Besides this affectionate desire and readiness to preach, there must in due season appear some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance. Surely, if the Lord sends a man to teach others—he will furnish him with the means. I believe many have intended well in becoming preachers, who yet went beyond or before their call in so doing. The main difference between a minister and a private Christian seems to consist in these ministerial gifts, which are imparted to him, not for his own sake—but for the edification of others. But then I say, these are to appear in due season. They are not to be expected instantaneously—but gradually, in the use of proper means. They are necessary for the discharge of the ministry; but not necessary as pre-requisites to warrant our desires after it. In your case, you are young, and have time before you. Therefore, I think you need not as yet perplex yourself with inquiring if you have these gifts already. It is sufficient if your desire is fixed, and you are willing, in the way of prayer and diligence, to wait upon the Lord for them—as yet you need them not.

3. That which finally evidences a proper call—is a correspondent opening in Providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place—of actually entering

upon the work of the ministry. And until this concurrence arrives, you must not expect to be always clear from hesitation in your own mind. The principal caution on this head is, not to be too hasty in catching at first appearances. If it be the Lord's will to bring you into his ministry—he has already appointed your place and service; and though you know it not at present—you shall at a proper time. If you had the talents of an angel—you could do no good with them until his hour has come—and until he leads you to the people whom he has determined to bless by your means.

It is very difficult to restrain ourselves within the bounds of prudence here, when our zeal is warm, a sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender compassion for perishing sinners is ready to prompt us to break out too soon—but "he who believes shall not make haste". I was about five years under this constraint. Sometimes I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to everything that seemed plausible, and to many things that were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I would have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as he in his good time has been pleased to lead me to. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main—yet I overrated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience which are requisite for so great a service.

I wish you therefore to take time; and if you have a desire to enter into the Established Church, endeavor to keep your zeal within moderate bounds, and avoid everything that might unnecessarily clog your admission with difficulties. I would not have you hide your profession, or to be backward to speak for God; but avoid what looks like preaching, and be content with being a learner in the school of Christ for some years. The delay will not be lost time; you will be so much the more acquainted with the Gospel, with your own heart, and with human nature. The last is a necessary branch of a minister's knowledge, and can only be acquired by comparing what passes within us, and around us—with what we read in the Word of God.

I am glad to find you have a distaste both for Arminian and Antinomian doctrines—but let not the mistakes of others sit too heavy upon you. Be thankful for the grace which has made you to differ; be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; but beware of engaging in theological disputes, without evident necessity, and some probable hope of usefulness. They tend to eat out the life and savor of religion, and to make the soul lean and dry. Where God has begun a real work of grace, incidental mistakes will be lessened by time and experience; where he has not, it is of little signification what sentiments people hold, or whether they call themselves Arminians or Calvinists.

I agree with you, that there is time enough for you to think of Oxford yet; and that if your purpose is fixed, and all circumstances render it prudent and proper to devote yourself to the ministry, you will do well to spend a year or two in private studies. It would be further helpful, in this view, to place yourself where there is Gospel preaching, and a spiritual people. If your favorable opinion of our church should induce you to come here, I shall be very ready to give you every assistance in my power. As I have trod exactly the path you seem to be setting out in, I might so far perhaps be more serviceable than those who are in other respects much better qualified to assist you. I doubt not but in this, and every other step, you will entreat the Lord's direction; and I hope you will not forget to pray for me.

01.01. The Christian and the world

The Christian and the world

November, 1776

Dear sir, My London journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of seeing you in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time—but afford me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half hour we were together by ourselves prolonged to half a day. The subject you were pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad would I be, were I able to offer you anything satisfactory upon it. There is no doubt but first religious impressions are usually mingled with much of a legal spirit; and that conscience at such a time, is not only tender—but misinformed and scrupulous. And I believe, as you intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feet a liberty from many fetters we had imposed upon ourselves, we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme.

It seems to me—that no person can adjust and draw the line exactly for another. There are so many particulars in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advice is mixed with such defects, that it is not right to expect others to be absolutely guided by our rules, nor is it safe for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others. But the Scripture undoubtedly furnishes sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstance; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be led in the right way, in the path of judgment. "Show me the path where I should walk, O Lord; point out the right road for me to follow. Lead me by Your truth and teach me, for You are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in You." Psalms 25:4-5 By frequent prayer, and close acquaintance with the Scripture, and a habitual attention to the frame of our hearts, there is a certain delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment to be acquired, which renders a proper judgement concerning the nature and limits of the Adiaphora, (questionable things) as they are called, or how near we may go to the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love to Christ is the clearest and most persuasive factor; and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his Word is in our eye—we seldom make great mistakes! And I believe the over-doings of a young convert, proceeding from an honest simplicity of heart, and a desire of pleasing the Lord, are more acceptable in his sight—than a certain coolness of conduct which frequently takes place afterward, when we are apt to look back with pity upon our former weakness, and secretly to applaud ourselves for our present greater attainments in knowledge, though perhaps (alas that it should ever be so!) we may have lost as much in warmth, as we have gained in light. From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude, the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeable to these views, though the Scripture does not enumerate or infallibly decide for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn; yet it furnishes us with some general rules, which, if rightly applied, will perhaps go a

good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please God than man. Some of these rules I will just mark to you: Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 8:13, and 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 4:30; Ephesians 5:11, Ephesians 5:15, Ephesians 5:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Ephesians 6:18 : to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isaiah 22:12; Luke 21:34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar passages of Scripture (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number) will bring a Christian under such restrictions as follow. To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, whatever has a tendency to dampen and indispose spiritual mindedness; for such things, if they are not condemned as sinful per se; if they are not absolutely unlawful; yes though they are, when duly regulated, lawful and right (for often our chief snares are entwined with our blessings); yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to deaden our hearts to Divine things, of which each person's experience must determine, there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance, wrong to us; and let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our gold—to pay us with pebbles. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if anything can be pursued, allowed, or rested in, as a tolerable substitute for it. For the sake of the church, and the influence that example may have upon his fellow-Christians, the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things—not because they are unlawful—but because they are harmful to others. Thus the Apostle, though strenuous for the right of his Christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the use, so as to eat no meat, rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience.

Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some public amusements, as a concert or oratorio, and return from thence with a warm heart to my closet (the possibility of which, in my own case, I greatly question); yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker brother than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful—but because I did it. In which case I should suspect, that, though I received no harm—they would.

I have known and conversed with some who have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline, from imitating others, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kinds of compliances.

It seems that an obligation of this sort of self-denial, rises and is strengthened in proportion to the weight and influence of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I would think it sinful to hunt for partridge—but, as a minister, I no more dare do it, than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offense to some, and be pleaded for as a license by others.

There is a duty, and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace, in our necessary converse among them. This seems to require, that, though we should not be needlessly singular—yet, for their instruction, and for the honor of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of singularity, and show ourselves called to be a separated people: that, though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up (in which we cannot be too exact)—yet we are not of this world—but belong to another community, and act from other principles, by other rules, and to other ends, than the generality of those about us.

I have observed that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions, and sentiments, and places of worship— provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such compliances, and have thought, that, if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits, professors would not, in such numbers, and so often, run among them to get relief from the burden of time hanging upon their hands. As our Lord Jesus is the great representative of his people in heaven, he does them the honor to continue a succession of them as his representatives upon earth. Happy are those who are favored with most of the holy unction, and best enabled to manifest to all around them, by their spirit, tempers, and conversation, what is the proper design and genuine effect of his Gospel upon the hearts of sinners. In our way of little life in the country, serious people often complain of the snares they meet with from worldly people, and yet they must mix with them to get a livelihood. I advise them, if they can, to do their business with the world as they do it in the rain. If their business calls them abroad, they will not leave it undone for fear of being a little wet; but then, when it is done, they presently seek shelter, and will not stand in the rain for pleasure. Just so, providential and necessary calls of duty, which lead us into the world, will not hurt us, if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our cross—is not so likely to be our snare. But if that spirit, which we should always watch and pray against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself—then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16. The value of time is to be taken into the account. Time is a precious talent, and our Christian profession opens a wide field for the due improvement of it. Much of it has been already lost—and therefore we are exhorted to redeem it.

Many things which custom pleads for, will not be suitable to a Christian, for this one reason—that they are not consistent with the simplest notion of the redemption of time. It is generally said—that we need relaxation. I allow it in a sense—the Lord Himself has provided it; and because our spirits are too weak to be always upon the wing in meditation and prayer, He has appointed to all men, from the king downwards, something to do in a secular way. And when everything of this sort in each person’s situation is properly attended to, if the heart is in a right state—spiritual concerns will present themselves, as affording the noblest, sweetest, and most interesting relaxation from the cares and toils of life. On the other hand, secular work will be the best relaxation and unbending of the mind from pious exercises. Between the two, perhaps there ought to be but little mere leisure time. A life, in this sense divided between God and the world, is desirable, when one part of it is spent in retirement, seeking after and conversing with Him whom our souls love; and the other part of it employed in active services for the good of our family, friends, the church, and society, for His sake. Every hour which does not fall in with one or other of these views, I apprehend is lost time. The day in which we live seems likewise to call for something of a peculiar spirit in the Lord’s people. It is a day of abounding sin, and I fear a day of impending judgment. The world, as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, is secure. We are soon to have a day of apparent humiliation; but the just causes for it are not confined to one day—but will exsist, and too probably increase, every day. If I am not mistaken in the signs of the times, there never was, within

the annals of the English history, a period in which the spirit and employment described Ezekiel 9:4, could be more suitable than the present, "Go throughout the city—and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." The Lord calls for mourning and weeping—but the words of many are stout against him! New kinds of evil are invented almost daily; and the language of those who bear the greatest sway in what is called the polite circle, I mean, the interpretative language of their hearts, is like that of the rebellious Jews, Jeremiah 44:16-17, etc., "As for the word which you have spoken—we will not hearken unto you at all!" In short, things are coming to a point, and it seems to be almost putting to the vote whether the Lord or Baal is God. In this state of affairs, methinks we cannot be too explicit in avowing our attachment to the Lord, nor too careful in avoiding an improper relationships with those who are in confederacy against him. We know not how soon we may greatly need that mark of providential protection which is given to those who sigh and cry for our abominations.

Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honorable, comfortable, and safe (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean), to be thought by some too scrupulous and precise—than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely contrary to a Divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the genius of the Gospel, or conformable to the mind which was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people. The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where the law of what is called custom is the only law which may not be violated with impunity, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded—that those who do fear him must hold their tongues though they should hear his name blasphemed—can hardly be a Christian’s voluntary chosen ground. Yet I fear these characters will apply to every kind of social amusement or assembly in the kingdom. As to family connections, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their friends often live as it were—in two elements, there is a mutual awkwardness, which makes their interactions rather dry and tedious. But upon that account they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of civility and affection; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is something considerable given up by one or the other; and I think Christians ought to be very cautious what concessions they make upon this account. But, as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given you such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not be dogmatic; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts and to the general tenor of Scripture.

01.01. The Christian's creed

The Christian’s creed

April 3, 1759.

Dear Sir,

I know not if my heart was ever more united to any person, in so short a space of time, than to you; and what engaged me so much, was the spirit of meekness and of love (that special and inimitable mark of true Christianity) which I observed in you. I mean it not to your praise. May all the praise be to Him, from whom every good and perfect gift comes--who alone makes the best to differ from the vilest of men. But I think I may well mention, to your encouragement, that all who conversed with you greatly regret your speedy departure; and I am persuaded, the same temper, the same candor, will make you acceptable, honorable, and useful, wherever you go. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers; they shall obtain the mercy they need, and possess the peace they love. They shall inherit the earth. The earth, sinful and miserable as it is, shall be worthy to be called an inheritance to them, for they shall enjoy a comparative heaven in it. They shall be called the children of God, though dignified with no title among men. Alas! how much are these things overlooked, even by many who, I would hope, are real believers.

Methinks a very different spirit from that of the church of Laodicea is to be seen among us; though perhaps it is not easy to say which is the best of the two. Laodicea was neither cold nor hot; we are both cold and hot at once, and both to the extreme. Hot, hasty, and arbitrary, in those few things where mediocrity is a virtue; but cool and remiss in those great points, where the application of the whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, is so absolutely necessary, and so positively enjoined. Surely there is too much room for this observation, and I perhaps stand self-condemned in making it.

I hope you will take opportunity to improve your interest in Mr. **** by letter. He expressed much satisfaction in the hour he spent with you before you sailed, and a great regard for you; therefore would, I doubt not, give you a fair hearing. He makes such large concessions sometimes, that I am apt to think he is conscious of the weakness of his own argument; and then he is as soon angry with himself for complying so far, and flies off to the other extreme. Yet for the most part, when he speaks plain, and is not restrained by complaisance for particular people, he appears not only a stranger to experimental religion--but averse to the notion, and generally inclined to treat it with levity. His obstacles are very many and very great; his reputation as a learned man, his years, his regular life, and perhaps, above all, his performances in print, especially his last book--are so many barriers that must be brake through before conviction can reach him. But the grace of God can do all this, and more; and indeed, when I think of the many truly valuable parts of his character, and the indefatigable pains he has taken in his researches after truth, I am willing to hope that the Lord will at length teach him the true wisdom, and enable him (however hard it may seem) to give up his own attainments, and sit down like a little child at the feet of Jesus.

I hope to hear soon and often from you. I number my Christian correspondents among my principal blessings; a few judicious pious friends, to whom, when I can get leisure to write, I send my heart by turns. I can trust them with my inmost sentiments, and can write with no more disguise than I think. I shall rejoice to add you to the number, if you can agree to take me as I am (as I think you will), and allow me to commit my whole self to paper, without respect to names, parties, and sentiments. I endeavor to observe my Lord's commands, to call no man master upon earth; yet I desire to own and honor the image of God wherever I find it.

I dare not say I have no bigotry: for I know not myself; and remember to my shame, that formerly, when I ignorantly professed myself free from it, I was indeed overrun with it. But this I can say, I allow it not; I strive and pray against it; and thus far, by the grace of God, I have attained, that I find my heart as much united to many who differ from me in some points, as to any who agree with me in all. I set no value upon any doctrinal truth, farther than it has a tendency to promote practical holiness. If others should think those things hindrances--which I judge to be helps in this respect, I am content they should go on in their own way, according to the light God has given them.

If it should be asked--Which are the necessary things? I answer--Those in which the spiritual worshipers of all ages and countries have been agreed. Those, on the contrary, are mere subordinate matters, in which the best men, those who have been the most eminent for faith, prayer, humility, and nearness to God, always have been, and still are, divided in their judgments. Upon this plan, I should think it no hard matter to draw up a form of sound words (whether dignified with the name of a creed or not--I care not), to which true believers of all sorts would unanimously subscribe. Suppose it ran something in the following manner:

"I believe that sin is the most hateful thing in the world. I believe that I and all men are by nature in a state of wrath and depravity, utterly unable to sustain the penalty or to fulfill the commands of God's holy law; and that we have no sufficiency of ourselves to think a good thought. I believe that Jesus Christ is the chief among ten thousand; that he came into the world to save the chief of sinners, by making a propitiation for sin by his death, by paying a perfect obedience to the law in our behalf; and that he is now exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins to all who believe; and that he ever lives to make intercession for us. I believe that the Holy Spirit (the gift of God through Jesus Christ), is the sure and only guide into all truth, and the common privilege of all believers; and under his influence, I believe the holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us thoroughly for every good work. I believe that love to God, and to man for God's sake, is the essence of true religion, and the fulfilling of the law; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that those who, by a patient course in well-doing, seek glory, honor, and immortality, shall receive eternal life. And I believe that this reward is not of debt--but of grace, even to the praise and glory of that grace whereby He has made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen."

I pretend not to accuracy in this hasty draught; they are only outlines, which, if you please to retouch, and fill up at your leisure, I hope you will favor me with a sight of it. I fear I have tired you. I shall only add my prayers, that the Lord may be with you, and crown your labors of love with success, that you may hereafter shine among those who have been instrumental in turning many to righteousness.

01.01. The City was pure gold

The city was pure gold

April, 1770 My friend,

Glorious things are spoken of the city of God, or (as I suppose) the state of glory, in Revelation 21:10 onwards. The description is doubtless mystical, and perhaps nothing short of a happy experience and participation, will furnish an adequate exposition. One expression, in particular, has I believe puzzled wiser heads than mine to explain: "The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." The construction likewise in the Greek is difficult. Some render it, pure gold, as transparent as glass. If our reading is right, we must understand it either of gold, pure, bright, and perspicuous as the finest transparent glass (for all glass is not transparent); or else as two distinct comparisons —as splendid and durable as the purest gold, as clear and transparent as the finest glass. In that happy world, the beauties and advantages which here are divided and incompatible, will unite and agree. Our glass is clear—but brittle; our gold is shining and solid—but it is opaque, and reveals only a surface. And thus it is with our minds. The powers of the imagination are lively and extensive—but transient and uncertain; the powers of the understanding are more solid and regular—but at the same time more slow and limited, and confined to the outside properties of the few objects around us. But when we arrive within the veil, the perfections of the glass and the gold will be combined, and the imperfections of each will entirely cease. Then we shall know more than we can now imagine! The glass will be all gold. And then we shall apprehend Truth in its relations and consequences; not (as at present) by that tedious and fallible process which we call Reasoning—but by a single glance of thought, as the sight pierces in an instant through the largest transparent body. The gold will be all glass.

I do not offer this as the sense of the passage—but as a thought which once occurred to me while reading it. I daily groan under a desultory, ungovernable imagination, and a palpable darkness of understanding, which greatly impede me in my attempts to contemplate the truths of God. Perhaps these complaints, in a greater or less degree, are common to all our fallen race, and exhibit mournful proofs that our nature is essentially depraved. The grace of God affords some assistance for correcting the wildness of the imagination, and enlarging the capacity of the mind; yet the cure at present is but palliative; but before long it shall be perfect, and our complaints shall cease forever. Now it costs us much pains to acquire a pittance of solid and useful knowledge; and the ideas we have collected are far from being at the disposal of judgment, and, like men in a crowd, are perpetually clashing and interfering with each other. But it will not be so, when we are completely freed from the effects of sin. Confusion and darkness will not follow us into the world where light and order reign. Then, and not until then, our knowledge will be perfect, and our possession of it uninterrupted and secure.

Since the radical powers of the soul are thus enfeebled and disordered, it is not to be wondered at that the best of men, and under their highest attainments, have found cause to make the acknowledgment of the Apostle, "When I would do good—evil is present with me!" But, blessed be

God, though we must feel hourly cause for shame and humiliation for what we are in ourselves; we have cause to rejoice continually in Christ Jesus, who, as he is revealed unto us under the various names, characters, relations, and offices, which he bears in the Scripture, holds out to our faith a balm for every wound, a cordial for every discouragement, and a sufficient answer to every objection which sin or Satan can suggest against our peace. If we are guilty—He is our Righteousness; if we are sick—He is our infallible Physician; if we are weak, helpless, and defenseless—He is the compassionate and faithful Shepherd who has taken charge of us, and will not allow anything to disappoint our hopes of heaven, or to separate us from his love. He knows our frame, he remembers that we are but dust, and has engaged to guide us by his counsel, support us by his power, and at length to receive us to his glory—that we may be with him forever!

01.01. The Duke of Sully

The Duke of Sully

December, 1772

Dear sir,

I lately employed some of my leisure hours (which, when I am not indolent, are but few) in reading the Memoirs of the Duke of Sully, which occasionally came in my way. It afforded me matter for variety of reflections. I pity the Duke of Sully, whose attachment to the name of Protestant seems to have been little more than a point of honor, who drew all his resources from himself, and whose chief aim seems to have been to approve himself faithful to an earthly master. He acted as well as could be expected from natural principles; and the Lord, who employed him as an instrument of his providence, rewarded his fidelity with success, honor, and riches--a reward which, though in itself a poor one, is suited to the desires of men who place their happiness in worldly things, and is so far a compensation of their services.

It is given to you, to act from nobler principles, and with more enlarged views. You serve a Master, of whose favor, protection, and assistance you cannot be deprived; who will not overlook or misconstrue the smallest service you attempt for him; who will listen to no insinuations against you; who is always near to comfort, direct, and strengthen you; and who is preparing for you such honors and blessings as he only can give--an eternal inheritance (the reverse of all earthly good). Thus animated and thus supported, assisted likewise by the prayers of thousands, may we not warrantably hope that you will be an instrument of great good, and that both church and state will be benefitted by your example, counsels, and care? In another view, the Duke of Sully’s history exhibits a comment upon the Psalmist’s words, "Surely man in his best estate--is altogether vanity!" View him in one light, he seems to have possessed all that the most aspiring mind could aim at--the favor and confidence of his prince, accumulated wealth, great honors, and such power, by his offices and influence with the King, that he could almost do what he pleased. Yet he had so much to suffer from the fatigues and difficulties of his station, and the cabals and malice of his enemies, that, in the midst of all his grandeur, a dispassionate mind would rather pity than envy him. And how suddenly were his schemes broken by the death of the King! Then he lost his friend, his protector, his influence. The remainder of his days were embittered by many inquietudes: he lived indeed (if that could afford any consolation) in much state and pageantry afterwards; but, after having toiled through more than fourscore years, died at last of a broken heart from domestic uneasiness. And is this all that the world can do for those who are accounted most successful! Alas! Too low they build--who build below the skies! And what a picture of the instability of human things, have we in his master, Henry! Admired, beloved, dreaded; full of vast designs; fondly supposing himself born to be the arbiter of Europe--in an awful moment, and in the midst of his friends, suddenly struck from the height of his grandeur, and snatched into the invisible, unchangeable world! In that moment all his thoughts and designs perished!

How unspeakably awful, is such a transition! How remarkable were his own foreboding of the approaching hour! O Lord, how do you pour contempt upon princes, and teach us that the great and the small are equally in your hands, and at your disposal, as clay in the hands of the potter! Poor king! while he expected obedience to his own commands--he lived in habitual defiance of the commands of God. Men may respect his memory, for his sincerity, benevolence, and other amiable qualities; but, besides that he was engrossed by a round of sensual pleasure (when business of state did not interfere), his life was stained with adultery. Happy, if in the hours he spent in retirement, when the pre-intimation of his death hung heavy upon his mind--if the Lord would have humbled and softened his heart, and gave him repentance unto life! I wish the history afforded a proof of this. However, in his death we see an affecting proof, that no human dignity or power can ward off the stroke of the Almighty, who by such sudden and unexpected dispensations, often shows himself dreadful to the princes and great men of the earth. O that they could see His hand--and wisely consider his works in them! But happy is the man who fears the Lord, and delights in his commandments; who sets God always before him, and acts under the constraining influence of Redeeming Love! He is the real friend and the best champion of his country--who makes, not the vague notions of human wisdom and honor--but the precepts and example of the blessed Jesus--the model and the motive of his conduct. He inculcates (as occasion offers) the great truths of Christian religion in his conversation, and demonstrates them by his practice; yet the best part of his life is known only to God and himself. His time is divided between serving his country in public, and wrestling for it in private. Nor shall his labors or his prayers be lost. Either he shall have the desire of his heart, and shall see the religion and the liberty which he so highly values transmitted to posterity; or, if he should live when wrath is decreed, and there is no remedy, the promise and the providence of God shall seal him as the peculiar charge of angels, in the midst of public calamity. And when all things are involved in confusion, when the hearts of the wicked shall shake like the leaves of the forest--he shall be kept in perfect peace, trusting in the Lord.

Chapter 66

01.01. The Furnace of affliction

The furnace of affliction September 27, 1777. My dear Friend,

I could not, at such a time as this, refrain from writing; and glad would I be, if the Lord may help me to drop a suitable word, and accompany it with a blessing to you in the reading.

I am glad to be assured (though I expected no less) that your sick wife happily feels herself safe in the Lord's hand, and under the care of the good Shepherd and Savior, to whom she has often committed herself; and finds him faithful to his promise, giving her strength in her soul according to her day, and enabling her quietly to submit to his holy, wise, and gracious will. And it is my prayer, that he may strengthen you likewise, and reveal his own all-sufficiency so clearly and powerfully to your heart, that you may not be afraid of any event--but cheerfully rely upon him, to be all that to you, in every circumstance and change, which his promise warrants you to expect.

I am willing to hope, that this is but a short season of concern, appointed for the exercise of your faith and patience, and to give you, in his good time, a signal proof of his power and goodness in answering prayer. He sometimes brings us into such a situation, when creature help is utterly unavailing, that we may afterwards be more clearly sensible of his interposition. Then we experimentally learn the vanity of all things here below, and are brought to a more immediate and absolute dependence upon himself. We have need of having these lessons frequently inculcated upon us; but when his end is answered, how often, after he has caused grief, does he show his great compassion, and save us from our fears by an outstretched arm, and with such a seasonable and almost unexpected relief, as constrains us to cry out, "What has God wrought!" and "Who is a God like unto you!" Such, I hope, will be the issue of your present trial, and that He who gave her to you at first, will restore her to you again.

You are in the furnace of affliction; but the Lord is sitting by it as a refiner of silver, to moderate the fire, and manage the process, so that you shall lose nothing but dross, and be brought forth as refined gold, to praise his name. Apparent difficulties, however great, are nothing to him. If He speaks--it is done; for to God the Lord belong the issues of life and death. Should his pleasure be otherwise, and should he call your dear partner to a state of glory before you--still I know he is able to support you. What he does, however painful to the flesh, must be right, because He does it. Having bought us with his blood, and saved our souls from hell, he has every kind of right to dispose of us and ours--as he pleases. And this we are sure of, he will not lay so much upon us--as he freely endured for us; and he can make us amends for all we suffer, and for all we lose--by the light of his countenance. A few years will set all to rights; and those who love him and are beloved by him, though they may suffer as others, shall not sorrow as others; for the Lord will be with them here--and he will soon have them with him! There, all tears shall be wiped from their eyes!

Perhaps I know as well how to calculate the pain of such a separation, as anyone who has not actually experienced it. Many a time the desire of my eyes has been threatened, many a time my

heart has been brought low; but from what I have known at such seasons, I have reason to hope, that, had it been his pleasure to bring upon me the thing that I feared, his everlasting arm would have upheld me from sinking under the stroke. As ministers, we are called to comfort the Lord's afflicted people, and to tell them the knowledge of his love is a cordial able to keep the soul alive under the sharpest trials. We must not wonder that he sometimes puts us in a way of showing that we do not deal in unfelt truths--but that we find ourselves that solid consolation in the Gospel, which we encourage others to expect from it. You have now such an occasion of glorifying the Lord; I pray he may enable you to improve it, and that all around you may see that he is with you, and that his good Word is the support and anchor of your soul. Then I am sure, if it upon the whole it is best for you--that he will give you the desire of your heart, and you shall yet live to praise him together.

01.01. The Great Shepherd

The Great Shepherd by John Newton

"He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young." Isaiah 40:11

It is not easy for those whose habits of life are insensibly formed by the customs of modern times, to conceive any adequate idea of the shepherd life, as it was in the eastern countries, before that simplicity of life, which characterized the early ages, was corrupted by the artificial and false refinements of luxury. Wealth, in those days, consisted principally in flocks and herds; and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, who were, to speak in modern language, people of high distinction, were likewise shepherds. The book of Genesis, which is an authentic and infallible history of the most ancient times, exhibits a manner of living so different from our own, that, perhaps, few people are qualified to enter fully in the spirit of the description. The opulence of Jacob may be conjectured from the present he sent to his brother Esau. (Genesis 32:14-15) Yet Jacob attended his flocks himself, "in the drought by day, and in the frost by night." (Genesis 31:40) The vigilance, the providence, the tenderness, necessary to the due discharge of the shepherd's office, have been frequently applied in describing the nature and ends of government; and it has been esteemed a high encomium of a good king, to style him the Shepherd of His People. This character of a shepherd, the Messiah, the Savior, condescends to bear; and happy are they who, with a pleasing consciousness, can say, "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." (Psalms 100:3) The passage will lead me to speak of the Shepherd, the flock, and his care and tenderness over them.

I. The Shepherd. Our Lord expressly styles himself the "Shepherd," the "good Shepherd of the sheep," (John 10:11-14) and the apostle Peter styles him the "chief Shepherd." (1 Peter 5:4) His faithful ministers have the honor to be under shepherds; he appoints and qualifies them to feed his flock. They are the messengers of His will, but they can do nothing without him; they can only communicate what they receive, and cannot watch over the flock, unless they are themselves watched over by him. (Psalms 127:1) For, with respect to power and authority, he is the chief, and, indeed, the sole Shepherd. The eyes of all are upon him, and his eye is upon and over all his flock. The Old Testament church had a shepherd, and their shepherd was Jehovah. (Psalms 23:1) Unless therefore the Shepherd of our souls, is likewise Jehovah; we fall unspeakably short of the privilege of ancient Israel, if their Shepherd was almighty, and if ours could be but a creature.

Surely we could not then say, what yet the apostle affirms, that we have a "better covenant, established upon better promises;" (Hebrews 8:6) since Messiah himself is expressly declared to be the surety and the mediator of this covenant. But would it not be better, upon this supposition, with David, who could say, Jehovah is my Shepherd, than with us, who are entrusted to the care of a delegated and inferior keeper, if Jesus is not Jehovah? Besides, who but Jehovah can relieve the necessities of multitudes in all places, in the same moment, and be equally near and attentive to them in every age? The sinner, who is enlightened to know himself, his needs, enemies, and

dangers, will not dare to confide in anything short of an almighty arm! He needs a shepherd who is full of wisdom, full of care, full of power; able, like the sun, to shine upon millions at once, and possessed of those transcendent attributes of Deity, omniscience and omnipresence. Such is our great Shepherd; and he is eminently the good Shepherd also, for he laid down his life for the sheep, and has redeemed them to God by his own blood.

II. The flock. A shepherd is a relative name; it has reference to a flock. This great and good Shepherd has a flock, whom He loved from eternity, and whom having once loved—He will love them to the end! (John 13:1).

He humbled Himself for their sakes, submitted to partake of their nature and their sorrows, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He died for His sheep, "the just for the unjust," (1 Peter 3:18) to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the power of Satan, and to bring them to God.

They all, by nature, have "gone astray, every one to his own way;" (Isaiah 53:6) but having thus bought them with His blood—in His own appointed time—He seeks, finds, and restores His sheep! By the power of His Word and Spirit, He makes Himself known to their hearts, causes them to hear and understand His voice, and guides them into His fold! Then they become His sheep in the sense of my text. They are under his immediate protection and government.

Considered as INDIVIDUALS, they are fitly described by the name of sheep. A sheep is a weak, defenseless, foolish creature; prone to wander; and if once it wanders astray, can seldom return of its own accord. A sheep has neither strength to fight with the wolf, nor speed to escape from him; nor has it the foresight of the ant, to provide its own sustenance. Such is our character, and our situation! We are unable to take care of ourselves, prone to wander from our resting-place, exposed to enemies which we can neither withstand nor avoid, without any resource in ourselves, and taught, by daily experience, the insufficiency of everything around us. Yet, if Jesus is our Shepherd, as weak and helpless as we are, we may can say with David, "The Lord is my Shepherd—I have everything I need! Surely Your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever!"

COLLECTIVELY, they are a flock. They are not, indeed, in one place. They are scattered abroad, dispersed through different ages and countries, separated by seas and mountains, and, too often, by misapprehensions and prejudices, by names and forms; and only a very small part of the flock are known to each other. But they are all equally known to him, and equally under his eye. In his view they are one flock, one body; they are animated by one and the same Spirit; their views, hopes, and aims are the same; and in a little while, they shall be all brought together, a multitude without number, to rejoice and to join in worship, before his throne of glory. For they have an inheritance reserved for them in heaven, (1 Peter 1:4-5) and they shall be safely kept, while they are sojourners upon earth, for the Shepherd of Israel is their keeper.

III. The Shepherd’s care and tenderness over His flock. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." The word "feed" is not restrained to feeding. It includes all the branches of the shepherd’s office. He shall act the part of a Shepherd to his flock. We have a beautiful miniature description of what he has engaged to do, and what he actually does, for his people, as their Shepherd, in the twenty-third Psalm. And the subject is more largely illustrated in the thirty-fourth chapter of

Ezekiel’s prophecy. His sheep, from age to age, have been witnesses to the truth of his promises. He has a flock at present who rejoice in his care, and greater multitudes, as yet unborn, shall successively arise in their appointed seasons, "and call him blessed."(Psalms 72:17) For he is the "same yesterday, today, and forever."

"He feeds them." He leads them into green and pleasant pastures. These pastures are, his Word and ordinances, by which he communicates to them of His own fullness; for in strict propriety of speech, he himself is their food. They eat his flesh, and drink his blood. (John 6:54) This was once thought a hard saying (John 6:60) by some of His professed followers, and is still thought so by too many. But it is his own saying, and therefore I am not concerned, either to confirm or to vindicate it. The knowledge they receive by faith, of his incarnation and sufferings unto death, of the names he bears, and of the offices and relations in which he is pleased to act for them, is the life and food of their souls. The expression of feeding them, is agreeable to the analogy he has been pleased to establish, between the natural and the spiritual life. As the strength of the body is maintained and renewed by eating and drinking; so they who, in this sense, feed upon him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving, even they live (John 6:57) by him; "for His flesh is food indeed, and his blood is drink indeed."

"He guides them." First by his example. He has trodden the path of duty and trial before them; and they perceive and follow his footsteps. Again, by his Word and Spirit, he teaches them the way in which they should go; and both inclines and enables them to walk in it. (Isaiah 30:21) He guides them, likewise, by his Providence; he appoints the bounds of their habitations, the line and calling in which they are to serve him, and orders and adjusts the circumstances of their lives according to his infinite wisdom, so as, finally, to accomplish his gracious designs in their favor.

"He guards them." It is written concerning him, "He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." (Micah 5:4) If we conceive of a flock of sheep feeding in the midst of wolves, who are restrained from breaking in upon them, not by any visible enclosure, but merely by the power of the shepherd’s eye, which keeps them in awe and at a distance, it will give us some idea of the situation of his people. He provides them food in the midst of many and mighty (Psalms 23:5) enemies, who envy them their privilege, but cannot prevent it. If he should withdraw his attention from the flock, for a single minute, they would be harassed. But he has promised to keep them night and day (Isaiah 27:3) and every moment; therefore their enemies plot and rage in vain. Their visible foes are numerous; and if we could look into the invisible world, and take a view of the subtlety, malice, machinations, and assiduity of the powers of darkness, who are incessantly watching for opportunities of destroying them, we would have a most striking conviction, that a flock so defenseless and feeble in themselves, and against which such a combination is formed, can only be kept by the power of God.

"He heals them." A good shepherd will examine the state of his flock. But there is no attention worthy of being compared with his. Not the slightest circumstance in their concerns escapes his notice. When they are ready to faint, borne down with heavy exercises of mind, wearied with temptations, dry and disconsolate in their spirits, he seasonably revives them. Nor are they in heaviness without a needs-be for it. All his dispensations towards them are medicinal, designed to correct, or to restrain, or to cure, the maladies of their souls. And they are adjusted, by his wisdom and tenderness, to what they can bear, and to what their case requires.

It is he, likewise, who heals their bodily sickness, and gives them help in all their temporal troubles. He is represented to us, as counting their sighs, (Psalms 56:1) putting their tears into his bottle, recording their sorrows in his book of remembrance; and even, as being himself "touched with a feeling of their infirmities," (Hebrews 4:15) as the head feels for the members of the body.

"He restores them." The power and subtlety of their enemies are employed to force or entice them from his rule; and too often prevail for a season. The sheep turn aside unto forbidden paths; and whenever they do, they would wander farther and farther, until they were quite lost again, if he were not their Shepherd. If he permits them to deviate, he has a time to convince them, "that it was an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord their Shepherd," (Jeremiah 2:19) and to humble them, and to bring them back. Thus they become more sensible of their own weakness, and of their obligations to his gracious care; for he will not allow their enemies to triumph over them. He will not lose one of his true flock; not one convinced sinner, who has, in deed and in truth, surrendered and entrusted his all to him. They must, and they shall, smart and mourn for their folly; but he will, in due season, break their snares, and lead them again into the paths of peace, for his own name’s sake. The flock are not all sheep. There are among them lambs. These are especially mentioned, and for these he expresses a peculiar tenderness. "He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart." Though they are weaklings, they shall not be left behind. This is a beautiful and tender image. If a poor lamb is weary, and unable to keep up with the flock, it shall be carried. This clause affords encouragement,

1. To young people. Early serious impressions are often made upon the hearts of children, which we are to cherish by directing their thoughts to the compassion of the good Shepherd, who has said, "Let the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:14) This high and holy One, who humbles himself to notice the worship of the heavenly host, hears the prayers of worms upon the earth; and his ear is open to the prayers of a child, no less so than to the prayer of a king.

2. To young converts. These, at whatever age, are children in the Lord’s family, lambs in his flock. They are, as yet, weak, unsettled, and inexperienced. Almost every day brings them into a new and untried situation. They often meet with opposition and discouragement. Perhaps their nearest friends are displeased with them. They are liable, likewise, while they are inquiring the way to Zion, to be perplexed by the various opinions and angry contentions prevailing among the different religious people or parties to whom they may address themselves. They are frequently discouraged by the falls and miscarriages of professors, some of whom, it is possible, they may have admired, and looked up to, as patterns for their own imitation. Add to these things, what they suffer from new and unexpected discoveries of the evil and deceitfulness of their hearts; the mistakes they commit, in judgment and practice, for lack of a more solid, and extensive knowledge of the Scriptures; and the advantage the great enemy of their souls derives from these their various difficulties to assault their peace and obstruct their progress. What would become of them in such circumstances, if their faithful Shepherd had not promised to lead, and uphold them, with the arm of his power?

There is, likewise, particular mention made of "the mother sheep with their young." These he will gently lead. This may signify a state of conviction or trouble. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," (Psalms 34:19) by which they are often wearied and heavy laden. But when their spirits

are overwhelmed within them, he knows their path. Jacob would not permit his cattle that were with young to be over-driven for one day, lest they should die. (Genesis 33:13) Much less will this good Shepherd allow the burdened among his flock to be hurried and tempted beyond what they are able, or what he will enable them, to bear.

"The mother sheep with their young." Two sorts of people in the Lord's flock, who come under this description, feel an especial need of his compassion, tenderness, and patience.

1. He only knows the feelings of the hearts of parents; what solicitude and concern they have for their young ones, the sucklings of the flock, which mingle with all their endeavors, to manage rightly the important charge committed to them, and to bring their "children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

2 Ministers, likewise, have painful exercises of mind. The apostle Paul speaks of "travailing in birth again, until Christ is formed in our hearts." (Galatians 4:19) When we know of any newly awakened, and beginning to seek their salvation, how solicitous is our care to bring them forward, to comfort them, to warn them against the devices of their hearts, and of their enemies! And how piercing our grief and disappointment, if they miscarry! How much is felt in sympathy for the trials of the flock! What wisdom, faithfulness, courage, meekness, and unction from on high—are necessary to the due discharge of what we owe to the flocks of which we have the oversight! Who is sufficient for these things? And when we have done our best, our all, what defects and defilements have we to mourn over? But this is our great consolation, that he, who knows us, and leads us, considers "our frame, and remembers that we are but dust." In this delineation of the character and conduct of the "Great Shepherd of the sheep," (Hebrews 13:20) we have an affecting exemplar and pattern, for the imitation of those who act in the honorable office of under shepherds, and are called, by their profession and engagement, to feed his sheep and lambs. Whether there are any ministers in our assembly or not, you will at least permit me to speak a word to my own heart; which may, I hope, at the same time, impress your minds with a sense of our great need of your prayers. "Brethren, pray for us," (1 Thessalonians 5:25) and "pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send forth more faithful laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:38) For it is his work alone.

It is not necessary, that a minister of the Gospel should be in the first line of those who are admired for their abilities or literature; much less that he should be distinguished by such titles, honors, and emoluments, as this world can give. But it is necessary, and of the last importance to his character and usefulness here, and to his acceptance in the great day of the Lord, that he should have a shepherd's eye and a shepherd's heart. He must serve the flock, "not for filthy lucre, or by constraint" (1 Peter 5:2-3) (that constraint, which the apostle attributes to the love of Christ, only excepted), "but willingly," and with a view to their edification. And he must, indeed, serve them, not acting as a "lord over God's heritage, but as an example to the flock." Not preaching "himself," (2 Corinthians 4:5) perverting his sacred office to the purposes of ambition or vain-glory, or the acquisition of wealth; but preaching Christ Jesus the Lord, and employing all his powers to turn sinners from the error of their ways.

"He who wins souls is wise." (Proverbs 11:30) If it is wisdom to propose the noblest end—the faithful minister is wise; the end at which he aims, in subordination to the will and glory of God, is the salvation of souls. The recovery of one immortal soul to the favor and image of God, is, and will

at length be found, a greater and more important event, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from slavery or temporal ruin. If it is wisdom to pursue a right end by the fittest means, he is wise; he knows the Gospel of Christ to be the power of God, the appointed, the effectual, the only sufficient means for accomplishing his great purpose. Therefore, however unfashionable it may be, he is not ashamed of it, he preaches it, and he glories in it.

If it is an effect of wisdom, not to be deterred from the prosecution of a great and noble design by the censure and dislike of weak and incompetent judges—the faithful minister is truly wise. He loves his fellow-creatures, and would willingly please them for their good; but he cannot fear them, because he fears and serves the Lord. He looks forward, with desire, to the day of that solemn and general visitation, when the "Shepherd and Guardian of souls shall himself appear." (1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4) And if he may then stand among those who are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved, and receive the "crown of life, which his Lord has promised to those who love him," (2 Timothy 4:8). This thought fully reconciles him to the trials of his situation; and however depreciated, misrepresented, opposed, or ill-treated here, he can say, "None of these things move me, neither do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24)

There is a counterpart to this character, described in strong and glowing language by the prophets. There are selfish shepherds, who feed not the flock, but themselves; (Ezekiel 34:2) who neither attempt to heal the sick, to strengthen the feeble, to bind up that which is broken, nor recover that which has been driven away; shepherds, (Isaiah 56:10-11) who cannot understand, greedy, lovers of gain—and who, by a change of metaphor, are compared to slumbering watchmen, and dumb dogs that cannot bark. The New Testament teaches us to expect that such people, under the name of ministers, will be found likewise in the visible church of Christ; men of corrupt minds, (1 Timothy 6:5; Romans 16:18) destitute of the truth, who serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly: men who are of the world, (1 John 4:5) and speak of the world; and therefore the world hears and favors them.

But, alas!—neither the wretched slave who toils at the galley-oar, nor he who is doomed to labor in a deep coal mine, where the light of the sun never reaches him, nor the lunatic who howls on a chain, are such emphatical objects of our compassion, as the unhappy man who prostitutes the name and function of a minister of Christ to the gratification of his pride and avarice; and whose object is not the welfare of the flock, but the possession of the fleece! Who intrudes into the post of a watchman, but gives no alarm of the impending danger (Ezekiel 33:7-8).

If the Scriptures are true; if the Gospel is not indeed, as Pope Leo the tenth profanely styled it, "a lucrative fable"; the more the minister accumulates riches, the more he rises in dignity, the more his influence extends, the more he is to be commiserated. He may have the reward he seeks: he may be admired and flattered; he may, for a season, be permitted to withstand and refute the efforts of the Lord’s faithful servants; he may shine as a scholar or a courtier: but nothing less than repentance, and faith in the Redeemer, whose name and cause he has dishonored, can finally screen him from the full effect of that terrible denunciation, "Woe to that worthless shepherd who forsakes" or neglects "the flock!" (Zechariah 11:17)

01.01. The Heart of man

The heart of man October 21, 1775. My Dear Friend, The calls and engagements which I told you engrossed and anticipated my time when I wrote last, have continued without any intermission hitherto, and I am still far behind-hand with my business. I am willing to hope, that the case has been much the same with you, and that lack of leisure has been the only cause of my not having been pleasured with so much as a note from you since my return from London.

I am reluctant, for my own sake, to charge your silence to any unwillingness of continuing that fellowship which I have been, and still find myself, desirous to improve on my part. For though we are not agreed in our views—yet, while our preliminary agreement, to allow mutual freedom, and to exercise mutual candor, in expressing our sentiments, exists, we may, and I hope shall, be glad to hear from each other. It may seem to intimate I have a better opinion of myself than of you, that, while I seem confident your freedom will not offend me, I feel now and then a fear lest mine should prove displeasing to you. But friendship is a little suspicious when exercised with long silence; and a plain declaration of my sentiments has, more than once, put amiable and respectable people to the full trial of their patience.

I now return your sermons: I thank you for the perusal. I see much in them that I approve, and nothing in them but what I formerly espoused. But in a course of years a considerable alteration has taken place in my judgment and experience, I hope, yes I may boldly say I am sure, not for the worse. Then I was seeking, and now, through mercy, I have found, the Pearl of great price. It is both the prayer and the hope of my heart, that a day is coming when you shall make the same acknowledgment. From your Letters and Sermons, I am encouraged to address you in our Lord’s words, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." I am persuaded the views you have received will not allow you to remain where you are. But fidelity obliges me to add, "Yet one thing you lack." That "one thing" I trust the Lord will both show you, and bestow upon you, in his due time.

You speak somewhere of "atoning for disobedience by repentance." Ah! my dear sir, when we are brought to estimate our disobedience, by comparing it with such a sense of the majesty, holiness, and authority of God; and the spirituality, extent, and sanction of his holy law, as he, and he only, can impress upon the heart of a sinner—we shall be convinced that nothing but the blood of the Son of God can atone for the smallest instance of disobedience!

I intimated, in my letter from London, one defect of your scheme, which will probably be the first to engage your notice. I am sure you have a desire to be useful to the souls of men; to be an instrument of reclaiming them from that course of open wickedness, or lifeless formality, in which you see them enslaved; and, in a word, to prevail with them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, according to the just and comprehensive sense you have given of those words in your sermon on Titus 2:11-12.

Now inward experience, and a pretty extensive observation of what passes abroad, have so perfectly convinced me there is but one mode of preaching which the Holy Spirit owns to the

producing these effects, that I am not afraid to pronounce confidently—you will not have the desires of your heart gratified upon your present plan! The people will give you a hearing—but remain just as they are, until the Lord leads you to speak to them as criminals condemned already, and whose first essential step it is, to seek forgiveness by the blood of Jesus, and a change of heart and state by his grace, before they can bring forth any fruit acceptable to God. As I have little time for writing, and little hope of succeeding in a way of argumentation, I have substituted, instead of a longer letter, the heads of some sermons I preached nine or ten years ago, on our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. However, when I have heard that you are well, and that you still are disposed to correspond with me, I shall be ready to give a more particular answer to the subjects you pointed out to me in the letter you favored me with the day before I left London. I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe that I am, with sincerity, etc.

You complain that I have hitherto disappointed your expectations. If you have preserved my first papers, I believe you will find that I apprised you this might probably be the event, and certainly must, unless it should please God to make what I should write a means of giving you the same views with myself. I only proposed, as a witness, to bear a simple testimony to what I had seen and known. So far as you believed me sincere, and unwilling to impose upon you, I thought you might admit there was perhaps some weight in what I advanced, though for the present you could not see things in the same light. And if you allowed a possibility, that my changing the sentiments which I once held in common with yourself might be upon sufficient grounds, you would, as I trust you do, wait upon the great Teacher for his instruction; otherwise I did not expect to convince you; nor do I yet, only I am glad to put myself in his hands as an instrument.

You quite misunderstood what I spoke of the light and influence of the Spirit of God. He reveals to me no new truths—but has only shown me the meaning of his own written Word. Nor is this light a special revelation to myself—it is common to all who are born again. And thus, though you and I cannot fully agree about it—yet I almost daily meet with people, from the east, west, north, and south, whom, though I never saw them before, I find we understand each other at once. This (as you bid me be explicit) is the one thing which you at present lack. And I limited my expression to one thing, because it is our Lord's expression, and because that one thing includes many. As I said before, I cannot give it to you—but the Lord can. And from the desire he has raised in your heart, I have a warm hope that he will. You place the whole stress of your inquiries upon human reason. I am far from discarding reason, when it is enlightened and sanctified; but spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, and can be received and discerned no other way; for to our natural reason they are foolishness; 1 Corinthians 2:14-15; Matthew 11:25. This certain something I can no more describe to those who have not experienced it, than I could describe the taste of a pineapple to a person who had never seen one. But Scriptural proofs might be adduced in abundance—yet not so as to give a solid conviction of it—until we actually experience it.

Thus it was with my friend, whose case I sent you. When God gave him the key (as he expressed it), then the Scriptures were unlocked. His wishing himself a Deist some time before, was not from any libertine exceptions he made to the precepts of the Gospel—but from the perplexing enigmas he had found, by endeavoring to understand the doctrines by dint of reason, though reason in him was as strong and penetrating as in most men I ever met with. Upon your present plan, how can I hope to satisfy you, though even Paul asserts it, that the carnal mind is enmity against God? You will readily agree with me to the proposition as it stands in Paul's words—but I think will not so

readily assent to what I have no more doubt than of my own existence, is the sense of it—That the heart of man—of any man, every man, however apparently amiable in his outward conduct, however benevolent to his fellow-creatures, however abundant and zealous in his devotions—is, by nature, enmity against God. Not indeed against the idea he himself forms of God—but against the character which God has revealed of himself in the Scripture. Man is an enemy to the justice, sovereignty, and law of God; and to the one method of salvation, which he has appointed in the Gospel, by faith alone; by such a faith as it is no more in his power to contribute to the production of in himself, than he can contribute to raising the dead, or making a world. Whatever is of the flesh is flesh, and can rise no higher than its principle—But the Lord could convince you of this by a glance of thought. But I must break off, for lack both of room and time. Let me remind you of our agreement, to use and allow the greatest freedom, and not to be offended with what is well-meant on either side. Something in your last letter made me apprehensive you were a little displeased with me. He who knows my heart, knows that I wish you as well as my own soul. The expression, of atoning for disobedience by repentance, was in one of your sermons. I considered it as unguarded; but, on my view of things, it were in a manner impossible I could use that expression, though perhaps too often unguarded myself.

I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe that I am, with sincerity, etc.

01.01. The Heavenly Builder

The heavenly Builder November 11, 1775. My dear Miss M, Our last visit was very pleasant to myself; if anything that passed was of service to you, we know to whom the thanks are due; for we can neither communicate nor receive anything—but so far as he is pleased to enable us. One reason why he often disappoints us—is that we may learn to depend on him alone. We are prone, as you observe, to rest too much upon sensible comforts—yet they are very desirable, only as to the measure and seasons. It is well to be submissive to his will; to be thankful for them when we have them, and humbly waiting for them when we have them not. They are not, however, the proper ground of our hope; a good hope springs from such a sense of our needs, and such a persuasion of his power and grace—as engages the heart to venture, upon the warrant of his promises, to trust in him for salvation. In a sense, we are often hindering him by our impatience and unbelief. But, strictly speaking, when he really begins the good work, and gives us a desire which will be satisfied with nothing short of himself—he will not be hindered from carrying it on; for he has said, I will work, and none shall hinder it. Ah! had it depended upon myself, upon my wisdom or faithfulness, I would have hindered him, and ruined myself long ago! How often have I grieved and resisted his Spirit! But hereby I have learned more of his patience and tenderness, than I could otherwise have known.

He knows our frame, and what effects our evil nature, fermented by the artifices of Satan, will have; he sees us from first to last. A thousand evils arise in our hearts, a thousand wrongnesses in our conduct, which, as they do arise, are new to ourselves, and perhaps at some times we are ready to think we were incapable of such things; but none of them are new to him, to whom past, present, and future are the same. The foresight of them did not prevent his calling us by his grace. Though he knew we were vile, and would prove ungrateful and unfaithful—yet he would be found of us; he would knock at the door of our hearts, and gain himself an entrance. Nor shall they prevent his accomplishing his gracious purpose. It is our part to be abased before him, and quietly to hope and wait for his salvation in the use of his appointed means. The power, success, and blessing—are wholly from himself. To make us more sensible of this, he often withdraws from our perceptions; and as, in the absence of the sun, the wild beasts of the forest roam abroad; so, when Jesus hides himself, we presently perceive what is in our hearts, and what a poor shift we can make without him. When he returns, his light chases the evils away, and we are well again.

It is your great and singular mercy, my dear Miss, that he has taught you to seek him so early in life. You have entered in the way of salvation—but you must not expect all at once. The work of grace is compared to the corn, and to a building; the growth of the one, and the carrying forward of the other, are gradual. In a building, for instance, if it is large, there is much to be done in preparing and laying the foundation, before the walls appear above ground; much is doing within, when the work does not seem perhaps to advance without; and when it is considerably forward—yet, being encumbered with scaffolds and rubbish—a bystander sees it at a great disadvantage, and can form but an imperfect judgment of it. But all this while the architect himself, even from the laying of the first stone, conceives of it according to the plan and design he has formed; he prepares and

adjusts the materials, disposing each in its proper time and place—and views it, in idea, as already finished. In due season it is completed—but not in a day. The top-stone is fixed, and then, the scaffolds and rubbish being removed—it appears to others as he intended it should be.

Men, indeed, often plan what, for want of skill or ability, or from unforeseen disappointments, they are unable to execute. But nothing can disappoint the heavenly Builder; nor will he ever be reproached with forsaking the work of his own hands, or beginning that which he could not or would not accomplish; Php 1:6. Let us therefore be thankful for beginnings, and patiently wait the outcome. His enemies strive to retard the work, as they did when the Jews, by his order, set about rebuilding the Temple. Yet it was finished, in defiance of them all.

01.01. The Heavenly gardener

The heavenly gardener

July 22, 1777. My dear Sir, The complaints you make of what passes within, encourage me under what I feel myself. Indeed, if those, who, I have reason to believe, are more spiritual and humble than I am, did not give some testimony that they find their hearts made of the same materials as mine is, I should be sometimes hard put to it to believe that I have any part or lot in the matter, or any real knowledge of the life of faith! But this concurrent testimony of many witnesses, confirms me, in what I think the Scripture plainly teaches—that the soil of human nature, though many spots are certainly better weeded, planted, and fertilized than others—is everywhere the same—universally bad! The heart is so bad, that it cannot be worse—and of itself is only capable of producing noxious weeds, and nourishing venomous creatures!

We know that culture, skill, and expense will make a garden—where all was desert before. When Jesus, the heavenly gardener, encloses a soil, and separates it from the wasteland of the world, to make it a residence for Himself—a change presently takes place; it is planted and watered from above, and visited with beams infinitely more nourishing and fertilizing than those of the material sun. But its natural propensity to bring forth weeds still continues, and one half of God's dealings with us, may be compared to a company of weeders, whom He sends forth into His garden—to pluck up all which He has not planted with His own hand; and which, if left to grow, would quickly overpower and over top the rest!

But, alas! the ground is so impregnated with evil seeds, and they shoot in such quick succession, that if this weeding work were not constantly repeated, all former labor would be lost! Hence arises the necessity of daily crosses and disappointments, and such multiplied convictions that we are nothing, and can do nothing, of ourselves! All these trials are needful, and barely sufficient, to prevent our hearts from being overrun with pride, lust, worldliness and self-dependence.

01.01. The History of mankind

The history of mankind

July, 1777

Dear sir,

I have recently read "Robertson’s History of Charles V", which, like most other histories, I consider as a comment upon those passages of Scripture which teach us the depravity of man, the deceitfulness of the heart, the ruinous effects of sin; and the powerful, though secret, rule of Divine Providence, moving, directing, controlling the designs and actions of men, with an unerring hand, to the accomplishment of his own purposes, both of mercy and judgment. Without the clue and the light which the Word of God affords—the history of mankind, of any, of every age, only presents to view—a labyrinth and a chaos; a detail of wickedness and misery to make us tremble; and a confused jumble of interfering incidents, as destitute of stability, connection, or order—as the clouds which fly over our heads. But with the Scripture key—all is plain, all is instructive. Then I see, truly there is a God, who governs the earth, who pours contempt upon princes, takes the wise in their own craftiness, over-rules the wrath and pride of man to bring his own designs to pass, and restrains all that is not necessary to that end; blasting the best concerted enterprises at one time, by means apparently slight, and altogether unexpected, and at other times producing the most important events from instruments and circumstances which are at first thought too feeble and trivial to deserve notice.

I would like to see a writer of Dr. Robertson’s abilities give us a history upon this plan; but I think his reflections of this sort are too general, too cold, and too few. What an empty phantom do the great men of the world pursue, while they wage war with the peace of mankind, and butcher (in the course of their lives) perhaps hundreds of thousands, to maintain the shadow of authority over distant nations, whom they can reach with no other influence than that of oppression and devastation! But when we consider those who are sacrificed to their ambition as justly suffering for their sins, then heroes and conquerors appear in their proper light, and worthy to be classed with earthquakes and pestilences—as instruments of Divine vengeance. So many cares, so much pains, so many mischiefs, merely to support the idea which a human worm has formed of his own grandeur, is a proof that man, by nature, is not only depraved—but infatuated. How awful is the case of those who live and die in such a spirit, and who have multiplied miseries upon their fellow-creatures, in order to support and feed their pride and arrogance! Perhaps they may, upon their entrance to the eternal state, be accosted by multitudes, to the purpose of that sarcastic language in the prophet’s sublime ode of triumph over the king of Babylon, Isaiah 14:5-17. But though the effects of this principle of SELF are more extensive and calamitous in proportion as those who are governed by it are more elevated, the principle itself is deep-rooted in every heart, and is the spring of every action—until grace infuses a new principle, and self, like Dagon, falls before the Lord Almighty. Great and small are but relative terms; and the passions of discontent, pride, and envy, which, in the breast of a potentate are severely felt by one half of Europe, exert

themselves with equal strength in the heart of a peasant, though, for lack of materials and opportunities, their operations are confined within narrow bounds. We are fallen into a state of gross idolatry—and SELF is the idol we worship!

01.01. The Impatient patient

The impatient patient November 23, 1774. My dear Sir,

I hope to be informed in due time—that the Lord has given you full health and cure. He has preserved me hitherto from the hands of surgeons; but I feel as if my flesh would prove, as you say, a very coward, were it needful to submit to a painful operation. Yet I observe, when such operations are necessary, if people are satisfied of a surgeon's skill and prudence, they will not only yield to be cut at his pleasure, without pretending to direct him where, or how long, he shall make the incision—but will thank and pay him for putting them to pain, because they believe it for their advantage. I wish I could be more like them in my concerns. My body, as I said, is, through mercy, free from considerable ailments—but I have a soul which requires surgeon's work continually: there is some tumor to be cut out, some dislocation to be reduced, some fracture to be healed, almost daily! It is my great mercy, that One who is infallible in skill, who exercises incessant care and boundless compassion towards all his patients, has undertaken my case! And, as complicated as it is, I dare not doubt his making a perfect cure! Yet, alas! I too often discover such impatience, distrust, and complaining, when under his hand; am so apt to find fault with the instruments he is pleased to make use of; so ready to think the beneficial wounds he makes are unnecessary, or too large. In a word, I show such a promptness to control, were I able, or to direct, his operations, that, were not his patience beyond expression, he would before now have given me up!

I am persuaded no money would induce any doctor to attend upon a patient who should act towards him—as I have towards my best Physician. Sometimes I indulge a hope that I am growing wiser, and think, "Surely, after such innumerable proofs as I have had, that he does all things well, I shall now be satisfied to leave myself quietly and without reserve to His disposal." A thousand such surrenders I have made, and a thousand times I have retracted them. Yet still he is gracious. Oh, how shall I praise him at last!

I thank you for your letter; I never receive one from you without pleasure, and, I believe, seldom without profit, at least for the time. I believe, with you, that there is much of the proper and designed efficacy of the Gospel mystery which I have not yet experienced; and I suppose those who are advanced far beyond me in the Divine life judge the same of their utmost present attainments. Yet I have no idea of any permanent state in this life—which shall make my experience cease to be a state of warfare and humiliation. At my first setting out, indeed, I thought to be better, and to feel myself better from year to year; I expected by degrees to attain everything which I then comprised in my idea of a godly Christian. I thought my grain of grace, by much diligence and careful improvement, would, in time, amount to a pound; that pound, in a farther space of time, to a talent; and then I hoped to increase from one talent to many; so that, supposing the Lord should spare me a number of years, I pleased myself with the thought of dying rich in grace.

But, alas! these my golden expectations have been like South-Sea dreams! I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one! Have I then gained nothing by waiting upon the Lord? Yes, I have gained, that which I once would rather have been without, such accumulated proofs of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart, as I hope, by the Lord’s blessing, has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean, when I say, "Behold I am vile!"

And, in connection with this, I have gained such experience of the wisdom, power, and compassion of my Redeemer; the need, the worth, of his blood, righteousness, attention, and intercession; the glory that he displays in pardoning iniquity and sin and passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage—that my soul cannot but cry out, "Who is a God like unto you!" Thus, if I have any lower thoughts of myself, Ezekiel 16:63, and any higher thoughts of him than I had twenty years ago, I have reason to be thankful. Every grain of this experience is worth mountains of gold. And if, by his mercy, I shall yet sink more in my own esteem, and he will be pleased to rise still more glorious to my eyes, and more precious to my heart—I expect it will be much in the same way. I was ashamed when I began to seek him; I am more ashamed now; and I expect to be most of all ashamed when he shall appear to destroy my last enemy. But, oh! I may rejoice in him, to think that he will not be ashamed of me.

01.01. The Lord Reigns!

The Lord Reigns!

John Newton "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!" Revelation 19:6 The book of the Revelation, being chiefly prophetical, will not perhaps be fully understood, until the final accomplishment of the events shall draw near, and throw a stronger light upon the whole book. But, while the learned commentators have been hitherto divided and perplexed in their attempts to illustrate many parts of it, there are other parts well adapted for the instruction and refreshment of plain Christians; particularly those passages in which the scenery and images seemed designed to give us some representation of the happiness and worship of the heavenly state. Thus a plain unlettered believer, when reading with attention the fourth and fifth chapters, though he cannot give a reason why there are 24 elders, why there are 4 living creatures, and why the number of their wings is neither more nor less than six; yet, from the whole description of the Lamb upon the throne, the songs of the redeemed, and the chorus of the angels, he receives such an impression of glory, as awakens his gratitude, desire, and joy, and excites him likewise to take up the same song of praise "to him who has loved him, and washed him from his sins in his own blood." He is content to leave the discussion of hard questions to learned men, while he feeds by faith upon those simple truths which can be relished only by a spiritual taste; and which, where there is such a taste, make their way to the heart, without the assistance of academic inquisition. The subject of the preceding chapter, is the destruction of mystical Babylon, the head of the opposition against the kingdom of the Lord Christ. But Babylon sinks like a millstone in the mighty ocean, and is no more found. So must all his enemies perish. The catastrophe of Babylon, like that of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, is beheld by the saints and servants of the Lord with admiration, and furnishes them with a theme for a song of triumph to his praise. This may be properly styled sacred music indeed. It is commanded, inspired, and regulated by the Lord himself. The performers are all interested in the subject, "they who fear God," and are devoted to his service and glory. And though people of this character are comparatively few upon earth, hidden, and in a manner lost, among the crowd of mankind; they will be, when brought together at last, a very large company. Their united voices are here compared to the voice of many waters, and of mighty thunders, and this is the solemn close, the chorus of their song, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns!" The impression which the performance of this passage in "Handel’s Messiah" usually makes upon the audience, is well known. But however great the power of music may be, should we even allow the flights of poetry to be truth, that it can "soften rocks, and bend the knotted oak," one thing we are sure it cannot do; it cannot soften and change the hard heart, it cannot bend the obdurate will of man. If all the people who hear "Handel’s Messiah", who are struck and astonished, for the moment, by this chorus in particular, were to bring away with them an abiding sense of the importance of the sentiment it contains, the nation would soon wear a new face. But do the professed lovers of sacred music, in this enlightened age, generally live as if they really believed that "the Lord God omnipotent reigns?" Rather, do not the greater part of them live, as they might do if they were sure of the contrary? as if they were satisfied to a demonstration, that either there is no God, or that his

providence is not concerned in human affairs? I appeal to conscience; I appeal to fact.

I apprehend that this passage, taken in the strictest sense, refers to a period not yet arrived. Babylon is not yet fallen. The servants of God in the present day, will most probably fulfill their appointed time upon earth, like those who have lived before them, in a state of conflict. They must endure the cross, and sustain opposition for his sake. The people who shall live when "the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ," when the "nations shall learn war no more," are yet unborn. But even now we may rejoice that "the Lord God omnipotent reigns," and that Jesus is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." I must consider my text as referring to him. The Christian doctrine is, that the Lord God omnipotent exercises his dominion and government, in the person of Christ. "The Father loves the Son, and has committed all things into his hands." (John 3:35) And thus our Lord, after his resurrection, assured his disciples, "All power in heaven and in earth is committed unto me." (Matthew 28:18) He has already "taken to himself his great power, and reigns." His right of reigning over all is essential to his divine nature; but the administration of government in the nature of man, is the effect and reward of his obedience unto death. But in the union of both natures, he is one person, Christ Jesus the Lord. All the riches and fullness of the Godhead, all the peculiar honors of the Mediator, center in him. They may be distinguished, but they are inseparable.

Happy are they who can, upon solid and Scriptural grounds, exult in the thought that the Lord reigns, and can make his government the subject of their hallelujahs and praises! Happy they, who see, acknowledge, and admire his management in the kingdom of providence, and are the willing subjects of his kingdom of grace. Let us take a brief survey of his reigning glory in these kingdoms.

I. Great and marvelous is the Lord God Almighty—in his kingdom of Universal Providence. His mighty arm sustains the vast fabric of the universe. He upholds the stars in their courses. If we attentively consider their multitude, their magnitudes, their distances from us and from each other, and the amazing swiftness, variety, and regularity of their motions—our minds are overwhelmed, our thoughts confounded, by the vastness and the wonders of the scene. But He spoke them into being, and they are preserved in their stations and revolutions by his power and agency.

If we fix our thoughts upon the earth, though in comparison of the immensity of his creation, it is but as a grain of sand—it is the object of his incessant care. All its various inhabitants derive their existence and their support from him. He provides for the young ravens when unable to fly, and for the young lions that traverse the woods. The instinct of animals, whereby they are unerringly instructed in whatever concerns the welfare and preservation of their species, so vastly exceeding the boasted wisdom of man, that he can neither imitate nor comprehend it, is communicated by him. He teaches the birds to build their nests, the spider to weave his web, and instructs the communities of bees, and insignificant emmets, to form their admirable policies and government among themselves.

If we speak of intelligent beings, "He does what he pleases in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." He directs and overrules the counsels and purposes of men, so that, though they act freely, the outcome of all their different interfering schemes, is only the accomplishment of his purposes. When they are employed as his instruments, from small beginnings, and in defiance of difficulties apparently insuperable, they succeed beyond their own expectations. When unhappily engaged against his designs, in vain they rage and plot. He takes

the wise in their own craftiness, pours contempt upon their power and policy, and all their great preparations melt like a mist, or like snow before the sun, and leave no trace behind.

Still more wonderful, to the eye of faith, is his control over Satan and the powers of darkness. Whatever, for wise reasons, though unknown to us, he may permit them to do—they cannot, with all their subtlety or strength, detain one soul in their bondage longer than until his appointed time of release; nor recover one soul back to their dominion, of which he is pleased to undertake the care. On the contrary, he breaks the heads of these Leviathan in pieces, turns their counsels against themselves, and makes them instrumental in purifying his people, and extending his church, by the means they employ for the destruction of both. Thus those who dwell under his shadow are safe; for all things are in his power, and he always cares for them, and keeps them, as the pupil of his eye. And therefore, though they are exercised with trials, and suffer many things for their good, his eye being always upon them, and his ear open to their prayer, they are supported, supplied, relieved, delivered, and, at last, made more than conquerors.

II. He has a peculiar kingdom, which he has established distinct from the kingdoms of this world, though diffused and extended among them, and which, in due time, like leaven, will pervade and assimilate them all to himself. This is the kingdom of the Gospel, his church. It is founded upon a rock, and though the gates of hell continually war against it, they cannot prevail. For he is "a wall of fire round about it, and a glory in the midst of it." (Zechariah 2:5)

Here he reigns upon a throne of grace. He possesses and exercises unlimited authority as a sovereign, to save whom he pleases, to pardon all manner of sins and offences, and to admit rebels and enemies, when they submit themselves and bow to his gracious scepter, into the number of his children and his friends. Seldom do the kings of the earth publish an act of grace in the favor of those who have been guilty of rebellion, without clogging it with exceptions. Either they feel a resentment against some of the delinquents, which they have not magnanimity sufficient to conquer, or they dare not trust them. But God’s mercy is infinite—and he knows how to change their hearts—when he pardons their sins.

Perhaps it may not be a digression wholly unuseful and impertinent, if I take this occasion to point out the several senses in which the word church may be understood agreeably to the Scripture.

1. It denotes, in the aggregate, the mystical church, the whole body of that spiritual kingdom, of which the Redeemer is the living and life-giving head. (Colossians 1:18) A succession of these has appeared upon earth in every age, from the days of righteous Abel, whom Cain slew; and we have reason to believe, that the far greater part of them are yet unborn. They will all be assembled together before the throne, in the great day of his final appearance, and inherit the kingdom of glory prepared for them. This is the "church which God has bought with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) Happy are those who belong to this society of the redeemed, "whose names are written in heaven."

2. The visible church contains all those who bear and acknowledge the name of Christians, and who admit and enjoy the Gospel revelation. But it is a small thing to belong only to the visible church, for it is compared to a threshing-floor (Matthew 3:12) on which chaff is mingled with the wheat; to a field in which tares grow promiscuously with the good seed; to a fish-net enclosing a great multitude of fish, both good and bad. (Matthew 13:24-47) But a time of separation will come.

The chaff and the tares, and whatever is evil, will be consumed. Alas! what will it avail at last to say, "Lord, we have eaten and drank in your presence," at your table with your true disciples, "and you have taught in our streets," (Luke 13:26-27) and we have heard in our own language of your wonderful works, if you say, "Depart from Me, you evildoers!" My heart is pained with the apprehension, lest some of you who have joined in the same public worship with true believers, have sat in the same seat, and lived in the same families, should at last see them, with whom you have been very nearly connected in this world, received into the kingdom of heaven—and you yourselves be shut out!

3. The universal church, in any one period, is that part of the visible church which is united to the Lord by living faith. It comprises all who agree in the profession of the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and whose conversation is regulated by its precepts, or, in the apostle's words, "All who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Ephesians 6:24) This universal church, through the policy of Satan and the deceitfulness of the heart, is too much divided against itself. Prejudice, bigotry, and remaining ignorance, greatly prevent that desirable union among true Christians, which would promote their peace, comfort, and increase, and would contribute more than a thousand arguments to put their adversaries to shame and to silence. That shameful contention for denominations, parties, and favorite preachers, for which the apostle reproved the Corinthians, (1 Corinthians 3:4) is still greatly to be lamented. But, though they are too backward in acknowledging and assisting each other, the Lord is merciful to their weakness, and bears with them all. And as they grow in grace, and drink more into his spirit—their hearts are enlarged, and they approach nearer to his pattern of love, patience, and tenderness.

4. The word church is applied to particular societies of Christians, who are connected by a participation in the same ordinances of the Gospel, and who maintain a scriptural separation from the sinful spirit and customs of the world. And though there may be pretenders among them, as there were among the apostolic churches, they are denominated by the better part. They belong to the universal church by their profession of the truth, and of course they are a part of the visible church: and those of them who are, in deed and in truth, what they profess to be, are living members of the mystical church, to which all the promises are made. By whatever name they are known or distinguished among men, they are "branches of the true vine," they "have their fruit unto holiness, and their end everlasting life." But to return: In this his church, or spiritual kingdom, he rules by wise and gracious laws and ordinances. He releases his subjects from all human authority, in point of conscience—but his own; and enjoins them to call no one master—but himself. (Matthew 23:8-10) If they "stand fast in the liberty with which he has made them free," (Galatians 5:1) they will not give themselves up implicitly to the dictates of any man, nor follow him farther than he follows their Lord. And consequently, if they are influenced by his royal law of doing to others—as they would that others should do unto them, they will not attempt to exert an undue authority, or wish to be called masters themselves, so as to assume a dogmatic carriage, or to expect a universal and absolute submission. But it must be owned that, in our present state of infirmity, this privilege is not sufficiently prized, nor this command duly complied with, there being scarcely a man who does not either arrogate too much to himself, or allow too much to others. A fault in the one or the other of these respects, may be assigned as a principal cause of most of the evils which deform the appearance, or injure the peace of the church. But the design of his Gospel is to set his people at liberty from the yoke of men, from the fetters of custom and tradition, of

superstition and will-worship, that they may enjoy, in his service, a state of perfect freedom. For it is the principal glory of his kingdom, that Christ reigns in the hearts of all His people. There He writes His precepts, impresses His image, and erects His throne; ruling them, not merely by an outward law, but by an inward secret influence, breathing His own life and spirit into them; so that their obedience becomes, as it were, natural, pleasurable, and its own reward. By the discoveries He affords them of His love—He wins their affections, captivates their wills, and enlightens their understandings. They derive from Him the "spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind," (2 Timothy 1:7) and run with alacrity in the way of His commandments

It is impossible, therefore, to make this song our own, and cordially to rejoice that "the Lord God omnipotent reigns," unless we are the willing subjects of his government; unless we are really pleased with his appointed way of salvation, approve of his precepts, and, from a view of his wisdom and goodness, can cheerfully submit and resign ourselves to the disposal of his wise and gracious providence. In all these respects we are by nature at variance with him. We are too proud to be indebted to his grace, too wise in our own conceits to desire his instruction, too obstinately attached to the love and practice of sin, to be capable of relishing the beauty and spirituality of his commandments. And our love of the world, and the things of it, is too strong and grasping, to permit us to be satisfied with the lot and with the dispensations he appoints for us. We wish, if possible, and as far as possible we attempt, to be our own god. We are unthankful when he bestows, impatient if he withholds, and if he sees fit to take back the gifts of which we are unworthy, we repine and rebel against his will. This enmity must be subdued, before we can be pleased with his government: in other words, we must be changed, we must be made new creatures. To produce this change, this new creation, the Gospel is the only expedient; and when revealed and applied to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, the miracle is wrought. The sinner who is first convinced of his guilt and misery, and then reconciled to God by faith in the great atonement, willingly yields to his administration. He owns and feels the propriety of his proceedings, is ready to acknowledge, in his sharpest afflictions, that the Lord is gracious, and has not dealt with him according to the desert of his iniquities. He considers himself as no longer his own, but bought with a price, and brought under the strongest obligations, "to live no longer to himself, but to him who loved him, and gave himself for him." And what was before his dread and dislike, becomes now the joy of his heart, the thought that the Lord reigns, and that all his concerns are in the hands of him who does all things well. Are there any among us who say in their hearts, "We will not have this" Savior "to rule over us?" The thought is no less vain than wicked! He must, he will "reign, until he has subdued all enemies under his feet." You must either bend—or break before him!

Chapter 74

01.01. The Lord only afflicts for our good

The Lord only afflicts for our good December 21, 1776. My dear Friend, Your letter brought me tidings of joy, and then furnished me with materials for a bonfire upon the occasion. It was an act of passive obedience to burn it—but I did obey. I congratulate you upon the happy outcome to which the Lord has brought your affairs. I see that his good Spirit and good providence have been and are with you. I doubt not but your union with Miss **** will be a mutual blessing, and on your part heightened by being connected with such a family. I could enlarge upon this head, if my letter likewise was to be burnt as soon as you have read it. I look upon the friendship the Lord has given me there, as one of my prime privileges; and I hope I shall always be thankful that it proved a means of introducing you into it.

I congratulate you likewise upon your accession to ******, not because it is a good living, in a genteel neighborhood, and a fine country; but because I believe the Lord sends you there for fulfilling the desires he has given you of being useful to souls. Church advancement in any other view, is dreadful! I would as soon congratulate a man upon seeing a millstone tied about his neck, to sink him into the depths of the sea, as upon his obtaining what is called a good living, except I thought him determined to spend and be spent in the cause of the Gospel. A parish is an solemn millstone indeed, to those who see nothing valuable in the flock but the fleece! But the Lord has impressed your heart with a sense of the glory and importance of his truth, and the worth of souls; and animated your zeal by the most powerful motive—the knowledge of his constraining love. Your case is extraordinary. Perhaps, when you review in your mind the circle of your former mirthful acquaintances, you may say, with Job’s servant, "I alone have escaped alive!" The rest are either removed into their eternal state, or are still hurrying down the stream of dissipation, and living without God in the world. Yet there was a time when there seemed no more probability on your side—than on theirs; that you should obtain mercy, and be called to the honor of preaching the glorious Gospel.

You are setting out with every possible advantage in early life, with a cheerful flow of health, and affluent circumstances; and now, to crown all, the Lord gives you the very choice of your heart in a partner; one who, besides deserving and meeting your affection, will, I am persuaded, be a real help-meet to you in your spiritual walk. How much is here to be thankful for!

I trust the Lord has given you, and will maintain in you, a right spirit; so as not to rest in his gifts—but to hold them in connection with the love and favor of the Giver. It is a low time with us, when the greatest assemblage of earthly blessings can seem to satisfy us without a real communion with him. His grace is sufficient for you—but undoubtedly such a scene of prosperity as seems to lie before you, is full of snares—and calls for a double effort of watchfulness and prayer. Your situation will fix many eyes upon you, and Satan will doubtless watch you, and examine every corner of the hedge around you—to see if he can find a gap by which to enter. We have but few rich Gospel ministers; but it is too evident that Satan has found the way to damp the zeal and hurt the spirits of some of those few, who for a time acted nobly, and seemed to walk out

of the reach of the allurements of the world.

I am not jealous of you; I feel a comfortable persuasion, that the Lord has taken a fast hold of your heart—and given you a fast hold of his Almighty arm! Yet I believe you will not be displeased with me for dropping a hint of this kind, and at this time.

You have heard of the trial with which the Lord has been pleased to visit us; it still continues, though considerably alleviated. It is tempered with many mercies, and I hope he disposes us in a measure, to submission. I trust it will be for good. My dear friend, you are coming into my school, where you will learn, as occasions offer, to feel more for the afflictions of others. But be not discouraged; the Lord only afflicts for our good. It is necessary that our sharpest trials should sometimes spring from our dearest comforts, else we would be in danger of setting up our rest here. In such a world, and with such hearts as we have—we shall often need something to prevent our cleaving to the dust, to quicken us to prayer, and to make us feel that our dependence for one hour's peace is upon the Lord alone.

I am ready to think I have known as much of the good and happiness which this world can afford, as most people who live in it. I never saw the person with whom I wished to exchange places. And for many years past I have thought my trials have been light and few, compared with what many, or most, of the Lord's people have endured. And yet, though in the main possessed of my own wishes, when I look back upon the twenty-seven years past, I am ready to style them, with Jacob, "few and evil;" and to give the sum-total of their contents in Solomon's words, "all is vanity." If I take these years to pieces, I see a great part of them was filled up with sins, sorrows, and inquietudes. The pleasures, too, are gone, and have no more real existence than the baseless fabric of a dream! The shadows of the evening will soon begin to come over us; and if our lives are prolonged, a thousand pains and infirmities, from which the Lord has in a remarkable measure exempted us hitherto—will probably overtake us; and at last we must feel the parting pang. Sin has so envenomed the soil of this earth, that the amaranth will not grow upon it. But we are hastening to a better world, and bright unclouded skies, where our sun will go down no more—and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes!

01.01. The Plan of salvation

The plan of salvation December 8, 1775. My Dear Friend, Are you willing that I should still call you so, or are you quite weary of me? Your silence makes me suspect the latter. However, it is my part to fulfill my promise, and then leave the event to God. As I have but an imperfect remembrance of what I have already written, I may be liable to some repetitions. I cannot stay to comment upon every line in your letter—but I proceed to notice such passages as seem most to affect the subject in debate. When you speak of the Scripture's maintaining one consistent sense, which, if it is the Word of God, it certainly must do, you say you read and understand it in this one consistent sense; nay, you cannot remember the time when you did not.

It is otherwise with me, and with multitudes; we remember when it was a sealed book; and we are sure it would have been so still, had not the Holy Spirit opened our understandings. But when you add, "Though I pretend not to understand the whole—yet what I do understand appears perfectly consistent;" I know not how far this exception may extend; for perhaps the reason why you allow you do not understand some parts, is because you cannot make them consistent with the sense you put upon other parts. You quote my words, "That when we are conscious of our depravity, reasoning stands us in no stead." Undoubtedly reason always will stand rational creatures in some stead; but my meaning is, that, when we are deeply convinced of sin, all our former reasoning upon the ways of God, while we made our conceptions the standard by which we judge what is befitting Him to do, as if He were altogether such an one as ourselves—all those cobweb reasonings are swept away, and we submit to him without reasoning, though not without reason—for we have the strongest reason imaginable to acknowledge ourselves vile and lost, without righteousness and strength, when we actually feel ourselves to be so.

You speak of the Gospel terms of justification. The term is faith, Mark 16:16; Acts 13:39; the Gospel propounds, admits, no other term. But this faith, as I endeavored to show in my former letter, is very different from rational assent. You speak likewise of the law of faith; by which, if you mean what some call the remedial law, which we are to obey as well as we can, and such obedience, together with our faith, will entitle us to acceptance with God—I am persuaded the Scripture speaks of no such thing. Grace, and works of any kind, in the point of acceptance with God—are mentioned by the Apostle not only as opposites, or contraries—but as absolutely contradictory to each other, like fire and water, light and darkness; so that the affirmation of one—is the denial of the other; Romans 4:5, and Romans 11:6. God justifies freely, justifies the ungodly, and him who works not. Though justifying faith is indeed an active principle, it works by love; yet not for acceptance. Those whom the Apostle exhorts "to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," he considers as justified already; for he considers them as believers, in whom he supposed God had already begun a good work; and, if so, was confident that God would accomplish it; Php 1:6. To them, the consideration that God (who dwells in the hearts of believers) wrought in them to will and to do, was a powerful motive and encouragement to them to work; that is, to give all diligence in his appointed means. As a right sense of the sin that dwells in us, and the snares and temptations around us, will teach us still to work with fear and trembling.

You suppose a difference between Christians (so called) who are devoted to God in baptism, and those who in the first ages were converted from abominable superstitions and idolatrous vices. It is true, in Christian countries we do not worship Heathen divinities; and this is the principal difference I can find. Neither reason nor observation will allow me to think that human nature is a whit better now, than it was in the Apostle's time. I know no kinds or degrees of wickedness which prevailed among Heathens, which are not prevalent among nominal Christians, who have perhaps been baptized in their infancy; and therefore, as the streams in the life are equally worldly, sensual, devilish—I doubt not but the fountain in the heart is equally polluted and poisonous. It is as equally true, as in the days of Christ and his Apostles, that unless a man is born again—he cannot see the kingdom of God.

You sent me a sermon upon the new birth, or regeneration, and you have several of mine on the same subject. I wish you to compare them with each other, and with the Scripture; and I pray God to show you wherein the difference consists, and on which side the truth lies. When you desire me to reconcile God's being the author of sin with his justice, you show that you misunderstand the whole strain of my sentiments; for I am persuaded you would not misrepresent them. It is easy to charge harsh consequences, which I neither allow, nor indeed do they follow from my sentiments. God cannot be the author of sin, in that sense you would fix upon me; but is it possible that upon your plan you find no difficulty in what the Scripture teaches us upon this subject? I conceive, that those who were concerned in the death of Christ were very great sinners, and that in nailing him to the cross they committed atrocious wickedness. Yet, if the Apostle may be believed—all this was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Acts 2:23; and they did no more than what His hand and purpose had determined should be done, Acts 4:28. And you will observe, that this wicked act (wicked with respect to the perpetrators) was not only permitted—but foreordained, in the strongest and most absolute sense of the word. The glory of God and the salvation of men, depended upon its being done, and just in that manner and with all those circumstances which actually took place; and yet Judas and the rest acted freely, and the wickedness was properly their own. Now, my friend, the arguments which satisfy you that the Scripture does not represent God as the author of this sin in this appointment, will plead for me at the same time; and when you think you easily overcome me by asking, "Can God be the author of sin?" your imputation falls as directly upon the Word of God himself.

God is no more the author of sin, than the sun is the cause of ice; but it is in the nature of water to congeal into ice when the sun's influence is suspended to a certain degree. So there is sin enough in the hearts of men to make the earth the very image of hell, and to prove that men are no better than incarnate devils—were he to suspend his influence and restraint. Sometimes, and in some instances, he is pleased to suspend it considerably; and so far as he does, human nature quickly appears in its true colors.

Objections of this kind have been repeated and refitted before either you or I were born; and the Apostle evidently supposes they would be urged against his doctrine, when he obviates the question, "Why does he yet find fault? Who has resisted his will?" To which he gives no other answer than by referring it to God's sovereignty, and the power which a potter has over the clay.

I acknowledge that I am fallible; yet I must again lay claim to a certainty about the way of salvation. I am as sure of some things—as of my own existence! However, my sentiments are confirmed by

the testimonies of thousands who have lived before me, of many with whom I have personally conversed in different places and circumstances, unknown to each other; yet all have received the same views—because taught by the same Spirit. And I have likewise been greatly confirmed by the testimony of many with whom I have conversed in their dying hours. I have seen them rejoicing in the prospect of death, free from fears, breathing the air of immortality; heartily disclaiming their duties and performances; acknowledging that their best actions were attended with evil sufficient to condemn them; renouncing every shadow of hope—but what they derived from the blood of Christ, as the sole cause of their acceptance; yet triumphing in him over every enemy and fear, and as sure of heaven as if they were already there!

Such were the Apostle's hopes, wholly founded on knowing whom he had believed, and his persuasion of his ability to keep that which he had committed unto him. This is faith, a renouncing of everything we are apt to call our own, and relying wholly upon the blood, righteousness, and intercession of Jesus. However, I cannot communicate this my certainty to you; I only tell you there is such a thing, in hopes, if you do not think I willfully lie both to God and man, you will be earnest to seek it from him who bestowed it on me, and who will bestow it upon all who will sincerely apply to him, and patiently wait upon him for it.

I cannot but wonder, that, while you profess to believe the depravity of human nature, you should speak of good qualities inherent in it. The Word of God describes it as evil, only evil, and that continually. "The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9. That there are such qualities as Stoics and infidels call virtue, I allow. God has not left man destitute of such dispositions as are necessary to the peace of society; but I deny there is any spiritual goodness in them, unless it is founded in a supreme love to God, has his glory for their aim, and is produced by faith in Jesus Christ. A man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned in zeal for the truth, and yet be a mere nothing, a tinkling cymbal, in the sight of Him who sees not as man sees—but judges the heart. Many infidels and avowed enemies to the Grace and Gospel of Christ, have made a fair show of what the world call virtue; but Christian virtue is grace, the effect of a new nature and new life; and works thus wrought in God are as different from the faint, partial imitations of them which fallen nature is capable of producing, as a living man is different from a statue! A statue may express the features and lineaments of the person whom it represents—but there is no life! Your comment on the seventh to the Romans, latter part, contradicts my feelings. You are either of a different make and nature from me, or else you are not rightly apprised of your own state, if you do not find the Apostle's complaints very suitable to yourself. I believe it applicable to the most holy Christian upon earth. But controversies of this kind are worn thread-bare. When you speak of the spiritual part of a natural man, it sounds to me like the living part of a dead man, or the seeing part of a blind man! Paul tells me, that the natural man (whatever his spiritual part may be) can neither receive nor discern the things of God. What the Apostle speaks of himself in Romans 7:1-25, is no more, when rightly understood, than what he affirms of all who are partakers of a spiritual life, or who are true believers, Galatians 5:17. The carnal, natural mind—is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. When you subjoin, "Until it be set at liberty from the law of sin," you do not comment upon the text—but make an addition of your own, which the text will by no means bear. The carnal mind is enmity. An enemy may be reconciled; but enmity itself is incurable. This carnal mind, natural man, old man, flesh—are all equivalent expressions,

and denote and include the heart of man as he is by nature. This cannot be sanctified.

All that is godly or gracious in a person—is the effect of a new creation, a supernatural principle, wrought in the heart by the Gospel of Christ, and the agency of his Spirit; and until that is effected, the highest attainments, the finest qualifications in man, however they may exalt him in his own eyes, or recommend him to the notice of his fellow-worms, are but abominations in the sight of God! Luke 16:15. The Gospel is calculated and designed—to stain the pride of human glory. It is provided, not for the wise and the self-righteous, for those who think they have good hearts and good works to plead—but for the guilty, the helpless, the wretched, for those who are ready to perish; it fills the hungry with good things—but it sends the rich empty away! See Revelation 3:17-18.

You ask, If man can do nothing without an extraordinary impulse from God—is he to sit still and careless? By no means! I am far from saying man can do nothing, though I believe he cannot open his own spiritual eyes, or give himself faith. I wish every man to abstain carefully from sinful company and sinful actions, to read the Bible, to pray to God for His heavenly teaching. For this waiting upon God, he has a moral ability; and if he perseveres thus in seeking, the promise is sure, that he shall not seek in vain. But I would not have him mistake the means for the end; think himself good because he is preserved from gross vices and follies; or trust to his religious course of duties for acceptance with God; nor be satisfied until Christ is revealed in him, formed within him, dwells in his heart by faith, and until he can say, upon good grounds, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I—but Christ lives in me!" I need not tell you these are Scriptural expressions; I am persuaded, if they were not, they would be exploded by many as unintelligible jargon.

True faith unites the soul to Christ—and thereby gives access to God, and fills it with a peace passing understanding, a living hope, a joy unspeakable and full of glory. True faith teaches us that we are weak in ourselves—but enables us to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. To those who thus believe, Christ is precious! He is their beloved; they hear and know his voice; the very sound of his name gladdens their hearts; and he manifests himself to them as he does not to the world. Thus the Scriptures speak, thus the first Christians experienced; and this is precisely the language which in our days is despised as enthusiasm and folly. For it is now as it was then, though these things are revealed to babes, and they are as sure of them as that they see the noon-day sun—they are hidden from the wise and prudent, until the Lord makes them willing to renounce their own wisdom, and to become fools, that they may be truly wise, 1 Corinthians 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 3:8; 1 Corinthians 8:2. Attention to the education of children is an undoubted duty; and it is a mercy when it so far succeeds as to preserve them from gross wickedness; but it will not change the heart! Those who receive Christ are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man—but of God! John 1:13.

If a man professes to love the Lord Jesus, I am willing to believe him, if he does not give me proof to the contrary; but I am sure, at the same time, no one can love him, in the Scriptural sense, who does not know the need and the worth of a Savior; in other words, who is not brought, as a ruined helpless sinner, to live upon him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Those who love him thus, will speak highly of him, and acknowledge that he is their all in all. And those who thus love him, and speak of him, will get little thanks for their pains in such a world as this: "All

who live godly in Christ Jesus—must suffer persecution." The world which hated him—will hate them. And though it is possible by his grace to put to silence, in some measure, the ignorance of foolish men; and though his providence can protect his people, so that not a hair of their heads can be hurt without his permission; yet the world will show their teeth—even if they are not allowed to bite.

"You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane!" Acts 26:24. "What is this babbler trying to say?" Acts 17:18. The Apostles were accounted as foolish babblers. I need not point out to you the force of these expressions. We are no better than the Apostles; nor have we reason to expect much better treatment—so far as we walk in their steps. On the other hand, there is a way of speaking of God, and goodness, and benevolence, and morality—which the world will bear well enough. But if we preach Christ as the only way of salvation, lay open the horrid evils of the human heart, tell our hearers that they are dead in trespasses and sins, and have no better ground of hope in themselves than the vilest malefactors; if we tell the virtuous and decent, as well as the profligate, that unless they are born again, and made partakers of living faith, and count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ—that they cannot be saved—this is the message they cannot bear! We shall be called knaves or fools, uncharitable bigots, and twenty harsh names! If you have met with no treatment like this—you should suspect whether you have yet received the right key to the doctrines of Christ; for, depend upon it—the offense of the cross is not ceased!

I am grieved and surprised that you seem to take little notice of anything in the account of my deceased friend—but his wishing himself to be a Deist, and his having play-books about him in his illness. As to the plays, they were Shakespeare’s, which, as a man of taste, it is no great wonder he should sometimes look at. Your remark on the other point shows that you are not much acquainted with the exercises of the human mind under certain circumstances. I believe I observed formerly, that it was not a libertine wish. Had you known him, you would have known one of the most amiable and unblemished characters. Few were more beloved and admired for an uniform course of integrity, moderation, and benevolence; but he was discouraged. He studied the Bible; believed it in general to be the Word of God; but his wisdom, his strong turn for reasoning, stood so in his way, that he could get no solid comfort from it. He felt the vanity of the schemes proposed by many men admired in the world as teachers of divinity; and he felt the vanity likewise of his own. He was also a minister, and had a sincere design of doing good. He wished to reform the profligate, and comfort the afflicted, by his preaching; but as he was not acquainted with that one kind of preaching which God owns to the edification of the hearers, he found he could do neither. A sense of disappointments of this kind distressed him. Finding in himself none of that peace which the Scripture speaks of, and none of the influence he hoped for attending his ministry, he was led sometimes to question the truth of the Scripture.

We have a spiritual enemy always near, to press upon a mind in this despondent situation: nor am I surprised that he should then wish himself a Deist; since, if there were any hope for a sinner but by faith in the blood of Jesus, he had as much of his own goodness to depend upon, as most I have known. As for the rest, if you could see nothing admirable and wonderful in the clearness, the dignity, the spirituality of his expressions, after the Lord revealed the Gospel to him, I can only say, I am sorry for it. This I know—that some people of sense, taste, learning, and reason, and far enough from my sentiments, have been greatly struck with them.

You say a death-bed repentance is what you would be sorry to give any hope of. My dear friend, it is well for poor sinners that God's thoughts and ways are as much above men's, as the heavens are higher than the earth. We agreed to communicate our sentiments freely, and promised not to be offended with each other's freedom, if we could help it. I am afraid of offending you by a thought just now upon my mind, and yet I dare not in conscience suppress it. I must therefore venture to say, that I hope those who depend upon such a repentance as your scheme points out, will repent of their repentance itself upon their death-bed at least, if not sooner.

You and I, perhaps, would have encouraged the fair-spoken young man, who said he had kept all the commandments from his youth—and would have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a villain, as he lived. But Jesus thought differently. I do not encourage sinners to defer their repentance to their death-beds; I press the necessity of a repentance this moment! But then I take care to tell them, that repentance is the gift of God; that Jesus is exalted to bestow it; and that all their endeavors that way, unless they seek to him for grace, will be vain as washing a black-man, and transient as washing a swine—which will soon return to the mire again!

I know the evil heart will abuse the grace of God; the Apostle knew this likewise, Romans 3:8, and Romans 6:8; but this did not tempt him to suppress the glorious grace of the Gospel, the power of Jesus to save to the uttermost, and his merciful promise, that whoever comes unto him, he will never cast out. The repentance of a natural heart, proceeding wholly from fear, like that of some malefactors, who are sorry—not that they have committed robbery or murder—but that they must be hanged for it! This kind of repentance, undoubtedly, is worth nothing, whether in time of health, or in a dying hour. But that gracious change of heart, views, and dispositions, which always takes place when Jesus is made known to the soul as having died that the sinner might live, and been wounded that he might be healed; this, at whatever period God is pleased to afford and effect it by his Spirit, brings a sure and everlasting salvation with it.

Still I find I have not done: you ask my exposition of the parables of the Talents and Pounds; but at present I can write no more. I have only just time to tell you, that when I begged your acceptance of my book, Omicron, nothing was farther from my expectation than a correspondence with you. The frank and kind manner in which you wrote, presently won upon my heart. In the course of our letters, I observed an integrity and unselfishness in you, which endeared you to me still more. Since then, our debates have taken a much more interesting turn. I have considered it as a call, and an opportunity put in my hand, by the especial providence of Him who rules over all. I have embraced the occasion to lay before you simply, and rather in a way of testimony than argumentation, what (in the main) I am sure is truth. I have done enough to discharge my conscience—but shall never think I do enough to answer the affection I bear you. I have done enough likewise to make you weary of my correspondence, unless it should please God to fix the subject deeply upon your mind, and make you attentive to the possibility and vast importance of a mistake in matters of everlasting concernment.

I pray that the Spirit of God may guide you into all truth. He only is the effectual teacher. I still retain a cheerful hope, that some things you can not at present receive—will be hereafter the joy and comfort of your heart: but I know it cannot be—until the Lord's own time. I cannot promise to give such long answers as your letters require, to clear up every text that may be proposed, and to answer every objection that may be started; yet I shall be glad to exchange a letter now and then.

At present it remains with you, whether our correspondence continues or not, as this is the third letter I have written since I heard from you, and therefore must be the last until I do. I would think what remains might be better settled in person; for which purpose I shall be glad to see you, or ready to wait on you when leisure will permit, and when I know it will be agreeable. But if (as life and all its affairs are precarious) we should never meet in this world, I pray God we may meet at the right hand of Jesus, in the great day, when he shall come to gather up his jewels, and to judge the world! There is an endless diversity of opinions in matters of religion—which of them are right and safe, and will lead to eternal glory. I am still in a manner lost amidst more engagements than I have time to comply with; but I feel and know that I am, etc.

01.01. The Work of grace

The work of grace September 3, 1776. My dear Miss M,

We saw no danger upon the road homeward; but my judgment tells me we are always upon the brink of danger, though we see it not; and that, without the immediate protection and care of Him who preserves the stars in their courses--there could be no traveling safely a few miles, nor even sitting in safety by the fire-side! But with him we are safe in all places and circumstances, until our race is done, and his gracious purposes concerning us in the present life are completely answered. Then he will call us home, that we may see his face, and be with him forever! It will not much matter, by what messenger he shall be pleased to call us home by.

While he took care of us abroad, he watched over our concerns at home likewise; so that we found all well upon our return, and met with nothing to grieve us. Many go out and return home no more, and many find distressing things have happened in their absence; but we have to set up our Ebenezer, and to say, Hitherto he has helped us! Assist me to praise him. The Lord is leading you in the good old way, in which you may perceive the footsteps of his flock who have gone before you. They had in their day the same difficulties, fears, and troubles as we have; and, through mercy, we partake of the same consolation which supported and refreshed them; and the promises which they trusted and found faithful--are equally sure to us. It is still true--that those who believe shall never be confounded.

If left to ourselves, we would have built upon sand. But he has provided and revealed a sure foundation, removed our natural prejudices against it; and now, though rains, and floods, and storms assault our building, it cannot fall--for it is founded upon a rock--the Lord Jesus Christ! The suspicious and fears which arise in an awakened mind, proceed, in a good measure, from remaining unbelief; but not wholly so, for there is a jealousy and self-distrust of ourselves, a wariness, owing to a sense of the deceitfulness of our hearts--which is a grace, and a gift of the Lord.

Some people, who have much zeal--but are destitute of this jealous fear--may be compared to a ship which spreads a great deal of sail--but is not properly ballasted, and is therefore in danger of being over set whenever a storm comes. A sincere person has many reasons for distrusting his own judgment; is sensible of the vast importance of the case, and afraid of too hastily concluding in his own favor, and therefore not easily satisfied. However, this fear, though useful, especially to young beginners, is not comfortable. Those who simply wait upon Jesus, are gradually freed from it, in proportion as their knowledge of him, and their experience of his goodness, increases.

He has a time for settling and establishing them in himself--and his time is best. We are hasty, and would be satisfied at once; but his word is, "wait for the Lord’s time." The work of grace is not like Jonah’s gourd, which sprang up and flourished in a night--and as quickly withered; but rather like the oak, which, from a little acorn and a tender plant, advances with an almost imperceptible growth from year to year, until it becomes a broad-spreading and deep-rooted tree, and then it

stands for ages. The Christian oak shall grow and flourish forever. When I see any, soon after they appear to be awakened, making a speedy profession of great joy, before they have a due acquaintance with their own hearts--I am in pain for them. I am not sorry to hear them afterwards complain that their joys are gone, and they are almost at their wit's end; for, without some such check, to make them feel their weakness and dependence, I seldom find them to turn out well; either their fervor insensibly abates, until they become quite cold, and sink into the world again--of which I have seen many instances. Or, if they do not give up all--their walk is uneven, and their spirit has not that savor of brokenness and true humility which is a chief ornament of our holy profession. If they do not feel the plague of their hearts at first--they find it out afterwards, and too often manifest it to others.

Therefore, though I know the Spirit of the Lord is free, and will not be confined to our rules, and there may be excepted cases; yet, in general, I believe the old proverb, "Soft and fair goes far," will hold good in Christian experience. Let us be thankful for the beginnings of grace, and wait upon our Savior patiently for the increase. And as we have chosen him for our physician--let us commit ourselves to his management, and not prescribe to him what he shall prescribe for us. He knows us and he loves us better than we do ourselves, and will do all things well.

You say, "It never came with power and life to my soul that he died for me." If you mean that you never had any extraordinary sudden manifestation, something like a vision or a voice from heaven, confirming it to you, I can say the same. But I know he died for sinners; I know I am a sinner; I know he invites those who are ready to perish; I am such a one. I know, upon his own invitation, I have committed myself to him; and I know, by the effects, that he has been with me hitherto, otherwise I should have been an apostate long ago! And therefore I know that he died for me; for had he been pleased to damn me (as he justly might have done), he would not have shown me such things as these.

If I must perish, would the Lord

Have taught my heart to love his Word?

Would he have given me eyes to see

My danger and my remedy;

Revealed his name, and bid me pray--

Had he resolved to say me nay?

I know that I am his child, because he teaches me to say, Abba, Father. I know that I am his, because he has enabled me to choose him for my best portion. For such a choice and desire could never have taken place in my heart--if he had not placed it there himself. By nature I was too blind to know him, too proud to trust him, too obstinate to serve him, too base-minded to love him. The enmity I was filled with against his government, righteousness, and grace--was too strong to be subdued by any power but his own. The love I bear to him is but a faint and feeble spark--but it is an emanation from himself; he kindled it, and he keeps it alive; and because it is his work, I trust many waters shall not quench it.

01.01. Theological Systems

Theological Systems John Newton, 1786 (From the preface of his fifty expository discourses on the MESSIAH) From those Readers, whose habits of thinking on religious subjects, are formed by a close attachment to particular systems of divinity, the Author requests a candid construction of what he advances, if he ventures, in some instances, to deviate a little from the more beaten track. If he is, sometimes, constrained to differ from the judgment of wise and good men, who have deserved well of the Church of God, he would do it modestly. Far from depreciating their labors, he would be thankful for the benefit which he hopes he has received from them. It is a great satisfaction to him, that in all doctrinal points of primary importance, his views are confirmed by the suffrage of writers and ministers eminent for genuine piety, and found learning; who assisted him in his early enquiries after truth, and at whose feet he is still willing to sit. And yet, remembering that he is authorized and commanded to call no man master, so as to yield an implicit and unqualified submission to human teachers; while he gladly borrows every help he can, from others, he ventures, likewise, to think for himself. His leading sentiments concerning the grand peculiarities of the Gospel, were formed many years since, when he was in a state of almost entire seclusion from society; when he had scarcely any religious book, but the Bible, within his reach; and had no knowledge, either of the various names, parties, and opinions, by which, Christians were distinguished and divided, or of the controversies which existed among them. He is not conscious, that any very material difference has taken place in his sentiments, since he first became acquainted with the religious world; but, after a long course of experience and observation, he seems to possess them in a different manner. The difficulties, which, for a season, perplexed him, on some points, are either removed, or considerably abated. On the other hand, he now perceives difficulties, that constrain him to lay his hand upon his mouth, in subjects, which, once appeared to him obvious and plain. Thus, if he mistakes not himself, he is less troubled with skepticism, and at the same time, less disposed to be dogmatic, than he formerly was. He feels himself unable to draw the line, with precision, between those essential points, which ought to be earnestly contended for (in a spirit of meekness) as for the faith once delivered to the saints; and certain secondary positions, concerning which, good men may safely differ, and wherein, perhaps, we cannot reasonably expect them to be unanimous, during the present state of imperfection. But if the exact boundary cannot be marked with certainty, he thinks it both desirable and possible, to avoid the extremes, into which men of warm tempers have often been led. Not that the Author can be an advocate for that indifference to truth, which, under specious semblance of toleration and candor, offers a comprehension, from which none are excluded—but those who profess, and aim, to worship God in the Spirit, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to renounce all confidence in the flesh. Toleration is a Christian grace. It differs much from that tame, unfeeling neutrality between truth and error, which is so prevalent in this present day. As the different rays of light, which, when separated by a prism exhibit the various colors of the rainbow, form, in their combination, a perfect and resplendent white, in which every color is incorporated; so, if the graces of the Holy Spirit were complete in us, the result of their combined effect, would be a truly candid, moderate, and liberal spirit towards our brethren. The Christian, especially he who is advanced and established in the

life of faith, has a fervent zeal for God, for the honor of His name, His law, and His Gospel. The honest warmth which he feels, when such a law is broken, when such a Gospel is despised, and when the great and glorious name of the Lord his God is profaned; would, by the occasion of his infirmities, often degenerate into anger or contempt, towards those who oppose themselves, if he was under the influence of zeal alone. But his zeal is blended with benevolence and humility; it is softened by a consciousness of his own frailty and fallibility. He is aware that his knowledge is very limited in itself, and very faint in its efficacy; that his attainments are weak and few, compared with his deficiencies; that his gratitude is very disproportionate to his obligations, and his obedience unspeakably short of conformity to his prescribed rule; that he has nothing but what he has received, and has received nothing—but what, in a greater or less degree, he has misapplied and misimproved. He is therefore a debtor to the mercy of God, and lives upon his multiplied forgiveness.

He makes the gracious conduct of the Lord towards himself, a pattern for his own conduct towards his fellow-creatures. He cannot boast, nor is he forward to censure. He considers himself, lest he also be tempted (Galatians 6:1); and thus he learns tenderness and compassion to others, and to bear patiently with those mistakes, prejudices, and errors in them, which once belonged to his own character; and from which, as yet, he is but imperfectly freed. But then, the same considerations, which inspire him with meekness and gentleness, towards those who oppose the truth, strengthen his regard for the truth itself, and his conviction of its importance. For the sake of peace, which he loves and cultivates, he accommodates himself, as far as he lawfully can—to the weakness and misapprehensions of those who mean well; though he is thereby exposed to the censure of bigots of all parties, who deem him flexible and wavering, like a reed shaken with the wind. But there are other points, nearly connected with the honor of God, and essential to the life of faith, which are the foundations of his hope, and the sources of his joy. For his firm attachment to these, he is content to be treated as a bigot himself. For here, he is immovable as an iron pillar, nor can either the fear, or the favor of man—prevail on him to give place, no not for an hour! (Galatians 2:5). Here his judgment is fixed; and he expresses it, in simple and unequivocal language, so as not to leave, either friends or enemies, in suspense, concerning the side which he has chosen, or the cause which is nearest to his heart. The minister who possesses a candor, thus enlightened, and thus qualified, will neither degrade himself to be the instrument, nor aspire to the head, of a party. He will not servilely tread in the paths prescribed him by men, however respectable. He will not multiply contentions, in defense, either of the shibboleths of others, or of any hobby-horse of his own, under the pretense that he is pleading for the cause of God, and truth. His attention will not be restrained to the interest of any detached denomination of Christians—but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity. On the other hand, knowing that the Gospel is the wisdom and power of God, and the only possible mean, by which fallen man can obtain either peace or rectitude, he most cordially embraces and avows it. Far from being ashamed of it, he esteems it his glory. He preaches Christ Jesus the Lord, and Him crucified. He dares not handle the Word of God deceitfully (2 Corinthians 4:2), disguise, or soften the doctrines of the grace of God, to render them more palatable to the depraved taste of the times. He disdains the thought! And he will no more encounter the prejudices, and corrupt maxims and practices of the world, with any weapon—but the truth as it is in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21), than he would venture to fight an enraged enemy, with a paper sword.

Such is the disposition which the Author wishes for himself, and which, he would endeavor to cultivate in others. He hopes that nothing, of a contrary tendency, will be found in the volumes now presented to the Public. The MESSIAH is the leading and principal subject of every sermon. His person, grace, and glory; His matchless love to sinners; His humiliation, sufferings, and death; His ability and willingness to save to the uttermost; His kingdom, and the present and future happiness of His willing people; are individually considered, according to the order suggested by the series of texts. Nearly connected with these topics, are the doctrines of the fall and depravity of man; the agency of the Holy Spirit; the nature and necessity of regeneration, and of that holiness, without which, no man shall see the Lord. On these subjects, the Author is not afraid of contradictions, from those who are taught of God. With respect to some other points which incidentally occur, he has endeavored so to treat them, as to avoid administering fuel to the flame of angry controversy. He is persuaded himself, and shall be happy to persuade his readers, that the remaining differences of opinion, among those who truly understand, and cordially believe the declarations of Scripture, on the preceding articles—are neither so wide, nor so important, as they have sometimes been represented. Many of these differences are merely verbal, and would cease, if due allowance was made for the imperfection of human language, and the effects of an accustomed phraseology, which often lead people to affix different ideas to the same expressions, or to express the same ideas in different words. And if, in some things, we cannot exactly agree, since we confess that we are all weak and fallible, mutual patience and forbearance, would be equally befitting the acknowledgements we make, and the Gospel which we profess. We should, thereby, act in character, as the followers of Him who was compassionate to the infirmities and mistakes of His disciples, and taught them—not every thing at once—but gradually, as they were able to bear. The Author ought not to be very solicitous, upon his own account, what reception his writings may meet with. The fashion of this world is passing away. The voice, both of applause and of censure, will soon be stifled in the dust. It is, therefore—but a small thing to be judged of man’s judgment (1 Corinthians 4:3). But conscious of the vast importance of the subject, which he thus puts into the Reader’s hands, he cannot take leave of him, without earnestly entreating his serious attention. The one principle, which, he assumes for granted, and which, he is certain cannot be disproved, is, That the Bible is a revelation from God. By this standard, he is willing, that whatever he has advanced, may be tried. If the Bible is true, we must all give an account, each one of himself, to the great and final Judge. That when we shall appear before His solemn tribunal, we may be found at His right hand, accepted in the Beloved, is the Author’s fervent prayer, both for his Readers and for himself.

01.01. Thought on the ice-palace

Thought on the ice-palace January 20, 1775

Dear sir,

We have entered upon another year! So have thousands, perhaps millions—who will not see it close! An alarming thought to the worldling! at least it should be so. I have an imperfect remembrance of an account I read, when I was a boy, of an ice palace, built one winter at Petersburgh. The walls, the roof, the floors, the furniture, were all of ice—but finished with taste; and everything that might be expected in a royal palace was to be found there; the ice, while in the state of water, being previously colored, so that to the eye all seemed formed of proper materials; but all was cold, useless, and transient. Had the frost continued until now, the palace might have been standing; but with the returning spring it melted away, like the baseless fabric of a vision. No contrivance could exhibit a fitter illustration of the vanity of life. Men build and plan as if their work were to endure forever; but the wind passes over them—and they are gone! In the midst of all their preparations, or at farthest when they think they have just completed their designs, their final breath departs, they return to their earth; in that very day their thoughts perish! "How many sleep—who kept the world awake!"

Yet this ice-house had something of a leisurely dissolution; though, when it began to decay, all the art of man was unable to stop it. But often death comes hastily, and destroys to the very foundations without previous notice. Then all we have been concerned in here (all—but the consequences of our conduct, which will abide to eternity) will be no more to us than the remembrance of a dream. This truth is too plain to be denied; but the greater part of mankind act as if they were convinced it was false—they spend their days in vanity, and in a moment they go down to the grave! What cause of thankfulness have those, who are delivered from this delusion; and who, by the knowledge of the glorious Gospel, have learned their true state and end; are saved from the love of the present world, from the heart-distressing fear of death; and know, that, if their earthly house were dissolved, like the ice-palace, they have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

Yet even these are much concerned to realize the brevity and uncertainty of their present state, that they may be stimulated to make the most and the best of it; to redeem their time, and manage their precarious opportunities, so as may most tend to the praise and glory of Him who has called them out of darkness, into marvelous light. Why should any, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, wish to live another day—but that they may have the honor to be fellow-workers with him, instrumental in promoting His designs, and of laying themselves out to the utmost of their abilities and influence in his service? To enjoy a sense of His loving-kindness, and to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon our souls, is indeed, respecting ourselves, the best part of life, yes, better than life itself! But this we shall have to unspeakably greater advantage, when we have finished our course, and shall be wholly freed from the body of sin. And therefore the great desirable while here on earth, seems to be grace, that we may serve him and suffer for him in the

world. Though our first wish immediately upon our own accounts might be, to depart and be with Jesus—yet a lively thought of our immense obligations to his redeeming love, may reconcile us to a much longer continuance here, if we may by any means be subservient to diffuse the glory of His name, and the blessings of his salvation, which is God's great and principal end in preserving the world itself. When historians and politicians descant upon the rise and fall of empires, with all their professed sagacity, in tracing the connection between causes and effects—they are totally unacquainted with the great master-wheel which manages the whole movement; that is, the Lord's design in favor of his church and kingdom. To this every event is subordinate; to this every interfering interest must stoop. How easily might this position be proved, by reviewing the history of the period about the Reformation.

I doubt not, but some who are yet unborn will hereafter clearly see and remark, that the present unhappy disputes between Great Britain and America, with their consequences, whatever they may be, are part of a series of events, of which the extension and interests of the church of Christ were the principal final causes. In a word, that Jesus may be known, trusted, and adored—and sinners, by the power of his Gospel, be rescued from sin and Satan, is comparatively the one great business, for the sake of which the succession of day and night, summer and winter, is still maintained. And when the plan of redemption is consummated, sin, which now almost fills the earth, will then set it on fire; and the united interest of all the rest of mankind, when detatched from that of the people of God, will not plead for its preservation a single day. In this view, I congratulate you, that, however your best endeavors to serve the temporal interests of the nation may fall short of your wishes; yet, so far as your situation gives you opportunity of supporting the Gospel cause, and facilitating its progress—you have a prospect both of a more certain and more important success. For instance, it was, under God, that your favor and influence brought me into the ministry. And though I be nothing—yet he who put it into your heart to patronize me, has been pleased not to allow what you then did for his sake to be wholly in vain. He has been pleased, in a course of years, by so unworthy an instrument as I am, to awaken a number of people, who were at that time dead in trespasses and sins. And now some of them are pressing on to the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus; and some of them are already before the throne!

"What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world—yet loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:26. Should I suggest in some companies, that the conversion of a hundred sinners to God, is an event of more real importance than the temporal prosperity of the greatest nation upon earth—I would be charged with ignorance and arrogance. But you are skilled in Scriptural arithmetic, which alone can teach us to estimate the value of souls, and will agree with me—that one soul is worth more than the whole world, on account of its redemption price, its vast capacities, and its endless duration. Should we suppose a nation to consist of forty million people, and each individual to enjoy as much good as this life can afford, without abatement, for a term of fifty years each; all this good, or an equal quantity, might be exhausted by a single person in two thousand million years, which would be but a moment in comparison of the eternity which would still follow. And if this good were merely temporal good, the whole aggregate of it would be evil and misery—if compared with that happiness in God, of which only those who are made partakers of a Divine life are capable. On the other hand, were a whole nation to be destroyed by such accumulated miseries as attended the siege of Jerusalem, the sum total of these calamities would be but trifling, if set in competition with what every single person who dies

in sin has to expect, when the sentence of everlasting destruction, away from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, shall be executed.

What an unexpected round have my thoughts taken since I set out from the ice-palace!

01.01. Thoughts from the sick room

Thoughts from the sick room

March 10,1774

Dear sir, For about six weeks past, I have had occasion to spend several hours of almost every day with the sick and the dying. These scenes are to a minister, like walking the hospitals to a young surgeon. The various cases which occur—exemplify, illustrate, and explain, with a commanding energy—many truths, which may be learned indeed at home—but cannot be so well understood, or their force so sensibly felt, without the advantage of experience and observation. As physicians, besides that competent general knowledge of their profession, which should be common to them all, have usually their several favorite branches of study—some applying themselves more to surgery, others to medicine, others to anatomy—so ministers, as their inclinations and gifts differ, are led more closely to consider some particular branch of the system of Divine truth. Some are directed to state and defend the doctrines of the Gospel; some have a talent for elucidating difficult texts of Scripture; some have a turn for explaining the prophetical parts; and so of the rest. For myself, if it is lawful to speak of myself, and so far as I can judge, heart-anatomy is my favorite branch—I mean, the study of the human heart, with its workings and counter-workings, as it is differently affected in a state of nature or of grace, in the different seasons of prosperity, adversity, conviction, temptation, sickness, and the approach of death. The Lord, by sending me here, provided me a good school for these purpose. I know not where I could have had a better one affording a greater variety of characters, in proportion to the number of people; and as they are mostly a poor people, and strangers to that culture which is the result of education, there is a simplicity in what they say or do, which gives me a peculiar advantage in judging of their cases. But I was about to speak of death. Though the grand evidence of those truths upon which our hopes are built upon, arises from the authority of God speaking them in his Word, and revealing them by his Spirit to the awakened heart (for, until the heart is awakened, it is incapable of receiving this evidence); yet some of these truths are so mysterious, so utterly repugnant to the judgment of depraved nature, that, through the remaining influence of unbelief and vain reasoning, the temptations of Satan, and the subtle arguments with which some men, reputed wise, attack the foundations of our faith—the minds even of believers are sometimes capable of being shaken. I know no better corroborating evidence for the relief of the mind under such assaults, than the testimony of dying people, especially of such as have lived outside of the noise of controversy, and who perhaps never heard a syllable of what has been started in these evil days against the Deity of Christ, his atonement, and other important articles.

Permit me to relate, upon this occasion, some things which exceedingly struck me in the conversation I had with a young woman, whom I visited in her last illness, about two years ago. She was a sober, prudent person, of plain sense, could read her Bible—but had read little beside. Her knowledge of the world was nearly confined to the parish; for I suppose she was seldom, if ever, twelve miles from home in her life. She had known the Gospel about seven years before the

Lord visited her with a lingering consumption, which at length removed her to a better world. A few days before her death, I had been praying by her bed-side, and in my prayer I thanked the Lord that he gave her now to see that she had not followed cunningly devised fables. When I had finished, she repeated that word. "No," she said, "not cunningly devised fables—these are realities indeed! I feel their truth—I feel their comfort! O tell my friends, tell my acquaintance, tell inquiring souls, tell poor sinners, tell all the daughters of Jerusalem" (alluding to Solomon's Song of Solomon 5:16, from which she had just before desired me to preach at her funeral), "what Jesus has done for my soul! Tell them, that now, in the time of need, I find him to be my beloved and my friend, and as such I commend him to them!"

She then fixed her eyes steadfastly upon me, and proceeded, as well as I can recollect, as follows: "Sir, you are highly favored in being called to preach the Gospel. I have often heard you with pleasure; but give me permission to tell you, that I now see all you have said, or can say, is, comparatively—but little. Nor, until you come into my situation, and have death and eternity fully in your view, will it be possible for you to conceive the vast weight and importance of the truths you declare. Oh, Sir, it is a serious thing to die! No words can express what is needful to support the soul in the solemnity of a dying hour."

I believe it was the next day when I visited her again. After some discourse, as usual, she said, with a remarkable vehemence of speech, "Are you sure I cannot be mistaken?" I answered without hesitation, "Yes, I am sure; I am not afraid to say, My soul for yours, that you are right." She paused a little, and then replied, " You say true; I know I am right. I feel that my hope is fixed upon the Rock of ages! I know in whom I have believed. Yet, if you could see with my eyes, you would not wonder at my question. But the approach of death presents a prospect, which is until then hidden from us, and which cannot be described." She said much more to the same purpose, and in all she spoke there was a dignity, weight, and evidence, which I suppose few professors of divinity, when lecturing from the chair, have at any time equaled. We may well say, with Elihu, Who teaches like him?

Many instances of the like kind I have met with here. I have a poor girl near me, whose mental capacity is indeed very small; but the Lord has been pleased to make her acquainted alternately with great temptations, and proportionally great discoveries of his love and truth. Sometimes, when her heart is enlarged, I listen to her with astonishment. I think no books or ministers I ever met with, have given me such an impression and understanding of Christian experience, as I have upon some occasions received from her conversation. But I am rambling again. My attendance upon the sick is not always equally comfortable; but could I learn aright, it might be equally instructive. Some confirm the preciousness of a Savior to me, by the cheerfulness with which, through faith in his name, they meet the king of terrors. Others no less confirm it, by the terror and reluctance they discover when they find they must die; for though there are too many who sadly slight the blessed Gospel while they are in health—yet in this place most are too far enlightened to be quite thoughtless about their souls, if they retain their senses in their last illness. Then, like the foolish virgins, they say, Give us some of your oil. Then they are willing that ministers and professors should pray with them, and speak to them.

Through the Lord's goodness, several whom I have visited in these circumstances have afforded me good hope—they have been savingly changed by his blessing upon what has passed at the

eleventh hour. I have seen a marvelous and blessed change take place in their language, views, and tempers, in a few days. I now visit a young person, who is cut short in her nineteenth year by a consumption, and I think cannot live many days. I found her very ignorant and insensible to spiritual realities, and she remained so a good while; but of late I hope her heart is touched. She feels her lost state; she seems to have some right desires; she begins to pray, and in such a manner as I cannot but hope the Lord is teaching her, and will reveal himself to her before she departs. But it is sometimes otherwise. I saw a young woman die last week—I had been often with her; but the night she was died, she could only say, "Oh, I cannot live! I cannot live!" She repeated this mournful complaint as long as she could speak; for as the vital powers were more oppressed, her voice was changed into groans, her groans grew fainter and fainter, and in about a quarter of an hour after she had done speaking, she expired. Poor thing, I thought, as I stood by her bedside, if you were a duchess, in this situation, what could the world do for you now! I thought likewise how many things are there that now give us pleasure or pain, and assume a mighty importance in our view, which in a dying hour will be no more to us than the clouds which fly unnoticed over our heads Then the truth of our Lord’s aphorism will be seen, felt, and acknowledged, "Only one thing is needful!"

Chapter 80

01.01. Three letters to a Christian friend

Three letters to a Christian friend

Letter 1 My dear Madam, My reproof was well meant on my side, and well taken on yours. You may perhaps see that my hints were not wholly unnecessary, and I ought to be satisfied with your apology, and am so. The circumstance of your being seen at the playhouse has nothing at all mysterious in it, as you say you have not been there for six or seven years—it was neither more nor less than a mistake. I had heard that you had been there within these two years. I am glad to find I was misinformed. I think there is no harm in your supposing, that of the many thousands who frequent public amusements, some may, in other respects, be better than yourself—but I hope your humble and charitable construction of their mistake will not lead you to extenuate the evil of those diversions in themselves. For though I am persuaded that a few Christians are, for lack of consideration, drawn in to expose themselves in such places—yet I am thoroughly convinced, that if there is any practice in this land which is sinful, attendance on the playhouse is properly and eminently so. The theaters are fountains and paths of vice! I can hardly think there is a Christian upon earth who would dare to be seen there—if the nature and effects of the theater were properly set before them.

Dr. Witherspoon of Scotland has written an excellent piece upon the stage, or rather against it, which I wish every person who makes the least pretense to fear God had an opportunity of perusing. I cannot judge much more favorably of all the innumerable train of profligacies, by which the god of this world blinds the eyes of multitudes, lest the light of the glorious Gospel should shine in upon them. What an awful aspect upon the present times have such texts as Isaiah 22:12-14. Isaiah 3:12, Amos 6:3-6, James 4:4. I wish you, therefore, not to plead for any of them—but use all your influence to make them shunned as pest-houses, and dangerous nuisances to precious souls; especially if you know any who you hope in the main are seriously disposed, who yet venture themselves in those haunts of Satan, endeavor earnestly and faithfully to undeceive them. The time is short; eternity at the door; was there no other evil in these vain amusements than the loss of precious time (but, alas! their name is legion), we have not leisure in our circumstances to regard them. And, blessed be God! we need them not. The Gospel opens a source of purer, sweeter, and more substantial pleasures! We may well bid adieu to these perishing pleasures of sin! We may well pity those who can find pleasure in those amusements where God is shut out; where His name is only mentioned to be profaned; where His commandments are not only broken—but insulted; where sinners proclaim their shame as in Sodom, and attempt not to hide it; where, at best, wickedness is wrapped up in a disguise of entertainment, to make it more insinuating!

I sympathize with all your ailments—but if the Lord is pleased to make them subservient to the increase of your sanctification, to wean you more and more from this world, and to draw you nearer to himself, you will one day see cause to be thankful for them, and to number them among your choicest mercies. A hundred years hence—it will signify little to you whether you were sick or

well the day I wrote this letter.

We thank you for your kind condolence. There is a pleasure in the pity of a friend—but the Lord alone can give true comfort. I hope he will sanctify the breach, and do us good. Mrs. **** exchanges forgiveness with you about your not meeting in London; that is, you forgive her not coming to you, and she forgives you entertaining a suspicious thought of her friendship (though but for a minute) on account of what she was really unable to do.

Letter 2 September 1, 1767. My dear Madam,

I shall not study for expressions to tell my dear friend how much we were affected by the news that came last post. We had, however, the pleasure to hear that your family was safe. I hope this will find you recovered from the hurry of spirits you must have been thrown into, and that both you and your papa are composed under the appointment of Him who has a right to dispose of his own as he pleases; for we know that, whatever may be the second causes and occasions, nothing can happen to us but according to the will of our heavenly Father. Since what is past cannot be recalled, my part is now to pray, that this, and every other dispensation you meet with, may be sanctified to your soul's good; that you may be more devoted to the God of your life, and have a clearer sense of your saving interest in that kingdom which cannot be shaken, that treasure which neither thieves nor flames can touch, that better and more enduring substance which is laid up for believers, where Jesus their Head and Savior is. With this in view, you may take joyfully the spoiling of your goods.

I think I can feel for my fiends—but for such as I hope have a right to that promise, that all things shall work together for their good, I soon check my solicitude, and ask myself, Do I love them better, or could I manage more wisely for them, than the Lord does? Can I wish them to be in safer or more compassionate hands than in his? Will he who delights in the prosperity of his servants, afflict them with sickness, losses, and alarms—except he sees there is need of these things? Such thoughts calm the emotions of my mind. I sincerely condole you—but the command is, to rejoice always in the Lord. The visitation was accompanied with mercy; not such a case as that of the late Lady Molesworth, which made everyone's ears to tingle that heard it. Nor is yours such a case as of some, who in almost every great fire lose their all, and perhaps have no knowledge of God to support them.

Though our first apprehensions were for you, we almost forgot you for a moment when we thought of your next-door neighbor, and the circumstance she was in, so unfit to bear either a fright or a removal. We shall be in much suspense until we hear from you. God grant that you may be able to send us good news, that you are all well, at least as well as can be expected after such a distressing scene. If what has happened should give you more leisure, or more inclination, to spend a little time with us, I think I need not say we shall rejoice to receive you.

Letter 3 September 3, 1767. My dear Madam, The vanity of all things below, is confirmed to us by daily experience. Among other proofs, one is, the precariousness of our friendships; and what little things, or rather what nothings, will sometimes produce a coolness, or at least a strangeness, between the dearest friends. How is it that our correspondence has been dropped, and that, after having written two letters since the fire, which removed you from your former residence, I should be still disappointed in my hopes of an answer? On our parts, I hope there has been no abatement

of regard; nor can I charge you with anything but remises. Therefore, waving the past, and all apologies on either side, let me beg you to write soon, to tell us how it is with you, and how you have been supported under the various changes you have met with since we saw you last.

I doubt not, but you have met with many exercises. I pray that they may have been sanctified to lead you nearer to the Lord, the fountain of all consolation, who is the only refuge in time of trouble, and whose gracious presence is abundantly able to make up every deficiency and every loss. Perhaps the reading of this may recall to your mind our past conversations, and the subjects of the many letters we have exchanged. I know not in what manner to write after so long an interval. I would hope your silence to us has not been owing to any change of sentiments, which might make such letters as mine less welcome to you. Yet when you had a friend, who I think you believed very nearly interested himself in your welfare, it seems strange, that in a course of two years you should have nothing to communicate. I cannot suppose you have forgotten me; I am sure I have not forgotten you; and therefore I long to hear from you soon, that I may know how to write; and should this likewise pass unanswered, I must sit down and mourn over my loss. As to our affairs, I can tell you the Lord has been and is exceedingly gracious to us. Our lives are preserved, our health's continued, and abundance of mercies and blessings on every side—but especially we have to praise him that he is pleased to crown the means and ordinances of his grace, with tokens of his presence. It is my happiness to be fixed among an affectionate people, who make an open profession of the truth as it is in Jesus, and are enabled, in some measure, to show forth its power in their lives and conversation. We walk in peace and harmony. I have reason to say—the Lord Jesus is a good Master, and that the doctrine of free salvation, by faith in his name, is a doctrine according to godliness. For, through mercy, I find it daily effectual to the breaking down the strongholds of sin, and turning the hearts of sinners from dead works to serve the living God. May the Lord give my dear friend to live in the power and consolation of his precious truth!

01.01. True patriotism!

True patriotism!

Dear friend,

Allow me to say, that it excites both my wonder and concern, that a Christian minister such as yourself, should think it worth his while to attempt political reforms. When I look around upon the present state of the nation, such an attempt appears to me, to be no less vain and foolish, than it would be to paint the cabin—while the ship is sinking! Or to decorate the parlor—while the house is on fire! When our Lord Jesus was upon earth, He refused to get involved in disputes or politics, "Friend, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Luke 12:14. "My kingdom is not of this world! If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight!" John 18:36. God’s children belong to a kingdom which is not of this world; they are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and a part of their Scriptural character is, that they are the "quiet in the land." Psalms 35:19.

Satan has many contrivances to amuse people, and to divert their thoughts from their real danger! My dear sir, my prayer to God for you is—that He may induce you to employ the talents He has given you, in pointing out sin as the great cause and source of every existing evil; and to engage those who love and fear Him, (instead of wasting time in political speculations, for which very few of them are competent,) to sigh and cry for our abounding abominations, and to stand in the breach, by prayer, that God’s wrath may yet be averted, and our national mercies prolonged! This, I think, is true patriotism—the best way in which people in private life may serve their country.

I consider the ungodly as saws and hammers in the hand of the Lord. So far as they are His instruments, they will succeed—but not an inch further! Their wrath shall praise Him, and be subservient to His designs!

If our lot is so cast that we can exercise our ministry free from stripes, fines, imprisonments, and death—it is more than the gospel has promised to us! If Christians were quiet when under the cruel governments of Nero and other wicked persecutors, when they were hunted down like wild beasts—then we ought to be not only quiet but very thankful now! It was then accounted an honor to suffer for Christ and the ’offence of the cross’!

Those are to be greatly pitied, who boast of their ’liberty’—and yet they do not consider that they are in the most deplorable bondage as the slaves of sin and Satan, under the curse of God’s law and His eternal wrath! Oh! for a voice to reach their hearts, that they may know their true and dreadful state—and seek deliverance from their horrific thraldom! May you and I labor to direct them to the one thing, which is absolutely needful, and abundantly sufficient.

If I had the wisdom or influence to soothe the angry passions of mankind—I would gladly employ them! But I am a stranger and a pilgrim here in this world. My charter, my rights and my treasures, are all in heaven—and there my heart ought to be. In a very short time, I may be removed (and perhaps suddenly) into the unseen and eternal world—where all that now causes so much bustle

upon earth—will be of no more importance to me—than the events which took place among the antediluvians! In the hour, when death shall open the door into eternity—many things which now assume an ’air of importance’, will be found as light and unsubstantial as a child’s dream!

How crucial then, is it for me—to be found watching, with my lamp burning, diligently engaged in my proper calling! For the Lord has not called me to set governments right—but to preach the gospel, to proclaim the glory of His name, and to endeavor to win souls! "Let the dead bury their own dead—but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God!" Luke 9:60. Happy is that servant, whom his Master finds so doing, when He returns! As you have forced me to respond—both duty and love have obliged me to be faithful and free in giving you my thoughts.

I recommend you to the care and blessing of the great Shepherd and Savior; and remain for His sake, your affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

Chapter 82

01.01. Trust in the providence of God, and benovolence to his poor

Trust in the providence of God, and benevolence to his poor My dear Friend, The more I think of the point you proposed to me, the more I am confirmed to renew the advice I then gave. There is doubtless such a thing as Christian prudence; but, my friend, beware of counterfeits. Self-love, and the evil heart of unbelief, will endeavor to obtrude upon us a prudence so called, which is as opposite to the former as darkness to light. I do not say, that, now that you have a wife, and the prospect of a family, you are strictly bound to give to the poor in the same proportion as formerly. I say, you are not bound; for everything of this sort should proceed from a willing heart. But if you should tell me the Lord has given you such a zeal for his glory, such a concern for the honor of the Gospel, such a love to his members, such a grateful sense of his mercies (especially by granting you, in this late instance of your marriage, the desire of your heart), and such an affiance in his providence and promises, that you find yourself very unwilling to be one sixpence in the year less useful than you were before, I could not blame you or dissuade you from it. But I do not absolutely advise it; because I know not the state of your mind, or what measure of faith the Lord has given you. Only this I believe, that when the Lord gives such a confidence, he will not disappoint it. When I look among the professors, yes, among the ministers of the Gospel, there are few things I see a more general lack of, than such a trust in God as to temporals, and such a sense of the honor of being permitted to relieve the necessities of his people, as might dispose them to a more liberal distribution of what they have at present in their power, and to a reliance on him for a sufficient supply in future. Some exceptions there are. Some people I have the happiness to know, whose chief pleasure it seems to be, to devise liberal things. For the most part, we take care, first to be well supplied, if possible, with all the necessaries, conveniences, and not a few of the elegancies of life; then to have a snug fund laid up against a rainy day, as the phrase is, (if this is in an increasing way, so much the better), that when we look at children and near relatives, we may say to our hearts, "Now they are well provided for." And when we have got all this and more, we are perhaps content, for the love of Christ, to bestow a pittance of our superfluities, a tenth or twentieth part of what we spend or hoard up for ourselves, upon the poor! But, alas! what do we herein more than others? Multitudes, who know nothing of the love of Christ, will do thus much, yes, perhaps, greatly exceed us, from the mere feelings of humanity. But it may be asked, would you show no regard to the possibility of leaving your wife or children unprovided for? Quite the reverse: I would have you attend to it very much, and behold the Scriptures show you the more excellent way. If you had a little money to spare, would you not lend it to me, if I assured you it should be repaid when needed? I call point out to you better interest and better security than I could possibly give you: Proverbs 19:17, "He who has pity upon the poor, lends unto the Lord: and that which he has given, will he pay him again." What do you think of this text? Is it the word of God, or not? Is he worthy of belief, or not? Is he able to make good his word, or is he not? I dare stake all my interest in your friendship (which I should be very reluctant to forfeit), that if you act upon this maxim, in a spirit of prayer and faith, and with a single eye to his glory, you shall not be disappointed. Read over Matthew 6:26-34. Shall we confine that reasoning and those promises to the primitive times? Say not, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, this thing might be." He has more ways to

bless and prosper those who trust in him, than we are able to point out to him. But I tell you, my friend, God will sooner make windows in heaven, turn stones into bread, yes, stop the sun in its course, than he will allow those who conscientiously serve him, and depend upon him, to be destitute.

Some instances we have had of ministers who have seemed to transgress the bounds of strict prudence in their attention to the poor. But they have been men of faith, prayer, and zeal: if they did it, not from impulse, or a spirit of indolence, but from such motives as the Scripture suggests and recommends, I believe their families have seldom suffered for it. Besides, you know not what you may actually save in the course of years by this method. The Apostle, speaking of some abuses that obtained in the church of Corinth, says, "For this cause many are sick among you." If prudence should shut up your compassion (which I trust it never will), the Lord might a severe illness upon your family, which would perhaps cost you twice the money which would have sufficed to refresh his people, and to commend your ministry and character. But if, after all, prudence will be heard, I counsel you to do these two things. First, Be very certain that you allow yourselves in nothing superfluous. You cannot, I trust, in conscience think of spending one penny more than is needful on yourself; unless you have another penny to help the poor. Then, secondly, Let your friends who are in good circumstances be plainly told, that, though you love them, prudence, and the necessary charge of a family, will not permit you to entertain them, no, not for a night. What! say you, shut my door against my friends? Yes, by all means, rather than against Christ. If the Lord Jesus was again upon earth, in a state of humiliation, and he, and the best friend you have, standing at your door, and your provision so strait that you could not receive both, which would you entertain? Now, he says of the poor, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me." Your friends have houses of their own, but the poor need relief. One would almost think that passage, Luke 14:12-14, was not considered as a part of God’s word; at least I believe there is no one passage so generally neglected by his own people. I do not think it unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us, that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.

I was enabled to set out upon the plan I recommend to you, at a time when my certain income was much too scanty for my own provision, and before I had the expectation or promise of assistance from any person upon earth. Only I knew that the Lord could provide me with whatever he saw needful; and I trusted, that, if he kept me dependent upon himself, and desirous to live for his service only, he assuredly would do so. I have as yet seen no cause to repent it. I live upon his promise; for, as to any present ways or means, everything here below is so uncertain, that I consider myself in the same situation with the birds of the air, who have neither storehouse nor barn. Today I have enough for myself, and something to impart to those who lack: as to futurity, the Lord must provide; and for the most part I can believe he will. I can tell you, however, that now and then my heart is pinched: unbelief creeps in, and self would much rather choose a strong box, or what the world calls a certainty, than a life of absolute dependence upon the providence of God. However, in my composed hours I am well satisfied. Hitherto he has graciously taken care of me; therefore may my heart trust in him, and not be afraid.

Consider, my friend, the Lord has done well for you likewise. He has settled you peaceably in a good and honorable employment; he has now answered your prayers, in giving you a partner, with whom you may take sweet counsel, one who will help and strengthen you in your best desires.

Beware, therefore, of that reasoning which might lead you to distrust the Lord your God, or to act as if you did. You complain that there is too much of an expensive taste among some people in your congregation. If you set yourself to discountenance this, and should at the same time too closely shut up your hands, they will be ready to charge you with being governed by the same worldly spirit, though in another form. If you have been hitherto tender and bountiful to the poor, and should make too great and too sudden an alteration in this respect, if the blame should not fall upon you, it probably would upon your wife, who, I believe, would be far from deserving it. If the house which has been open to the poor in former times, should be shut against them, now that you live in it, would it not open the mouths of those who do not love your ministry, to say, that, notwithstanding all your zeal about doctrines, you know how to take care of your own selfish interest, the same as those whom you have thought indifferent and lukewarm in the cause of the Gospel? Would it not?—But I forbear. I know you need not such arguments. Yet consider how many eyes are upon you, watching for your halting.

Now, at your first setting out, is the proper time seriously to seek the Lord’s directions, that you may from the beginning adopt such a plan as may be most for your own comfort, the honor of your character as a minister, the glory of him who has called you, and the edification of your people. It is easier to begin well, than to make alterations afterwards. I trust the Lord will guide and bless you in your deliberations. And for my own part, I am not in the least afraid that you will ever have cause to blame me for the advice I have given, if you should be disposed to follow it.

I have given you my opinion freely, and perhaps with an appearance of more strictness than is necessary. But I would apply our Lord’s words in another case to this: "All men cannot receive this saying: he who is able to receive it, let him receive it." If the Lord has given you this confidence in his word, you are happy. It is better than the possession of thousands by the year.

01.01. Views of Divine truth

Views of Divine truth

June 23, 1775

Dear Sir,

I hope that the Lord will make you comfortable and useful in your present rank as a curate. Advancement is not necessary, either to our peace or usefulness. We may live and die contentedly, without the honors and emoluments which aspiring men thirst after, if God is pleased to honor us with a dispensation to preach his Gospel, and to crown our endeavors with a blessing. He who wins souls is wise; wise in the choice of the highest end he can propose to himself in this life; wise in the improvement of the only means by which this desirable end can be attained.

Wherever we cast our eyes, the bulk of the people are ignorant, immoral, careless. They live without God in the world; they are neither awed by his authority, nor affected by his goodness, nor enabled to trust to his promises, nor disposed to aim at his glory. If, perhaps, they have a serious interval, or some comparative sobriety of character, they ground their hopes upon their own doings, endeavors, or purposes; and treat the inexpressible love of God revealed in Christ, and the Gospel method of salvation by faith in his name, with neglect, often with contempt.

They have preachers, whom perhaps they hear with some pleasure, because they neither alarm their consciences by insisting on the spirituality and sanction of the Divine Law, nor offend their pride by publishing the humiliating doctrines of that Gospel, which is the power of God through faith unto salvation. Therefore what they do speak, they speak in vain; the world grows worse and worse under their instructions; infidelity and profligacy abound more and more. For God will own no other doctrine but what the Apostle calls the truth as it is in Jesus; that doctrine which drives the sinner from all his vain pleas, and points out the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of hope, the supreme object of desire, as appointed of God to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, to all who believe in his name. When ministers themselves are convinced of sin, and feel the necessity of an almighty Savior, they presently account their former gain but loss; and determine, with the Apostle, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. In proportion as they do this, they are sure to be wondered at, laughed at, and railed at, if the providence of God, and the constitution of their country, secure them from severer treatment. But they have this invaluable compensation, that they no longer speak without effect. In a greater or less degree, a change takes place in their hearers—the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed; sinners are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; sinful practices are forsaken; and a new course of life in the converts, evidences that they have not followed cunningly devised fables, nor taken up with uncertain notions—but that God has indeed quickened them by his Spirit, and given them an understanding to know him who is true. The preachers, likewise, while they attempt to teach others, are taught themselves: a blessing descends upon their studies and labors, upon their perusal of the Scripture, upon their attention to

what passes within them and around them; the events of every day contribute to throw light upon the Word of God; their views of Divine truth grow more enlarged, connected, and comprehensive; many difficulties, which perplexed them at their first setting out, trouble them no more; the God whom they serve, and on whom they wait, reveals to them those great things, which, though plainly expressed in the letter of the Scripture, cannot be understood and realized without Divine teaching; 1 Corinthians 2:9-15. Thus they go on from strength to strength, hard things become easy, and a Divine light shines upon their paths. Opposition from men perhaps may increase—they may be represented as those who turn the world upside down; the cry "troublers" will be raised against them; the gates of the temple of preferment will be seldom open to them; but they will have the unspeakable consolation of applying to themselves those lively words of the Apostle, "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." 2 Corinthians 6:10.

It is the strain of evident sincerity which runs through your letters, that gives me a pleasing confidence the Lord is with you. An unselfish desire of knowing the truth, with a willingness to follow it through all disadvantages, is a preparation of the heart which only God can give. He has directed you to the right method—searching the Scripture, with prayer. Go on, and may his blessing attend you. You may see, from what I have written above, what is the desire of my heart for you. But I am not impatient. Follow your heavenly Leader, and in his own time and manner He will make your way plain. I have traveled the path before you. I see what you yet want; I cannot impart it to you—but He can, and I trust He will. It will rejoice my soul to be any way assistant to you; but I am afraid! should not afford you much, either profit or satisfaction, by entering upon a dry defense of creeds and articles. The truths of Scripture are not like mathematical theorems, which present exactly the same ideas to every person who understands the terms. The Word of God is compared to a mirror, 2 Corinthians 3:18; but it is a mirror in which—the longer we look, the more we see! The view will be still growing upon us, and still we shall see but in part while on this side eternity. When our Lord pronounced Peter blessed, declaring he had learned that which flesh and blood could not have taught him—yet Peter was at that time much in the dark. The sufferings and death of Jesus, though the only and necessary means of his salvation, were an offense to him. But he lived to glory in, what he once could not bear to hear of. Peter had received grace to love the Lord Jesus, to follow him, to venture all and to forsake all for him—these first good dispositions were of God, and they led to further advances. So it is still. By nature, SELF rules in the heart. When this idol is brought low, and we are truly willing to be the Lord’s, and to apply to Him for strength and direction, that we may serve Him—the good work is begun. For it is a truth that holds universally and without exception, "a man can receive nothing except it be given him from God." The Lord first finds us when we are thinking of something else (Isaiah 65:1), and then we begin to seek him in good earnest, and he has promised to be found of us. People may, by industry and natural abilities, make themselves masters of the external evidences of Christianity, and have much to say for and against different schemes and systems of sentiments; but all this while the heart remains untouched.

True religion is not a science of the head—so much as an inward and heart-felt perception, which casts down imaginations, and everything that exalts itself in the mind, and brings every thought into a sweet and willing subjection to Christ by faith. Here the learned have no real advantage

above the ignorant; both see when the eyes of the understanding are enlightened; until then, both are equally blind. And the first lesson in the school of Christ—is to become a little child, sitting simply at his feet, that we may be made wise unto salvation.

I was not only prevented beginning my letter as soon as I wished—but have been unusually interrupted since I began it. Often, as soon as I could well take the pen in hand, I have been called away to attend company and intervening business. Though I persuade myself, after what I have formerly said, you will put a favorable construction upon my delay—yet it has given me some pain. I set a great value upon your offer of friendship, which I trust will not be interrupted, on either side, by the freedom with which we mutually express our difference of sentiments, when we are constrained to differ. You please me with entrusting me with the first rough draught of your thoughts; and you may easily perceive by my manner of writing, that I place equal confidence in your candor. I shall be glad to exchange letters as often as it suits us, without constraint, ceremony, or apology—and may He who is always present with our hearts make our correspondence useful. I pray God to be your sun and shield, your light and strength, to guide you with his eye, to comfort you with his gracious presence in your own soul, and to make you a happy instrument of comforting many!

Chapter 84

01.01. What a Christian ought to be

What a Christian ought to be

September, 1772

Dear sir,

Weak, unskillful, and unfaithful, as I am in practice—the Lord has been pleased to give me some idea of what a Christian ought to be, and of what is actually attainable in the present life, by those whom he enables earnestly to aspire towards the prize of their high calling. They who are versed in mechanics can, from a knowledge of the combined powers of a complicated machine, make an exact calculation of what it is able to perform, and what resistance it can counteract. But who can compute the possible effects of that combination of principles and motives revealed in the Gospel, upon a heart duly impressed with a sense of their importance and glory? When I was recently at Mr. Cox's Museum, while I was fixing my attention upon some curious movements, imagining that I saw the whole of the artist's design, the person who showed it touched a little spring, and suddenly a thousand new and unexpected motions took place—and the whole piece seemed animated from the top to the bottom. I would have formed but a very imperfect judgment of it—had I seen no more than what I saw at first. I thought this might, in some measure, illustrate the vast difference that is observable among professors, even among those who are, it is to be hoped, sincere.

There are people who appear to have a true knowledge (in part) of the nature of Gospel religion—but seem not to be apprised of its properties in their extent. If they have attained to some hope of their acceptance, if they find at seasons some communion with God in the means of grace, if they are in measure delivered from the prevailing and corrupt customs of the world—they seem to be as satisfied, as if they were possessed of all. These are indeed great things. The profession of too many, whose sincerity, charity would be unwilling to impeach—is greatly blemished, notwithstanding their hopes and their occasional comforts—by the breaking forth of unsanctified tempers, and the indulgence of vain hopes, anxious cares, and selfish pursuits.

Far, very far, am I from that unscriptural sentiment of sinless perfection in fallen man. To those who have a due sense of the spirituality and ground of the Divine precepts, and of what passes in their own hearts—causes of humiliation and self-abasement on the account of sin will never be lacking. Yet still there is a liberty and privilege attainable by the Gospel, beyond what is ordinarily thought of. Permit me to mention two or three particulars, in which those who have a holy ambition of aspiring to them, shall not be altogether disappointed. A delight in the Lord's all-sufficiency, to be satisfied in him as our present and eternal portion. This, in the sense in which I understand it, is not the effect of a present warm frame—but of a deeply rooted and abiding principle; the habitual exercise of which is to be estimated by the comparative indifference with which other things are regarded. The soul thus principled, is not at leisure to take or to seek satisfaction in anything but what has a known subservience to this leading taste. Either the Lord is present—and then he is to be rejoiced in; or else he is absent—and then he is to be sought and waited for. They are to be

pitied, who, if they are at some times happy in the Lord, can at other times be happy without him, and rejoice in broken cisterns, when their spirits are at a distance from the Fountain of living waters.

I do not plead for an absolute indifference to temporal blessings. God gives us all things richly to enjoy; and a capacity of relishing them, is his gift likewise; but then the consideration of his love in bestowing all our temporal blessings, should exceedingly enhance the value, and a regard to his will should regulate their use. Nor can they all supply the lack of that which we can only receive immediately from himself. This principle likewise moderates that inordinate fear and sorrow to which we are liable, upon the prospect or the occurrence of great trials, for which there is a sure support and resource provided in the all-sufficiency of infinite goodness and grace. What a privilege is this—to possess God in all things while we have them—and all things in God when they are taken from us! An acquiescence in the Lord's will—founded in a persuasion of his wisdom, holiness, sovereignty, and goodness. This is one of the greatest privileges and brightest ornaments of our profession. So far as we attain to this—we are secure from disappointment. Our own limited views, and short-sighted purposes and desires, may be, and will be, often over-ruled; but then, our main and leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done, and must be accomplished. How highly does it befit us, both as creatures and as sinners—to submit to the appointments of our Maker! And how necessary is it to our peace! This great attainment is too often unthought of, and overlooked. We are prone to fix our attention upon the second causes and immediate instruments of events; forgetting that whatever befalls us, is according to God's purpose, and therefore must be right and seasonable in itself, and shall in the outcome, be productive of good. From hence arise impatience, resentment, and secret repining, which are not only sinful—but tormenting! Whereas, if all things are in his hand; if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and if he has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view, to which everything that happens is subordinate and subservient—then we have nothing to do—but with patience and humility to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy outcome. The path of present duty is marked out; and the concerns of the next and every following hour—are in his hands. How happy are those who can resign all to him, see his hand in every dispensation, and believe that he chooses better for them—than they could possibly choose for themselves! A single eye to his glory—as the ultimate scope of all our undertakings. The Lord can design nothing short of his own glory—nor should we. The constraining love of Christ has a direct and marvelous tendency, in proportion to the measure of faith, to mortify the corrupt principle, SELF, which for a season is the grand spring of our conduct and by which we are too much biased after we know the Lord. But as grace prevails, self is renounced. We feel that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; and that it is our duty, our honor, and our happiness, to be the servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To devote soul and body, every talent, power, and faculty, to the service of his cause and will; to let our light shine (in our several situations) to the praise of his grace; to place our highest joy in the contemplation of his adorable perfections; to rejoice even in tribulations and distresses, in reproaches and infirmities—if thereby the power of Christ may rest upon us, and be magnified in us; to be content, yes glad, to be nothing—that he may be all in all; to obey him, in opposition to the threats or solicitations of men; to trust him, though all outward appearances seem against us; to rejoice in him, though we should (as will sooner or later be the case) have nothing else to rejoice in; to live above the world, and to have our hearts in heaven; to be like the angels, finding our own

pleasure in performing his—this is the prize, the mark of our high calling, to which we are encouraged with a holy ambition continually to aspire! It is true, we shall still fall short; we shall find that, when we would do good, evil will be present with us. But the attempt is glorious, and shall not be wholly in vain. He who gives us thus to desire, will enable us to perform with growing success, and teach us to profit, even by our mistakes and imperfections.

O blessed man! who thus fears the Lord; who delights in his Word, and derives his principles, motives, maxims, and consolations, from that unfailing source of light and strength. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf is always green, and fruit abundant. The wisdom of God shall direct his plans, and inspire his counsels. The power of God shall guard him on every side, and prepare his way through every difficulty. He shall see mountains sink into plains—and streams spring up in the dry wilderness. The Lord's enemies will be his enemies; and they may be permitted to fight against him—but they shall not prevail, for the Lord is with him to deliver him. The conduct of such a one, though in a narrow and retired sphere of life, is of more real excellence and importance, than the most splendid actions of kings and conquerors, which fill the annals of history! And if the God whom he serves is pleased to place him in a more public light, his labors and cares will be amply compensated, by the superior opportunities afforded him of manifesting the power and reality of true religion, and promoting the good of mankind.

I hope I may say, that I desire to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am sure I must say, that what I have written is far from being my actual experience. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth, were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the law—but under grace. The Gospel is a dispensation for sinners, and we have an Advocate with the Father. There is the unshaken ground of hope. A reconciled Father, a prevailing Advocate, a powerful Shepherd, a compassionate Friend, a Savior who is able and willing to save to the uttermost! He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust; and has opened for us a new and blood-besprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.

Chapter 85

01.01. When we see the world in flames!

When we see the world in flames!

December 8, 1774

Dear sir,

How wonderful is the patience of God towards sinful men! In him they live, and move, and have their being; and if he were to withdraw his support for a single moment, they must perish! He maintains their lives, guards their persons, supplies their needs—while they employ the powers and faculties they receive from him in a settled course of opposition to his will. They trample upon his laws, affront his government, and despise his grace—yet still he spares! To silence all his adversaries in a moment, would require no extraordinary exertion of his power; but his forbearance towards them manifests his glory, and gives us cause to say, "Who is a God like unto you?"

Sometimes, however, there are striking instances of his displeasure against sin. When such events take place immediately upon a public and premeditated contempt offered to Him who sits in the heavens. For though his long-suffering is astonishing, and many dare him to his face daily, with seeming impunity; yet he sometimes strikes a dreadful and unexpected blow, and gives an illustration of that solemn word, "Who ever hardened himself against the Lord, and prospered?" But who am I, to make this observation? I ought to do it with the deepest humiliation, remembering that I once stood (according to my years and ability) in the foremost rank of his avowed opposers; and with a determined and unwearied enmity—renounced, defied, and blasphemed him! "But he will have mercy on whom He will have mercy;" and therefore I was spared, and reserved to speak of his goodness.

Josephus, when speaking of the death of Herod Agrippa, ascribes it to a natural cause, and says, he was seized with excruciating pains in his intestines. But Luke informs us of the true cause—an angel of the Lord smote him! Had we a modern history, written by an inspired pen, we would probably often be reminded of such an interposition where we are not ordinarily aware of it. For though the springs of actions and events are concealed from us for the most part, and vain men carry on their schemes with confidence, as though the Lord had forsaken the earth; yet they are under his eye and control. Faith in some measure, instructed by the specimens of his government recorded in the Scripture, can trace and admire his hand, and can see how he takes the wise in their own craftiness, and stains the pride of human glory; and that, when sinners speak proudly, he is above them, and makes everything bend or break before him.

While we lament the growth and pernicious effects of infidelity, and see how wicked men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived; what gratitude should fill our hearts to Him, who has been pleased to call us out of the horrid darkness in which multitudes are bewildered and lost—into the glorious light of His Gospel!

Faint are our warmest conceptions of this mercy. In order to understand it fully—we should have a full and adequate sense of the evil from which we are delivered; the glory to which we are called; and especially of the astonishing means to which we owe our great salvation—the humiliation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God! But our views of these points, while in our present state—are and must be exceedingly weak. We know them but in part, we see but a din reflection of them. And though they are faithfully represented in the mirror of God's Word, to us they appear indistinct, because we see them through a gross medium of ignorance and unbelief. In heavenly glory, every veil shall be removed; and we shall fully know—the unspeakable evil of sin, and the unsupportable dreadfulness of God's displeasure against it, when we see the world in flames, and hear the final sentence denounced upon the ungodly!

We shall have far other thoughts of Jesus when we see him as he is; and shall then be able to make a more affecting estimate of the love which moved him to be made a substitute and a curse for us. And we shall then know what great things God has prepared for those who love him. Then with transport, we shall adopt the queen of Sheba's language, "It was a true report we heard in yonder dark world; but, behold, the half, the thousandth part, was not told us!" In the mean time, may such conceptions as we are enabled to form of these great truths, fill our hearts, and be mingled with all our thoughts and all our concerns. May the Lord, by faith, give us an abiding evidence of the reality and importance of these eternal realities—so shall we be enabled to live above the world while we are in it, uninfluenced either by its blandishments or its frowns; and, with a noble simplicity and singularity, avow and maintain the cause of God in truth, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He whom we serve is able to support and protect us; and he well deserves at our hands, that we should be willing to endure, for his sake, much more than he will ever permit us to be exercised with.

You are not indeed called to serve God quite alone; but among those of your own rank, and with whom the station in which he has placed you—how few are there who can understand or approve, the principles upon which you act, or easily bear a conduct which must impress conviction, or reflect dishonor upon themselves! But you are not alone; the Lord's people (many of whom you will not know until you meet them in glory) are helping you here with their prayers; his angels are commissioned to guard and guide your steps; yes, the Lord himself fixes his eye of mercy upon your private and your public path, and is near you at your right hand, that you may not be moved! That he may comfort you with the light of his countenance, and uphold you with the arm of his power, is my frequent prayer.

Chapter 86

01.01. Without Me you can do nothing

Without Me you can do nothing February 23, 1775

Dear sir,

I assent to our Lord’s declaration, "Without Me you can do nothing;" not only upon the authority of the Speaker--but from the same irresistible and experimental evidence, as if he had told me, that I cannot make the sun to shine, or change the course of the seasons. Though my pen and my tongue sometimes move freely--yet the total incapacity and stagnation of thought I labor under at other times, convinces me, that in myself I have not sufficiency to think a good thought! And I believe the case would be the same, if that little measure of knowledge and abilities, which I am too prone to look upon as my own, were a thousand times greater than it is. For every new service, I stand in need of a new supply, and can bring forth nothing of my supposed store into actual exercise--but by his immediate assistance. His gracious influence is that, to those who are best furnished with gifts, which the water is to the mill, or the wind to the ship, without which the whole apparatus is motionless and useless.

I apprehend that we lose much of the comfort which might arise from a sense of our continual dependence upon him, and, of course, fall short of acknowledging as we ought what we receive from him--by mistaking the manner of his operation. Perhaps we take it too much for granted, that communications from himself must bear some kind of sensible impression that they are his, and therefore are ready to give our own industry or ingenuity, the credit for those performances in which we can perceive no such divine impression. Yet it is very possible that we may be under his influence, when we are least aware! And though what we say, or write, or do, may seem no way extraordinary; yet that we should be led to such a particular turn of thought at one time rather than at another, has, in my own concerns, often appeared to me remarkable, from the circumstances which have attended, or the consequences which have followed.

How often, in the choice of a text, or in the course of a sermon, or in a letter to a friend, have I been led to speak a word in season--and what I have expressed at large, and in general--has been so exactly suited to some case which I was utterly unacquainted with--that I could hardly have hit it so well, had I been previously informed of it. Some instances of this kind have been so striking, as hardly to admit a doubt of divine agency. And, indeed, if believers in Jesus, however unworthy in themselves, are the temples of the Holy Spirit; if the Lord lives, dwells, and walks in them; if he is their life and their light; if he has promised to guide them with his eye, and to work in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure; methinks what I have mentioned, and more, may be reasonably expected. That line in the hymn, "Help I every moment need," is not a hyperbolical expression--but strictly and literally true, not only in great emergencies--but in our smoother hours, and most familiar paths. This gracious assistance is afforded in a way imperceptible to ourselves, to hide pride from us, and to prevent us from being indolent and careless with respect to the use of appointed means. And it would be likewise more abundantly, and perhaps more sensibly afforded, were our spirits more simple in waiting upon the Lord. But, alas! a divided heart, an undue

attachment to some temporal object, sadly deadens our spirits (I speak for myself), and grieves the Lord's Spirit; so that we walk in darkness and at a distance, and, though called to great privileges, live far below them! But methinks the thought of him who is always near, and upon whom we do and must incessantly depend, should suggest a powerful motive for the closest attention to his revealed will, and the most punctual compliance with it. For so far as the Lord withdraws from us--we become as blind men; and with the clearest light, and upon the plainest ground, we are liable, or rather sure, to stumble at every step.

Though there is a principle of consciousness, and a determination of the will, sufficient to denominate our thoughts and performances our own; yet I believe mankind in general are more under an invisible agency than they apprehend. The Lord, immediately from himself, and perhaps by the ministry of his holy angels--guides, prompts, restrains, or warns his people. So there undoubtedly is what I may call a black inspiration--the influence of the evil spirits, who work in the hearts of the disobedient, and not only excite their wills--but assist their faculties, and qualify as well as incline them to be more assiduously wicked, and more extensively mischievous, than they could be of themselves. I consider Voltaire, for instance, and many writers of the same stamp, to be little more than secretaries and amanuenses of the evil one--who has unspeakably more wit and adroitness in promoting infidelity and immorality, than they of themselves can justly pretend to. They have, for a while, the credit (if I may so call it) of the fund from whence they draw; but the world little imagines who is the real and original author of that philosophy and poetry, of those fine turns and sprightly inventions, which are so generally admired. Perhaps many, now applauded for their genius, would have been comparatively dolts, had they not been engaged in a cause which Satan has so much interest in supporting.

But, to return to the more pleasing subject. How great and honorable is the privilege of a true believer! That he has neither wisdom nor strength in himself--is no disadvantage; for he is connected with Infinite Wisdom and Almighty Power! Though weak as a worm, his arms are strengthened by the almighty God--and all things become possible, yes easy to him--which occur within the compass of his proper duty and calling. The Lord, whom he serves, engages to proportion his strength to his day, whether it be a day of service or of suffering. And though he is fallible and short-sighted, exceeding liable to mistake and error; yet, while he retains a sense that he is so, and with the simplicity of a child asks counsel and direction of the Lord--he seldom takes a wrong step, at least not in matters of consequence. And even his sins are overruled for good. If he forgets his true state, and thinks himself to be something, he presently finds he is indeed nothing. But if he is content to be nothing, and to have nothing--he is sure to find a seasonable and abundant communication of all that he needs. Thus he lives, like Israel in the wilderness, upon mere divine bounty; but, then, it is a bounty unchangeable, unwearied, inexhaustible, and all-sufficient.

Moses, when speaking of the methods the Lord took to humble Israel, mentions his feeding them with manna, as one method. The manna would not keep; they could not hoard it up, and were therefore in a state of absolute dependence from day to day. This appointment was well suited to humble them.

Thus it is with us in spiritual matters. We would perhaps prefer to hoard up a stock of grace and sufficiency at once--such an inherent portion of wisdom and power, as we might depend upon, at

least for common occasions, without being constrained, by a sense of indigence--to have continual recourse to the Lord for everything we need. But His way is best. His own glory is most displayed--and our safety best secured, by keeping us quite poor and empty in ourselves, and supplying us from one minute to another, according to our need--out of His inexhaustible storehouse of grace.

This, if anything, will prevent boasting, and keep a sense of gratitude awake in our hearts. This is well adapted to quicken us to prayer, and furnishes us with a thousand occasions for praise, which would otherwise escape our notice. But who or what are we, that the Most High God should thus notice us; should visit us every morning, and water us every moment! It is an astonishing thought, that God should thus dwell with men! that he, before whom the mightiest earthly potentates are less than nothing and vanity--should thus stoop and accommodate himself to the situation, needs, and capacities of the weakest, lowest, and poorest of his children! But so it has pleased him. He sees not as man sees!

02.01. CHOICE EXCERPTS

CHOICE EXCERPTS

"He opened their minds—so they could understand the Scriptures." Luke 24:45

When God opens the eyes of our understanding, we begin to see everything around us to be just as the Scripture has described them. Then, and not until then, we perceive, that what we read in the Bible concerning the horrid evil of sin, the vileness of our fallen nature, the darkness and ignorance of those who know not God, our own emptiness, and the impossibility of finding relief and comfort from creatures—is exactly true.

And as we find our disease precisely described—so we perceive a suitableness in the proposed remedy.

We need a SAVIOR, and He must be a mighty one. And though our needs and sins, our fears and enemies, are great and numerous—we are convinced that the character of Jesus is sufficient to answer them all.

We need a REST, a rest which the world cannot give. Inquire where we will among the creatures, experience brings in the same answer from all, "It is not in me!" This again confirms the Word of God, which has forewarned us that we shall meet nothing but disappointment in such worldly pursuits. But there is a spiritual rest spoken of, which we know to be the very thing we need, and all our remaining solicitude is how to attain it. "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and heavy burdened—and I will give you rest!" Matthew 11:28

~ ~ ~ ~

I saw the Lord!

"In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord! He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of His robe filled the Temple. Hovering around Him were mighty seraphim, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with the remaining two they flew. In a great chorus they sang, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty! The whole earth is filled with His glory!' The glorious singing shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire sanctuary was filled with smoke! Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!'" Isaiah 6:1-5

Oh! for a glance of what Isaiah saw, and has described! Oh! that we, by the power of that faith, could behold the glory of the Lord filling this house; that we could realize the presence and the attitude of His attendant angels! They cover their faces and their feet with their wings, as overpowered by the beams of His majesty; and conscious, if not of defilement like us, yet of unavoidable inability as creatures, to render Him the whole of that praise and homage which are justly due to Him!

Oh! that, by faith, we could enter into the spirit of their ascription—'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is filled with His glory!' If we were all thus affected, as the prophet was, surely each one for himself would adopt the prophet's language. Or, if a comfortable hope in the Gospel prevented us from crying out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!" we should, at least, say, (the Hebrew word might be so rendered,) "I am silenced, I am struck dumb! I am overwhelmed with confusion and shame; for I am a man of unclean lips myself, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!"

If we have a degree of this impression, we shall not perplex ourselves concerning the second causes, or immediate instruments of our calamities. The evil of sin, contrasted with the holiness and glory of God, will engross our thoughts! And we shall ascribe all the troubles we either feel or fear—to our own sins, and the sins of those among whom we dwell.

~ ~ ~ ~ The eye of Divine Providence

"Not even a sparrow, worth only half a penny, can fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father! And the very hairs on your head are all numbered!" Matthew 10:29-30

Let us learn to see and acknowledge God's hand in all we have, and in all we meet with. Such a deep and abiding persuasion of the Most High God, ordering and over-ruling all our concerns, would—like the light, diffuse a luster and a beauty upon everything around us. To consider every comfort of life, as an effect and proof of God's favor towards us, would, like the fabled magic stone—turn all our possessions to gold, and stamp a value upon things which a common eye might judge as insignificant.

The eye of Divine Providence is upon every flitting sparrow of the field. Nor can we properly term any circumstance of our lives as small, since such things as seem most trifling in themselves, do often give birth to things which become most important. On the other hand—to be able to discover the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, through the darkest cloud of troubles and afflictions; to see all our trials appointed to us—in number, weight, and measure; nothing befalling us by chance; nothing without need; nothing without a support; nothing without a designed advantage—what a support must this truth be to the soul!

Take away this truth—and man is the most forlorn, helpless and miserable object in the world! He would be pining for everything he has not—and trembling for everything he has! He would be equally suffering under the pressure of what does happen—and the fear of what may happen! He would be liable to thousands of unsuspected dangers—yet unable to guard against those which are most obvious!

Let us learn the secret of being content in any and every situation, "Our heavenly Father knows what we have need of, before we ask Him!" "The earth is His, and the fullness thereof;" and His goodness is equal to His power. In Christ, He has already given us more than ten thousand worlds! Are you poor? Be satisfied with the Lord's appointment. It were as easy to Him to give you large estates—as to supply you with the bread you eat, or to continue your breath in your nostrils. But He sees that poverty is best for you—He sees that prosperity might prove your ruin! Therefore He has appointed you the honor of being in this respect, conformable to your Lord, who, when on earth, "had nowhere to lay His head!"

~ ~ ~ ~

True religion

True religion is a serious and personal concern. It arises from a right knowledge of God and ourselves; a sense of the great things He has done for fallen man; a persuasion, or at least a well-grounded hope, of our own interest in His favor; and a principle of unbounded love to Him who first loved us.

True religion consists in an entire surrender of ourselves, and our all, to God; in setting Him continually before us, as the object of our desires, the scope and inspector of our actions, and our only refuge and hope in every trouble. It also consists in making the goodness of God to us—the motive and model of our behavior to our fellow-creatures: to love, pity, relieve, instruct, forbear, and forgive them, as occasions offer, because we ourselves both need and experience these things at the hand of our heavenly Father.

The two great points to which true religion tends, and which it urges the soul, where it has taken place, incessantly to press after, are: communion with God, and conformity to Him. And as neither of these can be fully attained in this life, it teaches us to pant after eternal glory; to withdraw our thoughts and affections from temporal things, and fix them on that eternal state, where our desires shall be abundantly satisfied; and that work begun by grace—shall be crowned with glory!

~ ~ ~ ~

Christ reigns in the hearts of all His people

Christ reigns in the hearts of all His people. There He writes His precepts, impresses His image, and erects His throne; ruling them, not merely by an outward law, but by an inward secret influence, breathing His own life and spirit into them; so that their obedience becomes, as it were, natural, pleasurable, and its own reward. By the discoveries He affords them of His love—He wins their affections, captivates their wills, and enlightens their understandings. They derive from Him the "spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind," (2 Timothy 1:7) and run with alacrity in the way of His commandments.

They are the willing subjects of His government; are really pleased with His appointed way of salvation, approve of His precepts, and, from a view of His wisdom and goodness, cheerfully submit and resign to the disposal of His kind providence.

In all these respects, we are by nature at variance with Him. We are too proud to be indebted to His grace, too wise in our own conceits to desire His instruction, too obstinately attached to the love and practice of sin to be capable of relishing the beauty and spirituality of His commandments. And our love of the world, and the things of it, is too strong and grasping, to permit us to be satisfied with the lot and with the dispensations He appoints for us. We wish, if possible, and as far as possible we attempt—to be our own god. We are unthankful when He bestows, and impatient if He withholds; and if He sees fit to take back the gifts of which we are unworthy—we repine and rebel against His will. This enmity must be subdued, before we can be pleased with His government: in other words, we must be changed, we must be made new creatures.

To produce this change, this new creation, the Gospel is the only expedient; and when revealed and applied to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, the miracle is wrought! The sinner who is first convinced of his guilt and misery, and then reconciled to God by faith in the great atonement, willingly yields to His administration. He owns and feels the propriety of His proceedings, is ready to acknowledge, in his sharpest afflictions, that the Lord is gracious, and has not dealt with him according to the desert of his iniquities. He considers himself as no longer his own, but bought with a price, and brought under the strongest obligations, "to live no longer to himself, but to Him who loved him, and gave Himself for him." And what was before his dread and dislike, becomes now the joy of his heart—the thought that the Lord reigns, and that all his concerns are in the hands of Him who does all things well.

~ ~ ~ ~

It is an ocean without either bottom or shore!

"May you experience the love of Christ—though it is so great you will never fully understand it!" Ephesians 3:19

There is no love which can be compared with the love of Christ. He is God manifest in the flesh; all things were created by Him, and for Him. This high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, in the fullness of time, assumed our nature, was born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law—so that sinners, believing in Him, might not only escape deserved condemnation—but actually become His children!

For this great purpose, though truly God, He emptied Himself and appeared upon earth in the form of a servant; submitted to a state of poverty, reproach and opposition; was despised and rejected of men, lived a suffering life, and terminated His sufferings by a cruel and ignominious death—for He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!

The LAMB, once upon the cross, is now the Lamb upon the throne, possessing and exercising all power in heaven and on earth. Yet He is still mindful of those for whom He suffered; His heart is made of tenderness; His affections melt with love; He appears in the presence of God for them, as their great High Priest, Advocate and Intercessor. By His holy Word He invites, and by the power of His Holy Spirit He draws, and encourages, and enables the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him for rest. He promises to save them to the uttermost; to support and guide them safely through all their conflicts, temptations, and trials; to lead them safely through the dark valley of the shadow of death; and then to receive them to Himself, that they may be forever with Him to behold His glory!

You may truly say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength. The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore I have everything I need. I need not fear. He will support me by His arm, cheer me with His presence, protect me by His power, guide me by His counsels, and afterwards receive me to glory!"

Such is the love of Christ! When we attempt to consider the glory of His divine person, the depth of His humiliation, the unknown sorrows and agonies which wrung His heart in Gethsemane, and on Golgotha; and that He endured all this for His enemies, even for those whose hearts were, both by nature and habit, alienated from Him; the power He exerts in reconciling them to Himself; the

blessings He bestows upon them in this life, when they are renewed by His grace; and the eternal happiness He has prepared for them in the eternal state—I say, when we attempt to conceive of this love, in its origin, progress, and effects—we are soon overwhelmed, our thoughts are swallowed up, and we can only wonder and adore in silence!

This love of Christ to sinners is inexpressible, unsearchable and unfathomable! It is an ocean without either bottom or shore!

"May you experience the love of Christ—though it is so great you will never fully understand it!" Ephesians 3:19

~ ~ ~

Sin will distress—but it cannot condemn!

The language of Psalms 40:5 suits my soul well, "Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders You have done. The things You planned for us no one can recount to You! Were I to speak and tell of them—they would be too many to declare!" There is no end to the inventory of my mercies! May He who has given so much to me, and done so much for me—add the crowning mercy of a thankful heart! Though I can talk of thankfulness, I feel much insensibility and hardness of heart; but, I know that, while sin dwells in me, it will have such effects. Sin will distress—but it cannot condemn, those who believe in Jesus!

~ ~ ~ ~ Their little girl has died!

"Yet another messenger came and said, 'Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house! It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!' At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away—may the name of the LORD be praised!'" Job 1:18-21

My dear wife,

Our dear friends have sent me word, that their little girl has died!

Thus, at one time or another, every family and every person finds vanity entwined with their choicest comforts. It is best for us that it is so; for, poor and vain as this life is—we are too greatly attached to it. How strong then would our attachment to this world be—if we met with no trials or thorns along the way? Is not the history of every day, a comment upon those words, "Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy!" Micah 2:10

~ ~ ~ ~ The Lord our Preserver

My dear wife,

I thank you for your letter. I do not complain of its brevity. A single line to inform me of your safe arrival, would have gladdened my heart, and, I trust, have excited my gratitude to the Lord our

Preserver. Not that I think you in more real danger upon the road than when at home; for a thousand unthought-of dangers are always near us, and our own shortsighted care is insufficient to preserve ourselves, or each other, for a single moment! Yet my foolish mind is prone to be more solicitous about you when you are out of my sight.

I have had another peaceful night, and awoke this morning in health. We lie down and arise in safety, because the Lord sustains us. Oh! to say, "This God, this great God—is our God—our Sun, and Shield and Portion!" What a privilege is this! What a counterbalance for every trial!

God is as near us in a storm—as in a calm; and we need His protection no less in a calm—than in a storm. The earth is the Lord's; and His servants, wherever their lot is cast, have His throne of grace always near them.

It is good to trust the Lord, and leave the management of all to Him. He is wise. He sees to the end of our path. We, poor short-sighted creatures, cannot see an inch before us, and if left to our own choice, would embroil ourselves in troubles by the very steps we would take to prevent them.

Sickness and death have entered many houses here. But we are still preserved. Our times are in the hands of Him who cares for us!

"Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Psalms 119:117

~ ~ ~ ~

I am a living commentary!

We are poor, weak, inconsistent creatures—if left but a little to ourselves.

When I think how cold, dull and heartless I have been; how often I have wandered, how often trifled upon the brink of temptation; when I consider what powerful, vigilant, and subtle enemies are combined against me; and how many professors have fallen on my right hand and my left—I am amazed at the greatness of His mercy in preserving me! I am a living commentary, that there is forgiveness with Him—and that He is able to save to the uttermost!

"Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Psalms 119:117

~ ~ ~ ~

God's grace will make us scorn-proof

"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible!" Hebrews 11:26-27

My dearest wife,

You will observe, that the principal effects or properties of Moses' faith, by which he walked with God, were humility and integrity. He humbled himself before the Lord in secret, claiming no higher title than 'dust and ashes'. And he stood up boldly, as God's avowed, devoted servant, before men. Let us imitate him.

I little doubt, but he was thought peculiar, and perhaps laughed at—and so probably shall we. But I trust that God's grace will make us scorn-proof, and not allow us to be in the number of those who are ashamed of the Lord Jesus and His Gospel. No, I hope He will enable us to glory in the cross, and to endure the opposition we may meet with, as seeing Him who is invisible, who, when upon earth, submitted to be laughed to scorn Himself, for us. Having borne our reproach—He has a just right to require that we should be ready and willing to bear reproach for Him!

This you may be assured of—that you cannot live out a consistent profession of Christ's religion in this town, without incurring the charge of being strange and singular. And, unless you can confine yourself wholly to the mirthful and careless, and go all their lengths, you will certainly have a bit of the cross to carry, and must prepare yourself to be thought very strange, by some of your acquaintances. The less we are connected with worldly people, the better.

We must endeavor to act with prudence, and not give needless offence; but we must never be ashamed of the glorious Gospel.

~ ~ ~ ~ The empty, amusing chit-chat

August 12, 1755

My dearest wife,

My companions on my trip are civil and agreeable in their way. But I had rather be alone; for to commune with God and my own heart, would be much more pleasing and profitable, than the empty, amusing chit-chat I am engaged in at present. Still, I pray to Him who can hear the breathings of my thoughts, when in the midst of company, and who is more ready to hear than I am to ask. I am astonished at my many mercies, and resign both you and myself into the hands of God, with much satisfaction.

I hope you, my dearest, will continue waiting upon Him—for from Him only our help can come. Pray for a praying spirit; lay all your hopes and all your fears before Him. In this way, and in no other, peace and comfort will be surely found. I recommend you to His blessing.

~ ~ ~ ~

They hatch viper's eggs and weave spider's webs!

Dear friend,

The true Christian has no home in this present world. He is, and must be—a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth. His citizenship, treasure, and real home are in a better and eternal world. Every step he takes—is a step nearer to his Father's house! He sets the Lord always before him, and finds himself equally near the Throne of Grace at all times and in all places.

I trust, my dear sir, that you will carry out a determination similar to that of the patriarch Jacob, who made this vow: "If God will be with me and protect me on this journey and give me food and clothing, and if He will bring me back safely to my father—then I will make the Lord my God!" Genesis 28:20-21. May the Lord Himself write it on your heart!

You are now at Rome, the center of the Fine Arts; a place abounding with everything to gratify a person of your taste. Athens had the pre-eminence in the Apostle Paul's time; and I think it highly probable, from many passages in his writings, that he likewise had a taste capable of admiring and relishing the beauties of painting, sculpture and music—which he could not but observe during his abode in Athens.

But he had a higher, a spiritual, a divine taste, which was greatly shocked and grieved by the ignorance, idolatry, and wickedness which surrounded him; insomuch that he could attend to nothing else! This taste, which cannot be acquired by any effort or study of ours—but is freely bestowed on all who sincerely ask it from the Lord, divests the vanities which the duped world admire; and enables us to judge of the most splendid works of unsaved men, according to the declaration of the Prophet, "They hatch viper's eggs and weave spider's webs! Whoever eats their eggs will die; crack one open—and a viper is hatched!" Isaiah 59:5.

Much ingenuity is displayed in the weaving of a spider's web—but, when finished, it is worthless and useless. Incubation of eggs requires close diligence and attention; if the hen is too long away from her nest, the egg is spoiled. Why should she sit at all upon the egg, and watch it, and warm it night and day—if it only produces a viper at last!

Thus vanity or evil are the chief ends of unsanctified genius. The artists spin spider's webs; and the philosophers, by their learned speculations, hatch viper's eggs—only to poison themselves and their fellow-creatures! Few of either sort have one serious thought of that dreadful eternity—upon the brink of which they stand for a while; or the "depth of misery" to which they successively and shortly must fall.

A part of the sentence denounced against the city which stood upon seven hills, is so pointed and graphic, that I must write it out, "How terrible, how terrible for that great city! She was so beautiful—like a woman clothed in finest purple and scarlet linens, decked out with gold and precious stones and pearls! And in one single moment all the wealth of the city is gone! They will weep as they watch the smoke ascend, and they will say, 'Where in all the world is there another city like this!' And they will throw dust on their heads to show their great sorrow. And they will say, 'How terrible, how terrible for the great city! She made us all rich from her great wealth. And now in a single hour it is all gone!' Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder as large as a great millstone. He threw it into the ocean and shouted— Babylon, the great city, will be thrown down as violently as I have thrown away this stone, and she will disappear forever. Never again will the sound of music be heard there—no more harps, songs, flutes, or trumpets. There will be no industry of any kind, and no more milling of grain. Her nights will be dark, without a single lamp. There will be no happy voices of brides and grooms. This will happen because her merchants, who were the greatest in the world, deceived the nations with her sorceries!" Revelation 18:1-24

~ ~ ~ ~

People who long to be rich

An inordinate desire and attachment to the things of this present world, is a prevailing cause of a spiritual declension. Unless this evil principle is mortified in its root—by the doctrine of the cross—it will in time prevail over the most splendid profession. That love of the world, which is inconsistent with the true love of God—manifests itself in two different ways, as men by temper

and habit are differently inclined:

The first is covetousness or greediness for gain. This was the ruin of Judas, and probably the cause of the defection of Demas. By the honorable mention made of him in some of Paul's epistles, Demas seems to have had much of Paul's confidence and esteem for a season. Yet at length his covetous passion prevailed, and the last account we have of him from the apostle, is, "Demas has deserted me—because he loved this present world." 2 Timothy 4:10

Again, there are people not chargeable with the love of money for its own sake—for they rather squander it—than hoard it. Yet they are equally under the influence of a worldly spirit! They manifest their worldly hearts—by an expensive taste in the articles of dress, furniture and feasting—which are always unsuitable to a Christian profession.

It is not easy to exactly mark out the precise line of Christian conduct in these respects, which befits the different situations in which the providence of God has placed us. Nor is it necessary, to those who are poor in spirit—and upright in heart. A simple desire of pleasing God, and adorning the gospel, will solve most cases of how a believer should spend his money—which occupy little and trifling minds. The inclination of our heart—will always direct and regulate our voluntary expenses. Those who love the Lord, and whose spirits are lively in His service, will avoid both stinginess and selfish extravagance. They will rather lean to the frugal side in how they spend their money on themselves—that they may be better able to promote God's cause, and to relieve the necessities of His people.

Misers, who can be content with the mere form of religion, will hoard all they can save—in order to gratify their avarice! Others will spend all they can spare—to gratify their vanity, or their worldly appetites!

It is not easy to determine which of these evils is the greatest. Perhaps of the two, the miser is least accessible to conviction, and consequently the most difficult to be reclaimed. But a desire for extravagance and indulgence, if persisted in, will gradually lead to such compliances with the spirit and maxims of the world, as will certainly weaken, if not wholly suppress—the exercise of vital godliness. In whatever degree the "love of the world" prevails—the "health of the soul" will proportionably decline.

"People who long to be rich, fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows!" 1 Timothy 6:9-10

~ ~ ~ ~ The worst of all trades!

The Christian ministry is the worst of all trades—but the best of all professions.

My grand point in preaching, is to break the hard heart—and to heal the broken one!

~ ~ ~ ~ A signature of wisdom and power

There is a signature of wisdom and power impressed on the 'works of God', which evidently distinguishes them from the feeble imitations of men. Not only the splendor of the sun—but the

glimmering light of the glow-worm, proclaims His glory!

"The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display His marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make Him known!" Psalms 19:1-2

~ ~ ~ ~

Like a sword in a madman’s hands!

Learning, though it is useful when we know how to make a right use of it; yet considered as in our own power, and to those who trust to it without seeking God’s guidance—is usually the source of perplexity, strife, skepticism, and infidelity. It is indeed, like a sword in a madman’s hands, which gives him the more opportunity of hurting himself than others!

~ ~ ~ ~ The Lord’s school

’Experience’ is the Lord’s school.

Those who are taught by Him, usually learn by the mistakes they make—that in themselves they have no wisdom; and by their slips and falls—that they have no strength.

~ ~ ~ ~ The origin of evil?

"Avoid foolish controversies . . . because these are unprofitable and useless!" Titus 3:9

Many have puzzled themselves about the origin of evil. I am content to observe that there is evil, and that there is a way to escape from it; with this I begin and end.

~ ~ ~ ~ My principal method for defeating error and heresy, is, by establishing the truth. One may purpose to fill a bushel with tares; but if I can fill it first with wheat, I may defy his attempts.

~ ~ ~ ~

Let the world have the world! The Lord has provided better things for His children! "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived—what God has prepared for those who love Him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9

~ ~ ~ ~ My chief desire for you

(The following is a letter of John Newton to his 11 year old adopted daughter, who was away at school)

My dear Betsy,

I wish you to be as cheerful as possible. Cheerfulness is no sin, nor is there any grace in a sullen countenance. On the other hand, I would not have you light or giddy with levity; it will hurt your own spirit, and hinder you from the pursuit of what, in your serious moments, you most desire.

One of the best methods of keeping free from uneasy, troublesome thoughts, at least of lessening them—is to be always employed. Strive and pray against indolence, look upon it as a hurtful, yes, a sinful thing.

My chief desire for you, is that you may know and love the Lord. If not, though you were accomplished and admired beyond any of your age, and though you could live in all the splendor of a queen, I would weep over you! I would lament your birth!

When you read our Savior's discourses in Scripture, pay attention as if you saw Him with your own eyes standing before you! Form your ideas of Him from the accounts the evangelists give you—that He was meek and lowly when upon earth, full of compassion and gentleness, ready to pity, to heal, to help, and to teach all who come to Him. "Yes, He is altogether lovely!" Song of Solomon 5:16.

Do not let a day pass without thinking on His sufferings in Gethsemane, and on Mount Golgotha. Surely His love to poor sinners, in bleeding and dying for them, will constrain you to love Him in return. And, if once you love Him—then you will account it your greatest pleasure to please Him. Not to love the Lord Jesus—is the height of wickedness, and the depth of misery! "If anyone does not love the Lord, that person is cursed!" 1 Corinthians 16:22

And when you pray, assure yourself, before you begin, that He is actually in the room with you, and that His ear is open to every word you say! This will make you serious, and it will likewise encourage you, when you consider that you are not speaking into the air, or to one who is a great way off; but to One who is very near you, to your best Friend, who is both able and willing to give you everything that is good for you!

May the Lord bless you. I love you dearly.

Your affectionate father

~ ~ ~ ~

Richard died about two weeks ago

(The following is a letter of John Newton to his 11 year old adopted daughter, who was away at school)

My dear Betsy,

Richard died about two weeks ago, and I buried him and three others within a week. All four were rather young people, that is, about thirty years of age.

Mrs. ___ died recently, and was buried yesterday. I had often visited her during her illness. She was well a few months ago—but a consumption soon brought her down to the grave. But, though she was young, she was not sorry to leave such a poor world as this. I always found her happy and cheerful, though her illness was very painful. She suffered much by cold sweats; but she said, a few days before her death, that it would be worth laying a thousand years in a cold sweat, for one hour's such happiness as she then felt. "Oh," she said, "if this is dying, what a pleasant thing dying is!"

You have told me that you are often terrified at the thoughts of death. Now, if you seek the Lord, as Mrs. ___ did, while you are young—then, whenever you come to die, you will find that death has nothing terrible in it to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. He has disarmed death, and taken away its sting; and He has promised to meet His people and receive them to Himself—when they

are about to leave this world, and everything they loved in it, behind them.

You have the same advantages that Mrs. ___ had. Like her, you are placed under the care of those who wish well to your soul; the Scriptures, which made her wise to salvation, are put into your hand likewise, and you also have the opportunity of hearing the gospel. She was exhorted and encouraged from a child, to pray to the Lord for His saving grace—and so are you. I hope you will do as she did; and the Lord who was gracious to her—will be gracious to you.

Your conscience tells you that you are a sinner—and that makes you afraid. But, when the Lord gives you faith, you will see and understand, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Then you will love Him; and, when you love Him, you will find it easy and pleasant to serve Him! And then you will long to see Him who died for you! And, as it is impossible to see Him in this world—you will be glad that you are not to stay here always; you will be willing to die, that you may be with Him, where He is!

We must know we are sick, before we can prize a physician. If I live to see you a partaker of the grace of God, one of the chief desires of my heart will be gratified! This would please me more than to have your weight in gold! And therefore you may be sure I often pray for you.

Your affectionate father

~ ~ ~ ~ When you see anybody sick, or hurt or lame

(The following is a letter of John Newton to his 11 year old adopted daughter, who was away at school)

My dear Betsy,

I am thankful that the Lord preserves you in health and safety. I hope you are thankful too. When you see anybody sick, or hurt or lame—I would have you think it is of the Lord's goodness, that their case is not yours.

Sin has filled the world with sorrow; all the calamities you read or hear of, or see with your eyes—are the fruits of sin! And, as you are a sinner, you might suffer what others do! It is only the Lord's mercy that preserves you, and provides you good things which many others have not.

You know many children are brought up in poverty, meet with evil treatment, and have no parents or kind friends to take care of them. But, though the Lord removed your parents before you were old enough to miss them—He took care to provide you a home with us; He inclined us not only to receive you—but to love you; and now your needs are all supplied. And, besides this, you have been and are instructed and prayed for every day. You have great reason to be thankful indeed, and I hope you will pray to the Lord to give you a thankful heart—for you cannot have it—unless He gives it to you.

Oh, it is a great blessing to be sensible that we deserve nothing from God but eternal misery—and that all the good we receive is from His wondrous mercy! When you understand this, you will love Him, and then you will be happy indeed. Then it will be your pleasure to please Him, and then, putting your trust in Him, you will be preserved from anxiety and evil.

~ ~ ~ ~ See the bread multiply!

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." 2 Timothy 4:2

Dear friend,

The Word does not flourish here as I ought to wish it; but, through mercy—it is not wholly without effect. I would rather be the pastor of this church, than in any situation the world can afford! Oh, the honor, the blessedness—of being an instrument in His hands—of feeding His gathered sheep and lambs, and bringing wanderers into His fold!

That is a striking and beautiful thought of the apostle, "as poor—yet making many rich." When I feel . . .

my own poverty,

my heart wandering,

my head confused,

my graces languid,

my gifts apparently dormant;

when I thus stand up with half a loaf, or less, before a multitude—and see the bread multiply in the breaking; and that the hungry, the thirsty, the mourners in Zion—are not wholly disappointed; when I find that some, in the depth of their outward afflictions, can rejoice in me, as the messenger by whom the Lord is pleased to send them . . .

a word in season,

balm for their wounds, and

cordials for their cases;

then indeed, my heart rejoices!

"I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 1:4

~ ~ ~ ~

Whatever your papa and mamma have told you

March 3, 1772

Dear Miss,

Your obliging request to hear from me has not been forgotten; and, if my leisure time were equal to my inclination, I would write very often.

It rejoices my heart to think, that at a time of life when you might have been plunging into the vanities of the world—you are seeking Jesus! The Lord, who appointed the hour of your birth, and the bounds of your habitation, was pleased in His good providence to withdraw you early from the giddy circle of vanity in which you might have lived, and to favor you with the advantages of godly example and instruction. You live at a distance from those ensnaring temptations by which the

minds of young people are blinded and stupefied. Yet this alone would not have secured you. His providence has been subservient to His grace; otherwise, by this time, you would have been weary and impatient of restraint; you would have accounted the means of grace burdensome, and your home a prison! The evil of the heart is too deeply rooted to be overcome by anything less than the power of God. Whatever your papa and mamma have told you concerning your state as a lost sinner, and your need of a Savior—you would not have believed them—unless the Lord Himself had borne witness in your heart to His own truths.

You are now seeking Him—yet, if He had not found you first, you would never have sought Him at all. This I mention for your encouragement, as a good reason why you may be assured that you shall not seek Him in vain.

I take it for granted, that, though you are but a young soldier, you have already met with conflicts. There is a subtle enemy who labors to distress, hinder, and wound all who desire to serve the Lord. If you would give up the way of holiness, and be content to make the world your portion—you would meet with no disturbance from him! If you were asleep—he would make no noise to awaken you. Those who are content with his service and wages—he manages with so much skill, that, though he leads them captives at his will, though he dwells and works in their hearts, though all the faculties of the mind and members of their body are under his influence—yet they are not aware of him at all! Yes, when many in this state pretend to dispute his very existence—he does not attempt to undeceive them!

Thus, while the strong one armed keeps his house—his goods are in peace. But, when the Stronger than he, the gracious Redeemer, comes to deliver His prey out of the hand of the mighty, and to release His child from Satan’s captivity—then the foul enemy begins to show himself as he really is! And therefore I suppose by this time you can tell in a measure, from your own experience, why he is called in the Scripture— an accuser, an adversary, a serpent, a roaring lion; and what is meant by his wiles, devices, and fiery darts!

But, if he assaults you in any of these ways, you need not fear him; for he is a conquered and a chained enemy! Jesus has conquered him! He has broken his power, and taken away his dominion, so far as concerns those who flee for refuge to the hope of the gospel. And Jesus holds him fast with an breakable chain, and sets limits to his rage and malice, beyond which he cannot pass! Therefore, fear him not! He who delivered Daniel from the lions—will deliver you, and make you more than a conqueror by faith in His name, and at last bruise Satan under your feet!

Dear miss, may all your desires and all your actions be regulated by His Word, directed to His glory, and animated by a living principle of grace, derived from Him who is the fountain of grace.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes." Ephesians 6:10-11

~ ~ ~ ~ Our best graces and services

"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags!" Isaiah 64:6

Our best graces and services are, and always will be, defective and defiled. The sole exclusive ground of our hope and salvation is Jesus Christ—who is our . . .

wisdom,

righteousness,

sanctification, and

redemption.

I trust only in the freeness and riches of His grace, not withstanding I feel myself polluted and vile. "For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly!" Romans 5:6

~ ~ ~ ~ His most afflictive dispensations

Dear friend,

I hope that you have found your trials so sweetened, and so sanctified, by God's blessing, that you have been enabled to rejoice in them!

Whatever may be the immediate causes of your troubles—they are all under the direction of a gracious hand—and each, in their place, cooperating to a gracious end. Your afflictions all come from God's heart, who loves you better than you love yourself! They are all tokens of His love and favor—and are necessary means of promoting your growth in faith and grace.

You are in the hands of Him who does all things well, and conducts His most afflictive dispensations to those who fear Him, with wisdom and mercy!

The Lord knows what is best for you! When there is an especial need-be for your being in the furnace—He knows how to support you; and at what season, and in what manner, deliverance will best comport with His glory and your good. These are the two great ends which He has in view, and which are inseparably connected together.

He knows our frame, and of what we are made. His pity exceeds that of the most tender parent. And though He causes grief—He will have compassion. Your afflictions which at present are not joyous but grievous, shall, when you have been duly exercised by them—yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. I trust the Lord gives you a measure of patience and submission to His holy will. If so, everything shall be well. And when He has fully tried you—you shall come forth as gold!

The thoughts of what we have deserved at His hands—and what Jesus suffered for our sakes—when applied by His Holy Spirit, have a sovereign efficacy to compose our minds, and enable us to say, "Not my will—but may Yours be done!" How unspeakably better is it to be chastened by the Lord now—than to be left to ourselves for a season, and at last condemned with the world.

The path of affliction is sanctified by the promise of God, and by the consideration of our Lord Jesus, who walked in it Himself, that we might not think it too much to tread in His steps. Yes, it has been a beaten path in all ages; for the innumerable multitudes of the redeemed who are now before the eternal throne, have entered the kingdom by no other way. Let us not then be weary and faint—but cheerfully consent to be the followers of those who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises!

If, after much tribulation, we stand accepted before the Lord in His glory, we shall not then think much of the difficulties we met in our pathway to glory. Then sorrow and sighing shall cease forever—and songs of triumph and everlasting joy shall take their place! Oh, happy transporting moment, when the Lord God Himself shall wipe every tear from our eyes!

Until then, may the prospect of this glory which shall be revealed, cheer and comfort our hearts! Hitherto the Lord has helped us. He has delivered us in six troubles—and we may trust Him in the seventh.

Whatever storms may arise, we have an infallible and almighty Pilot, who will be a Sun and a Shield to those who love Him!

As long as we live, new trials will be needful. It is not that the Lord delights in grieving us and putting us to pain; on the contrary, He rejoices in the prosperity of His servants. No, it is not for His pleasure—but for our profit, that we may be made partakers of His holiness!

Perhaps you may have observed a bird, in a hedge, or upon the boughs of a tree; if you disturb it—it will move a little higher—and thus you may make it change its place three or four times. But if it finds, after a few trials, that you continue to follow it, and will not allow it to rest near you—it takes wing at last, and flies away!

Thus it is with us! When the Lord drives us from one creature-rest, we immediately perch upon another! But He will not allow us to stay long upon any. At length, like the bird, we are sensible that we can have no safety, no stable peace below! Then our hearts take flight and soar heavenwards, and we are taught by His grace to place our treasure and affections out of the reach of earthly vanities. So far as this end is accomplished, we have reason to be thankful and say, happy rod—that brought me nearer to my God!

~ ~ ~ ~ Our friend’s conversion

Our friend’s conversion, if it could be generally known and understood, would be more effectual than many volumes of arguments to confirm what the Scriptures teach concerning the author, the nature, and effects of that great change which must be wrought in the heart of a sinner, before he can see the kingdom of God.

His natural and acquired abilities were great; his moral character, as it is called, unblemished; he was beloved and admired by his friends, and perhaps had no enemies. To see such a man made willing in an instant to give up all his supposed righteousness; to rank himself with the chief of sinners; and to glory only in those self-denying truths which a little before were foolishness to him; and to see him as suddenly possessed of a solid peace, reconciled to the thoughts of death, and rejoicing in a hope and an eternal happiness of which he had not the least idea until then—this is indeed wonderful.

~ ~ ~ ~ Your shoes shall be iron and brass!

"Your shoes shall be iron and brass; and as your days—so shall your strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25

That valuable promise, "Your shoes shall be iron and brass," intimates, that we must not expect a path strewed with flowers, or spread with soft carpets—but rather a rough and thorny path, otherwise such shoes would be unnecessary. But it is sufficient if divine strength is given according to our day, and if the Lord is pleased to be with us.

~ ~ ~ ~ In this point they all agree!

"The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." Romans 8:7

The carnal mind is not only desperately wicked—but deeply deceitful! It deceives others—and often it deceives itself!

The history of all ages and countries uniformly confirms the Scriptural doctrine—that man is a depraved and fallen creature; and that some selfish temper, ambition, avarice, pride, revenge, and the like, are, in effect, the main springs and motives of his conduct; unless so far, and in such instances, as they are corrected and subdued by Divine Grace.

Therefore, when Paul speaks of the most dreadful degree of impiety that can be imagined—enmity against God—he does not consider it as the fault of the particular time in which he lived, or impute it singly either to the idolatrous Heathen or the obstinate Jews—but he affirms universally, that the carnal mind is enmity against God. Men differ considerably in capacity, rank, education, and attainments; they jar in sentiments and interests; they mutually revile, hate, and destroy one another; but in this point they all agree! Whether Greeks or Barbarians, wise or ignorant, slave or free—the bent and disposition of their minds, while unrenewed by grace, is atrocious and implacable enmity against the blessed God!

What can be stronger marks of enmity against God—than to despise His Word, to scorn His favor, to oppose His will, to caress His enemies, and to insult and abuse His servants, and with unwearied malice, persecute our Lord Jesus to the death of the cross?

"So then those who are in the flesh cannot please God!" Romans 8:8

~ ~ ~ ~

I was the worst of them all!

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the worst of them all!" 1 Timothy 1:15

The more sensible we are of the disease—the more we shall admire the great Physician.

Innumerable cases might be published to the honor of the great Physician; none more memorable perhaps than my own. I was laboring under a multitude of grievous evils: fired with raging madness, possessed with many devils, and bent upon my own destruction!

But Jesus interposed—unsought and undesired. He opened my eyes, and pardoned my sins! He broke my fetters, and taught my once blasphemous lips—to praise His name. For the foulest of the foul—He dies!

~ ~ ~ ~ A hot-bed or nursery for wickedness!

When I was in London, the cloud of smoke hanging over the city, to which every house contributes its quota—led me to daydream. I imagined it to be an emblem of that cloud of sin which is continually ascending with a mighty cry into the ears of the Lord Almighty!

Sin overspreads the earth; but in London the number and impunity of offenders, joined with the infidelity and profligacy of the times, make it a kind of a hot-bed or nursery for wickedness! Sin is studied as a science, and there are professors and inventors of evil things in a variety of branches, who thrive on teaching others to sin with delight.

Could we have knowledge of the monstrous enormities and villainies which are committed in a single day in London—it would make us groan and tremble!

Such were a part of my meditations, accompanied with some degree of praise to Him who snatched me out of that state in which I was a monster in iniquity—and brought me to a knowledge of salvation and peace!

~ ~ ~ ~ My advice

Concerning the point on which you asked my advice—continue to look to Jesus, my dear friend, and He will guide you with His eye, give you support for the present, and direction for the future.

If He were upon earth, and you could get near Him—would you not lay your difficulties before Him? You have the same liberty and encouragement to do it now—as if you saw Him with your eyes!

I need not tell you this—you know it! Yet though our judgments are fully convinced that He is as near, as kind, as attentive to our concerns, as ready to hear and as willing to assist as our own hearts can wish—it is not always easy to reduce these sentiments to practice.

If you find, through grace, that you are submissive, and only desirous to know His will, and continue waiting upon Him—then fear not! He will not allow a soul that depends upon Him to take a wrong step in a matter of such importance. The Lord can and will order all things for the good of His children, and especially of those who are desirous to give themselves up, without reserve, to His service, and to cast all their care and concerns on Him by faith and prayer.

~ ~ ~ ~

Simple, poor, afflicted, and unnoticed

My friend whom you met, is a simple-hearted, honest man. I account him a good sample of our flock. Most people in our church are somewhat like him:

not abounding in that wit which the world calls wisdom;

more spiritual than clever,

have more grace than politeness,

and are more desirous to live above the world—than to be wealthy, or be admired by it.

They know the Lord and the truth—but very few of them know much of anything else.

Such are the people whom, for the most part, the Lord chooses and sets apart for Himself—simple, poor, afflicted, and unnoticed in the present world—but rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom of glory!

~ ~ ~ ~ But alas! I am a slow scholar!

I am desirous to learn to apply the great truths of the Gospel, to the common concerns of every day and every hour.

I desire to learn, not only to believe that my soul is safe in the Redeemer's hand—but that the hairs of my head are all numbered! Not only that those events in life which I call important are under His direction—but that those which I account the most trivial are equally so! That I have no more right or power to determine for myself where or how I would spend a single day—than I had to choose the time of my coming into the world or of going out of it! But alas! I am a slow scholar, and make bungling work at my lessons!

Oh, would it not be a blessed thing simply to follow Him, and to set Him by faith always before us! Then we might be freed from anxious cares, and be out of the reach of disappointment! For, if His will is ours—we may be confident that nothing can prevent its taking place.

When I hire a carriage, I give myself up, with the most absolute confidence, to the driver. He knows the way, and how to manage better than I do. Therefore I seldom trouble him either with questions or directions—but I sit at my ease, and read a book.

I wish I could trust the Lord so! But though I have given myself up to the care of His infinite wisdom and love, and, in my judgment, believe they are engaged on my behalf; I am ready to direct my Guide, and to question Him at every turn, and secretly to wish that I had the reins in my own hand! "So stupid and ignorant am I—even as a beast before Him!" Psalms 73:22

~ ~ ~ ~

What a family has He to bear with!

"The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion!" Numbers 14:18

What a family has He to bear with!

Those whom He has graciously saved, have secret idols in their hearts!

His friends hold a secret correspondence with His enemies!

His children repine against Him, and quarrel one with another!

His servants (ministers) serve themselves!

"But You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness!" Psalms 86:1

~ ~ ~ ~ This includes all I can wish for you

"Looking unto Jesus—the author and finisher of our faith!" Hebrews 12:2

My dear friend,

The great secret of the Christian life—is to be always looking unto Jesus! Oh, that I could learn it better!

Oh, that thus by the eye of faith—we might obtain such a sight of the glory, beauty, and love of King Jesus—as might unite our scattered thoughts, and attract all our powers and affections to Himself! But, alas! we are prone (at least I may speak for myself) to forsake the fountain of living waters—and to hew out broken cisterns!

I wish we may learn never think ourselves either safe or happy—but when we are beholding the glory of Christ by the light of faith—in the looking-glass of the Gospel. To view Him as all in all in Himself, and all in all for us—

this is cheering,

this is strengthening,

this makes hard things easy,

this makes bitter things sweet!

This includes all I can wish for you—that you may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

To know Jesus—is the shortest description of true grace.

To know Jesus better—is the surest mark of growth in grace.

To know Jesus perfectly—is eternal life!

This is the prize of our heavenly calling!

The sum and substance of all we can desire or hope for is—to see Jesus as He is, and to be like Him! He will surely bring all who sincerely love Him—to this honor and happiness. We need not think much of the difficulty of any way—which leads to this blessed end!

~ ~ ~ ~ Our gourds must wither one day!

"In this world you will have trouble!" John 16:33

Uncertainty and brevity are written upon all below. Therefore, may we be enabled both to weep and rejoice—as those who know that we shall not be here in this world very long!

We should be thankful for present blessings; but, oh, what greater thankfulness for spiritual blessings—for pardon, peace, and eternal life! Our gourds must wither one day—but our heavenly portion will be ours forever! Jesus, the fountain, will be full—when every creature-stream will be dried up!

His presence with us, is now sufficient to comfort us under all the pains, losses and trials—which we can either feel or fear. Oh, then, let us rejoice in the Lord, and welcome every painful trouble, knowing and believing that all we receive is conveyed to us by infinite love and unerring wisdom!

~ ~ ~ ~

I find the return of my old sins and temptations

Dear friend,

I find the return of my old sins and temptations:

this evil heart of unbelief;

this wicked spirit of SELF;

this stupidity and deadness in the things of God; and

this groveling attachment to the vanities of time and sense.

For these things I groan, being burdened.

But we have heard of One who is able to save to the uttermost; and we find that His compassions never fail. His arm is not shortened, nor is His ear heavy! And, though our many iniquities might justly keep His good things from us—yet still He is gracious!

"The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion!" Numbers 14:18

"But You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness!" Psalms 86:1

~ ~ ~ ~

Let me tell you a heathen story

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it!" Psalms 81:10

He would not say this—if He did not mean it!

Oh, He gives bountifully—like a king!

A little is too much for our deserts.

But much is too little for His bounty!

Let me tell you a heathen story. It is said, that a man once asked King Alexander to give him some money for his daughter's wedding. The king bid him go to his treasurer, and ask whatever he pleased. So he went, and demanded an enormous sum. The treasurer was startled, and said that he could not part with so much without an express order, and went to the king, and told him he thought a small part of the money the man had named, might serve for the occasion. "No!" said the king, "let him have it all. I like that man—he does me honor—he treats me like a king, and proves by what he asks—that he believes me to be both rich and generous!"

Come, my friend, let us go to the throne of grace, and put up such petitions as may show that we have honorable views of the riches and bounty of King Jesus! Alas! I have such poor scanty desires, as if I thought He was altogether such a one as myself. Speak a word for me when you are near Him; entreat Him to increase my love, faith, humility, zeal, and knowledge, a thousand-fold. Ah! I am poor and foolish—and I need a great supply! I cannot dig, and yet am

often unwilling to beg.

~ ~ ~ ~ Shall I say that I am sorry?

"I have refined you in the furnace of suffering!" Isaiah 48:10

My dear friend,

I hear that you still continue very sick. Shall I say that I am sorry? This is allowable—as we have in the sympathizing Savior—the best example and authority to sympathize with suffering friends.

Yet our sorrow should be mixed with joy, for we are directed to rejoice always in the Lord. Always—not only when we are well—but when we are sick! I rejoice, therefore, that you are in safe hands; in the hands of Him whom you love best—and who best loves you! You need not fear that He will lay more upon you than you are able to bear—for He has engaged His faithfulness to the contrary.

I trust this sickness of your body is, and shall be, for the health of your soul. Yes, perhaps even now, if you were able to write, you would tell me that, as your afflictions abound—so your consolations in Christ do much more abound. All the fruit of your affliction, shall be to take away sin! Therefore be of good courage. We count them happy and blessed—whom the Lord chastises. He deals with you as His child. He intends this painful dispensation to revive in you a sense of the uncertainty and vanity of all things here below; to give you a nearer and closer perception of the importance of unseen realities; to afford you the honor of greater conformity to Jesus, who went through the greatest sufferings—to the kingdom!

But how different were His sufferings—from yours! There is no sting in your rod—nor wrath in your cup! Your pains and infirmities do not cause you to sweat blood, nor are you left to cry out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me!"

I pray for your recovery at the Lord's best season—but especially that the rod may be sanctified, and that you may be brought forth from the furnace—refined as gold!

"I will bring this third through the fire and make them pure, just as gold and silver are refined and purified by fire!" Zechariah 13:9

~ ~ ~ ~

You have lately been in the furnace

"I have refined you in the furnace of suffering!" Isaiah 48:10

Dear friend,

The day must come when all creature-comforts shall vanish. And when we view things in the light of eternity—it seems comparatively of small importance whether it is this year—or twenty years hence.

You have lately been in the furnace—and are now brought safely out. I hope you have much to say of the grace, care, and skill of the great Refiner—who watched over you; and that you have lost nothing but your dross.

The Lord has been pleased to put me in the fire; but, blessed be His name—I am not burnt! Oh, that I may be brought out refined, and that the outcome may be to the praise of His grace and power! The Lord drew near in the day of distress, and gave me some degree of peaceful resignation to His will. Yet my evil heart of impatience and unbelief displayed itself, and I have the greatest reason to lie ashamed in the dust, and cry "Unclean, unclean!" But truly God is good; He considers my frame; He remembers that I am but dust. He delights in mercy—and therefore I am not consumed.

Our faithful God will surely make our strength equal to our day! It will not be long before He will wipe away all tears from our eyes. Therefore let us not fear—whatever sufferings may be yet appointed for us—they shall work together for our good! They are but light and momentary, in comparison of that exceeding and eternal weight of glory to which we are drawing nearer every hour!

The day is coming when all the Lord's people who are scattered abroad, who praise Him in different ages and different languages, shall be collected together, and stand with one heart, consent, and voice before the throne! Oh, the glorious assembly! How white are their robes! How resplendent their crowns! How melodious their harps! Every hour the chorus is augmented by the accession of fresh voices! Before long we hope to join them! Then shall we remember the way by which the Lord led us through this dark wilderness world; and shall see that all our afflictions, our heaviest afflictions, were tender mercies—no less than our most pleasing comforts. What we shall then see, it is now our privilege and duty to believe.

"I will bring this third through the fire and make them pure, just as gold and silver are refined and purified by fire!" Zechariah 13:9

~ ~ ~ ~

Sickness is a greater mercy!

Health is a blessing, a great mercy, enabling us to relish the comforts of life, and to be useful in our generation. But sickness is a greater mercy to the children of God; for it is and shall be sanctified . . .

to wean us more from the present world,

to stir up our thoughts and desires heaven-ward,

to quicken us to prayer, and

to give us more opportunity of knowing the sweetness and suitableness of the promises, and the power and wisdom of a promise-performing God!

Troubles have many uses—when the Lord is pleased to work by them for the good of His children. They are necessary, because we would miss the meaning and comfort of a great part of the Bible without them! I hope the Lord blesses you both with a measure of submission to His will and confidence in His love—then, with respect to other things you will say, All is well!

~ ~ ~ ~ That word, uttermost

"Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost, those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them!" Hebrews 7:25

That word, uttermost includes all that can be said. Take an estimate of . . .

all our sins,

all our temptations,

all our difficulties,

all our fears, and

all our backslidings of every kind

—still the word uttermost goes beyond them all. And, since He ever lives to make intercession, since He is the Righteous One who is always heard, since His promise and compassions are unchangeable—He is indeed able and willing and determined—to save us even to the uttermost!

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand!" John 10:2

~ ~ ~ ~

02.02. CHOICE EXCERPTS contd

Oh! who is a God like Him

My dear friend,

Every year, and indeed every day—affords me new proofs of the evil and deceitfulness of my heart, and of my utter insufficiency to think even a good thought by myself! I have had much experience of warfare, on account of the remaining principle of indwelling sin. Without this experience, I would not have known so much of the wisdom, power, grace and compassion of Jesus. I have good reason to commend Him to others—as a faithful Shepherd, an infallible Physician and an unchangeable Friend! I have found Him such. His name is precious! His love is amazing! His compassions are boundless!

I trust I am enabled to choose Him as my all, my Lord, my Strength, my Savior, my Portion! I long for more grace to love Him better; for, alas! I have reason to number myself among the least of saints, and the chief of sinners.

Had He not been with me, and were He not mighty to forgive and deliver—long ago I would have been trodden down like mire in the streets. He has wonderfully preserved me in my outward walk, so that they who have watched for my halting have been disappointed. But He alone knows my innumerable backslidings, and the great perverseness of my heart. It is of His grace and mercy that I am what I am! Having obtained help from Him, I continue to this day!

I am, indeed, a poor servant—but He is a gracious Master! I am sure that He is with me, and is pleased to keep up in my heart, some sense of . . .

the evil of sin,

the beauty of holiness,

my own weakness, and

His glorious all-sufficiency.

Oh! who is a God like Him—who forgives iniquity, and casts the sins of His people into the depths of the sea! I shall not always live at such a poor dying rate. The land to which we are going is far different than this wilderness through which He is now leading us. Then we shall see His face—and never, never sin!

~ ~ ~ ~ The Lord preserves His people

March 1, 1769

Dear madam,

Through grace, I can say, that, as I never saw more of my own vileness—so, I think, I never saw Jesus more precious and desirable; or was more clearly sensible of the vanity of everything without Him, than I have of late. "None but Jesus!" is my motto. All wisdom, righteousness, holiness and happiness, which does not spring from and center in Him—I renounce.

The heart is deceitful,

the world is ensnaring,

the enemy is subtle and powerful.

But we know Him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you!" He is able to keep us from falling, in every circumstance and station to which His providence calls us.

The Lord preserves His people—by putting His fear in their hearts, by making them sensible of their dangers, and drawing them to come boldly to His throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.

Our daily prayer should be, "Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Psalms 119:117

~ ~ ~ ~

I would wish for a thousand hands and eyes, and feet, and tongues!

September 10, 1760

Dear Madam,

The best advice I can send, or the best wish I call for you, is that you may have an abiding and experimental sense of those words of the apostle, "LOOKING UNTO JESUS!" The duty, the privilege, the safety and the unspeakable happiness of a believer, are all comprised in that one sentence!

Let us first pray that the eyes of our understanding may be opened and strengthened; and then let us fix our whole gaze upon Him! But how are we to behold Him? I answer, in the looking-glass of His written Word! There He is represented to us in a variety of views. The wicked world can see no loveliness in the portraiture He has given of Himself; yet, blessed be God, there are those who can "behold His glory as the glory of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth!" And while they behold it, they find themselves, changed into His image," by the transforming influence of His Spirit.

In vain we use our reasonings, and arguments, and resolutions, to beat down our corruptions and to silence our fears. A believing view of Jesus is the only effectual means!

When heavy trials in life are appointed us, and we are called to give up, or perhaps to pluck out a right eye—it is an easy matter for another to say, "Be comforted;" but this is totally useless. Only a believing view of Jesus will sustain us!

When: we can fix our thoughts upon Him, as submitting, for our sakes, to drink our whole bitter cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs; and we consider, that He who thus suffered in our nature, who knows and sympathizes with all our weakness, is now the Supreme Disposer of all that

concerns us, and we further consider, He numbers the very hairs of our heads, appoints every trial we meet with in number, weight, and measure, and will allow nothing to befall us but what shall contribute to our real good—this view, I say, is the sure remedy for every disease, and powerfully reconciles us unto every affliction.

Again, we are afraid of being swallowed up by our many restless enemies; and are weary of our long pilgrimage through such a thorny, tedious, barren wilderness. A sight of Jesus, as Stephen saw Him, crowned with glory, yet noticing all the sufferings of His poor servants, ready to receive them to Himself and make them partakers of His everlasting joy—this will raise the spirits, and restore strength; this will animate us to hold on and to hold out! This will do it—and nothing but this can!

Looking unto Jesus will melt the soul into love and gratitude; and those who greatly love, and are greatly obliged, find obedience to Jesus to be easy. When Jesus is upon our thoughts, then we can ask the Apostle’s question with befitting disdain, "What! Shall I continue in sin—that grace may abound? God forbid! What! Shall I sin against my Lord, my Love, my Friend—who once died for my sins, and now lives and reigns on my behalf; who supports, and leads, and guides, and feeds me every day? God forbid! No! Rather I would wish for a thousand hands and eyes, and feet, and tongues, for ten thousand lives—that I might devote them all to His service!"

"Looking unto Jesus—the author and finisher of our faith!" Hebrews 12:2

~ ~ ~ ~ The best of Christians, and under their highest attainments, have found cause to make the acknowledgment of the Apostle, "When I would do good—evil is present with me!" But, blessed be God, though we must feel hourly cause for shame and humiliation for what we are in ourselves; we have cause to rejoice continually in Christ Jesus, who holds out to our faith: a balm for every wound, a cordial for every discouragement, and a sufficient answer to every objection which sin or Satan can suggest against our peace.

If we are guilty—He is our Righteousness; if we are sick—He is our infallible Physician; if we are weak, helpless, and defenseless—He is the compassionate and faithful Shepherd who has taken charge of us, and will not allow anything to disappoint our hopes of heaven, or to separate us from His love.

He knows our frame, He remembers that we are but dust, and has engaged to: guide us by His counsel, support us by His power, and at length to receive us to His glory—that we may be with Him forever!

~ ~ ~ ~ The history of mankind

July, 1777

Dear sir,

I have recently read "Robertson’s History of Charles V", which, like most other histories, I consider as a commentary upon those passages of Scripture which teach us the depravity of man, the deceitfulness of the heart, the ruinous effects of sin; and the powerful, though secret, rule of Divine Providence, moving, directing, controlling the designs and actions of men, with an unerring hand—to the accomplishment of His own purposes, both of mercy and judgment. Without the clue

and the light which the Word of God affords—the history of mankind, of any, of every age, only presents to view—a labyrinth and a chaos; a detail of wickedness and misery to make us tremble; and a confused jumble of interfering incidents—as destitute of stability, connection, or order—as the clouds which fly over our heads!

But with the Scripture key—all is plain, all is instructive. Then I see truly, that there is a God, who governs the earth, who pours contempt upon princes, captures the wise in their own craftiness, over-rules the wrath and pride of man—to bring His own designs to pass; and restrains all that is not necessary to that end; blasting the best concerted enterprises at one time, by means apparently slight, and altogether unexpected, and at other times producing the most important events from instruments and circumstances which are, at first thought, too feeble and trivial to deserve notice!

~ ~ ~ ~

They will not—and they cannot come!

Where the Gospel is preached, those who perish do willfully resist the Gospel light, choose and cleave to darkness, and stifle the convictions which the truths of God will, in one degree or other, force upon their minds. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the love of other things, the violence of sinful appetites, their prejudices, pride, and self-righteousness either prevent the reception, or choke the growth of the gospel seed. Thus, their own sin and obstinacy is the proper cause of their destruction. "You WILL not come to Me—that you might have life." John 5:40

At the same time, it is true that they cannot come, unless they are supernaturally drawn by God! "No one CAN come to Me—unless the Father who sent Me draws him." John 6:44. They will not and they cannot come! Both are equally true.

The natural man is so blinded by Satan, so alienated from God by nature and wicked works, so given up to sin, so averse from that way of salvation which is contrary to his pride and natural wisdom—that he will not embrace it or seek after it! And therefore he cannot receive it—until the grace of God powerfully enlightens his mind, and overcomes his obstacles.

The unbeliever is insensible of his lost and dreadful condition. He does not know the evil of sin, the strictness of God’s law, the majesty of the God whom he has offended, nor the total apostasy of his heart! He is blind to eternal realities, and ignorant of the excellency of Christ! He thinks that he is whole—and sees not his need of this great Physician! For salvation, he relies upon his own wisdom, power, and supposed righteousness.

Now, in this state of things, when God comes with a purpose of saving mercy—He begins by convincing the person of sin, judgment, and righteousness; causes him to feel and know that he is a lost, condemned, helpless creature; and then reveals to him the necessity, sufficiency, and willingness of Christ to save those who are ready to perish—without money or price—without personal doings or deservings.

~ ~ ~ ~ For the guilty, the helpless, the wretched

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

The heart of man—of any man, every man, however apparently amiable in his outward conduct, however benevolent to his fellow creatures, however abundant and zealous in his religious devotions —is, by nature, enmity against God! Not indeed against the idea which he himself forms of God —but against the character which God has revealed of Himself in the Scripture!

Man is an enemy to the justice, sovereignty, and law of God.

He is an enemy to the one method of salvation,

which God has appointed in the Gospel, which is by grace alone.

All that is godly or gracious in a person

—is the effect of a new creation, a supernatural principle,

wrought in the heart by the Gospel of Christ, and the agency of His Spirit!

Until that is effected, the highest attainments, the finest qualifications in man, however they may exalt him in his own eyes, or recommend him to the notice of his fellow-worms, are but abominations in the sight of God!

The Gospel is calculated and designed—to stain the pride of human glory.

It is not provided for the wise and the self-righteous, for those who

think they have good hearts and good works to plead

—but for the guilty, the helpless, the wretched, for those who are ready to perish!

It fills the hungry with good things—but it sends the rich away empty!

~ ~ ~ ~ The heavenly gardener

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

The soil of human nature, though many spots are certainly better weeded, planted, and fertilized than others—is everywhere the same—universally bad! The human heart is so bad, that it cannot be worse—and of itself is only capable of producing noxious weeds, and nourishing venomous creatures!

We know that culture, skill, and expense will make a garden—where all was desert before. When Jesus, the heavenly gardener, encloses a soil, and separates it from the wasteland of the world, to make it a residence for Himself—a change presently takes place; it is planted and watered from above, and visited with beams infinitely more nourishing and fertilizing than those of the material sun.

But its natural propensity to bring forth weeds still continues, and one half of God’s dealings with us, may be compared to a company of weeders, whom He sends forth into His garden—to pluck up all which He has not planted with His own hand; and which, if left to grow, would quickly overpower and over top the rest!

But, alas! the ground is so impregnated with evil seeds, and they shoot in such quick succession, that if this weeding work were not constantly repeated, all former labor would be lost! Hence arises the necessity of daily crosses and disappointments, and such multiplied convictions that we are nothing, and can do nothing, of ourselves! All these trials are needful, and barely sufficient, to prevent our hearts from being overrun with pride, lust, worldliness and self-dependence.

And as we have chosen Him for our Physician—let us commit ourselves to His management, and not prescribe to Him what He shall prescribe for us. He knows us and He loves us better than we do ourselves—and will do all things well.

~ ~ ~ ~

What a Christian ought to be

The life of faith seems so simple and easy in theory, that I can point it out to others in few words. But in practice it is very difficult; and my advances are so slow, that I hardly dare say I get forward at all. It is a great thing indeed to have the spirit of a little child, so as to be habitually afraid of taking a single step without God's leading.

I have some idea of what a Christian ought to be; and it is, I hope, what I desire to be.

A Christian should be conformable to Christ in his spirit and in his practice. That is, he should be spiritually minded, dead to the world, and filled with zeal—for the glory of God, the spread of the Gospel, and the good of souls. He should be humble, patient, meek, cheerful, and thankful under all events and changes. He should account it the business and honor of his life—to imitate Him who pleased not Himself but went about doing good.

The whole deportment of a Christian should show that the saving knowledge of Jesus affords him all he could expect from it— a balm for every grief, an amends for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for everything which he is called to do or suffer, and a principle sufficient to constitute the actions of every day, even in common life—as acts of piety.

A Christian should make every event through which he passes, subservient and subordinate to his main design—the glory of Christ.

~ ~ ~ ~ Our losses

We often complain of our losses; but the expression is rather improper. Strictly speaking, we can lose nothing, because we have no real property in anything. Our earthly comforts are all lent to us by our good and gracious God; and when recalled, we ought to return and resign them with thankfulness—to Him who has let them remain so long in our hands!

~ ~ ~ ~

I shall not always live this poor dying life!

May, 1774.

My dear Madam,

Death and illness are still walking about the town. The sudden death of our friend is a heavy blow. He was an amiable, judicious, candid man, and an excellent preacher in a great sphere of usefulness; and his age and constitution gave hopes that he might have been eminently serviceable for many years. How often does the Lord write vanity upon all our expectations from men! O for grace to take warning by the sufferings of others—to set loose to the world, and so number our days as to incline our hearts to the one thing needful. Indeed that one thing includes many things, sufficient to engage the best of our thoughts and the most of our time—if we were duly sensible of their importance.

But I may adopt the Psalmist's expression, "My soul cleaves to the dust!" How is it that the truths of which I have the most undoubted conviction, and which are, of all others, the most weighty—should make so little impression upon me? O I know the cause! It is deeply rooted. An evil nature cleaves to me; so that when I would do good—evil is present with me.

It is, however, a mercy to be made sensible of it, and in any measure humbled for it. Before long, this evil nature will be dropped into the grave—then all hindrances shall cease! This thought gives relief—I shall not always live this poor dying life! When I shall see the Redeemer as He is—I shall be like Him! This will be a heaven indeed—to behold His glory without a veil, to rejoice in His love without a cloud, and to sing His praises without one jarring or wandering note, forever!

In the mean time, may He enable us to serve Him with our best. O that every power, faculty, and talent, were devoted to Him! He deserves all we have—and ten thousand times more if we had it; for He has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood! In one sense we are well suited to answer His purpose; for if we were not vile and worthless beyond expression, the exceeding riches of His grace would not have been so gloriously displayed. His glory shines more in redeeming one sinner—than in preserving a thousand angels!

And now, dear madam, farewell. If the Lord spares our lives, I hope we shall see each other again upon earth. But above all, let us rejoice in the blessed Gospel, by which immortality is brought to light, and a glorious prospect opened beyond the grave! There at least, after all the changes and trials of this earthly state, we shall meet to part no more!

~ ~ ~ ~

I set no value upon any doctrinal truth

We learn more, and more effectually—by one minute's communion with God through the medium of His Word—than we could from an assembly of theologians, or a library of books!

I set no value upon any doctrinal truth, farther than it has a tendency to promote practical holiness.

"If anyone teaches other doctrine and does not agree with the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching that promotes godliness, he is conceited, understanding nothing, but having a sick interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slanders, evil suspicions, and constant disagreement among men whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth." 1 Timothy 6:3-5

~ ~ ~ ~ The lesson Paul learned

"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak—then I am strong!" 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

August 19, 1775.

Dear friend,

Do not be afraid—even when you feel your own weakness and insufficiency most sensibly. We are never more safe, and never have more reason to expect the Lord's help—than when we are most sensible that we can do nothing without Him. This was the lesson Paul learned—to rejoice in his own poverty and emptiness, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Could Paul have done anything, Jesus would not have had the honor of doing all.

This way of being saved entirely by grace, from first to last—is contrary to our natural pride. It mortifies SELF, leaving it nothing to boast of. When we think ourselves so utterly helpless and worthless, we are too ready to fear that the Lord will therefore reject us. Whereas, in truth, such a poverty of spirit is the best mark we can have of a saving interest in His promises and care.

~ ~ ~ ~

Learned by painful experience!

January 16, 1775.

Dear friend,

I can sympathize with you in your troubles—yet, knowing the nature of our salvation, that, by an unalterable appointment, the way to the kingdom lies through many tribulations; I ought to rejoice, rather than sympathize, that to you it is given, not only to believe—but also to suffer!

If you escaped these hard things, whereof all the Lord's children are partakers, might not you question your adoption into His family? How could the power of grace be manifest, either to you, in you, or by you—without afflictions? How could the corruptions and devastations of the heart be checked, without a cross? How could you acquire a tenderness and skill in speaking to those who are weary, without a taste of such trials as they also meet with? You would only be a hearsay witness to the truth, power, and sweetness of the precious promises, unless you have been in such a situation as to need them, and to find their suitableness and sufficiency.

The Lord has given you a good desire to serve Him in the Gospel, and He is now training you for that service. Many things, yes, the most important things, belonging to the Gospel ministry, are not to be learned by books and study—but by painful experience! You must expect a variety of difficult trials—but two things He has promised you—

that you shall not be tried above what He will enable you to bear,

and that all things shall work together for your spiritual good!

Were we to acquire no other knowledge of the Christian warfare, than what we could derive from cool and undisturbed book study, instead of coming forth as able ministers of the New Testament,

and competently acquainted with the devices, the deep-laid devices and stratagems of Satan—we would prove to be worthless. But the Lord will take better care of those whom He loves and designs to honor. He will try, and permit them to be tried, in various ways. He will make them feel much affliction in themselves, that they may know how to feel much for others.

This painful discipline is necessary to enable us to take the field in a public capacity with courage, wisdom, and success, that we may lead and animate others in the fight! It is equally necessary for our own sakes, that we may obtain and preserve the grace of humility, which He has taught you to set a high value upon. Indeed, we cannot value it too highly; for we can be neither comfortable, safe, nor habitually useful, without sincere humility! The root of pride lies deep in our fallen nature, and, where the Lord has given great abilities—pride would grow apace, if He did not mercifully watch over us, and suit His dealings with us, to keep it down.

Therefore I trust He will make you willing to endure hardships, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. May He enable you to behold Him with faith holding out the prize, and saying to you, "Fear none of those things that you shall suffer! Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life!"

We sail upon a turbulent and tumultuous sea—but we are embarked on a good vessel, and in a good cause. We have an infallible and almighty Pilot, who has the winds and weather at His command, and can silence the storm into a calm with a word, whenever He pleases. We may be persecuted—but we shall not be forsaken; we may be cast down—but we cannot be destroyed. Many will molest us that we may fall—but the Lord will uphold us!

I am sorry to find that you are quite alone. Yet, you are not alone; for the Lord is with you, the best Counselor and the best Friend!

There is a strange backwardness in us (at least in me) to fully improve that gracious intimacy to which He invites us. Alas! that we so easily wander from the fountain of life—to hew out broken cisterns for ourselves; and that we seem more attached to a few drops of His grace in our fellow-creatures, than to the fullness of grace that is in Himself! I think nothing gives me a more striking sense of my depravity, than my perverseness and folly in this respect. Yet He bears with me, and does me good continually.

~ ~ ~ ~ Your dear friend’s death

I sympathize with you in your sorrow for your dear friend’s death. Such things are very distressing! But such a case might have been our own. Let us pray for grace to be thankful for ourselves, and submit everything in humble silence to the sovereign Lord—who has a right to do as He pleases with His own.

We feel and grieve for any deaths in our own little circles; but O, the dreadful mischief of sin! Human death is as frequent as the hours, the minutes, perhaps the moments of every day. And though we may be impacted by but one death in a million—the souls of all others have an equal capacity for endless happiness or misery!

In this situation, the Lord has honored us with a call to warn our fellow-sinners of their danger, and to set before them His free and sure salvation! And if He is pleased to make us instrumental of snatching but one as a brand out of the fire—it is a service of more importance than to be the means of preserving a whole nation from temporal ruin!

~ ~ ~ ~

It is better to feed our people like chickens!

(Letter of John Newton to a minister)

It has been reported to me—that the length of your sermons is frequently two hours, and the vehemence of your voice so great—that you may be heard far beyond the church-walls.

I would be unwilling to dampen your zeal—but I feel unwilling likewise, that by excessive, unnecessary exertions, that you should wear away very soon, and preclude your own usefulness!

I know that the spirits of some high-strung people are highly volatile. I consider you as mounted upon a fiery steed, and provided you use due management and circumspection, you travel more pleasantly than we plodding folks upon our sober, stolid horses. But then, if instead of pulling the rein—you plunge in the spurs, and add wings to the wind—I cannot but be in pain for the consequences. Permit me to remind you of an old adage—the end of speaking is to be heard; and if the person farthest from the preacher can hear, he speaks loud enough.

Upon some occasions, a few sentences of a discourse may be enforced with a voice still more elevated—but to be uncommonly loud from beginning to end—is hurtful to the speaker, and in no way useful to the hearer! It is a fault which many inadvertently give into at first, and which many have repented of too late—when the harmful practice has rendered it habitual, and not easily corrected. I know some think that preaching very loudly—and preaching with power—are synonymous expressions. But your judgment is too good to fall in with that false sentiment.

There is a quotation from Homer, where he describes the eloquence of Nestor, and compares it, not to a thunderstorm or hurricane—but to a fall of snow, which, though pressing, insinuating, and penetrating—is soft and gentle. I think the simile is beautiful and expressive.

Secondly, as to long preaching. There is an old-fashioned instrument called an hour-glass, which in days of yore, before clocks and watches abounded, used to be the measure of many a good sermon, and I think it a tolerable stint. I cannot wind up my ends to my own satisfaction in a much shorter time than an hour—nor am I pleased with myself if I greatly exceed an hour.

If an angel was to preach for two hours—unless his hearers were angels likewise—the greater part of them wish that he had preached for a much shorter time! It is a shame it should be so—but so it is! Partly through the weakness and partly through the wickedness of the flesh—we can seldom stretch our attention to spiritual things for two hours—without cracking it, and hurting its spring! When weariness begins—edification ends! It is better to feed our people like chickens—a little and often; than to cram them like turkeys, until they cannot hold one more mouthful!

Besides, overlong sermons break in upon family concerns, and often call off the thoughts from the sermon—to the pudding at home, which is in danger of being over-boiled! Long sermons leave likewise but little time for secret or family devotions, which are entitled to a share of each Sunday.

Upon the preacher long sermons must have a bad effect, and tend to wear him down before his time. I have known some, by over preaching at first, have been constrained to sit still and do little or nothing for months or years afterwards. I recommend you to this wise advice: Set out at such a

pace—that you may hold out to your journey's end.

Now, if Fame with her hundred mouths has brought me a false report of you, and you are not guilty of preaching either too long or too loud, still I am not willing my remonstrance may go for nothing. I desire you to accept it, and thank me for it as a proof of my love to you, and likewise of the sincerity of my friendship; for if I had wished to flatter you—I could easily have written on another subject.

~ ~ ~ ~ The spiritual conflict

July, 1764

My dear Madam,

The spiritual conflict which you express, is inseparable from a spiritual acquaintance with our own hearts. I would not wish you to be less affected with a sense of indwelling sin. It befits us to be humbled into the dust—yet our grief, though it cannot be too great, may be under a wrong direction; and if it leads us to impatience or distrust, it certainly is so.

Sin is the sickness of the soul, in itself mortal and incurable as to any power in heaven or earth—but that of the Lord Jesus only. But He is the great, the infallible, Physician. Have we the privilege to know His salvation? Have we been enabled to put ourselves into His hand? Then we have then no more to do but to attend His prescriptions, to be satisfied with His methods, and to wait His time.

It is lawful to wish we were well; it is natural to groan, being burdened—but still He must and will take His own course with us; and, however dissatisfied with ourselves, we ought still to be thankful that He has begun His work in us, and to believe that He will complete it. Therefore while we mourn—we should likewise rejoice! We should encourage ourselves to expect all that He has promised; and we should limit our expectations by His promises.

We are sure, that when the Lord delivers us from the guilt and dominion of sin, He could with equal ease free us entirely from sin—if He pleased. But He has appointed that sanctification should be effected, and sin mortified, not at once completely—but little by little; and doubtless He has wise reasons for it. Therefore, though we are to desire a growth in grace, we should, at the same time, acquiesce in His appointment, and not be discouraged or despond, because we feel that conflict which His Word informs us will only terminate with our lives.

Your heart is not worse than it was formerly—only your spiritual knowledge is increased. And this is no small part of the growth in grace, which you are thirsting after—to be truly humbled, and emptied, and made little in your own eyes.

Further, the examples of the saints recorded in Scripture (and indeed of the saints in general), prove that the greater measure any person has of the grace of God, the more conscientious and lively they have been, and the more they have been favored with assurances of the Divine favor—so much the more deep and sensible, is their perception of indwelling sin and infirmity! So it was with Job, Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul.

It is likewise common to overcharge ourselves. Indeed we cannot think ourselves worse than we really are! Yet some things which abate the comfort and alacrity of our Christian profession, are rather natural impediments than properly sinful—and will not be imputed to us by Him who knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust.

Thus, to have an infirm memory; or to be subject to disordered, irregular, or depressed spirits—are faults of the constitution, in which the heart and will has no share; though they are all oppressive, and sometimes needlessly so, by our charging ourselves with guilt on their account. The same may be observed of the unspeakable and fierce temptations of Satan, with which some people are pestered—but which shall be laid to him from whom they proceed, and not to them who are troubled and terrified because they are forced to feel them.

Lastly, it is by the experience of these evils within ourselves, and by feeling our utter insufficiency, either to perform duty or to withstand our enemies—that the Lord takes occasion to show us the suitableness, the sufficiency, the freeness, the unchangeableness of His power and grace!

Let us then, dear madam, be thankful and cheerful! And while we take shame to ourselves—let us glorify God, by giving Jesus the honor due to His name!

Though we are poor—He is rich.

Though we are weak—He is strong.

Though we have nothing—He possesses all things.

He suffered for us. He calls us to be conformed to Him in sufferings. He conquered in His own person, and He will make each of His members more than conquerors in due season.

It is good to have one eye upon ourselves—but the other should always be fixed on Him who is our Savior, Husband, Sustainer and Shepherd! In Him—we have righteousness, peace, and power. He can control all that we fear; so that if our path should be through the fire or through the water, neither the flood shall drown us, nor the flame kindle upon us! Before long He will cut short our conflicts, and say, 'Come up higher!' Then shall our grateful songs abound—and every fear be wiped away! Having such promises and assurances, let us lift up our banner in His name, and press on through every discouragement!

~ ~ ~ ~

Some of the last notes of this 'swan'

July, 1764

My dear Madam,

In a letter I received from Mrs. **** yesterday, she writes thus:

"I am at present very ill with some disorder in my throat, which seems to threaten my life. But death or life, things present or things to come—all things are mine, and I am Christ's! O glorious privilege! precious foundation of soul-rest and peace, when all things concerning us are most troublous! Soon we shall be at home with Christ, where sin, sorrow, and death have no place! In the mean time, our Beloved will lead us through the wilderness. How safe, how joyous we are—in

the most dire case!"

If these should be some of the last notes of this 'swan', I think them worth preserving. May the Lord grant that you and I, madam, may be happy in the same assurance, when we shall have death and eternity near in view!

~ ~ ~ ~

He will not spoil them!

1769.

Dear friend,

I heard of your being laid on the bed of affliction, and of the Lord's goodness to you there, and of His raising you up again. Blessed be His name! He is all-sufficient and faithful; and though He causes grief, He is sure to show compassion in supporting and delivering.

Ah! the evil of our nature is deeply rooted and very powerful—or such repeated, continual corrections and chastisements would not be necessary! And were they not necessary, we would not have them. But such we are—and therefore such must be our treatment. For though the Lord loves us with a tenderness beyond what the mother feels for her nursing child—yet it is a tenderness directed by Infinite Wisdom, and very different from that weak indulgence which in parents we call fondness, which leads them to comply with their children's desires and inclinations, rather than to act with a steady view to their true welfare.

The Lord loves His children, and is very indulgent to them so far as they can safely bear it—but He will not spoil them! Their sin-sickness requires strong medicines, some of which are very unpalatable. But when the case calls for such, no short-sighted entreaties of ours can excuse us from taking what He prepares for our good. But every dose is prepared by His own hand, and not one is administered in vain, nor is it repeated any oftener than is absolutely needful to answer His purposed end. Until then, no other hand can remove what He lays upon us. But when His merciful design is answered, He will relieve us Himself; and in the mean time He will so moderate the operation, or increase our ability to bear up—that we shall not be overpowered.

It is true, without a single exception, that all His paths are mercy and truth, to those who fear Him. His love is the same, when He wounds—as when He heals; when He takes away—as when He gives. We have reason to thank Him for all—but most for His loving corrections and chastisements.

~ ~ ~ ~

Though we are all dunces!

"He began to teach them many things." Mark 6:34

Though we are poor, slow scholars—the great Teacher to whom we have been encouraged and enabled to apply, can and will effectually teach us! He communicates not only instructions—but capacities and abilities. There is none like Him! He can make . . .

the blind to see,

the deaf to hear, and

the dumb to speak!

How great is His condescension and patience! How does He accommodate Himself to our weakness—and teach us as we are able to bear! Though we are all dunces when He first receives us, not one was ever turned out as incapable—for He makes us what He would us to be! "The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." John 14:26

~ ~ ~ ~ A sad story in a newspaper

1772.

Dear friend,

I can assure you of my sincere sympathy with you in your trials. I can in some measure guess at what you feel, from what I have seen and felt myself in cases where I have been similarly concerned. But my compassion, though sincere, is ineffectual. Though I can pity—I cannot relieve. All I can do is, as the Lord enables me, to remember you before His throne of grace.

But there is One whose compassion is infinite! The love and tenderness of ten thousand earthly friends, of ten thousand mothers towards their nursing infants, if compared with His—are less than a drop of water, compared to the ocean!

And His power is infinite too. Why then do our sufferings continue, when He is so compassionate, and could remove them with a word? Surely, if we cannot give the particular reasons (which yet He will acquaint us with hereafter, John 13:7), the general reason is at hand. He does not afflict us needlessly—but for our profit; to make us partakers of His holiness, and because He loves us!

I wish you much comfort from David’s thought, Psalms 142:3, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me—You knew my path." The Lord is not withdrawn to a distant universe—but His eye is upon you! He does not see you with the indifference of a mere spectator—but He observes with loving attention—He knows, He considers your path. Yes, He appoints it—and every circumstance about it is under His direction! Your trouble began at the hour which He saw best—it could not come before! He has marked the degree of it, to a hair’s breadth; and the duration to the minute! He knows likewise how your spirit is affected; and such supplies of grace and strength, and in such seasons as He sees needful—He will afford. Therefore, hope in God, for you shall yet praise Him!

I do not need to remind you—that Jesus has suffered unspeakably more for you! He drank for your sake—a cup of unmixed wrath! And He only puts into your hand—a cup of affliction mixed with many mercies! What are all of our sufferings—compared to His? And yet He endured them freely. He needed not to have borne them—for He might have left us to perish! But such was His love—that He died that we might live; and endured the fiercest agonies that He might open to us the gate of everlasting peace and happiness!

Remember that we are chastened less than our iniquities have deserved. If our illness is so grievous and so hard to bear—what do we owe to Him who delivered us from that place of

unutterable torment, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth forever—without hope or respite!

How amazingly perverse is my heart—that I can be more affected with a sad story in a newspaper concerning people I never saw—than with all that I read of His bitter passion in the garden and on the cross—though I profess to believe that He endured it all for me!

Oh, if we could always behold Him by faith—as evidently crucified before our eyes—how would it compose our spirits as to all the sweets and bitters of this poor life! What an armor would it prove against all the snares and temptations whereby Satan would draw us into evil! I long for more love to Jesus—that I may be preserved humble, thankful, watchful, and dependent upon Him. To behold the glory and the love of Jesus—is the only effectual way to be changed into His image!

To stand at the foot of the Cross, with a softened heart and melting eyes; to forget our sins, sorrows, and burdens, while we are wholly swallowed up in the contemplation of Him who bore our sins in His own body upon the cruel tree—is certainly the most desirable situation on this side the grave!

~ ~ ~ ~

O these clogs, fetters, valleys, and mountains

I should be more affected than I am, with . . .

the coolness of my love,

the faintness of my zeal,

the vanity of my heart, and

my undue attachment to the things of time.

O these clogs, fetters, valleys, and mountains, which . . .

obstruct my course,

darken my views,

slacken my pace, and

disable me in service!

Well it is for me, that I am not under the law—but under grace.

~ ~ ~ ~ The instructions and writings of spiritual men

Remember your exalted privilege—you have the Bible in your hands, and are not bound to follow books or preachers any farther than what they teach agrees with the Oracles of Truth. We have great reason to be thankful for the instructions and writings of spiritual men—but they are all fallible—even as ourselves. One is our master, even Christ—what He says, we are to receive implicitly—but we do not owe implicit subjection to the best of our fellow-creatures. The Bereans were commended because they would not implicitly believe even the Apostle Paul—but searched the Scriptures to see whether the things which he taught were true. May the Lord give us a spirit of

humility and discernment in all things.

~ ~ ~ ~ Shall I tell you a bit of a riddle?

August, 1772

My dear Miss,

Shall I tell you a bit of a riddle? That, notwithstanding the many spiritual fluctuations which I pass through—I am always the same! This is the very truth: "In me, that is, in my flesh—dwells no good thing!"

So that if sometimes my spirit is in a measure humble, lively and holy—it is not that I have grown better than I was—but the Lord is pleased to put forth His gracious power in my weakness!

And when my heart is dry and stupid, when I can find no pleasure in waiting upon God—it is not because I am worse than I was before—but only because the Lord sees it best that I should feel—what a poor creature I am.

My heart was once like a dungeon, beyond the reach of the sun, and always dark. Yet the Lord by His grace has been pleased to make this dungeon into a room, by putting windows in it. But I need not tell you, that though windows will transmit the light into a room, they cannot supply the lack of light. When the day is gone—the windows are of little use. When the day returns, the room is enlightened by them again. Thus, unless the Lord shines, I cannot retain today—the light I had yesterday! And though His presence makes a delightful difference, I have no more to boast of in myself at one time than another. When He is with me—all goes on pleasantly. When He withdraws—I find I can do nothing without Him.

I need not wonder that I find it so; for it must be so of course, if I am what I confess myself to be—a poor, helpless, sinful creature in myself. Nor need I be over-much discouraged, since the Lord has promised to help those who can do nothing without Him—and not those who can make a tolerable shift to help themselves.

In His great mercy, He does not so totally withdraw, as to leave me without any power or will to cry for His return. I hope He maintains in me at all times—a desire for His presence. Yet it befits me to wait for Him with patience, and to live upon His faithfulness, when I can feel nothing but evil in myself.

~ ~ ~ ~

O the happiness of such a life!

We may indeed admire God’s patience towards us.

If we were blind, and reduced to need a person to lead us—and yet would dispute with him, and direct him at every step—we would probably soon weary him, and provoke him to leave us to find the way by ourselves!

But our gracious Lord is long-suffering and full of compassion. He bears with our frowardness—yet He will take methods both to shame and to humble us, and to bring us to a confession that He is wiser than we. The great and unexpected benefit He intends for us, by all the discipline we meet

with—is to tread down our wills, and bring them into subjection to His. So far as we attain to this, we are out of the reach of disappointment. For when the will of God can please us—we shall be pleased every day, and from morning to night—with respect to His dealings with us. O the happiness of such a life! I have an idea of it; I hope I am aiming at it—but surely I have not attained it.

SELF is active in my heart, though it does not absolutely reign there. I profess to believe that one thing is needful and sufficient—and yet my thoughts are prone to wander after a hundred more. If it is true, that the light of His countenance is better than life—why am I solicitous about anything else? If He is all-sufficient, and gives me liberty to call Him mine—why do I go a begging to creatures for help? If He is about my path and bed; if the smallest, as well as the greatest, events in which I am concerned are under His immediate direction; if the very hairs of my head are numbered—then my care (any farther than a care to walk in the paths of His precepts, and to follow the openings of His providence) must be . . .

useless and needless,

yes indeed sinful and heathenish,

burdensome to myself, and

dishonorable to my profession!

Let us cast down the load we are unable to carry; and if the Lord is our Shepherd, refer all, and trust all to Him! Let us endeavor to live to Him and for Him today, and be glad that tomorrow, with all that is behind it, is in His hands

~ ~ ~ ~

Last week we had a lion in town

July 7, 1778

My dear friend,

Last week we had a lion in town. I went to see him. He was astonishingly tame; as friendly with his keeper, and as docile and obedient as a pet dog. Yet the man told me he had his surly fits, when they dared not go near him.

No looking-glass could show my face more justly—than this lion shows my heart. I could trace every feature—as wild and fierce by nature; yes, much more so—but grace has in some measure tamed me. I know and love my Keeper, and sometimes watch His looks that I may learn His will. But, oh! I have my surly fits too! Seasons when I relapse into the savage again, as though I had forgotten all.

~ ~ ~ ~ Our sea may sometimes be stormy!

November 27, 1778.

My dear friend,

I heartily sympathize with you in your illnesses—but I see you are in safe hands! The Lord loves you—and He will take care of you. He who raises the dead—can revive your spirits when you are cast down. He who sets bounds to the sea, and says "Hitherto shall you come, and no further," can limit and moderate those illnesses which sometimes distress you. He knows why He permits you to be thus exercised. I cannot assign the reasons—but I am sure they are worthy of His wisdom and love, and that you will hereafter see and say, "He has done all things well!"

I do not like to puzzle myself with second causes, while the first cause is at hand, which sufficiently accounts for every phenomenon in a believer's experience. Your constitution, your situation, your temper, your distemper, all that is either comfortable or painful in your lot—is of His appointment! The hairs of your head are all numbered. The same power which produced the planet Jupiter—is necessary to the production of a single hair! Nor can one of your hairs fall to the ground without His notice—any more than the stars can fall from their orbits! In providence, no less than in creation—He is the absolute Sovereign and Ruler.

Healing and wounding are equally from His hand—and are equally tokens of His love and care over us! "The Lord gives—and the Lord takes away. Praise the name of the Lord!" Job 1:21

Therefore, fear not—only believe. Our sea may sometimes be stormy—but we have an infallible Pilot, and shall infallibly gain our port! The way must be right, however rough, that leads to such a glorious end!

~ ~ ~ ~ A sealed book in all languages

"My soul cleaves to the dust! Quicken me according to Your Word!" Psalms 119:25

The Scripture itself, whether I read it in Hebrew, Greek or English—is a sealed book in all languages—unless the Spirit of the Lord is present to expound and apply it to my heart!

O for more of His gracious influence, which in a moment can make my wilderness-soul rejoice and blossom like the rose!

~ ~ ~ ~

Prison cells

My dear friend,

I hope and trust, that you find the Lord's presence with you in your new home; otherwise you would think it a dungeon! There is the same difference among people now, as there was between the Egyptians and Israel of old. Multitudes are buried alive under a cloud of thick darkness—but all the Lord's people have light in their dwellings. Ah! how many great and fair houses are there, without the heavenly inhabitant! It might be written upon their doors, 'God is not here!' And, when you go in, you may be sure of it, for there is neither peace nor truth within the walls.

This thought has often struck me, when I have been to see some fine houses, as they are called. When the Lord is not known and acknowledged, the rooms are but prison cells, in which the poor criminals eat and sleep a little while—until the sentence under which they lie condemned, shall be executed upon them.

On the other hand, the houses of believers, though most of them are poor cottages—are truly palaces; for it is the presence of the King that makes the court! There the Lord reigns upon a throne of grace, and there a royal guard of angels take their stand to watch over and minister to the heirs of salvation.

After all, the best houses upon earth—are but inns, where we are accommodated a little time, while we are doing our Master's business.

Your real dwelling, your real home, is in heaven; here on earth, you are but a sojourner. But, to express it in a more honorable manner—you are an ambassador, entrusted with affairs of great importance, to manage for the King, your Master!

~ ~ ~ ~

Gazing-stocks and laughing-stocks

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2

We are not to stoop to a conformity to the vain world among whom we live. We are . . .

neither to imitate their customs,

nor regard their maxims,

nor speak their language,

nor desire their honors or their favors,

nor fear their frowns!

If they account us as gazing-stocks and laughing-stocks because of our singularity; if they reproach, revile, and despise us—we may pity them! For a day is coming when they shall be ashamed, when we shall stand forth with boldness and shine like the sun in our Father's kingdom!

The Lord whom we serve has engaged to maintain and protect us, and has given us His instructions to which it is both our duty and our honor to conform.

~ ~ ~ ~

I prefer a state of ignorance!

I have little idea as to the state of things in the world—for I seldom see a newspaper for two weeks together. And when I do, I meet with so little to encourage me, that I prefer a state of ignorance, which gives me more scope for hoping for the best.

~ ~ ~ ~

We are upon enchanted ground

"God is exalted in His power. Who is a teacher like Him?" Job 36:22

God has given us His infallible Word, and promised us His infallible Spirit—to guide us into all necessary truth!

In the study of His infallible Word, and in dependence upon His infallible Spirit, none can miss the way of peace and salvation, who are sincerely desirous to find it. But we are cautioned to keep our eye upon both; and the caution is necessary, for we are too prone to separate what God has joined together.

What strange mistakes have been made by some who have thought themselves able to interpret Scripture by their own abilities, because they have studied with much diligence! Unless our dependence upon divine teaching bears some proportion to our diligence—we may take much pains to little purpose!

On the other hand, we are directed to expect the teaching and assistance of the Holy Spirit only within the limits, and by the medium of the written Word. For He has not promised to reveal new truths—but to enable us to understand what we read in the Bible—and if we venture beyond the pale of Scripture, we are upon enchanted ground, and exposed to all the illusions of our imagination!

Only an attention to the Word of God, joined to humble supplications for the guidance of the Spirit—will lead us to new advances in true knowledge.

~ ~ ~ ~

All may be reduced to these heads

Indeed, the great points of our eternal concerns, may be summed up in a few words:

to have a real conviction of our sin and unworthiness;

to know that Jesus is the all-sufficient Savior, and that there is no other;

to set Him before us as our Shepherd, Advocate and Master;

to place our hope upon Him alone;

to live to Him—who lived and died for us;

to wait in His appointed means for the consolations of His Spirit;

to walk in His steps—and copy His character;

to be daily longing for the end of our warfare—that we may see Him as He is.

All may be reduced to these heads. But, though the lessons are brief, it is a great thing to attain any good measure of proficiency in them. Yes, the more we advance—the more we shall be sensible how far we fall short of their full import!

~ ~ ~ ~

I am an avowed Calvinist

I am an avowed Calvinist. The points which are usually comprised in that term, seem to me so consonant to Scripture, reason (when enlightened), and experience—that I have not the shadow of a doubt about them. But I cannot dispute over them.

I feel much more union of spirit with some holy Arminians, than I do with some worldly Calvinists. If I thought that a certain person feared sin, loved the Word of God, and was seeking after Jesus—I would not walk the length of my study to proselyte him to the Calvinistic doctrines! Not because I think them mere opinions, or of little importance to a believer—I think the contrary; but because I believe these doctrines will do no one any good—until he is taught them by God. I believe a too hasty assent to Calvinistic principles, before a person is duly acquainted with the plague of his own heart—is one principal cause of that lightness of profession which so lamentably abounds in this day, a chief reason why many professors are rash, heady, high-minded, contentious about words, and sadly remiss as to the divine means of grace.

For this reason, I suppose, though I never preach a sermon in which the tincture of Calvinism may not be easily discerned by a judicious hearer—yet I very seldom insist expressly upon those five points, unless they fairly and necessarily are in my text of Scripture.

I believe most people who are truly alive to God, sooner or later meet with some pinches in their experience which constrain them to flee to those doctrines of grace for relief—which perhaps they had formerly dreaded, if not abhorred, because they knew not how to get over some harsh inferences they thought necessarily resulted from them, or because they were stumbled by the miscarriages of those who professed them.

In this way I was made a Calvinist myself; and I am content to let the Lord take His own way, and His own time, with others.

~ ~ ~ ~

Our slips and sins We serve a gracious Master who knows how to overrule even our slips and sins to His glory and our own advantage.

~ ~ ~ ~ The "tyranny of fashion"

"I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes—but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God." 1 Timothy 2:9-10

I have no doubt that many godly parents who desire to see their children brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, give them many excellent lessons in the nursery. They endeavor to impress their tender minds with a sense of their sinful state by nature, of the evil of pride, and of the vanity of the world. But, when their children begin to appear in public view, for lack of due reflection, or resolution, or both—they either encourage, or at least permit them, to form habits, which have a direct tendency to counteract all the benefits which might otherwise be hoped for, from the instruction of their early years.

If clothes are considered merely as a covering for the body and a defense from the cold, it will be difficult to draw the line to determine exactly between what is necessary and what is superfluous. But it is more for the honor of the gospel that a woman, professing godliness, should be distinguished from others, by modesty, sobriety and good works, than by the shape of her hat, or the color of her garment.

A careful attention to 'dress' will cost you much of what is more valuable than money—that is, your precious time! It will too much occupy your thoughts, and that at the seasons when you would wish to have them otherwise engaged. And it certainly administers fuel to that latent fire of pride and vanity, which is inseparable from our fallen nature and is easily blown up into a blaze!

If a woman, when going to public worship, looks in the mirror and contemplates, with a secret self-delight, the figure which it reflects to her view—I am afraid she is not in the frame of spirit most suitable for one, who is about to 'cry for mercy as a miserable sinner'.

I am most concerned by what we call 'fashion', and the eagerness with which every changing fashion, however improper, is adopted by people whose religious profession might lead us to hope they had no time to attend to such trifles! If some allowance is to be made for youth on this subject, it is painful to see mothers, and possibly sometimes grandmothers, who seem, by the gaudiness and levity of their attire—very unwilling to be sensible that they are growing older!

It may be a sufficient censure of some fashions—to say they are ridiculous. And perhaps the inventors of them had no worse design, than to see how far they could lead 'the passive unthinking many' in the path of absurdity! Why should a godly woman, or one who wishes to be thought so—make herself ridiculous, or hazard a suspicion of her character, to please and imitate an ungodly world?

But the worst of all the fashions are those, which are evidently calculated to allure the eyes, and to draw the attention of men. Is it not strange that modest and even pious women should be drawn into an immodest compliance? Yet I have sometimes been in company with ladies of whose modesty I have no doubt and of whose piety I entertained a good hope, when I have been embarrassed and at a loss as to which way to look! They are indeed noticed by the men—but not to their honor nor advantage. The manner of their dress gives encouragement to vile and insidious men, and exposes them to dangerous temptations. Their immodesty has often proved the first step into the road which leads to misery and ruin. They are pleased with the flattery of the worthless, and go on without thought, "like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing that it would cost him his life!"

Soon, and perhaps suddenly—the body, now adorned with so much extravagance and care, must be deposited in the grave, and be food for worms!

~ ~ ~ ~

I am no advocate for a monkish austerity

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus!" 2 Timothy 2:3

A minister is a soldier of Jesus Christ and, as such, is to expect to endure hardship. It is well to have this in mind in the education of young men for the Christian ministry.

They are not called to be loafers—but soldiers; not to live delicately—but to prepare for battle and hardship. They should therefore be advised and accustomed to prefer a plain and frugal manner of life, and to avoid multiplying those expenses which luxury and folly would prompt us to multiply almost infinitely.

A propensity to indulgence either in the quantity or quality of food, is a baseness unworthy of a man, still more unsuitable to the character of a Christian, and scandalous in a minister! I am no advocate for a monkish austerity or a scrupulous, superstitious self-denial, which will almost starve the body—to feed the pride of the heart. It is, however, very desirable to possess in early life, a habit of temperance, a mastery over appetite and a resolute guard against everything that has a tendency to blunt the activity of the mind and heart. And youth is the proper season for gaining this mastery, which, if the golden opportunity is then lost, is seldom thoroughly acquired afterwards.

A propriety in dress should also be consulted. Neatness is commendable; but a student in divinity should keep at a distance from being a devotee to fashion. A finical disposition in this article not only occasions a waste of time and expense—but is an evidence of a trifling turn of mind and exposes the fine self-admiring youth, to the contempt or pity of the wise and godly.

Farther, a habit of rising early should be resolutely formed. It redeems much time, and chiefly of those hours which are most favorable to study or devotion. It likewise cuts off the temptation to sitting up late, a hurtful and preposterous custom, which many students unwarily give in to and which they cannot so easily break, when the bad effects of it upon their health convince them too late of their imprudence.

~ ~ ~ ~

I am not sorry that you complain of your evil heart

Liverpool, October 3, 1755

My dearest wife,

I am not sorry that you complain of your evil heart; for, since our hearts will always be evil—it is a mercy to be sensible that they are so. Nor will I contradict you when you say, that you are ungrateful and insensible to the Lord’s goodness. Only remember that you are so in common with every other sincere Christian, and that there is not a person upon earth who knows himself—but must make the same complaint!

~ ~ ~ ~

We may praise God for that pain or sickness

My dearest wife,

I was enabled this morning to commend you to the Lord’s blessing, with much comfort. God is gracious and merciful—even in afflicting us! If your health should be fully restored, let us remember it is but a reprieve. We must experience, sooner or later, another and final visitation, to put an end to this frail life. Happy shall we be, if, when that hour arrives, we shall be found ready, and enabled, by faith in our Redeemer to withstand and overcome the shock of that last enemy, death.

I have a cheerful hope that He will raise you up in due time. Until then, let us attend to present duty, and keep close to Him by humble prayer and a renewed dependence upon the blood of Jesus. Let us, while the rod is upon us, inquire into the meaning of it, and hear His voice by it. Let us bow to His chastisement, and acknowledge that we have rebelled against Him, and that He

afflicts us far less than our iniquities have deserved. Then we may be assured, that though He causes grief, He will have compassion; and will not only deliver us—but allow us to see, and to say, that "it was good for us to have been afflicted!"

Make use of means prescribed for restoring your health—but do not rest in them. The blessing must be from the Great Physician. To Him let us apply for it; and ascribe to Him all the praise if we obtain relief.

We may praise God for that pain or sickness, however severe, which teaches us in good earnest to call upon Him in prayer.

~ ~ ~ ~

02.03. CHOICE EXCERPTS contd1

Our comforts and crosses are all from the same hand!

Your frequent sicknesses are not pleasant; but they are God’s mercies, for which we have reason to be thankful. Our comforts and crosses are all from the same hand! We have chastisement, only because we need it. I aim to leave you in the Lord’s hands. Would we not forget ourselves, if He did not seasonably remind us, what, where, and who we are?

In the case of some of your dear friends, for whom you grieve, you may see how it would have been with you—if His eye of love had not been fixed upon you from your birth. He prepared His dispensations, to withdraw you gradually from that life of vanity and wastefulness to which you would otherwise have been enslaved all your days. And He has been gently dealing with your heart for several years; leading you, if slowly, yet, I hope surely, nearer to Himself. How much of His ways has He shown you! And He has given you a heart to love those spiritual realities, to which you were once as little inclined as those whom you now pity!

~ ~ ~ ~ The common wearisome pursuit of the worldling

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" Ecclesiastes 1:2

The common wearisome pursuit of the worldling is described in Scripture: "Why do you spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" Isaiah 55:2, "Many are saying—Who can show us anything good?" Psalms 4:6

Worldlings are wandering from object to object in quest of happiness, but are always frustrated by incessant and repeated disappointments. We would pity a person whom we see seeking some necessary thing day after day—in a place where we knew it was impossible to be found there. This is, however, the case with all people—until they come to Christ. Satisfaction is what they profess to aim at; and they turn over every stone (as we say), they try every expedient, to find lasting happiness—but in vain. Real satisfaction is only to be found in Jesus! When they come to Him, their wishes are fully answered and satisfied!

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst!" John 4:13-14

02.04. Choice Quotes

John Newton

CHOICE EXCERPTS

I am not what I once was!

In his old age, when he could no longer see to read, John Newton heard someone recite this text, "By the grace of God—I am what I am."

He remained silent a short time and then, as if speaking to himself, he said: "I am not what I ought to be—ah, how imperfect and deficient! I am not what I wish to be—I abhor that which is evil, and I would cleave to that which is good. I am not what I hope to be—soon, soon I shall put off mortality, and with mortality all sin and imperfection! Though I am not what I ought to be, what I wish to be, and what I hope to be—yet I can truly say, I am not what I once was—a slave to sin and Satan! I can heartily join with the apostle and acknowledge, "By the grace of God—I am what I am!"

~ ~ ~ ~

You would pity me indeed!

Dear friend,

Wickedness prevails and increases in our city to a dreadful degree! Our streets are filled with the sons of Belial, who neither fear God, nor regard man. I wish my heart was more affected with what my eyes see and my ears hear every day! I am often ready to fear lest the Lord should show His displeasure in some dreadful way!

And surely, if He were strict to mark all that is amiss—I myself would tremble! Oh, were He to plead against me—I could not answer Him one word! Alas! my dear friend, you know not what a poor, unprofitable, unfaithful creature I am! If you knew the evils which I feel within, and the snares and difficulties which beset me from without—you would pity me indeed!

So much forgiven—yet so little love to Jesus.

So many mercies—yet so few returns.

Such great privileges—yet a life so sadly below them.

Indwelling sin presses me downwards; when I would do good, evil is present with me! I can attempt nothing—but it is debased, polluted and spoiled by my depraved nature! My sins of omission are innumerable. In a word, there is . . .

much darkness in my understanding,

much perverseness in my will,

much disorder in my affections,

much folly and madness in my imagination!

In short, I am a riddle to myself—a heap of inconsistency!

Alas! when shall it be otherwise? I have a desire of walking with God—but I cannot attain unto it. Surely it is far better to depart, and to be with Jesus Christ—than to live here up to the ears in sin and temptation!

But, "We have an Advocate with the Father." Here my hope revives! Though wretched in myself—I am complete in Him! He is my wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. On this "Rock" I build—for time and eternity!

~ ~ ~ ~

’Tis a point I long to know

Oft it causes anxious thought;

Do I love the Lord or no?

Am I His—or am I not?

If I love—why am I thus?

Why this dull and lifeless frame?

Hardly, sure, can they be worse,

Who have never heard His name!

Could my heart so hard remain,

Prayer a task and burden prove,

Every trifle give me pain,

If I knew a Savior’s love?

When I turn my eyes within,

All is dark, and vain, and wild;

Filled with unbelief and sin,

Can I deem myself a child?

If I pray, or hear, or read,

Sin is mixed with all I do!

You who love the Lord indeed,

Tell me—Is it thus with you?

Yet I mourn my stubborn will,

Find my sin a grief and thrall;

Should I grieve for what I feel,

If I did not love at all?

Could I joy His saints to meet,

Choose the ways I once abhorred,

Find, at times, the promise sweet,

If I did not love the Lord?

Lord, decide the doubtful case!

You who are Your people's sun,

Shine upon Your work of grace,

If it is indeed begun.

Let me love You more and more,

If I love at all, I pray;

If I have not loved before,

Help me to begin today!

~ ~ ~ ~

Every man's shoes should be exactly of one size!

The church of Christ is composed of all who are savingly united to Him by genuine faith. They are infallibly known only to Himself. They are scattered far and wide, separated from each other by seas and mountains; they are a people of many nations and languages. But, wherever their lot is cast, they hear His voice, and are under His gracious eye. They do not have equal degrees of spiritual light, or measures of grace—but they are all 'accepted in the Beloved'. They are all spiritual worshipers, and joint partakers of grace—and all will hereafter appear together at their Savior's right hand in glory! In whatever is essential to their salvation, they are all led by the same Spirit, and mind the same things.

But at present they are in an imperfect state. Though they are new creations—they are not freed from the 'principle of indwelling sin'. Their knowledge is clouded by much remaining ignorance; and their zeal, though right in its aim, is often warped and misguided by the corrupt influence of SELF. They still have many corruptions. They live in a world which furnishes frequent occasions of enticing them. And Satan, their subtle and powerful enemy, is always upon his watch to mislead and ensnare them!

Besides all this—they are born, educated, and effectually called, under a great variety of circumstances. Habits of life, local customs, early relationships with families and friends, and even

bodily constitution, have more or less influence in forming their characters, and in giving a bias and turn to their manner of thinking; so that, in matters of a secondary nature—their sentiments may, and often do—differ as much as the features of their faces! A uniformity of judgment among them on these secondary matters, is not to be expected, while the wisest are defective in knowledge, the holiest are defiled with sin, and while the weaknesses of human nature, which are common to them all—are so differently affected by a thousand impressions which arise from their various situations.

They might, however, maintain a unity of spirit, and live in the exercise of mutual love, were it not that almost every individual unhappily conceives that they are bound in conscience, to prescribe their own line of conduct—as a standard to which all their brethren ought to conform! They are but few, who consider this "narrow mind-set" to be as unnecessary, unreasonable, and impracticable, as it would be to insist, or expect, that every man’s shoes should be exactly of one size!

Thus, though all agree in asserting the authority and right of the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His church—yet the various ideas they frame of the rule or standard to which He requires them to conform, and their pertinacious attachment to their own conceptions of it—separate them almost as much from each other, as if they were not united to Him by a principle of living faith! Their petty differences form them into so many separate churches; and the fury with which they defend their own ideas, and oppose all who cannot agree with them in every minute point, makes them forget that they are children in the same family, and servants of the same Master! And, while they vex and worry each other with disputations and censures—the world is bewildered by all this, and laughs at them all! The spirit of love is restrained, offences are multiplied, and Satan is gratified by beholding the extensive effects of his pernicious and long-practiced maxim, Divide and conquer!

"Accept one another, therefore, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Romans 15:7

~ ~ ~ ~ The most generally prevailing and ensnaring sin

"For of this you can be sure: that no sexually immoral or impure nor covetousness person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of God." Ephesians 5:5

What is covetousness?

Covetousness is a sin from which few people are entirely free. It is eminently a deceitful sin! It is decried and condemned in others—by multitudes who live in the habit of it themselves! It is very difficult to fix a conviction of this sin—upon those who are guilty of it!

Whether drunkards or profligates regard the warnings of the preacher or not, when he declares that those who persist in those evil practices, shall not inherit the kingdom of God—they at least know their own characters, and are sensible that they are the people intended.

But if the preacher adds, "nor the covetousness person—such a man is an idolater" —the covetous man usually sits unmoved, and is more ready to apply the threatening to his neighbor—than to himself! If he now and then gives a few dollars to some charity—he does not suspect that he is liable to the charge of covetousness!

I consider covetousness as the most generally prevailing and ensnaring sin, by which professors of the gospel, in our materialistic society, are hindered in their spiritual progress. A disposition deeply rooted in our fallen nature, strengthened by the custom of all around us, the power of habit, and the fascinating charm of wealth—is not easily counteracted.

If we are, indeed, genuine believers in Christ—we are bound by obligation, and required by our Scriptural rule—to set our affections on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. Christ has called us out of the world, and cautioned us against conformity to its spirit. While we are in the world—it is our duty, privilege, and honor—to manifest that grace which has delivered us from the love of the world. Christians must indeed eat and drink, and may buy and sell, as other people do. But the principles, motives, and ends of their conduct, are entirely different—they are to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior, and to do all for His glory!

The Christian knows that it is not necessary to be rich, or to be admired or envied by the vain unthinking world—and that it is absolutely necessary for him to maintain peace of conscience, and communion with God. In these respects, all God’s people, however differently situated—are exactly upon a par.

But, alas! how many who profess to know and value the gospel—are far otherwise minded! The chief mark of their profession, is their attendance on Sunday services! At other times, and in other respects—they are not easily distinguished from the ungodly world! Their houses, furniture, tables, and other belongings; and the manner in which they seek worldly things—sufficiently proves them to be covetous! Their love of money, and the desire of more—are always in exercise. They attempt to look two ways at once—and to reconcile the incompatible claims of God—and mammon! They rise early, go to bed late, and eat the bread of worry—that they may be able to vie with the world in their possessions; and to lay up snares, and thorns, and encumbrances for their children!

Often, they already have a lawful employment, which affords a competence for a comfortable support. But if opportunity offers, they eagerly catch at some other prospect of gain, though they thereby double their anxieties, and encroach still more upon that time (too little before) which they should allot to the concerns of their souls!

Such opportunities they call providential openings, and perhaps say they are thankful for them; not considering that such openings of Providence are frequently temptations or tests, which the Lord permits a man to meet with—to prove what is in his heart, and to try him, whether his affections are indeed set on the things above—or still cleave to the earth!

For those who, as the apostle expresses it, "long to be rich," who will strain every nerve to be found in the list of the wealthy—may, and often do, obtain the poor reward they seek. As in the case of Israel, when, not satisfied with bread from heaven, they clamored for meat. God gives them their desire—but with it, sends leanness into their souls. They expose themselves to temptations and snares, to foolish passions and pursuits; and thus too many, who promised fair at the first setting out, are drowned in destruction and perdition! For it is written in the Scripture, "For of this you can be sure: that no covetousness person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of God." Ephesians 5:5 And the Scriptures cannot be broken!

"For the love of money is the root of all evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows!" 1 Timothy 6:10. Who can enumerate

the many sorrows with which the covetous and worldly-minded professor is pierced! Sooner or later, his schemes are broken; losses and crosses, disappointments and and anxieties, wear down his spirit. Improper connections, which he formed, because he longed to be rich, become thorns in his sides and in his eyes! He trusted in men—and men deceive him! He leaned upon a weak reed—which breaks, and he falls! Thus he finds that the way of transgressors and backsliders is hard!

If therefore, my dear reader, you wish to avoid trouble, and to pass through life as smoothly as possible, take heed and beware of covetousness!

~ ~ ~ ~

Thank Him for His prescription!

Trials are medicines which our gracious and wise Physician prescribes, because we need them. He proportions the frequency and weight of them—to what our case requires. Let us trust in His skill—and thank Him for His prescription!

~ ~ ~ ~

True patriotism!

Dear friend,

Allow me to say, that it excites both my wonder and concern, that a Christian minister such as yourself, should think it worth his while to attempt political reforms. When I look around upon the present state of the nation, such an attempt appears to me, to be no less vain and foolish, than it would be to paint the cabin—while the ship is sinking! Or to decorate the parlor—while the house is on fire!

When our Lord Jesus was upon earth, He refused to get involved in disputes or politics, "Friend, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Luke 12:14. "My kingdom is not of this world! If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight!" John 18:36. God’s children belong to a kingdom which is not of this world; they are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and a part of their Scriptural character is, that they are the "quiet in the land." Psalms 35:19.

Satan has many contrivances to amuse people, and to divert their thoughts from their real danger! My dear sir, my prayer to God for you is—that He may induce you to employ the talents He has given you, in pointing out sin as the great cause and source of every existing evil; and to engage those who love and fear Him, (instead of wasting time in political speculations, for which very few of them are competent,) to sigh and cry for our abounding abominations, and to stand in the breach, by prayer, that God’s wrath may yet be averted, and our national mercies prolonged! This, I think, is true patriotism—the best way in which people in private life may serve their country.

I consider the ungodly as saws and hammers in the hand of the Lord. So far as they are His instruments, they will succeed—but not an inch further! Their wrath shall praise Him, and be subservient to His designs!

If our lot is so cast that we can exercise our ministry free from stripes, fines, imprisonments, and death—it is more than the gospel has promised to us! If Christians were quiet when under the

cruel governments of Nero and other wicked persecutors, when they were hunted down like wild beasts—then we ought to be not only quiet but very thankful now! It was then accounted an honor to suffer for Christ and the 'offence of the cross'!

Those are to be greatly pitied, who boast of their 'liberty'—and yet they do not consider that they are in the most deplorable bondage as the slaves of sin and Satan, under the curse of God's law and His eternal wrath! Oh! for a voice to reach their hearts, that they may know their true and dreadful state—and seek deliverance from their horrific thraldom! May you and I labor to direct them to the one thing, which is absolutely needful, and abundantly sufficient.

If I had the wisdom or influence to soothe the angry passions of mankind—I would gladly employ them! But I am a stranger and a pilgrim here in this world. My charter, my rights and my treasures, are all in heaven—and there my heart ought to be. In a very short time, I may be removed (and perhaps suddenly) into the unseen and eternal world—where all that now causes so much bustle upon earth—will be of no more importance to me—than the events which took place among the antediluvians! In the hour, when death shall open the door into eternity—many things which now assume an 'air of importance', will be found as light and unsubstantial as a child's dream!

How crucial then, is it for me—to be found watching, with my lamp burning, diligently engaged in my proper calling! For the Lord has not called me to set governments right—but to preach the gospel, to proclaim the glory of His name, and to endeavor to win souls! "Let the dead bury their own dead—but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God!" Luke 9:60. Happy is that servant, whom his Master finds so doing, when He returns!

As you have forced me to respond—both duty and love have obliged me to be faithful and free in giving you my thoughts.

I recommend you to the care and blessing of the great Shepherd and Savior; and remain for His sake, your affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

~ ~ ~ ~

Perhaps, while we are admiring our gourd

We are in the Lord's school—the school of the cross. His daily providential dispensations are suited to wean our attachment from everything here on earth—and to convince us that this world cannot be our rest, for it is polluted. Our roses grow on thorns; our honey brings a sting. Frequently our sharpest trials—spring from our choicest comforts. Perhaps, while we are admiring our gourd—a worm is secretly preying upon its root! As every bitter thing is sweetened to a believer—so there is some bitterness mingled with every sweet thing. This is wisely and mercifully ordered by our heavenly Father. It is necessary. With such hearts an we have, and in such a world as we live in—much discipline is needful to keep us from sleeping upon the enchanted ground.

But the time is short. It will not always be thus. We shall soon be out of the reach of sin and temptation. Happy hour, when troubles and sorrows, hitherto our inseparable companions, shall flee away, to return no more! When Jesus, with joy and gladness shall come forth to meet us, and conduct us to our eternal home! Then we shall drink of the rivers of pleasure that are at His right

hand—and our happiness shall be unspeakable, uninterrupted, without abatement, and without end!

~ ~ ~ ~ The poor worm is secretly indulging self-applause!

Among the many general causes of decline in grace, we may assign a principal place to spiritual pride and self-admiration. If our attainments in knowledge and giftedness, and even in grace—seduce us into a good opinion of ourselves, as if we were wise and good—we are already ensnared, in danger of falling every step we take, of mistaking the right path, and proceeding from bad to worse, without a power of correcting or even of discovering our deviations! That is—unless and until the Lord mercifully interposes, by restoring us to a spirit of humility, and dependence upon Himself. For God, who gives more grace to the humble—resists the proud! He beholds them with abhorrence—in proportion to the degree in which they admire themselves! It is the invariable law of His kingdom, that everyone who exalts himself—shall be abased!

True Christians, through the remaining evil of their hearts, and the subtle temptations of their enemy, are liable, not only to the workings of that pride which is common to our fallen nature—but to a certain kind of pride, which, though the most absurd and intolerable in any person—can only be found among those who make profession of the gospel. We have nothing but what we have received, and therefore to be proud of our titles, wealth, knowledge, success, or any temporal advantages by which the providence of God has distinguished us—is downright sinful! For those who confess themselves to be 'sinners', and therefore deserving of nothing but misery and wrath—to be proud of those peculiar blessings which are derived from the gospel of God's grace—is a wickedness of which even the demons are not capable of!

The apostle Paul was so aware of his danger of being exalted above measure, through the abundant revelations and peculiar favors which the Lord had afforded him—that he says, "There was given me a messenger of Satan to buffet me." He speaks of this sharp trial as a great mercy, because he saw that it was necessary, and designed to keep him humble and attentive to his own weakness.

Ministers who are honored with singular abilities and success, have great need of watchfulness and prayer on this account! Simple-hearted hearers are apt to admire their favorite preacher—taking it for granted that he is deeply affected himself with the truths, which, with so much apparent liberty and power—he proposes to them. While, perhaps—the poor worm is secretly indulging self-applause, and pleasing himself with the numbers and attention of those who hang upon his words!

Perhaps such thoughts will occasionally rise in the minds of the best ministers; but, if they are allowed, if they become habitual, and enter strongly into the idea he forms of his own importance; and if, while he professes to preach Jesus Christ—he is preaching himself, and seeking his own glory—he is guilty of high treason against the Majesty of Him in whose name he speaks! And sooner or later, the effects of his pride will be visible and noticed. Doctrinal errors, gross misconduct, an abatement of zeal, of gifts, of influence—are evils, always to be dreaded, when spiritual pride has gained an ascendancy, whether in public or in private life.

"The Lord Almighty has planned it, to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble all who are renowned on the earth." Isaiah 23:9

"For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have—that you did not receive? And if you did receive it—why do you boast as though you did not?" 1 Corinthians 4:7

~ ~ ~ ~

If he is a liar, a talebearer, a railer, a flatterer or a jester

There is, perhaps, no one test or proof of the reality of a work of grace upon the heart, more simple, clear and infallible—than the general tenor of our speech; for our Lord's aphorism is of certain and universal application, that "out of the abundance of the heart—the mouth speaks."

To the same purpose, the apostle James proposes to all who make a profession of the gospel, a searching criterion of their sincerity, when he says, "If anyone considers himself religious, and yet does not keep a tight bridle on his tongue—he deceives himself and his religion is worthless!" James supposes that the grace of God in a true believer will check the evils of the heart, and prevent them from breaking out by the tongue.

The grace of God will necessarily influence and govern the tongues of those who partake of it, in what they say when they speak of God, of themselves, and of or to their fellow-creatures.

Having seen a glimpse of the holiness and majesty, the glory and the grace, of the great God with whom they have to do—their hearts are impressed with reverence, and therefore there is a seriousness in their language. They cannot speak lightly of God, or of His ways. One would suppose that no person, who even but seems to be pious, can directly and expressly profane His glorious name. But there is a careless and flippant manner of speaking of the great God, which is very disgusting and very suspicious. Likewise, the hearts of believers teach their mouths to speak honorably of God under all their afflictions and crosses, acknowledging the wisdom and the mercy of His painful dispensations. And, if an impatient word escapes them—it grieves and humbles them, as quite unfitting to their situation as His creatures, and especially as sinful creatures, who have always reason to acknowledge, that it is of the Lord's mercy alone—that they are not wholly consumed.

When they speak of themselves, their tongues are bridled, and restrained from boasting. They speak as befits poor, unworthy creatures—because they feel themselves to be such! In what they say, either of their comforts or of their sorrows, sincerity dictates a simplicity which cannot be easily counterfeited.

In what they say of or to others, the tongues of believers are bridled by a heart-felt regard to truth, love and purity.

Where saving grace is in the heart—the tongue will be bridled by the law of TRUTH. It is grievous to see how nearly and readily some professors will venture upon the borders of a lie; either . . .

to defend their own conduct,

to avoid some inconvenience,

to procure a supposed advantage,

or sometimes merely to embellish a story!

Where instances of this kind are frequent, I hardly know a fouler blot in profession, or which can give a more just warrant to fear that such professors know nothing aright, either of God or themselves! The Lord is a God of truth; and He teaches His servants to hate and abhor lying, and to speak the truth from their hearts. I may add likewise, with regard to promises—that the person, whose simple word may not be safely depended upon—scarcely deserves the name of a Christian!

Where grace is in the heart, the tongue will likewise be bridled by the law of LOVE. If we love our neighbor—can we lightly speak evil of him, magnify his failings, or use provoking or insulting language to him? Love thinks no evil—but bears, hopes and endures. Love acts by the golden rule, to "Do unto others—what you would like them to do unto you." Those who are under the influence of Christian love, will be gentle and compassionate, disposed to make the most favorable allowances, and of course their tongues will be restrained from the language of malevolence, harsh censure, and slander—which are as familiar to us as our mother tongue—until we are made partakers of the grace of God.

The tongue is also bridled by a regard to PURITY, agreeable to the precepts, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths!" "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking!" Ephesians 4:29, Ephesians 5:4. Grace has taught believers to hate these things! How then can their tongues speak of them?

There are false professors, indeed, who can suit their language to their company. When with the people of God—they call talk very seriously. But at other times, they are well pleased to join in vain, frothy and evil conversation. But this double-mindedness is of itself, sufficient to discredit all their pretenses to a pious character.

Upon the whole, though perfection is not to be expected, though true believers may, on some occasions, speak rashly, and have great cause for humiliation, watchfulness, and prayer, with respect to the government of their tongues; yet Scripture authorizes this conclusion: That, if the tongue is frequently without a bridle; if it may be observed, that a person often speaks . . .

lightly of God and of divine things,

proudly of himself, and

harshly of his fellow-creatures;

if he is a liar, a talebearer, a railer, a flatterer or a jester—then, whatever other good qualities he may seem to possess—his speech betrays him! He deceives himself, and his religion is worthless!

Let us think of these things, and entreat the Lord to cast the salt of His grace into the fountain of our hearts—that the streams of our conversation may be wholesome.

~ ~ ~ ~ But my eye and my heart are to Jesus!

(from the diary of John Newton)

January 1, 1773

This is the ninth New Years day I have seen in this church. I have reason to say, 'The Lord crowns every year with His goodness!' The entrance of this year finds me and my dear Mary in health and peace. I am still favored with strength, and with some liberty for my pastoral work, and hope the Lord is still pleased to work by me—for the edification of His people, and the awakening of lost sinners.

As to myself . . .

my exercise of grace is faint,

my consolations small,

my heart is full of evil,

my chief burdens are, a wild ungoverned imagination, and a strange sinful backwardness to reading the Scriptures, and to secret prayer.

These have been my complaints for many years, and I have no less cause of complaint than formerly. But my eye and my heart are to Jesus! His I am; Him I desire to serve; to Him this day, I would devote and surrender myself anew.

O Lord, accept, support, protect, teach, comfort and bless me. Be . . .

my Arm,

my Eye,

my Joy and

my Salvation.

Mortify the power of sin—and increase the image of Your holiness in my heart. Anoint me with fresh oil, make me humble, faithful, diligent and obedient. Let me in all things attend . . .

to Your Word as my rule,

to Your glory as my end, and

depend upon Your power and promise for my safety and success.

I am now in the 49th year of my life, and may expect in the course of a few years at most—to go whence I shall no more return; nor have I a certainty of continuing here a single year—or even a month or a day! May Your grace keep me always until my appointed change shall come, and when the summons shall come—may I be enabled to rejoice in You, as the strength of my heart and my portion forever!

"You guide me with Your counsel, and afterwards You will take me up in glory. Whom do I have in heaven but You? And I desire nothing on earth but You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever!" Psalms 73:24-26

~ ~ ~ ~ The load will be too heavy for us!

I compare the troubles which we have to undergo in the course of the year—to a great bundle of sticks, far too large for us to lift. But God does not require us to carry the whole bundle at once. He mercifully unties the bundle, and gives us first one stick, which we are to carry today; and then another, which we are to carry tomorrow, and so forth.

We can easily manage our troubles, if we would only carry the trouble appointed for each day. But the load will be too heavy for us—if we carry yesterday's burden over again today, and then add the burden of tomorrow to the weight, before we are required to bear it.

~ ~ ~ ~

Poor ship!

(The following is a letter of John Newton to his 14 year old adopted daughter, who was away at school)

"He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm!" Luke 8:24

My dear Betsy,

Sometimes, when I consider what a world you are growing up into, and what snares and dangers young people are exposed to, with little experience to help them—I have some painful feelings for you!

The other day I was at the harbor, and saw a ship launched—she slipped easily into the water; the people on board cheered; the ship looked clean and mirthful, she was freshly painted, and her colors flying. But I looked at her with a sort of pity, "Poor ship!" I thought, "you are now in port and in safety; but before long you must go into the wild sea! Who can tell what storms you may meet with hereafter, and to what hazards you may be exposed! How weather-beaten you may be before you return to port again, or perhaps you may return at all!"

Then my thoughts turned from the ship—to my dear Betsy. The ship seemed to be an emblem of your present state—you are now, as it were, in a safe harbor; but by and by you must launch out into the world, which may well be compared to a tempestuous sea. I could even now almost weep at the resemblance! But I take courage, as my hopes are greater than my fears. I know there is an infallible Pilot, who has the winds and the waves at His command! There is hardly a day passes, in which I do not entreat Him to take charge of you. Under His care—I know you will be safe. He can guide you, unhurt, amidst the storms, and rocks, and dangers—by which you might otherwise suffer—and bring you, at last, safely to the haven of His eternal rest!

"Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water—and they obey Him!" Luke 8:25

I hope you will seek Him while you are young—then you will be happy, and I shall rejoice. Nothing will satisfy me but this! Though I should live to see you settled to the greatest advantage in temporal matters—unless you love Him, and live in His fear and favor—you would be quite miserable! I think it would nearly break my heart; for, next to your dear mamma, there is nothing so dear to me in this world as you! But the Lord gave you to me—and many a time upon my knees, I have given you back to Him. Therefore I hope you must, and will, and shall be His!

I am, with great tenderness, my dear child,

Your very affectionate father

~ ~ ~ ~

If you could form a 'little creature' and make it live

(The following is a letter of John Newton to his 13 year old adopted daughter, who was away at school)

My dear Betsy,

Idleness is a very great evil—the door by which a thousand temptations and mischiefs may enter!

Though you yourself have not been a sufferer—I wish for you to cultivate a sympathetic and benevolent spirit—a disposition to have compassion on the distresses of others—even though you cannot relieve them. Compassion, next to the grace of God, is the brightest ornament of human nature. When it is genuine, it is one of the best effects and proofs of saving grace. It was the mind of Jesus the Savior—and those who love Him, will in a degree resemble Him! A hard-hearted, unfeeling, selfish Christian is a total contradiction.

When you think what multitudes of mankind are suffering by war, famine, sickness, storms, earthquakes, and other calamities—let it lead your thoughts to the evil of sin—which brought all these other evils into the world.

But what is sin?

Sin is presuming to do our own will—in opposition to the will of God—who is our Creator, Lawgiver and Benefactor. By sin we . . .

attempt independence from our Creator,

affront the authority of our righteous Lawgiver, and

are guilty of base and horrid ingratitude against our greatest and kindest Benefactor!

If you could form a 'little creature' and make it live—and if it hated you and opposed you, slighted your kindness, and took pleasure in displeasing you—would you not soon be weary of it, and, instead of feeding and taking care of it, be provoked to tread it under your feet? But, oh, the patience of God—though He could destroy rebellious men much more easily than you could kill a loathsome spider—yet He waits to be gracious, and has so loved them as to send His own Son to die—that they may live!

Sin has not only filled the world with woe—but it was the cause of all the woe that Jesus endured. He groaned and wept, and sweat blood, and died upon the cross—only because we had sinned! May I live to see you duly affected with the evil of sin—and the love of Jesus! There is nothing more that I desire for you!

I am, my dear child,

Your most affectionate father

~ ~ ~ ~

I would teach you a way to be never be disappointed

(The following is a letter of John Newton to his 13 year old adopted daughter, who was away at school)

"The LORD does whatever pleases Him—in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths!" Psalms 135:6

My dear Betsy,

How vain are all things here below! "Vanity of vanities!" says the preacher. And you, and I, and your mamma, may say so likewise; for we all counted upon seeing you last Sunday. We listened at the door—and peeped out of the window—but no Betsy came! Now we will venture to expect you next Sunday.

Indeed, it is not amiss that you should now and then meet with a hindrance—that you may learn, if possible—not to count too much on what tomorrow may do for you—and that you may begin to feel the impossibility of being happy, any further than your will is brought into submission to the will of God. In order to learn this—you must have your own will frequently crossed. And things do and will turn out, almost daily in one way or other—contrary to our wishes and expectations.

When such disappointments happen—most people fret and fume! They are angry and impatient! But others, who are in the Lord's school, and desirous of being taught by Him—get benefit by these things, and sometimes find more pleasure in yielding to His appointments, though contrary to their own wills—than they would have done, if all had happened just as they had desired!

I wish for you my dear child, to think much of the Lord's governing providence. It extends to the minutest concerns. He rules and manages all things; but in so secret a way, that most people think that He does nothing. When, in reality—He does ALL!

He appointed the time of your coming into the world. And the day and hour of your coming home from school to us—totally depends upon Him likewise! Nor can you safely travel one step of the road—without His protection and care over you!

It may now seem a small matter to you and I, whether you came home last Sunday—or are to come home next Sunday. But we know not what different consequences may depend upon the day—we know not what hidden danger you might have escaped by staying at school last Sunday. The Lord knows all things! He foresees every possible consequence! Often what we call disappointments, are really mercies from Him to save us from harm!

If I could teach you a lesson, which, as yet, I have but poorly learned myself—I would teach you a way to be never be disappointed. This would be the case—if you could always form a right judgment of this world, and all things in it.

If you go to a bramble-bush to look for grapes—you must be disappointed; but then you are old enough to know that grapes never grow upon brambles. So, if you expect much pleasure here in this world—you will not find it. But you ought not to say you are disappointed, because the Scripture plainly warned you beforehand, to look for crosses, trials and hindrances, every day. If

you expect such things—you will not be disappointed when they happen!

"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother’s womb—and naked I will depart. The Lord gave—and the Lord has taken away! May the name of the Lord be praised!" Job 1:20-21

~ ~ ~ ~

I asked the Lord, that I might grow

In faith, and love, and every grace;

Might more of His salvation know;

And seek more earnestly His face.

Twas He who taught me thus to pray,

And He, I trust has answered prayer;

But it has been in such a way,

As almost drove me to despair!

I hoped that in some favored hour,

At once He’d answer my request;

And by His love’s constraining power,

Subdue my sins—and give me rest!

Instead of this, He made me feel

The hidden evils of my heart;

And let the angry powers of hell

Assault my soul in every part!

Yes more, with His own hand He seemed

Intent to aggravate my woe!

Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,

Blasted my gourds—and laid me low!

"Lord, why is this!" I trembling cried,

"Will you pursue your worm to death?"

"This is the way," the Lord replied,

"I answer prayer for grace and faith."

"These inward trials I employ,

From self and pride to set you free;

And break your schemes of earthly joy,

That you may seek your all in Me!"

~ ~ ~ ~ Be thankful, my dear, that he treats you as his enemy!

November 13, 1772

My dear Miss,

I am glad that you complain of evil thoughts and temptations; for, though these things are grievous, they always accompany a saving work of grace. Though every Christian does not suffer greatly by persecution, poverty, and worldly troubles—yet they all suffer much from indwelling sin, temptation and Satan.

As to evil thoughts, they as unavoidably arise from an evil nature—as steam arises from a boiling tea-kettle! Every cause will have its effect—and a sinful nature will have sinful effects. You can no more keep such thoughts out of your mind—than you can stop the course of the clouds!

But if the Lord had not taught you—you would not have been sensible of them, nor concerned about them. This is a token for good. By nature your thoughts would have been only evil, and that continually. But you find 'something' within you that makes you dislike these thoughts; makes you ashamed of them; makes you strive and pray against them.

Now, this 'something' that resists your evil thoughts—what can it be? It cannot be human nature; for we naturally love our vain imaginations. It is the grace of God! The Lord has made you sensible of your disease—that you might love and prize the great Physician! The knowledge of His love for you—shall make you hate these thoughts! Yet you will be pestered with them more or less, while you live in this world. For sin is wrought into our bodies, and our souls must be freed from our bodies—before we shall be fully freed from the evils under which we mourn!

Your other complaint of temptations is likewise a good one. If you were to visit some young ladies who know no other end of living—but to dress and dance and socialize; and if you were to ask them if they are troubled with Satan's temptations—they would think that you were out of your wits! Poor things! They know no better! They are blinded by the god of this world; they go on quietly in the way of sin and vanity, careless of their souls, and mindless of eternity! While they continue in this course, you may be sure that Satan will not disturb them! They are asleep, and it would not be for his interest to do anything that might awaken them out of their pleasant dream!

And if you yourself were thus asleep, Satan would be content that you should sleep on—and take your rest. But, when he sees anyone awakened out of this deadly sleep, he probably tries first to lull them asleep again. And, if the Lord prevents that by His mercy, then Satan alters his measures, and roars like a lion which has lost his prey! Be thankful, my dear, that he treats you as his enemy! For the state of those to whom he behaves as a friend, is miserable indeed! And always remember that he is a chained enemy! He may terrify—but he cannot devour those who have fled for refuge to Jesus!

You cannot be too jealous of your own heart, or too cautious of the snares which you are exposed to. But the Lord is able and faithful to keep those from falling, who, sensible of their own weakness, cry daily to Him, "Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Continue in prayer, that you may be preserved humble and abased in your own eyes—and then I am sure that you will not fall.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil!" Ephesians 6:10-11

I am sincerely, your affectionate friend and servant,

John Newton

~ ~ ~ ~

I am sure I cannot endure to the end!

"I will put My fear in their hearts—so they will never turn away from Me." Jeremiah 32:40

Jesus, to whom I have been led to commit myself, has engaged to save me, absolutely, and from first to last. He has promised not only that He will not depart from me—but that He will put, keep, and maintain His fear in my heart—so that I shall never finally depart from Him! And if He does not do this for me—I have no security against my turning apostate! For I am so weak, inconsistent, and sinful; I am so encompassed with deadly snares from the world; and I am so liable to such assaults from the subtlety, vigilance, and power of Satan—that, unless I am "kept by the power of God," I am sure I cannot endure to the end!

I do believe that the Lord will keep me while I walk humbly and obediently before Him; but, were this all—it would be cold comfort! For I am prone to wander—and need a Shepherd whose watchful eye, compassionate heart, and boundless mercy—will pity, pardon, and restore my backslidings!

For, though by His goodness and not my own—I have hitherto been preserved in the path of holiness; yet I feel those evils within me, which would shortly break loose and bear me down to destruction, were He not ever present with me to control them.

Those who comfortably hope to see His face in glory—but depend upon their own watchfulness and endeavors to preserve themselves from falling—must be much wiser, better, and stronger than I am! Or at least they cannot have so deep and painful a sense of their own weakness and vileness, as daily experience forces upon me. I desire to be found in the use of the Lord’s appointed means for the renewal of my spiritual strength—but I dare not undertake to watch a single hour, nor do I find ability to think a good thought, nor a power in myself of resisting any temptation! My strength is perfect weakness—and all I have is sin.

In short, I must sit down in despair—if I did not believe that He who has begun a good work in me, will carry it out to completion.

"Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Psalms 119:117

~ ~ ~ ~

God’s work of grace in the soul

"The soil produces grain—

first the blade,

then the stalk, and

then the ripe grain on the stalk."

Mark 4:28

The Lord compares the usual method of growth in grace—to the growth of grain, which is perfected by a slow and almost imperceptible progress.

The seed is hidden for a time in the soil; and, when it appears, it passes through a succession of changes—the blade, the stalk, and lastly the ripe grain.

And it is brought forward amidst a variety of weather: the dew, the frost, the wind, the rain, the sun—all concur to advance its maturity, though some of these agents are contrary to each other; and some of them, perhaps, seem to threaten the life of the plant! Yet, when the season of harvest returns—the grain is found ready for the sickle!

Just so is God’s work of grace in the soul. Its beginnings are small, its growth for the most part slow, and, to our apprehensions, imperceptible and often precarious. But there is this difference in the comparison: frosts and blights, drought or floods, may possibly disappoint the gardener’s hopes. But the great Gardener of the soul—will not, and cannot be disappointed. What He sows—shall flourish in defiance of all opposition! And, if at times it seems to wither—He can and He will revive it!

For the most part, God’s people are exercised with sharp trials and temptations; for it is necessary they should learn not only what He can do for them—but how little they can do without Him! Therefore He teaches them not all at once—but by degrees, as they are able to bear it.

"The soil produces grain—

first the blade,

then the stalk, and

then the ripe grain on the stalk."

Mark 4:28

~ ~ ~ ~ For pastors only!

"He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." Colossians 4:7

Dear fellow pastor,

You have desired a good work—may the Lord give you the desires of your heart. May He give you . . .

the wisdom of Daniel,

the meekness of Moses,

the courage of Joshua,

the zeal of Paul, and

that self-abasement and humility which Job and Isaiah felt—when they not only had heard of Him by the hearing of the ear—but when they saw His glory, and abhorred themselves in dust and ashes!

May you be taught of God—for none teaches like Him—and come forth an able minister of the New Covenant, well instructed rightly to divide and faithfully to distribute the Word of truth.

In the school of Christ, you will have to learn some lessons which are not very pleasant to flesh and blood. You must learn to labor, to run, to fight, to wrestle—and many other hard exercises—some of which will try your strength, and others your patience.

You know the common expression, 'a jack of all trades'. I am sure a minister had need be such a one:

a brave soldier,

an alert watchman,

a caring shepherd,

a hardworking farmer,

a skillful builder,

a wise counselor,

a competent physician,

and a loving nurse.

But do not be discouraged—you have a wonderful and a gracious Master, who does not only give instructions—but power and ability! He engages that His grace shall be sufficient, at all times and in all circumstances, for those who simply give themselves up to His teaching and His service.

"Be an example to all believers . . .

in what you teach,

in the way you live,

in your love, your faith, and your purity."

1 Timothy 4:12

~ ~ ~ ~ Did you ever see my picture?

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do—that I do not do; but what I hate—that I do. I have the desire to do what is good—but I cannot carry it out. For what I do—is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing!" Romans 7

Did you ever see my picture? It has been drawn by a masterly hand. And though another person, and one whom I am far from resembling, sat for it—it is as like me as one new penny is like another! The original was drawn at Corinth—and sent to the Christians at Rome. Many copies have been produced, and it has a place in most public and private libraries, and I would hope in most families. I had seen it a great many times, before I could discover one of my own features in it—but then my eyes were very bad.

What is most remarkable, is that it was drawn long before I was born! And now, having been favored with some excellent eye-salve, I quickly knew it to be my own. I am drawn in a posture which would be strange and peculiar, if it was not so common with me—looking two different and opposite ways at once, so that you would be puzzled to tell whether my eyes are fixed upon heaven—or upon the earth! I am aiming at two things inconsistent with each other at the same time, so that I can accomplish neither.

According to the different light in which you view the picture, I appear to rejoice—or to mourn; to have nothing—or possessing everything; to be a conqueror—or a captive. In a word, I am a double person! I am a riddle! So it is no wonder if you know not what to make of me—for I cannot tell what to make of myself!

I would—and I would not.

I do—and I do not.

I can—and I cannot.

I find the hardest things easy—and the easiest things impossible.

I am both rich—and poor.

I can do nothing—yet I can do all things.

I am opposed beyond my strength—yet I am not overpowered.

I gain when I lose—and I often am a loser by my gains.

But while I am in this perplexity, you will observe in the same picture—a hand stretched forth for my relief, and may see a label proceeding out of my mouth with these words, "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The more I study this picture, the more I discover some new and striking resemblance, which convinces me that the Painter knew me better than I knew myself!

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do—I do not do; but what I hate—I do. I have the desire to do what is good—but I cannot carry it out. For what I do—is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing!" Romans 7:1-25

In a word, I am a sinner, a vile one—but a sinner believing in Jesus!

I am a silly sheep—but I have a gracious, watchful Shepherd!

I am a dull scholar—but I have a Master who can make the dullest learn.

~ ~ ~ ~

I am a perverse and unruly patient!

I am bound to speak well of my Physician—He treats me with great tenderness, and bids me in due time to expect a perfect cure. I know too much of Him (though I know but little) to doubt either His skill or His promise.

It is true, I have suffered sad relapses since I have been under His care. Yet I confess, that the fault has not been His—but my own! I am a perverse and unruly patient! I have too often neglected His prescriptions, and broken the regimen He appoints me to observe. This perverseness, joined to the exceeding obstinacy of my disorders, would have caused me to be turned out as an incurable long ago—had I been under any other hand but His! Indeed—there is none like Him! When I have brought myself very low—He has still helped me. Blessed be His name—I am yet kept alive only by means of His perfect care.

Though His medicines are all beneficial—they are not all pleasant. Now and then He gives me a pleasant cordial; but I have many severe disorders, in which there is a needs-be for my frequently taking His bitter and unpalatable medicines!

We sometimes see published in the newspapers, acknowledgments of cures received. Methinks, if I were to publish my own case, that it would run something like this:

"I, John Newton, have long labored under a multitude of grievous disorders:

a fever of ungoverned passions,

a cancer of pride,

a frenzy of wild imaginations,

a severe lethargy, and

a deadly stroke!

In this deplorable situation, I suffered many things from many physicians, spent every penny I had—yet only grew worse and worse!

In this condition, Jesus, the Physician of souls, found me when I sought Him not. He undertook my recovery freely, without money and without price—these are His terms with all His patients! My fever is now abated, my senses are restored, my faculties are enlivened! In a word, I am a new man! And from His ability, His promise, and the experience of what He has already done—I have the fullest assurance that He will infallibly and perfectly heal me—and that I shall live forever as a monument of His power and grace!"

~ ~ ~ ~

Walking with Jesus

When I speak of walking with Jesus, my idea is helped by considering how it was with His first disciples—they lived in His presence! While He stayed in a place—they stayed; and when He moved—they went with Him. Having Him thus always near, always in view—the sight of Him undoubtedly gave a composure to their whole behavior; and was a check upon their eyes, their

tongues, and their actions!

When they had hard questions upon their minds—they did not puzzle themselves with vain reasonings. When they were in need—they looked to Him for a supply. When they had difficulties and dangers—they little doubted of deliverance, knowing that He was with them.

Just so, I need a faith that shall have such an abiding, experimental conviction of His nearness and presence—as if I actually saw Him! "Lord, increase my faith!"

Surely, if He were now upon earth, and I expected a visit from Him this afternoon—my heart would bound at the thought! With what a mixture of joy and fear would I open the door to receive Him! How cautious would I be—not to do or say anything that might grieve Him, and shorten His stay with me! And how gladly, if He gave me permission to speak, would I catch the opportunity of telling Him all my concerns! Surely I would be unwilling to let Him go—until He had healed the wounds in my soul, and renewed my spiritual strength; until He had taught me better how to serve Him, and promised to support me in His service. And if I heard Him say, with an audible voice, "Though they fight against you—they shall not prevail, for I am always with you to deliver you!" I would bid adieu to fear!

But, alas, my unbelieving heart! Are not these things true, even at present? Is He not as near and as kind? Have I not the same reasons and the same encouragement to set Him always before me—and to tell Him . . .

all my needs,

all my fears, and

all my troubles—

as if I saw Him with my bodily eyes!

"Be sure of this: I am with you always—even to the end of the age!" Matthew 28:20

~ ~ ~ ~

Worship God in the shop or kitchen

May 2, 1771

My dear friend,

The more the Lord blesses you in earthly things—the more sensible you will be that true happiness is only to be found in Himself; for sin and vanity are closely connected with everything beneath the skies! In this view, I trust He will enable you to number your troubles among your mercies, as necessary to keep your soul from cleaving to the dust, and to quicken your prayers and desires heavenwards.

Our necessary relationships in this life, especially those which are most pleasing, are attended with many snares. May the Lord keep you sensible of the danger, that you may be watchful against the first appearances of spiritual decline, and be continually crying, "Hold me up—and then I shall be safe!"

I am, however, fully persuaded that a due attention to the concerns of our relative duties and callings in this world, can never be a hindrance to our walking with God. These earthly things require some of our thoughts—and much of our time; and if we can manage them in obedience to His will, and with a reference to His glory—they are then sanctified, and become holy actions. A believer, acting in a right spirit, may be truly said to worship God in the shop or kitchen, no less than when waiting on Him in prayer and Scripture meditation. A person called by God's providence to sweep the streets, if he does it to the Lord, performs as acceptable a service as another who should preach the Gospel to thousands!

~ ~ ~ ~ The magical lantern blinding us with a splendid delusion!

"Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place—because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy!" Micah 2:10

My dear friend,

What a poor, uncertain and dying world is this! What a wilderness in itself! Without the saving knowledge of Jesus—how dark, how desolate it is! It does not appear to us thus, before we were saved—because we were then in a state of enchantment, the magical lantern blinding us with a splendid delusion!

It is a great mercy to be undeceived in time; and though our mirthful dreams are at an end, and we awake to everything that is dismaying—yet we see a highway through the wilderness, and a powerful and infallible Guide at hand to conduct us through it! And we can discern, beyond the limits of the wilderness—a better land, where we shall be at rest and at home!

What will the difficulties we met along the way—then signify? The remembrance of them will only remain to heighten our sense of the love, care, and power of our Savior and Leader! O how shall we then admire, adore, and praise Him—when He condescends to unfold to us—the beauty, propriety, and harmony of the whole train of His providential dealings with us—and give us a clear retrospect of all the way, and all the windings of our earthly pilgrimage!

In the mean while, the best method of adorning our profession, and of enjoying peace in our souls—is simply to trust Him, and absolutely to commit ourselves and our all to His wise and loving management. By casting our burdens upon Him—our hearts become light and cheerful. We are then freed from a thousand anxieties and worries—which are wearisome to our minds, and which are needless for us—yes, even useless!

Oh the blessedness of this confident trust in our Father's care, through all the changes and vicissitudes we meet with—knowing that His love, purpose and promise—are wise, good and unchangeable! May this be your experience!

~ ~ ~ ~

He drank the whole cup!

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble! Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas!" Psalms 46:1-2

November 2, 1761

My dear sister,

Let us not be greatly discouraged at the many tribulations, difficulties and disappointments which lie in the path which leads to glory. Our Lord has plainly told us, that "in this world, you will have many trials and sorrows." Yet He has also made a suitable provision for every case we can meet with; and is Himself always near to those who call upon Him—as a sure refuge, an almighty strength, a never-failing, ever-present help in every time of trouble!

Jesus Himself was a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief for our sakes. He drank the whole cup of unmixed wrath for us! Shall we then refuse to taste a sip of the cup of affliction at His appointment; especially when His wisdom and His love prepare it for us—and He proportions every circumstance to our strength; when He puts it into our hands, not in anger—but in tender mercy—to do us good, to bring us near to Himself; and when He sweetens every bitter sip with those comforts which none but He can give?

All former believers were once as we are now—they had their afflictions and their fears, their enemies and temptations; they were exercised with a wicked heart, and a wicked world! Now they are all before the eternal throne of God and the Lamb! While we are sighing—they are singing! While we are fighting—they are triumphing!

The time is short—and the world is passing away! All its troubles and all its vanities will soon be at an end! In a little while, "we shall see Him as He is!" Every veil will be taken away, every seeming frown will be removed from His face—and every tear wiped away from ours! We shall also be like Him! Even now, when we contemplate His glory as shining in the looking-glass of the Gospel—we feel ourselves, in some measure, transformed into His image! What a sudden, wonderful, and abiding change we shall then experience—when He shall shine directly, immediately, and eternally upon our souls, without one interposing cloud between!

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:3

~ ~ ~ ~ The secret of being content!

"Godliness with contentment is great gain!" 1 Timothy 6:6

August 17, 1776

My dear friend,

It befits every Christian to say—It is not necessary for me to be rich—or what the world accounts wise. It is not necessary for me to be healthy—or admired by my fellow-worms. It is not necessary for me to pass through life in a state of prosperity and outward comfort. These things may be, or they may not be—as the Lord in His wisdom shall appoint them for me.

But it is necessary for me to be humble and spiritual, to seek communion with God, to adorn my profession of the Gospel, and to yield submissively to His disposal, in whatever way, whether of

service or suffering—that He shall be pleased to call me to glorify Him in this world. It is not necessary for me to live long—but highly expedient that while I do live—I should live unto Him! Here then, I would bound my desires; and here, having His Word for my rule, I am secured from asking amiss. Let me have His presence, wisdom to know my calling, and opportunities and faithfulness to improve them; and as to the rest, Lord, help me to sincerely pray,

Whatever You will,

whenever You will, and

however You will.

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want!" Php 4:11-12

~ ~ ~ ~

There are only two things which I am sure of

When I was young, I was sure of many things.

But now that I am old, there are only two

things which I am sure of:

One is that I am a miserable sinner!

Secondly, that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior!

He is well taught—who learns these two lessons.

"This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full

acceptance: 'Christ Jesus came into the world

to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them!"

1 Timothy 1:15

~ ~ ~ ~

If I ever reach heaven, I expect to find three wonders there:

first, to meet some I would not have expected to be there;

second, to miss some I would have expected to be there;

third, the greatest wonder of all—to find myself there!

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

~ ~ ~ ~

Academic studies

Dear friend,

I truly pity those who rise early and study late—with no higher prize and prospect in view, than the obtaining of academic honors! Such pursuits will before long appear (as they really are) as vain as the foolish games of children! May the Lord impress them with the noble ambition of living to and for Him. If these scholars, who are laboring for pebbles under the semblance of goodly pearls, had a discovery of the Pearl of great price—how quickly and gladly would they lay down their admired attainments, and become fools—that they might be truly wise! Their academic studies, if taken in the aggregate, are little better than splendid trifles!

Friend, what a snare have you escaped! You would have been nothing but a scholar—had not God visited your heart and enlightened you by His grace! Now I trust you account your former academic gains, but loss—compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus. What you have attained in the way of learning, will be useful to you—if sanctified, and chiefly so by the knowledge which you have of its insufficiency to any valuable purpose in the great concerns of life—knowing God and walking with Him!

~ ~ ~ ~

02.05. Choice Quotes contd

His sheep feed in the midst of wolves!

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need!" Psalms 23:1

The Lord is my Shepherd! This is a comprehensive word. The sheep can do nothing for themselves. The Shepherd must guide, guard, feed, heal and recover. It is well for us—that our Shepherd is the Lord Almighty! If His power, care, compassion and fullness were not infinite—the poor sheep would be forsaken, starved and die! But we have a Shepherd full of care, full of kindness, full of power, who has said, "I will search for My lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak!" Ezekiel 34:16. How tender are these expressions, and how well fulfilled! His sheep feed in the midst of wolves—yet are safely preserved; for, though they cannot see Him—His eye and His heart are ever upon them!

Which of God's children have not cause to say, "My soul is among lions!" But our Shepherd stops their mouths, or only permits them to gape and roar, and show their teeth. He does not allow them to bite and tear us at their will. Let us trust our Shepherd—and all shall be well.

As to daily occurrences, it is best to trust that a daily portion of comforts and crosses—each one the most suitable to our case—is adjusted and appointed by the hand which was once nailed to the cross for us! We must trust, that where the path of duty and prudence leads us—that there is the best situation we could possibly be in, at that time.

~ ~ ~ ~ The fight!

September 1764

My dear Madam,

I understand something of your warfare. Paul describes his own case in few words, "Conflicts on the outside, fears on the inside." Does not this comprehend all you would say? And how are you to know experimentally, either your own weakness—or the power, wisdom and grace of God, seasonably and sufficiently afforded—but by frequent and various trials? How are the graces of patience, resignation, meekness and faith, to be discovered and increased—but by the exercise of trials?

The Lord has chosen, called, and armed us for the fight! Shall we wish to be excused from the battle? Shall we not rather rejoice that we have the honor to appear in such a cause, under such a Captain, such a banner and in such a company?

God has graciously provided:

a complete suit of armor,

formidable weapons,

precious balm to heal us—if we receive a wound, and

precious cordials to revive us—when we are in danger of fainting!

Further, we are assured of the victory beforehand! O what a crown of glory is prepared for every conqueror, which Jesus, the righteous Judge, the gracious Savior—shall place upon every faithful head with His own hand!

So let us not be weary and faint, for in due season we shall reap! The time is short! In a little while, the struggle of indwelling sin, and all the conflicts surrounding us, shall be known no more! "Be faithful, even to the point of death—and I will give you the crown of life!" Revelation 2:10

~ ~ ~ ~

He has a numerous and necessitous family!

What a multitude of eyes and hearts wait at the Throne of Grace! He has a numerous and necessitous family—but He is rich enough to supply them all—and His tender compassions extend to the poorest and most unworthy of them! Like the sun—He can cheer and enlighten millions of His poor pensioners at once! He gives to each one as bountifully—as if there were no others to partake of His favor!

His best blessings are not diminished—by being shared among many. The greatest earthly monarch would soon be poor—if he was to give but a pittance to all his subjects. But Jesus has unsearchable, inexhaustible riches of grace to bestow!

The innumerable assembly around the Eternal Throne are all continually supplied from His fullness; and yet there is enough and to spare for His earthly children also—and for all who shall come after us! May He give us an eager appetite—a hunger and thirst that will not be satisfied with anything short of the Bread of Life. We may confidently open our mouths wide—for He has promised to fill them!

"Let us therefore approach the Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need!" Hebrews 4:16

~ ~ ~ ~

Mr. Cox’s Museum

August, 1772

My dear Miss,

I received some instruction where I little expected it—at Mr. Cox’s Museum. The efforts of his ingenuity amazed me—while at the same time I was struck with their insignificance. His fine things were curious beyond all I had any idea of; and yet what are they better than toys and amusements, suited to the taste of children! And notwithstanding the variety of their motions, they were all destitute of life.

There is unspeakably more wisdom and skill in the mechanism of a butterfly or a bee which flutters unnoticed in the fields—than in all his fancy apparatus put together! But the works of God are disregarded, while the feeble imitations of them which men can produce gain universal applause! If you and I could make self-moving lions and elephants, what would it profit us?

Blessed be God, that He has given us some glimpses of His wisdom and love—by which our hearts, more hard and lifeless by nature than the stones in the street—are constrained and enabled to move upwards, and to seek after Him. He has given us in His Word, a greater treasure than all that we ever beheld with our eyes, and a hope which shall flourish when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up! What will all the fine things of men's devising be worth on that day?

~ ~ ~ ~

Then they hiss and spit their venom!

"I know, O Lord, that Your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness You have afflicted me!" Psalms 119:75

"God disciplines us for our good—that we may share in His holiness." Hebrews 12:10

In Scripture, we read much concerning the emptiness, vanity and uncertainty of the present world.

When our minds are enlightened by the Holy Spirit—then we receive and acknowledge what His Word declares to be truth. Yet if we remain long without changes and trials, and when our path is very smooth—we are for the most part but faintly affected with what we profess to believe. But when some of our dearest friends die, or we ourselves are brought low with pain and sickness—then we not only say, but feel that this world must not, cannot be our rest!

We know by experience, that though afflictions in themselves are not joyous—but grievous—yet in due season they yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness. Various are the blessed fruits which afflictions produce:

By affliction, prayer is quickened—for our prayers are very apt to grow languid and formal in a time of ease.

Affliction greatly helps us to understand the Scriptures, especially the promises; most of which are made to times of trouble. We cannot so well know their fullness, sweetness and certainty—as when we have been in the situation to which they are suited, have been enabled to trust and plead them, and found them fulfilled in our own case.

We are usually indebted to affliction—as the means or occasion of the most signal discoveries we are favored with—of the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of the Lord. These are best observed by the evident proofs we have—that He is near to support us under trouble, and that He can and does deliver us out of it.

Likewise, many of our graces cannot thrive or manifest themselves, without trials—such as resignation, patience, meekness and long-suffering. Strength of grace is not ordinarily acquired by those who sit still and live at ease.

Afflictions do us good likewise, as they make us more acquainted with what is in our own hearts, and thereby promote humiliation and self-abasement. There are abominations which, like nests of vipers, lie so quietly within our hearts, that we hardly suspect they are there—until the rod of affliction rouses them! Then they hiss and spit their venom! This discovery is indeed very distressing—yet, until it is made, we are prone to think ourselves much less vile than we really are, and cannot so heartily abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes.

I must write a sermon rather than a letter—if I would enumerate all the good fruits which, by the power of sanctifying grace, are produced from this bitter tree of affliction!

While we have such a depraved nature, and live in such a polluted world; while the roots of pride, vanity, self-dependence and self-seeking, are so strong within us—we need a variety of sharp afflictions to keep us from cleaving to the dust!

"Before I was afflicted I went astray—but now I obey Your Word." Psalms 119:67

~ ~ ~ ~

Stupid creature!

"What a wretched man I am!" Romans 7:24

January 27, 1778

My dear friend,

At present it is January with me—both within and without. The outward sun shines and looks pleasant—but his beams are faint, and too feeble to dissolve the frost.

Is it just so in my heart. I have many bright and pleasant beams of truth in my mind’s view—but they have but little power to warm my heart—and cold predominates in my frost-bound spirit!

I could tell a stranger something about Jesus, which would perhaps astonish him—such a glorious person is He! Such wonderful love! Such humiliation! Such a life! Such a death! I could tell of what He is in Himself, and what He is to His people! What a sun! What a shield! What a fortress! What a friend! My tongue can run on upon these themes sometimes; and could my heart keep pace with it—I would be the happiest fellow in the country! Stupid creature! to know these things so well—and yet be no more affected with them!

Indeed, I have reason to be upon ill terms with myself! It is strange that pride should ever find anything in my experience to feed upon—but this completes my character for folly, vileness, and inconsistency—that I am not only vile—but proud! And though I am convinced I am a very wretch, and nothing before the Lord—yet I am prone to go forth among my fellow-worms, as though I were wise and good!

You ask me what I am doing. I must admit, that too much of my time passes in busy idleness, too much in waking dreams. I aim at something—but hindrances from within and without—make it difficult for me to accomplish anything! I dare not say that I am absolutely idle, or that I willfully waste much of my time. I have seldom one hour free from interruption: letters come that must be answered, visitors who must be received, and business which must be attended to. I have a good

many sheep and lambs to look after—sick and afflicted souls, dear to the Lord—and these must not be neglected. Among these various avocations, night comes before I am ready for noon!

O precious, irrecoverable time! O that I had more wisdom in redeeming and improving you!

I beg you to pray for me. I am a poor creature—and full of needs. I seem to need . . .

the wisdom of Solomon,

the meekness of Moses, and

the zeal of Paul—

to enable me to fulfill my ministry.

~ ~ ~ ~

I would have carried the whole human race to hell with me!

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

October 27, 1778

My dear friend,

How industriously is Satan served! I was formerly one of his most active under-tempters! Not content with running down the broad way which leads to destruction by myself—I was indefatigable in enticing others! And, had my influence been equal to my wishes—I would have carried the whole human race to hell with me! And doubtless some have already perished, to whose destruction I was greatly instrumental, by tempting them to sin, and by poisoning and hardening them with principles of infidelity. And yet I was spared! When I think of the most with whom I spent my ungodly days of ignorance, I am ready to say, "I alone have escaped alive!"

Surely I have not half the activity and zeal in the service of Him who snatched me as a brand out of the burning—as I had in the service of His enemy! Then the whole stream of my endeavors and affections went one way; now my best desires are continually crossed, counteracted, and spoiled, by the sin which dwells in me! Then the tide of a corrupt nature bore me along; now I have to strive and swim against it.

Had my abilities and opportunities been equal to my heart desires—I would have been a monster of profaneness and profligacy! A common drunkard or harlot is a petty sinner—compared to what I once was! I had unabated ambition, and wanted to rank in wickedness among the foremost of the human race!

"O to grace how great a debtor—daily I’m constrained to be!"

~ ~ ~ ~

Filled with folly, vanity, and vexation!

August 28, 1779

My dear friend,

The days speed away apace! Each one bears away its own burden with it—to return no more. Both pleasures and pains which are past—are gone forever! What is yet future will likewise, soon be past.

Our final end will shortly arrive! O to realize the thought, and to judge of things now in some measure suitable to the opinion which we shall form of them, when we are about to leave them all! Many things which now either elate or depress us—will then appear to be trifles as light as air!

Only one thing is needful—

to have our hearts united to Jesus in humble faith;

to set Him always before us;

to rejoice in Him as our Shepherd and our portion;

to submit to all His appointments, not of necessity, because He is stronger than us—but with a cheerful acquiescence, because He is wise and good, and loves us better than we do ourselves;

to feed upon His truth;

to have our understandings, wills, affections, imaginations, memory—all filled and impressed with the great mysteries of His redeeming love;

to do all for Jesus;

to receive all from Jesus;

to find all in Jesus!

I have mentioned many things, but they are all comprised in one—a life of faith in Jesus!

We are empty vessels in ourselves—but we cannot remain empty. Unless Jesus dwells in our hearts, and fills them with His power and presence—they will be filled with folly, vanity, and vexation!

~ ~ ~ ~

Wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves

Concerning 'Handel's Messiah' John Newton wrote:

How shall we view the people of our times? I see the great mass of people involved in one common charge of high treason against the omnipotent God! They are already in a state of imprisonment, but have not yet been brought to their trial. The evidence against them is so plain, strong and pointed, that there is not the least doubt of their guilt being fully proved—and that nothing but a free pardon from God can preserve them from their deserved eternal punishment!

In this situation, it would seem in their best interest—to avail themselves of every expedient in their power for obtaining God's mercy. But they are entirely heedless of their imminent danger, and are wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves, that they may pass away the term of their imprisonment with as much cheerfulness as possible!

Among other resources, they call in the assistance of music—and they are particularly pleased with ’Handel’s Messiah’. They choose to make . . .

the solemnities of their impending judgment,

the character of their Judge,

the methods of His procedure, and

the dreadful punishment to which they are exposed

—the themes of their musical entertainment!

And, as if they were quite unconcerned in the outcome—their attention is chiefly fixed upon the skill of the composer, in adapting the style of his music—to the very solemn subjects with which they are trifling!

The offended King, however, unasked by them, and out of His great mercy and compassion towards those who have no pity for themselves, sends them a gracious message. He assures them that He is unwilling that they should eternally perish; and that He requires, yes, He entreats them to submit to Him! He points out a way in which He offers them a free and a full pardon!

But, instead of taking a single step towards a compliance with His undeserved and gracious offer—they set His message to music! And this, together with a description of their present hopeless state, and of the fearful doom awaiting them if they continue obstinate, is sung for their entertainment, and accompanied with every kind of music!

Surely, if such a case as I have supposed, could be found in real life, though I might admire the musical taste of these people—I would certainly commiserate their stupidity and hardness of heart!

~ ~ ~ ~

There is no such a word in the ’dictionary of faith’

"Godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Timothy 6:6

There is many a thing which the world calls ’disappointment’, but there is no such a word in the ’dictionary of faith’. What to others are disappointments, are divine appointments to believers.

If two angels were sent down from heaven—one to conduct an empire, and the other to sweep a street—they would feel no inclination to change employments.

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in need." Php 4:11-12

~ ~ ~ ~ A vulnerable heel

"In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes." 2 Corinthians 2:11

Satan knows knows how to suit his temptations to our personal tempers and circumstances. And if, like Achilles, you have a vulnerable heel—the old serpent will be sure to strike there!

"Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil." Ephesians 6:11

~ ~ ~ ~

I am glad that it is a mortal disease, from which I will not recover!

"For to me, to live is Christ—and to die is gain!" Php 1:21

Dear friend,

You kindly inquire about my health. I am, through the grace of God—perfectly well. Yet, as healthy as I am—I labor under a growing disorder, for which there is no cure—I mean old age. I am glad that it is a mortal disease, from which I will not recover! I would not always want to live in such a poor world as this! I have a Scriptural hope of a glorious inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—reserved in heaven for me!

I am now in my seventy-second year, and have lived long enough. I have known something of the evils of life—and have had a large share of the good things of life. I know what the world can do—and what it cannot do. It can neither give nor take away that peace of God which passes all understanding; it cannot soothe a wounded conscience, nor enable us to meet death and eternity with comfort.

I have an abiding and abounding experience, that the Gospel is the "universal remedy" adapted to all our wants and all our woes; and a "suitable help" when every other help fails!

Your affectionate friend,

John Newton

~ ~ ~ ~

If I should meet a child who has lost his penny

"The Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone." 2 Timothy 2:24

John Newton’s biographer writes, "When Mr. Newton moved to London—being of the most friendly and generous disposition, his house was open to Christians of all social ranks and church denominations. Here, like a father among his children, he used to entertain, encourage, and instruct his friends. Here also the poor, the afflicted, and the tempted found an asylum and a sympathy, which they could scarcely find, in an equal degree, anywhere else. Sometimes his whole day was so benevolently spent, that he was found both rejoicing with those who rejoiced—and literally weeping with those who wept!

"I remember to have heard him say, ’I see two heaps in this world—of human happiness and misery. If I can take but the smallest bit from one heap—and add to the other, I shall be content. As I am on my way home, if I should meet a child who has lost his penny—and if, by giving him another penny, I could wipe away his tears—I feel I have done something. I would be glad, indeed, to do greater things—but I will not neglect these smaller acts of kindness.’

"Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Colossians 3:12

~ ~ ~ ~ The rich followers of this poor Savior

"There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, feasting lavishly every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table." Luke 16:19-21

However some professors may seem to differ from the world—they are not easily distinguished upon many other points; particularly at their meals. The people of the world can scarcely exceed them in the cost, care, profusion, and variety with which their tables are covered.

Perhaps there is no one circumstance in the history of our Savior so little laid to heart, so generally overlooked, by those who acknowledge him as their Master and their Lord—as that state of poverty to which He submitted, while upon earth. He had no home. He did not even have money to pay His tax. He was hungry when He went to the fig-tree. He wrought no miracle solely for His own relief; but He felt for the necessitous, and miraculously fed them by thousands; not with dainties, which would have been equally easy to Him—but, finding a few loaves and fish among them, He satisfied their needs with plain food. Yes, after His resurrection, when He had taken possession of all power and authority both in heaven and in earth—He condescended to dine with His disciples upon broiled fish and bread, which He likewise provided for them.

Alas! the rich followers of this poor Savior have more reason to be ashamed of . . .

their gorgeous apparel,

their fine houses,

their elegant furniture, and

their sumptuous feastings

—than to value themselves upon such trifles!

They are unavoidable appendages to people in some situations; but, I believe, those who have drank deeply into our Lord’s spirit, account them rather burdens than benefits!

We must be watchful of that sinful, shameful conformity to the world, which spreads like a gangrene, which is the reproach of the gospel, and threatens the utter extinction of vital religion in multitudes who profess it.

"In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him—Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire!" Luke 16:23-24

~ ~ ~ ~

If I were not so poor, so sick, so foolish

May 31, 1775

My dear friend,

You ask how I am—but I know not what answer to give. My experience is made up of enigmas—but the sum and solution of all is, "That I am a vile creature—but I have a good and gracious Savior!"

He has chosen me—and through His rich grace—I have chosen Him! There is a union between Him and my soul, which shall never be broken, because He has undertaken for both parts—that He will never forsake me, and that I shall never forsake Him. Oh, I like those royal, sovereign words, "I will," and "they shall."

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts—that they shall not depart from Me!" Jeremiah 32:40

How sweetly are they suited to the long experience He has given me of my own weakness, and the power and subtlety of Satan! If my spiritual conflicts terminate in victory—it must be owing to His own arm, and for His own name's sake. For I in myself have neither strength nor plea. If I were not so poor, so sick, so foolish—the power, skill, riches, wisdom and mercy of my Physician, Shepherd, and Savior—would not be so signally illustrated in my own case! Upon this account, instead of complaining, we may glory in our infirmities. Oh, it is pleasant to be deeply indebted to Him, to find Him, and own Him, all in all—

Our Husband, Shepherd, Brother, Friend,

Our Guide, and Guard, our Way, and End!

"Christ is all!" Colossians 3:11

~ ~ ~ ~

What a happy state we are in!

My dear wife,

I hope you will make good use of the Bible, and throne of grace, to preserve you from being infected by the spirit of the world. Ah! what a poor vain thing is the world! We have both found it so at times, (though we once loved it,) and shall find it so again. May the Lord keep us alert to a sense of its vanity!

Your recent sickness and near prospect of death, force upon your mind a conviction of the littleness and vanity of a worldly life. But there is a more pleasing way of learning this lesson, if we pay due attention to the Word of God, and pray for the light of His countenance. If He is pleased to make His face to shine upon us—all that the world can offer to bribe and tempt us, will appear insignificant and trivial as the sports of children!

What a happy state we are in! We have . . .

peace with God, by Jesus Christ;

liberty of access to the throne of grace;

a saving interest in all God's promises;

a sure Guide along the way; and

a glorious inheritance at our journey's end!

These things were once hidden from us! We were so blinded by the god of this world—that we could look no farther than the present life! But, even then, the Lord looked upon us with an eye of mercy. He led us on, gradually, by a way which we knew not—to bring us into the paths of eternal peace.

Though death will eventually part us—we shall soon meet again—to part no more! to be forever with the Lord; to join in an eternal song to Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood! Then all tears shall be wiped from our eyes—and we shall weep no more forever!

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined—what God has prepared for those who love Him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9

~ ~ ~ ~

Swimming down the stream of vanity and folly

My dear wife,

What is all below—but vanity and vexation! There is no solid comfort, no abiding peace—but what we derive from God. Once we knew nothing of this. But the Lord directed our path in life, in subservience to the designs of His saving grace. How few of those with whom you were acquainted in your early years, have any right knowledge of God—or of themselves. We ourselves set out upon this dreadful plan; and, if God's mercy had not stopped us—we would have gone on, until we had perished with a lie in our own right hands! Admire the Lord's goodness in choosing you (as one of a thousand) to the knowledge of His truth—when you might have been still swimming down the stream of vanity and folly, with the thoughtless multitude!

The great lesson we have to learn, is to love and trust the Lord Jesus. We are slow scholars, but He can teach us effectually. Without Him, the very best of this life is insipid. His presence can make the worst things supportable. He can . . .

forgive sin,

impart grace,

subdue corruption,

silence unbelief,

make us strong in our weakness, and

do more than we can either ask or think!

And what He does—He does freely, without money and without price!

A humble spirit, sincere faith, heart-felt repentance, and every other grace and virtue—are all His gifts, which He bestows freely on the unworthy.

We have nothing, deserve nothing, can do nothing; but He is mighty to both save and to preserve all who come to Him in sincere faith and love.

May we grow daily in the knowledge of His grace, and views of His excellency. He will surely, though gradually, make Himself known to the heart that sincerely seeks Him. Everything else is vain, uncertain and changeable.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus—the author and perfecter of our faith!" Hebrews 12:2

~ ~ ~ ~

Old age is creeping in upon us!

"For this God is our God for ever and ever! He will be our guide even unto death!" Psalms 48:14

August 6, 1785

My dear wife,

The Lord has preserved us through a long course of years, and in different situations, from various calamities which have overtaken others. Our obligations to thankfulness are singular and numerous.

Tell our niece Eliza that I love her very dearly. She would soon be well—if I could make her so. But she is in better hands than mine! I have a comfortable hope that her illness has been, and will be, sanctified to an end far more desirable than health or life itself. Therefore I leave her to the wise and merciful direction of the Lord, who loves her better than I can.

May the Lord bless this little separation to quicken us to mutual prayer, and to lead us to a thankful review of the mercy and goodness which have followed us through the many years we have been united.

How many changes have we seen!

Under how many trials have we been supported!

How many deliverances have we known!

How many comforts have we enjoyed!

Especially, what great advantages have we possessed, in knowing those things which pertain to our everlasting peace!

The years we have passed together—will return no more. The afflictions are gone, the pleasures likewise are gone, forever. The longer we live, such pleasures as this world can afford, will, more and more, lose their power of pleasing. Only our love, I trust, will exist and flourish to the end of life—yes, beyond it! It will always be a truth, that the Lord, in giving you to me—gave me the best temporal desire of my heart. But the shadows of the evening advance. Old age is creeping in upon us, and the days are approaching when we shall have no pleasure—but what we can derive from the good Word of God, and the consolations of his Holy Spirit. These, if we are favored with them, will sufficiently compensate for the abatement, or the loss, of all the rest. The streams may run dry—but the fountain of living waters will always flow! May His presence be near our hearts—and

then all will be well.

~ ~ ~ ~

He became sick on Saturday—and died on Monday!

Dear friend,

Two people who were well the day you left us—have since died. One of them has already been buried—he was a poor ungodly creature, suddenly cut off in the prime of life! The other man was young, jovial, jesting and thoughtless. He became sick on Saturday—and died on Monday!

Oh, my friend, what do we owe to the grace of God—that we were not cut off in the days of our ignorance—as so many others have been!

Blessed be God for Jesus Christ—He is exalted to "save to the uttermost!" That word 'uttermost' has an extensive meaning—it includes a conquest over all difficulties, and a supply of all that is necessary! How totally, and how often, would I have been lost—had not Jesus engaged to save me to the uttermost! And many a time I would have given up all hope—but for that text, "He is able to save to the uttermost!" "To the uttermost" reaches to all possible circumstances. He can . . .

enlighten the most ignorant,

soften the most obdurate,

support the most tempted,

comfort the most distressed,

pardon the most guilty!

Oh, may His precious name be engraved upon our hearts, and sound sweeter than music to our ears—for He has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and will save us to the uttermost—in defiance of . . .

all our sins,

all our fears and

all our enemies!

~ ~ ~ ~

If every man was compelled to speak all that he thinks

"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I know! I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve." Jeremiah 17:9-10

The heart, with all its deceitful and wicked workings—is incessantly under Divine inspection and examination! The Lord searches the heart—He traces and investigates, the inmost principles of our souls and their motives, with the utmost exactness!

To form a more just idea of this scrutiny, let us ask ourselves how we could bear to be compelled to declare aloud, in full company—every thought, wish and desire which pass through our minds—with no exception! People, if they were brought to this trial, would rather choose to die than comply with it!

If every man was compelled to speak all that he thinks—there would be an end of human society; and man would no more venture to dwell with man, than with tigers and bears!

We know what mischief one ungoverned tongue may sometimes occasion. But the tongue can do no evil, any farther than as it is an instrument of disclosing the hidden things of the heart—yet it is but a small part of these, that the worst tongue is capable of disclosing! What then would be the case, if all our hearts were open—and all our evil thoughts, motives and desires known to one another! What a mixture of confusion, defiance, shame, rage, fear, and contempt—would overspread every countenance!

And yet, we are thus exposed to the searching eye of a pure and holy God! The Lord knows the thoughts of man's heart, that they are vain. He long ago declared the result of His examination, "God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually!" Thus, we see how vile and hateful our hearts must appear—in the sight of a heart-searching God!

And consider that the Lord does not observe the heart of man with the indifference of a mere spectator—but as an impartial and inflexible Judge! "I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve!" Alas! Is it not sufficient to fill our souls with dread—that He sits as Judge, not only upon outward actions, but He examines the very thoughts and intents of the heart! Can any of us stand under such a trial?

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account!" Hebrews 4:13

This is a most uncomfortable doctrine indeed—were there no remedy provided! "The blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin!" 1 John 1:7

~ ~ ~ ~

I am still sadly deficient in practice!

Who that had seen me as a slave in Africa, could have expected what has since taken place! How unworthy am I of all that I have received—and most unworthy of the honor of preaching the Gospel, which I too long despised and blasphemed! The language of Psalms 40:5 suits my soul well, "Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders You have done. The things You planned for us no one can recount to You! Were I to speak and tell of them—they would be too many to declare!" There is no end to the inventory of my mercies! May He who has given so much to me, and done so much for me—add the crowning mercy of a thankful heart! Though I can talk of thankfulness, I feel much insensibility and hardness of heart; but, I know that, while sin dwells in me, it will have such effects.

Alas! though I know in theory what a Christian should be—I am still sadly deficient in practice! I am a poor creature, and see much to be ashamed of every day, and in every circumstance. Yet, though sin will distress—it cannot condemn, those who believe in Jesus! "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" Romans 8:1

~ ~ ~ ~

Those mistakes, blemishes and faults in others

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Romans 15:7

The Christian, especially he who is advanced and established in the life of faith, has a fervent zeal for God—for the honor of His Name, His Word and His Gospel. The honest warmth of zeal which he feels, when God's Word is broken, His Gospel is despised, and when the great and glorious Name of the Lord his God is profaned, would, by the occasion of his infirmities, often degenerate into anger or contempt towards those who error—if he was under the influence of zeal alone.

But his zeal is blended with benevolence and humility; it is softened by a consciousness of his own frailty and fallibility. He is aware, that his knowledge is very limited in itself, and very faint in its transforming power in his own life; that his attainments are weak and few, compared with his deficiencies; that his gratitude is very disproportionate to his obligations; and that his obedience is unspeakably short of conformity to his prescribed rule; that he has nothing but what he has received, and has received nothing but what, in a greater or less degree, he has either misapplied or misimproved. He is, therefore, a debtor to the mercy of God—and lives upon His multiplied forgiveness.

The Christian also makes the gracious conduct of the Lord towards himself—a pattern for his own conduct towards his fellow-worms. He cannot boast of himself—nor is he anxious to censure others. He considers himself, lest he also fall. And thus he learns tenderness and compassion to others, and to bear patiently with those mistakes, blemishes and faults in others—which once belonged to his own character; and from which, as yet, he is but imperfectly freed.

He therefore acts in character, as the follower of Him who was compassionate towards the infirmities and mistakes of His disciples, and taught them gradually, as they were able to bear it—and not everything at once.

But then, the same considerations which inspire him with meekness and gentleness towards those who oppose the truth—strengthen his regard for the truth itself, and his conviction of its importance. For the sake of peace, which he loves and cultivates—he accommodates himself, as far as he lawfully can, to the weaknesses and mistakes of other sincere Christians; though he is thereby exposed to be censured by 'bigots' of all parties, who deem him flexible and wavering, like a reed shaken with the wind.

But there are other fundamental points, essential to the Gospel, which are the foundations of his hope, and the sources of his joy. For his firm attachment to these, he is content to be treated as a 'bigot' himself! For here he is immovable as an iron pillar; nor can either the fear or the favor of man prevail on him to yield the truth of the Gospel, no not for an hour! (Galatians 2:5). Here his judgment is fixed; and he expresses it in simple and unequivocal language, so as not to leave

either friends or enemies in suspense, concerning the side which he has chosen, or the cause which is nearest to his heart.

Knowing that the Gospel is the wisdom and power of God, and the only possible means by which fallen man can obtain peace with God—he most cordially embraces and avows it. Far from being ashamed of it—he esteems it his glory. He preaches Christ Jesus, and Him crucified. He disdains the thought of distorting, disguising, or softening the great doctrines of the grace of God, to render them more palatable to the depraved taste of the times (2 Corinthians 4:2). And he will no more encounter the errors and corrupt maxims and practices of the world, with any weapon but the truth as it is in Jesus—than he would venture to fight an enraged tiger with a paper sword!

~ ~ ~ ~ A weak, defenseless, foolish creature!

"He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young." Isaiah 40:11

Our Lord expressly calls Himself the "good Shepherd of the sheep", and the apostle Peter calls Him the "chief Shepherd." (John 10:1-42, 1 Peter 5:4)

With respect to power and authority, He is the chief, and, indeed, the sole Shepherd. The eyes of all His people are upon Him—and His watchful eye is upon and over all His flock. None but an omnipotent and omnipresent Shepherd can relieve all the necessities of all of His people, in all places, in the same moment, and be equally near and attentive to each one! Such is our great Shepherd! He is eminently the good Shepherd also, for He laid down His life for His sheep, and has redeemed them by His own blood.

This great and good Shepherd has a flock, whom He loved from eternity, and whom having once loved—He will love them to the end! (John 13:1). He humbled Himself for their sakes, submitted to partake of their nature and their sorrows, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He died for His sheep, "the just for the unjust," to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the power of Satan—and to bring them to God!

They all, by nature, had "gone astray, every one to his own way;" but having thus bought them with His blood, in His own appointed time—He seeks, finds and restores His sheep! By the power of His Word and Spirit, He makes Himself known to their hearts, causes them to hear and understand His voice, and guides them into His fold! They are then under His immediate protection and government.

Considered as individuals, they are fitly described by the name of "sheep". A sheep is a weak, defenseless, foolish creature; prone to wander, and can seldom return of its own accord. A sheep has neither strength to fight with the wolf, nor speed to escape from it; nor has a sheep the foresight of the ant, to provide its own sustenance.

Such is our character, and our situation! We are . . .

unable to take care of ourselves,

prone to wander from our resting-place,

exposed to enemies which we can neither escape nor withstand,

without any resource in ourselves, and

taught, by daily experience, the insufficiency of everything around us.

Yet, if Jesus is our Shepherd, as weak and helpless as we are—we may say with David, "The Lord is my Shepherd—I have everything I need! Surely Your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever!" Every sheep has an inheritance reserved for them in heaven, (1 Peter 1:4-5) and they shall be safely kept, while they are sojourners upon earth, for the Shepherd of Israel is their keeper.

The Good Shepherd cares for His flock. Not the slightest circumstance in their concerns, escapes His notice. When they are ready to faint, borne down with heavy exercises of mind, wearied with temptations, dry and disconsolate in their hearts—He seasonably revives them. Nor are they in affliction without a needs-be for it. All His dispensations towards them are medicinal, designed to correct, or to restrain, or to cure—the maladies of their souls. And they are all adjusted, by His wisdom and tenderness, to what they can bear, and to what their case requires.

The Good Shepherd is represented as counting their sighs, putting their tears into His bottle, recording their sorrows in His book of remembrance; and as being "able to sympathize with our weaknesses".

There are lambs among His flock, and for these He expresses a special tenderness. "He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart." Though they are weaklings, they shall not be left behind. If a poor lamb is weary, and unable to keep up with the flock, He shall carry it. These are new converts in the Lord’s family—they are, as yet, weak, unsettled and inexperienced. Almost every day brings them into a new and untried situation. They often meet with opposition and discouragement. What would become of them in such circumstances, if their faithful Shepherd had not promised that "He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart!"

~ ~ ~ ~

He is my Beloved, my Shepherd, my Savior and my Husband!

The life of faith is a happy life. Though it is attended with conflicts—there is an assurance of victory. If we sometimes get a wound—there is healing balm near at hand. If we seem to fall—we are raised again. And, if tribulations abound—then consolations shall much more abound. Is it not happiness to have . . .

an infallible Guide,

an invincible Guard,

an Almighty Friend?

It is bliss, to be able to say of the Maker of heaven and earth, "He is my Beloved, my Shepherd, my Savior and my Husband!"

Oh, the peace which flows from believing that all the events in which we are concerned, are under His immediate disposal; that the very hairs of our head are all numbered; that He delights in our prosperity; that there is a need-be, if we are in heaviness; and that all things shall surely work

together for our good!

How happy to have such views of His sovereignty, wisdom, love, and faithfulness—as will enable us to meet every difficult dispensation with submission; and to look through the painful changes of the present life—to that unchangeable inheritance to which the Lord is leading us, when all evil shall cease, and where our joy shall be perfect and eternal!

~ ~ ~ ~ A child of God in London!

"You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with Me, dressed in white, for they are worthy!" Revelation 3:4

July 7, 1778

My dear friend,

I don't know that I have anything to say worth the postage. But I do pity you in London! I see you melted with heat, stifled with smoke, stunned with noise!

Ah! what a change from the brooks, and woods, and birds, and green fields—to which you lately had access. Of old they used to retire into the deserts for contemplation and meditation.

If I was to set myself a moderate penance—it might be to spend two weeks in London in the height of summer! But I forget myself. I hope the Lord is with you—and then all places are alike. He makes the dungeon and the stocks comfortable, Acts 26:1-32. Yes, even a fiery furnace, and a lion's den! A child of God in London—seems to be in all these trying situations—but Jesus can preserve His own people. I honor the grace of God in those few (comparatively few, I fear,) who preserve their garments undefiled in that Sardis! The air is filled with spiritual infection; and it is by God's special power and miraculous preservation, that they enjoy spiritual health—when so many sicken and fall around them on the right hand and on the left. May the Lord preserve you from the various epidemic soul diseases which abound where you are—and may He be your comfort and defense from day to day.

"Hold me up—and I shall be safe!" Psalms 119:117

~ ~ ~ ~

Let them alone!

"They are joined to their idols—let them alone!" Hosea 4:17

God sometimes leaves men to themselves—their furious passions are unchained, and they are given up, without restraint, to the lusts of their own evil hearts! A more dreadful judgment than this, cannot be inflicted on this side of hell.

Matthew Henry writes, "People go on in sin until the Lord says, 'Let them alone!' Then they receive no more warnings—and feel no more convictions. Satan takes full possession of them—and they ripen for destruction! It is a sad and sore judgment for any man—to be let alone in sin! Those who are not disturbed in their sin—will be destroyed for their sin! May we be kept from this dreadful state; for the wrath of God, like a strong tempest—will soon hurry all impenitent sinners into eternal ruin!"

~ ~ ~ ~

We can't even imagine!

Our most enlarged ideas of our future glory, are faint and imperfect. Who can describe or conceive the happiness of heaven? It will be as unlike as possible—to this wilderness of sin and sorrow where we are now confined. Here on earth, we are in a warfare—but then we shall enter into perfect rest. We now cry out, "O that I had wings like a dove! For then would I flee away and be at REST." (Psalms 55:6)

Heaven will be a rest from all SIN. No 'unclean thing' shall ever defile or disturb us forever! We shall be free from all indwelling sin. This alone would be worth dying for! Indwelling sin is a burden under which all the redeemed must groan, while they sojourn in the body.

And those who are most spiritual—are most deeply affected with shame, humiliation, and grief, on account of their sins—because they have the clearest views of the holiness of God, the spirituality of His law, the love of Christ, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts! Therefore the Apostle Paul, though perhaps in grace and talents, in zeal and usefulness, was distinguished above all saints—accounted himself the 'chief of sinners,' (1 Timothy 1:15) 'less than the least of all saints,' (Ephesians 3:8) and cried out under the disparity he felt between what he actually was—and what he desired to be, "O wretched man that I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin!" (Romans 7:24)

But we shall not carry this burden of sin beyond the grave. The hour of death shall free us from our inbred enemies (the inseparable attendants of this frail perishing nature) which now trouble us, and we shall see them no more forever!

Heaven will also be a rest from all outward AFFLICTIONS, which, though necessary, and, under the influence of Divine grace, are profitable—yet they are grievous to bear. But in heaven, they will no more be necessary. Where there is no sin—there shall be no sorrow. Then, "God will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever!" (Revelation 21:4)

Heaven will also be a rest from SATAN'S TEMPTATIONS. How busy is this adversary of God and man—what various arts and schemes he employs! What surprising force, what constant assiduity does he employ to ensnare, distress, and terrify those who by grace have escaped from his servitude! He says, like Pharaoh of old, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will destroy!" (Exodus 15:9) He follows them to the last stage of life—but he can follow them no farther. The moment of their departure out of the body—shall place them beyond his reach forever!

Heaven will also be a rest from UNSATISFIED DESIRES. Here on earth, the more we drink—the more we thirst. But in heaven, our highest wishes shall be crowned and exceeded! We shall rest in full communion with Him whom we love; we shall no more complain of interruptions and imperfections, and a careless heart.

Here on earth—we obtain a little glimpse of His presence, when He brings us into His banqueting-house, and spreads His banner of love over us! And how gladly would we remain in such a desirable frame! How unwilling are we to 'come down' from the mount! But these pleasing and holy seasons are quickly ended, and often give place to some sudden unexpected trial, which

robs us of all that sweetness in which we lately rejoiced. But when we ascend the holy hill of God above—we shall never again 'come down'! We shall be forever with the Lord, never offend Him, and never be separated from Him again! "I will see Your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be fully satisfied with Your presence!" (Psalms 17:15)

Here on earth—we find a mixture of evil in our most holy moments! When we approach nearest to God, we have the liveliest sense of our defilement, and how much we fall short in every branch of duty, and in every temper of our hearts. But when we shall see Jesus as He is—we shall be fully transformed into His image, and be perfectly like Him!

"Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when He comes—we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He really is!" 1 John 3:2

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined—what God has prepared for those who love Him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9

~ ~ ~ ~ The more vile we are in our own eyes,

the more precious Christ will be to us!

03.0001. The Works of John Newton Vol 01

THE WORKS OF JOHN NEWTON

VOLUME I LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH, AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH HAW, LONDON: WITH MEMOIRS OF THE AUTHOR, AND GENERAL REMARKS ON HIS LIFE, CONNECTIONS, AND CHARACTER; BY THE REV. RICHARD CECIL, M.A.

THIRD EDITION. IN SIX VOLUMES. VOL. I Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 2002, Heritage Educational Systems, all rights reserved.

03.0002. Vol 01 - PREFACE

PREFACE The Memoirs of the Hon. and Reverend William Bromley Cardogan, and those of John Bacon, Esq., were written at the particular request of their relations; but in publishing these of the late Rev. John Newton, I profess myself a volunteer; and my motives were the following: When I perceived my venerable friend bending under a weight of years, and considered how soon, from the very course of nature, the world must lose so valuable an instructor and example when I reflected how common it is for hasty and inaccurate accounts of extraordinary characters to be obtruded on the public by venal writers, whenever more authentic documents are wanting above all, when I considered how striking a display such a life affords of the nature of true religion, of the power of Divine grace, of the mysterious but all-wise course of Divine Providence, and of the encouragement afforded for our dependence upon that Providence in the most trying circumstances, I say, on these accounts, I felt that the leading features of such a character should not be neglected, whilst it was easy to authenticate them correctly.

Besides which, I have observed a want of books of a certain class for young people; and have often been inquired of by Christian parents for publications that might amuse their families, and yet tend to promote their best interests. The number, however, of this kind which I have seen, and that appeared unexceptionable, is but small. For, as the characters and sentiments of some men become moral blights in society men, whose mouths seldom open but, like that of sepulchers, they discover the putridity they contain, and infect more or less whoever ventures within their baneful influence; so the reformed subject of these Memoirs was happily a remarkable instance of the reverse: the change that took place in his heart, after such a course of profligacy, affords a convincing demonstration of the truth and force of Christianity. Instead of proceeding as a blight in society, he became a blessing: his future course was a striking example of the beneficial effects of the Gospel; and that not only from the pulpit, and by his pen, but also by his conversation in the large circle of his acquaintance, of which there is yet living a multitude of witnesses.

Impressed, therefore, with the advantages which I conceived would result from the publication of these Memoirs, I communicated my design some years ago to Mr. N.--Whatever tended to promote that cause in which his heart had been long engaged, I was sure would not fail to obtain his concurrence. He accordingly promised to afford whatever materials might be necessary, beyond those which his printed "Narrative" contained. He promised also to read over and revise whatever was added from my own observation; and he soon after brought me an account in writing, containing every thing memorial which he recollected before the commencement of his "Narrative." I shall, therefore, detain the reader no longer than to assure him that the whole of the following Memoirs (except what relates to Mr. N.’s character) was submitted to him in MS. while he was capable of correcting it, and that it received his sanction.

R. C.

April, 1808.

03.0003. Vol 01 - MEMOIRS

MEMOIRS These Memoirs seem naturally to commence with the Account mentioned in the Preface, and which I here transcribe.

"I was born in London the 24th of July, 1725, old style. My parents, though not wealthy, were respectable. My father was many years master of a ship in the Mediterranean trade. In the year 1748 he went Governor of York Fort in Hudson's Bay, where he died in the year 1750.

"My mother was a Dissenter, a pious woman, and a member of the late Dr. Jennings's Church. She was of a weak, consumptive habit, loved retirement; and, as I was her only child, she made it the chief business and pleasure of her life to instruct me, and bring me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I have been told, that, from my birth, she had, in her mind, devoted me to the ministry; and that, had she lived till I was of a proper age, I was to have been sent to St. Andrew's in Scotland to be educated. But the Lord had appointed otherwise. My mother died before I was seven years of age.

"I was rather of a sedentary turn, not active and playful, as boys commonly are, but seemed as willing to learn as my mother was to teach me. I had some capacity, and a retentive memory. When I was four years old, I could read (hard names excepted) as well as I can now: and could likewise repeat the answers to the questions in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, with the proofs; and all Dr. Watts's smaller Catechisms, and his Children's Hymns. "When my father returned from sea, after my mother's death, he married again. My new mother was the daughter of a substantial grazier at Aveley in Essex. She seemed willing to adopt and bring me up; but, after two or three years, she had a son of her own, who engrossed the old gentleman's notice. My father was a very sensible, and a moral man, as the world rates morality; but neither he nor my step-mother was under the impressions of religion: I was therefore much left to myself, to mingle with idle and wicked boys; and soon learnt their ways.

"I never was at school but about two years; from my eighth to my tenth year. It was a boarding-school, at Stratford, in Essex. Though my father left me much to run about the streets, yet, when under his eye, he kept me at a great distance. I am persuaded he loved me, but he seemed not willing that I should know it. I was with him in a state of fear and bondage. His sternness, together with the severity of my schoolmaster, broke and overawed my spirit, and almost made me a dolt; so that part of the two years I was at school, instead of making a progress, I nearly forgot all that my good mother had taught me.

"The day I was eleven years old, I went on board my. father's ship in Longreach. I made five voyages with him to the Mediterranean. In the course of the last voyage, he left me some months at Alicant in Spain, with a merchant, a particular friend of his. With him I might have done well, if I had behaved well: but, by this time, my sinful propensities had gathered strength by habit: I was very wicked, and therefore very foolish; and, being my own enemy, I seemed determined that nobody should be my friend.

"My father left the sea in the year 1742. I made one voyage afterwards to Venice, before the mast; and, soon after my return, was impressed on board the Harwich. Then began my awfully mad career, as recorded in the 'Narrative;' to which, and to the 'Letters to a Wife,' I must refer you for any further dates and incidents.

"I am truly yours,

Dec. 19, 1795 "JOHN NEWTON." A few articles may be added to this account from the "Narrative," where we find that his pious mother stored his "memory with whole chapters, and smaller portions of Scripture, catechisms, hymns, and poems; and often commended him with many prayers and tears to God:" that, in his sixth year, he began to learn Latin, though the intended plan of his education was soon broken; and that he lost his valuable parent, July 11th, 1782.

We also find, that, after his father's second marriage, he was sent to the school above-mentioned: and, in the last of the two years he spent there, a new usher came, who observed and suited his temper. He prosecuted Latin, therefore, with great eagerness; and, before he was ten years old, he had reached and maintained the first post in the second class, which, in that school, read Tully and Virgil. But, by being pushed forward too fast, and not properly grounded (a method too common in inferior schools) he soon lost all he had learned. In the next and most remarkable period of Mr. N.'s life, we must be conducted by the "Narrative" above-mentioned. It has been observed, that, at eleven years of age, he was taken by his father to sea. His father was a man of remarkably good sense, and great knowledge of the world. He took much care of his son's morals, but could not supply a mother's part. The father had been educated at a Jesuit's College, near Seville in Spain; and had an air of such distance and severity in his carriage, as discouraged his son, who always was in fear when before him, which deprived him of that influence he might otherwise have had. From this time to the year 1742 Mr. N. made several voyages, but at considerable intervals. These intervals were chiefly spent in the country, excepting a few months in his fifteenth year, when he was placed, with a very advantageous prospect, at Alicant already mentioned.

About this period of his life, with a temper and conduct exceedingly various, he was often disturbed with religious convictions; and, being from a child fond of reading, he met with Bennett's "Christian Oratory," and, though he understood little of it, the course of life it recommended appeared very desirable. He therefore began to pray, to read the Scriptures, to keep a diary, and thought himself religious; but soon became weary of it, and gave it up.

He then learned to curse and to blaspheme; and was exceedingly wicked when out of the view of his parents, though at so early a period.

Upon his being thrown from a horse near a dangerous hedge-row, newly cut, his conscience suggested to him the dreadful consequences of appearing in such a state before God. This put him, though but for a time, upon breaking off his profane practices; but the consequence of these struggles between sin and conscience was, that on every relapse he sunk into still greater depths of wickedness. He was roused again, by the loss of a companion who had agreed to go with him one Sunday on board a man of war. Mr. N. providentially coming too late, the boat had gone without him, and was over set, by which his companion and several others were drowned. He was

exceedingly affected, at the funeral of this companion, to think that by the delay of a few minutes (which at the time occasioned much anger) his life had been preserved: but this also was soon forgotten. The perusal of the "Family Instructor" produced another temporary reformation. In short, he took up and laid aside a religious profession three or four different times, before he was sixteen years of age.

"All this while," says he, "my heart was insincere. I often saw the necessity of religion, as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it. I was so strangely blind and stupid, that, sometimes when I have been determined upon things which I knew were sinful, I could not go on quietly till I had first dispatched my ordinary task of prayer, in which I have grudged every moment of the time: when this was finished, my conscience was in some measure pacified, and I could rush into folly with little remorse." But his last reform was the most remarkable. "Of this period," says he, "at least of some part of it, I may say, in the Apostle's words, After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee. I did every thing that might be expected from a person entirely ignorant of God's righteousness, and desirous to establish his own. I spent the greatest part of every day in reading the Scriptures, and in meditation and prayer. I fasted often: I even abstained from all animal food for three months, I would hardly answer a question for fear of speaking an idle word: I seemed to bemoan my former miscarriages very earnestly, and sometimes with tears: in short, I became an Ascetic, and endeavored, as far as my situation would permit, to renounce society, that I might avoid temptation." This reformation, it seems, continued for more than two years. But he adds, "it was a poor religion: it left me in many respects under the power of sin; and, so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsociable, and useless." That it was a poor religion, and quite unlike that which he afterwards possessed, will appear from what immediately follows: for, had it been taken up upon more scriptural ground, and attended with that internal evidence and satisfaction which true religion only brings, he could not so soon have fallen a dupe to such a writer as Shaftesbury. It was at a petty shop at Middleburgh, in Holland, that he first met a volume of the "Characteristics." The declamation, called by his lordship a "Rhapsody," suited the romantic turn of his mind. Unaware of its tendency, he imagined he had found a valuable guide. This book was always in his hand, till he could nearly repeat the "Rhapsody." Though it produced no immediate effect, it operated like a slow poison, and prepared the way for all that followed.

About the year 1742, his father, having lately come from a voyage, and not intending to return to sea, was contriving for Mr. N.'s settlement in the world. But, to settle a youth who had no spirit for business, who knew but little of men or things, who was of a romantic turn a medley, as he expressed it, of religion, philosophy, and indolence, and quite averse to order must prove a great difficulty. At length a merchant in Liverpool, an intimate friend of the father, and afterwards a singular friend to the son, offered to send him for some years to Jamaica, and undertook the charge of his future welfare, This was consented to, and preparation made for the voyage, which was to be prosecuted the following week. In the mean time, he was sent by his father on some business to a place, a few miles beyond Maidstone, in Kent. But the journey, which was designed to last but three or four days, gave such a turn to his mind as roused him from his habitual indolence, and produced a series of important and interesting occurrences. A few days before this intended journey, he received an invitation to visit some distant relations in Kent. They were particular friends of the mother, who died at their house, but a coolness having taken place upon

his father’s second marriage, all intercourse between them had ceased. As his road lay within half a mile of the house, and he obtained his father’s leave to call on them, he went thither, and met with the kindest reception from these friends. They had two daughters. It seems the elder had been intended, by both the mothers, for his future wife. Almost at first sight of this girl, then under fourteen years of age, he was impressed with such an affection for her as appears to have equaled all that the writers of romance have imagined.

"I soon lost," says he, "all sense of religion, and became deaf to the remonstrance’s of conscience and prudence: but my regard for her was always the same; and I may, perhaps, venture to say, that none of the scenes of misery and wickedness I afterwards experienced ever banished her a single hour together- from my waking thoughts for the seven following years. His heart being now riveted to a particular object, every thing with which he was concerned appeared in a new light. He could not now bear the thought of living at such a distance as Jamaica for four or five years, and therefore determined not to go thither. He dared not communicate with his father on this point; but, instead of three days, he staid three weeks in Kent, till the ship had sailed, and then he returned to London. His father, though highly displeased, became reconciled; and, in a little time, he sailed with a friend of his father to Venice. In this voyage, being a common sailor, and exposed to the company of His comrades. he began to relax from the sobriety which he had preserved, in some degree, for more than two years. sometimes, pierced with convictions, he made a few faint efforts, as formerly, to stop; and, though not yet absolutely profligate, he has making large strides towards a total apostasy from God. At length he received a remarkable check by a dream, which made a very strong, though not abiding, impression upon his mind.

I shall relate this dream in his own words, referring to the "Narrative" those who wish to know his opinion of dreams, and his application of this one in particular to his own circumstances.

"The scene presented to my imagination was the harbour of Venice, where we had lately been. I thought it was night, and my watch upon the deck; and that, as I was walking to and fro by myself, a person came to me (I do not remember from whence) and brought me a ring, with an express charge to keep it carefully; assuring me, that, while I preserved that ring, I should be happy and successful: but, if I lost or parted with it, I must expect nothing but trouble and misery. I accepted the present and the terms willingly, not in the least doubting my own care to preserve it, and highly satisfied to have my happiness in my own keeping. I was engaged in these thoughts, when a second person came to me, and, observing the ring on my finger, took occasion to ask me some questions concerning it. I readily told him its virtues; and his answer expressed a surprise at my weakness, in expecting such effects from a ring. I think he reasoned with me some time, upon the impossibility of the thing; and at length urged me, in direct terms, to throw it away. At first I was shocked at the proposal; but his insinuations prevailed. I began to reason and doubt, and at last plucked it off my finger, and dropped it over the ship’s side into the water, which it had no sooner touched, than I saw, at the same instant, a terrible fire burst out from a range of mountains (a part of the Alps) which appeared at some distance behind the city of Venice. I saw the hills as distinct as if awake, and that they were all in flames. I perceived, too late, my folly; and my tempter, with an air of insult, in-termed me, that all the mercy God had in reserve for me was comprised in that ring, which I had willfully thrown away. I understood that I must now go with him to the burning mountains, and that all the flames I saw were kindled on my account. I trembled, and was in a great agony; so that it was surpassing I did not then awake: but my dream continued; and, when I

thought myself upon me point of a constrained departure, and stood self condemned, without plea or hope, suddenly, either a third person, or the same who brought the ring at first (I am not certain which), came to me, and demanded the cause of my grief. I told him the plain case, confessing that I had ruined myself willfully, and deserved no pity. He blamed my rashness, and asked if I should be wiser, supposing I had my ring again. I could hardly answer to this, for I thought it was gone beyond recall. I believe, indeed, I had not time to answer, before I saw this unexpected friend go down under the water, just in the spot where I had dropped it; and he soon returned, bringing the ring with him: the moment he came on board, the flames in the mountains were extinguished, and my seducer left me. Then was the prey taken from the hand of the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered. My fears were at an. end, and with joy and gratitude I approached my kind deliverer to receive the ring again; but he refused to return it, and spoke to this effect:--'If you should be entrusted with this ring again, you would very soon bring yourself into the same distress: you are not able to keep it; but I will preserve it for you, and, whenever it is needful, will produce it in your behalf.--Upon this I awoke, in a state of mind not to be described: I could hardly eat, or sleep, or transact my necessary business, for two or three days: but the impression soon wore off, and in a little time I totally forgot it; and I think it hardly occurred to my mind again till several years afterwards."

Nothing remarkable took place in the following part of that voyage. Mr. N. returned home in December 1743; and, repeating his visit to Kent, protracted his stay in the same imprudent manner he had done before. This so disappointed his father's designs for his interest, as almost to induce him to disown his son. Before any thing suitable offered again, this thoughtless son, unmindful of the consequences of appearing in a check'd shirt, was marked by a lieutenant of the Harwich man of war, who immediately impressed and carried him on board a tender. This was at a critical juncture, as the French fleets were hovering upon our coast; so that his father was incapable of procuring his release. A few days after, he was put on board the Harwich, at the Nore. Here a new scene of life was presented; and, for about a month, much hardship endured. As a war was daily expected, his father was willing he should remain in the navy, and procured him a recommendation to the captain, who sent him upon the quarter-deck as a midshipman. He might now have had ease and respect, had it not been for his unsettled mind and indifferent behavior. The companions he met with here completed the ruin of his principles: though he affected to talk of virtue, and preserved some decency, yet his delight and habitual practice was wickedness. His principal companion was a person of talents and observation, an expert and plausible infidel, whose zeal was equal to his address. "I have been told," says Mr. N., "that afterwards he was overtaken in a voyage from Lisbon in a violent storm: the vessel and people escaped; but a great sea broke on board, and swept him into eternity." Being fond of this man's company, Mr. N. aimed to display what smattering of reading he had: his companion, perceiving that Mr. N. had not lost all the restraints of conscience, at first spoke in favor of religion; and, having gained Mr. N.'s confidence, and perceiving his attachment to the "Characteristics," he soon convinced his pupil that he had never understood that book. By objections and arguments Mr. N.'s depraved heart was soon gained. He plunged into infidelity with all his spirit; and, like an unwary sailor who quits his post just before a rising storm, the hopes and comforts of the Gospel were renounced at the-very time when every other comfort was about to fail. In December, 1744, the Harwich was in the Downs, bound to the East Indies. The captain gave Mr. N. leave to go on shore for a day; but, with his usual inconsideration, and following the dictates of a restless passion, he went to take a

last leave of the object with which he was so infatuated. Little satisfaction attended the interview in such circumstances, and on new year's day he returned to the ship. The captain was so highly displeased at this rash step, that it occasioned ever after the loss of his favor. At length they sailed from Spithead, with a very large fleet. They put in to Torbay, with a change of wind; but sailed the next day on its becoming fair. Several of the fleet were lost at leaving the place; but the following night the whole fleet was greatly endangered upon the coast of Cornwall, by a storm from the southward. The ship on which Mr. N. was aboard escaped unhurt, though several times in danger of being run down by other vessels; but many suffered much: this occasioned their patting back to Plymouth.

While they lay at Plymouth, Mr. N. heard that his father who had an interest in some of the ships lately lost, was come down to Torbay. He thought that, if he could see his father, he might easily be introduced into a service which would be better than pursuing a long and uncertain voyage to the East Indies. It was his habit in those unhappy days, never to deliberate. As soon as the thought occurred, he resolved to leave the ship at all events: he did so, and in the worst manner possible. He was sent one day in the boat to prevent others from desertion, but betrayed his trust, and deserted himself. Not knowing which road to take, and fearing to inquire lest he should be suspected , yet having some general idea of the country, he found, after he had traveled some miles, that he was on the road to Dartmouth. That day and part of the next every thing seemed to go on smoothly. He walked first, and thought to have seen his father in about two hours, when he was met by a small party of soldiers, whom he could not avoid or deceive: they brought him back to Plymouth, through the streets of which he proceeded guarded like a felon. Full of indignation, shame, and fear, he was confined two days in the guard-house; then sent on ship-board, and kept a while in irons: next he was publicly stripted and whipt, degraded from his office, and all his former companions forbidden to shew him the least favor or even to speak to him. As midshipman he had been entitled to command, in which (being sufficiently haughty and vain he had not been temperate; but was now in his turn brought down to a level with the lowest, and exposed to the insults of all. The state of his mind at this time can only be properly expressed in his own words : As my present situation was uncomfortable, my future prospects were still worse: the evils I suffered were likely to grow heavier every day. While my catastrophe was recent, the officers and my quondam brethren were something disposed to screen me from ill usage; but, during the little time I remained with them afterwards, I found them cool very fast in their endeavors to protect me. Indeed, they could not avoid such conduct without running a great risk of sharing with me; for the captain, though in general a humane man, who behaved very well to the ship's company, was almost implacable in his resentment, and took several occasions to shew it, and the voyage was expected to be (as it proved) for five years. Yet nothing I either felt or feared distressed me so much as to see myself thus forcibly torn away from the object of my affections, under a great improbability of seeing her again, and a much greater of returning in such a manner as would give me hope of seeing her mine.

"Thus I was as miserable on all hands as could well be imagined My breast was filled with the most excruciating passions; eager desire, bitter rage, and black despair.

Every hour exposed me to some new insult and hardship, with no hope of relief or mitigation; no friend to take my part, nor to listen to my complaint. Whether I looked inward or outward, I could perceive nothing but darkness and misery. I think no case, except that of a conscience wounded

by the wrath of God, could be more dreadful than mine. I cannot express with what wishfulness and regret I cast my last looks upon the English shore: I kept my eyes fixed upon it, till, the ship's distance increasing, it insensibly disappeared; and, when I could see it no longer, I was tempted to throw myself into the sea, which (according to the wicked system I had adopted) would put a period to all my sorrows at once. But the secret hand of God restrained me."

During His passage to Madeira, Mr. N. describes himself as a prey to the most gloomy thoughts. Though he had deserved all, and more than all he had met with from the captain, yet pride suggested that he had been grossly injured "and this so for," says he, "wrought upon my witched heart, that I actually formed designs against his life, and that was one reason which made me willing to prolong my own. I was sometimes divided between the two, not thinking it practicable to effect both. The Lord had now, to appearance, given me up to judicial hardness: I was capable of any thing; I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor (so far as I remember) the least sensibility of conscience. I was possessed with so strong a spirit of delusion, that I believed my own lie, and was firmly persuaded that after death I should cease to be. Yet the Lord preserved me! Some intervals of sober reflection would at times take place: when I have chosen death rather than life, a ray of hope would come in (though there was little probability for such a hope) that I should yet see better days, that I might return to England, and have my wishes crowned, if I did not willfully throw myself away. In a word, my love to Mrs. N. was now the only restraint I had left: though I neither feared God nor regarded man, I could not bear that she should think meanly of me when I was dead."

Mr. N. had now been at Madeira some time. The business of the fleet being completed, they were to sail the following day: on that memorable morning he happened to be late in bed, and would have continued to sleep, but that an old companion, a midshipman, came down, between jest and earnest, and bid him rise. As he did not immediately comply, the midshipman cut down the hammock in which he lay: this obliged him to dress himself; and, though very angry, he durst not resent it, but was little aware that this person, without design, was a special instrument of God's providence. Mr. N. said little, but went upon deck, where he saw a man putting his own clothes into a boat, and informed Mr. N. he was going to leave the ship. Upon inquiry, he found that two men from a Guinea ship, which lay near them, had entered on board the Harwich, and that the commodore (the late, Sir George Pecock) had ordered the captain to send two others in their room. Inflamed with this information, Mr. N. requested that the boat be detained a few minutes: he then entreated the lieutenants to intercede with the captain that he might be dismissed upon this occasion: though he had formerly behaved ill to these officers, they were moved with pity, and were disposed to serve him. The captain, who had refused to exchange him at Plymouth. though requested by Admiral Medley, was easily prevailed with now. In little more than half an hour from his being-asleep in bed, he found himself discharged, and safe on board another ship: the events depending upon this change, will shew it to have been the most critical and important. The ship he now entered was bound to Sierra Leone, and the adjacent parts of what is called the Windward Coast of Africa. The commander knew his father, received him kindly, and made professions of assistance; and probably would have been his friend, if, instead of profiting by his former errors, he had not pursued a course, if possible, worse. He was under some restraint on board the Harwich; but, being now among strangers, he could sin without disguise. " I well remember," says he, "that, while I was passing from one ship to the other, I rejoiced in the exchange, with this reflection, that I

might now be as abandoned as I pleased, without any control; and, from this time, I was exceedingly vile indeed, little, if any thing, short of that animated description of an almost irrecoverable state, which we have in 2 Peter 2:14. I not only sinned with a high hand myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion: nay, I eagerly sought occasion, sometimes to my own hazard and hurt." By this conduct he soon forfeited the favor of his captain; for, besides being careless and disobedient, upon some imagined affront, he employed his mischievous wit in making a song to ridicule the captain as to his ship, his designs, and his person; and he taught it to the whole ship's company.

He thus proceeded for about six months, at which time the ship was preparing to leave the coast; but, a few days before she sailed, the captain died. Mr. N. was not upon much better terms with his mate, who succeeded to the command, and upon some occasion had treated him ill. He felt certain, that if he went in the ship to the West Indies, the mate would have put him on board a man of war, a consequence more dreadful to him than death itself: to avoid this, he determined to remain in Africa, and pleased himself with imagining it would be an opportunity of improving his fortune.

Upon that part of the coast there were a few White men settled, whose business it was to purchase Slaves, &c. and sell them to the ships at an advanced price. One of these, who had first landed in circumstances similar to Mr. N.'s, had acquired considerable wealth. This man had been in England, and was returning in the same vessel with Mr. N., of which he owned a quarter part. His example impressed Mr. N. with hopes of the same success; and he obtained his discharge upon condition of entering into the trader's service, to whose generosity he trusted without the precaution of terms. He received, however, no compensation for his time on board the ship, but a bill upon the owners in England; which, in consequence of their failure, was never paid: the day, therefore, on which the vessel sailed, he landed upon the island of Benanoes, like one shipwrecked, with little more than the clothes upon his back.

"The two following years," says he, "of which I am now to give some account, will seem as an absolute blank in my life: but, I have seen frequent cause since to admire the mercy of God in banishing me to those distant parts, and almost excluding me from all society, at a time when I was big with mischief, and, like one infected with a pestilence, was capable of spreading a taint wherever I went. :But the Lord wisely placed me where I could do little harm. The few I had to converse with were too much like myself; and I was soon brought into such abject circumstances, that I was too low to have any influence. I was rather shunned and despised than imitated; there being few even of the Negroes themselves, during the first year of my residence, but thought themselves too good to speak to me. I was as yet an outcast, ready to perish; but the Lord beheld me with mercy: he even now bid me live; and I can only ascribe it to his secret upholding power, that what I suffered in a part of this interval did not bereave me either of my life or senses." The reader will have a better idea of the station Mr. N. was now in. by his brief sketch of it. "From Cape de Verd, the most western point of Africa, to Cape Mount, the whole coast is full of rivers: the principal are the Gambia, Rio Grande, Sierra Leone, and Sherbro. Of the former, as it is well known, and as I was never there, I need say nothing. The Rio Grande (like the Nile) divides into many branches near the sea. On the most northerly, called Cacheo, the Portuguese have a settlement. The most southern branch, known by the name of Rio Nuna, is, or was, the usual boundary of the White men's trade northward. Sierra Leone is a mountainous peninsula,

uninhabited, and I believe inaccessible, upon account of the thick woods, excepting those parts which he near the water. The river is large and navigable. From hence, about twelve leagues to the south-east; are three contiguous islands, called the Benanoes, twenty miles in circuit: this was about the center of the White men's residence. Seven leagues further, the same way, lie the Plantanes, three small islands, two miles distant from the continent, at the point which forms one side of the Sherbro. This river is more properly a sound, running within a long island, and receiving the confluence of several large rivers; 'rivers unknown to song,' but far more deeply engraved in my remembrance than the Po or Tiber. The southernmost of these has a very peculiar course almost parallel to the coast; so that in tracing it a great many leagues upwards, it will seldom lead one above three miles, and sometimes not more than half a mile from the sea shore."

Mr. N.'s new master had resided near Cape Mount, but at this time had settled at the Plantanes, on the largest of the three islands. It is low and sandy, about two miles in circumference, and almost covered with palm-trees. They immediately began to build a house. Mr. N. had some desire to retrieve his time and character, and might have lived tolerably well with his master, if this man had not been much under the direction of a Black woman, who lived with him as a wife, and influenced him against his new servant. She was a person of some consequence in her own country, and he owed his first rise to her interest. This woman, for reasons not known, was strangely prejudiced against Mr. N. from the first. He also had unhappily a severe fit of illness, which attacked him before he had opportunity to shew what he could or would do in the service of his master. Mr. N. was sick when his master sailed in a shalop to Rio Nuna, and was left in the hands of this woman. He was taken some care of at first; but, not soon recovering, her attention was wearied, and she entirely neglected him. Sometimes it was with difficulty he could procure a draught of cold water when burning with a fever! His bed was a mat, spread upon a board or chest, with a log for his pillow. Upon His appetite returning, after the fever left him, he would gladly have eaten, but no one gave unto him. She lived in plenty, but scarcely allowed him sufficient to sustain life, except now and then, when in the highest good humor, she would send him victuals in her own plate after she had dined. And this (so greatly was he humbled) he received with thanks and eagerness, as the most needy beggar does an alms.

"Once," says he, "I well remember, I was called to receive this bounty from her own hand: but, being exceedingly weak and feeble, I dropped the plate. Those who live in plenty can hardly conceive how this loss touched me: but she had the cruelty to laugh at my disappointment; and, though the table was covered with dishes (for she lived much in the European manner), she refused to give me any more. My distress has been at times so great, as to compel me to go by night, and pull up roots in the plantation (though at the risk of being punished as a thief), which I have eaten raw upon the spot, for fear of discovery. The roots I speak of are very wholesome food, when boiled or roasted, but as unfit to be eaten raw in any quantity as a potato. The consequence of this diet, which, after the first experiment, I always expected, and seldom missed, was the same as if I had taken tartar emetic; so that I have often returned as empty as I went: yet necessity urged me to repeat the trial several times. I have sometimes been relieved by strangers; yea, even by the Slaves in the chain, who have secretly brought me victuals (for they durst not be seen to do it) from their own slender pittance. Next to pressing want, nothing sits harder upon the mind than scorn and contempt, and of this likewise I had an abundant measure." When slowly recovering, the same woman would sometimes pay Mr. N. a visit; not to pity or relieve, but to insult him. She

would call him worthless and indolent, and compel him to walk; which when he could scarcely do, she would set her attendants to mimic his motions, to clap their hands, laugh, throw limes at him, and sometimes they would even throw stones. But though her attendants were forced to join in this treatment, Mr. N. was rather pitied than scorned, by the meanest of her slaves, on her departure. When his master returned from the voyage, Mr. N. complained of ill usage, but was not credited; and, as he did it in her hearing, he fared worse for it. He accompanied his master in his second voyage, and they agreed pretty well, till his master was persuaded by a brother trader that Mr. N. was dishonest. This seems to be the only vice with which he could not be charged; as his honesty seemed to be the last remains of a good education which he could now boast of: and though his great distress might have been a strong temptation to fraud, it seems he never once thought of defrauding his master in the smallest matter. The charge, however, was believed, and he was condemned without evidence. From that time he was used very hardly: whenever his master left the vessel, he was locked upon deck with a pint of rice for his day's allowance, nor had he any relief till his master's return. "Indeed," says he, "I believe I should have been nearly starved, but for an opportunity of catching fish sometimes. When fowls were killed for my master's own use, I seldom was allowed any part but the entrails, to bait my hooks with; and, at what we called slack-water, that is, about the changing of the tides, when the current was still, I used generally to fish, (at other times it was not practicable,) and I very often succeeded. If I saw a fish upon my hook, my joy was little less than any other person would have found in the accomplishment of the scheme he had most at heart. Such a fish, hastily broiled, or rather half burnt, without salt, sauce, or bread, has afforded me a delicious meal. If I caught none, I might, if I could, sleep away my hunger till the next return of slack-water, and then try again.

"Nor did I suffer less from the inclemency of the weather, and the want of clothes. The rainy season was now advancing: my whole suit was a shirt, a pair of trowsers, a cotton handkerchief instead of a cap, and a cotton cloth about two yards long, to supply the want of upper garments: and, thus accoutered, I have been exposed for twenty, thirty, perhaps near forty hours together, in incessant rains accompanied with strong gales of wind, without the least shelter, when my master was on shore. I feel to this day some faint returns of the violent pains I then contracted. The excessive cold and wet I endured in that voyage, and so soon after I had recovered from a long sickness, quite broke my constitution and my spirits: the latter were soon restored, but the effects of the former still remain with me, as a needful memento of the service and the wages of sin." In about two months they returned, and the rest of the time which Mr. N. spent with his master was chiefly at the Plantanes, and under the same regimen as has been mentioned. His heart was now bowed down, but not at all to a wholesome repentance. While his spirits sunk, the language of the prodigal was far from him: destitute of resolution, and almost of all reflection, he had lost the fierceness which fired him when on board the Harwich, and rendered him capable of the most desperate attempts; but he was no further changed than a tiger tamed by hunger.

However strange it may appear, he attests it as a truth, that, though destitute both of food and clothing, and depressed beyond common wretchedness, he could sometimes collect his mind to mathematical studies. Having bought Barrow's Euclid at Plymouth, and it being the only volume he brought on shore, he used to take it to remote corners of the island, and draw his diagrams with a long stick upon the sand. "Thus," says he, "I often beguiled my sorrows, and almost forgot my feelings; and thus without any other assistance I made myself in a good measure master of the

first six books of Euclid." With my staff, I passed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. These words of Jacob might well affect Mr. N., when remembering the days in which he was busied in planting some lime or lemon trees. The plants he put into the ground were no higher than a young gooseberry bush. His master and mistress, in passing the place, stopped a while to look at him: at length his master said, "Who knows but, by the time these trees grow up and bear, you may go home to England, obtain the command of a ship, and return to reap the fruits of your labors? We see strange things sometimes happen."

" This," says Mr. Newton, "as he intended it, was a cutting sarcasm. I believe he thought it full as probable that I should live to be king of Poland: yet it proved a prediction: and they (one of them at least) lived to see me return from England, in the capacity he had mentioned, and pluck some of the first limes from these very trees. How can I proceed in my relation, till I raise a monument to the Divine goodness, by comparing the circumstances in which the Lord has since placed me, with what I was in at that time? Had you seen me, sir, then go so pensive and solitary in the dead of night to wash my one shirt upon the rocks, and afterwards put it on wet, that it might dry upon my back while I slept; had you seen me so poor a figure, that when a ship's boat came to the island, shame often constrained me to hide myself in the woods, from the sight of strangers; especially, had you known that my conduct, principles, and heart, were still darker than my outward condition, how little would you have imagined, that one, who so fully answered to the Greek [hateful and hating one another] of the Apostle, was reserved to be so peculiar an instance of the providential care and exuberant goodness of God! There was, at that time, but one earnest desire of my heart, which was not contrary and shocking both to religion and reason: that one desire, though my vile licentious life rendered me peculiarly unworthy of success, and though a thousand difficulties seemed to render it impossible, the Lord was pleased to gratify."

Things continued thus nearly twelve months. In this interval Mr. N. wrote two or three times to his father, describing his condition, and desiring his assistance; at the same time signifying, that he had resolved not to return to England, unless his parent were pleased to send for him. His father applied to his friend at Liverpool, who gave orders accordingly, to a captain of his who was then fitting out for Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Some time within the year, Mr. N. obtained his master's consent to live with another trader, who dwelt upon the same island. This change was much to his advantage, as he was soon decently clothed, lived in plenty, was treated as a companion, and trusted with his effects to the amount of some thousand pounds. This man had several factories, and White servants in different places; particularly one in Kittam, the river already described as running so near along the sea coast. Mr. N. was soon appointed there, and had a share in the management of business, jointly with another servant. They lived as they pleased; business flourished; and their employer was satisfied.

"Here," says he, "I began to be wretch enough to think myself happy. There is a significant phrase frequently used in those parts, that such a White man is grown black. It does not intend an alteration of complexion, but disposition. I have known several, who, settling in Africa after the age of thirty or forty, have at that time of life, been gradually assimilated to the tempers, customs, and ceremonies of the natives, so far as to prefer that country to England: they have even become dupes to all the pretended charms, necromancies, amulets, and divination's of the blinded Negroes, and put more trust in such things than the wiser sort among the natives. A part of this

spirit of infatuation was growing upon me (in time, perhaps, I might have yielded to the whole): I entered into closer engagements with the inhabitants, and should have lived and died a wretch amongst them, if the Lord had not watched over me for good. Not that I had lost those ideas which chiefly engaged my heart to England, but a despair of seeing them accomplished made me willing to remain where I was. I thought I could more easily bear the disappointment in this situation than nearer home. But, as soon as I had fixed my connections and plans with these views, the Lord providentially interposed to break them in pieces, and save me from ruin, in spite of myself." In the mean time, the ship that had orders to bring Mr. N. home, arrived at Sierra Leone. The captain made inquiry for Mr. N. there, and at the Benanas; but, finding he was at a great distance, thought no more about him. A special providence seems to have placed him at Kittam just at this time; for the ship coming no nearer than the Benanas, and staying but a few days, if he had been at the Plantanes he would not probably have heard of her till she had sailed: the same must have certainly been the event had he been sent to any other factory, of which his new master had several. But though the place he went to was a long way up a river, much more than a hundred miles distant from the Plantanes, yet by its peculiar situation already noticed, he was still within a mile of the sea coast. The interposition was also more remarkable, as at that very juncture he was going in quest of trade, directly from the sea; and would have set out a day or two before, but that they waited for a few articles from the next ship that came, in order to complete the assortment of goods he was to take with him.

They used sometimes to walk to the beach, in hopes of seeing a vessel pass by; but this was very precarious, as at that time the place was not resorted to by ships of trade: many passed in the night, others kept a considerable distance from the shore. nor does he remember that any one had stopped while he was there. In Feb. 1747, his fellow-servant walking down to the beach in the forenoon, saw a vessel sailing by, and made a smoke in token of trade. She was already beyond the place, and the wind being fair, the captain demurred about stopping: had Mr. N.’s companion been half an hour later, the vessel would have been beyond recall: when he saw her come to an anchor, he went on board in a canoe; and this proved the very ship already spoken of, which brought an order for Mr. N.’s return. One of the first questions the captain put was concerning Mr. N., and, understanding he was so near, the captain came on shore to deliver his message.

"Had," says he, "an invitation from home reached me when I was sick and starving at the Plantanes, I should have received it as the from the dead; but now, for the reasons already given, I heard it at first with indifference." The captain, however, unwilling to lose him, framed a story, and gave him a very plausible account of his having missed a large packet of letters and papers which he should have brought with him; but said he had it from his father’s own mouth, as well as from his employer, that a person lately dead had left Mr. N. 400#. per annum, and added, that, if embarrassed in his circumstances, he had express orders to redeem Mr. N. though it should cost one half of his cargo. Every particular of this was false, nor could Mr. N. believe what was said about the estate; except, that, as he had some expectations from an aged relation, he thought a part of it might be true. But though his father’s care and desire to see him was treated so lightly, and would have been insufficient alone to draw him from his retreat, yet the remembrance of Mrs. N., the hopes of seeing her, and the possibility that his accepting this offer might once more put him in the way of gaining her hand, prevailed over all other considerations. The captain further promised (and in this he kept his word) that Mr. N. should lodge in his cabin, dine at his table, and

he his companion, without being liable to service. Thus suddenly was he greed from a captivity of about fifteen months. He had neither a thought nor a desire of this change one hour before it took place; but, embarking with the captain, he in a few hours lost sight of Kittam. The ship in which he embarked as a passenger was on a trading voyage for gold, ivory, dyer's wood, and bees' wax. Such a cargo requires more time to collect than one of slaves. The captain began his trade at Gambia, had been already four or five months in Africa; and during the course of a year after Mr. N. had been with him, they ranged the whole coast as far as Cape Lopez, which lies about a degree south of the Equinoctial, and more than a thousand miles further from England than the place from whence he embarked.

"I have," says he, "little to offer worthy of notice in the course of this tedious voyage. I had no business to employ my thoughts, but sometimes amused myself with mathematics: excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer. Not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones: so that I was often seriously reproved by the captain, who was himself a very passionate mall, and not at all circumspect in his expressions. From the relation I at times made him of my past adventures, and what he saw of my conduct, and especially towards the close of the voyage, when we met with many disasters, he would often tell me, that, to his great grief, he had a Jonah on board; that a curse attended me wherever I went; and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage were owing to his having taken me into his vessel."

Although Mr. N. lived long in the excess of almost every other extravagance, he was never, it seems, fond of drinking: his father was often heard to say, that while his son avoided drunkenness, some hopes might be entertained of his recovery. Sometimes, however, in a frolic, he would promote a drinking-bout; not through love of liquor, but disposition to mischief: the last proposal he made of this kind, and at his own expense, was in the river Gabon, whilst the ship was trading on the coast.

Four or five of them sat down one evening to try who could hold out longest in drinking Geneva and rum alternately. A large sea-shell supplied the place of a glass. Mr. H. was very unfit for such a challenge, as his head was always incapable of bearing much liquor: he began, however, and proposed as a toast, some imprecation against the person who should start first: this proved to be himself. Fired in his brain, he arose and danced on the deck like a madman, and while he was thus diverting his companions, his hat went overboard. Seeing the ship's boat by moonlight, he endeavored eagerly to throw himself over the side into the boat, that he might recover his hat. His sight, however, deceived him, for the boat was not (as he supposed) within his reach, but perhaps twenty feet from the ship's side. He was, however, half overboard, and would, in the space of a moment, have plunged into the water; when somebody caught hold of his clothes and pulled him back. This was an amazing escape, as he could not swim, had he been sober: the tide ran very strong: his companions were too much intoxicated to save him, and the rest of the ship's company were asleep.

Another time, at Cape Lopez, before the ship left the coast, he went, with some others, into the woods, and shot a buffalo, or wild cow: they brought a part of it on board, and carefully marked the place (as he thought) where the rest was left. In the evening they returned to fetch it, but set out too late. Mr. N. undertook to be their guide; but, night coming on before they could reach the place,

they lost their way. Sometimes they were in swamps, and up to the middle in water: and when they recovered dry land, they could not tell whether they were proceeding towards the ship, or the contrary way. Every step increased their uncertainty, the night grew darker, and they were entangled in thick woods, which perhaps the foot of man had never trodden, and which abound with wild beasts: besides which, they had neither light, food, nor arms, while expecting a tiger to rush from behind every tree. The stars were clouded, and they had no compass whereby to form a judgment which way they were going. But it pleased God to secure them from the beasts; and after some hours perplexity, the moon arose, and pointed out the eastern quarter. It appeared then, that, instead of proceeding towards the sea, they had been penetrating into the country: at length, by the guidance of the moon, they recovered the ship.

These, and many other deliverance's, produced at that time no salutary effect. The admonitions of conscience, which from successive repulses had grown weaker and weaker, at length entirely ceased; and, for the space of many months, if not for some years, he had not a single check of that sort. At times he was visited with sickness, and believed himself to be near death, but had not the least concern about the consequences. "In a word," says he, "I seemed to have every mark of final impenitence and rejection: neither judgments nor mercies made the least impression on me." At length, their business being finished, they left Cape Lopez; and, after a few days' stay at the island of Annabona, in order to lay in provisions, they sailed homeward about the beginning of January, 1748. From Annabona to England is perhaps more than seven thousand miles, if the circuits are included, which it is necessary to make on account of the trade-winds. They sailed first westward, till near the coast of Brazil. then northward, to the banks of Newfoundland, without meeting any thing extraordinary. On these banks they stopped half a day to fish for cod: this was then chiefly for diversion, as they had provision enough, and little expected that those fish (as it afterwards proved) would be all they would have to subsist on. They left the banks, March 1st, with a hard gale of wind westerly, which pushed them fast homewards. By the length of this voyage, in a hot climate, the vessel was greatly out of repair, and very unfit to endure stormy weather. The sails and cordage were likewise very much worn; and many such circumstances concurred to render what followed imminently dangerous.

Among the few books they had on board was Stanhope's Thomas A Kempis: Mr. N. carelessly took it up, as he had often done before, to pass away the time, but which be had read with the same indifference as if it were a romance. But, in reading it this time, a thought occurred. What if these things should be true! He could not bear the force of the inference, and therefore shut the book, concluding that, true or false, he must abide the consequences of his own choice; and put an end to these reflections by joining in the vain conversation which came in his way.

"But now,, says he, "the Lord's time was come, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive was deeply impressed upon me by an awful dispensation."

He went to bed that night in his usual carnal security, but was awakened from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea which broke on board: so much of it came down as filled the cabin in which he lay with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck, that the ship was sinking. He essayed to go upon deck, but was met upon the ladder by the captain, who desired him to bring a knife. On his return for the knife, another person went up in his place, who was instantly washed overboard. They had no leisure to lament him, nor did they expect to survive him long, for

the ship was filling with water very fast. The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made it a mere wreck in a few minutes; so that it seems almost miraculous that any survived to relate the story. They had immediate recourse to the pumps, but the water increased against their efforts: some of them were set to bailing, though they had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service. But, notwithstanding all they could do, the vessel was nearly full, and with a common cargo must have sunk; but, having a great quantity of bees'-wax and wood on board, which were specifically lighter than water, and providentially receiving this shock in the very crisis of the gale, towards morning they were enabled to employ some means for safety, which succeeded beyond hope. In about an hour's time, day began to break, and the wind abated: they expended most of their clothes and bedding to stop the leaks: over these they nailed pieces of boards; and, at last, perceived the water within to subside. At the beginning of this scene Mr. N. was little affected: he pumped hard, and endeavored to animate himself and his companions. He told one of them, that in a few days this distress would serve for a subject over a glass of wine; but the man, being less hardened than himself, replied with tears, "No, it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labor, Mr. N. went to speak with the captain, and, as he was returning, said, almost without meaning, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us?" thus expressing, though with little reflection, his desire of mercy for the first time within the space of many years. Struck with his own words, it directly occurred to him, What mercy can there be for me! He was, however, obliged to return to the pump, and. there continued till noon, almost every passing wave breaking over his head, being, like the rest, secured by ropes, that they might not be washed away. He expected, indeed, that every time the vessel descended into the sea she would rise no more: and though he dreaded death Now, and his heart foreboded the worst, if the Scriptures, which he had long opposed, were true; yet he was still but half convinced, and remained for a time in a sullen frame. a mixture of despair and impatience. he thought, if the Christian religion were true, he could not be forgiven; and was therefore expecting, and almost at times wishing, to know the worst of it. The following part of his "Narrative" will, I think, be best expressed in his own words:--"The 10th, that is, in the present style, the 21st of March, is a day much to be remembered by me, and I have never suffered it to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high, and delivered me out of deep waters. I continued at the pump from three in the morning till near noon, and then I could do no more. I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain, and almost indifferent whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called; and, not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship till midnight, excepting a small interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and convenient opportunity for reflection. I began to think of my former religious professions, the extraordinary turns of my life, the calls, warnings, and deliverance's I had met with, the licentious course of my conversation, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the Gospel history (which I could not be sure was false, though I was not yet assured it was true) the constant subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the Scripture premises, there never was or could be such a sinner as myself; and then, comparing the advantages I had broken through, I concluded at first, that my sins were too great to be forgiven. The Scripture, likewise, seemed to say the same: for I had formerly been well acquainted with the Bible, and many passages, upon this occasion, returned upon my memory; particularly those awful passages, Proverbs 1:24-31; Hebrews 6:4-6; and 2 Peter 2:20, which seemed so exactly to suit my case and character, as to bring with them a presumptive proof of a Divine original.

"Thus, as I have said, I waited with fear and impatience to receive my inevitable doom. Yet, though I had thoughts of this kind, they were exceeding faint and disproportionate: it was not till after (perhaps) several years that I had gained some clear views of the infinite righteousness and grace of Christ Jesus my Lord, that I had a deep and strong apprehension of my state by nature and practice: and, perhaps, till then, I could not have borne the sight. So wonderfully does the Lord proportion the discoveries of sin and grace: for he knows our frame, and that, if he were to put forth the greatness of his power, a poor sinner would be instantly overwhelmed, and crushed as a moth.

"But, to return--When I saw, beyond all probability, that there was still hope of respite, and heard, about six in the evening, that the ship was freed from water, there arose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favor. I began to pray: I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him Father: my prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus whom I had so often derided: I recollected the particulars of his life, and of his death; a death for sins not his own, but, as I remembered, for the sake of those who, in their distress, should put their trust in him. And how I chiefly wanted evidence. The comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted; and I rather wished than believed these things were real facts. You will please to observe, that I collect the strain of the reasoning and exercises of my mind in one view; but I do not say that all this passed at one time. The great question now was, how to obtain faith. I speak not of an appropriating faith (of which I then knew neither the nature nor necessity), but how I should gain an assurance that the Scriptures were of Divine inspiration, and a sufficient warrant for the exercise of trust and hope in God.

"One of the first helps I received (in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully) was from Luke 11:13. I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when, in reality, I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God; but here I found a Spirit spoken of, which was to be communicated to those who ask it. Upon this I reasoned thus: If this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise. I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. he has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask: I must therefore pray for it; and, if it be of God, he will make good his own word. My purposes were strengthened by John 7:17. I concluded from thence, that, though I could not say from my heart that I believed the Gospel, yet I would, for the present, take it for granted; and that, by studying it in this light, I should be more and more confirmed in it.

"If what I am writing could be perused by our modern infidels, they would say (for I too well know their manner) that I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was; and so would they be, if the Lord should shew them, as he was pleased to shew me at that time, the absolute necessity of some expedient to interpose between a righteous God and a sinful soul: upon the Gospel scheme, I saw at least a peradventure of hope; but, on every other side, I was surrounded with black, unfathomable despair." The wind being now moderate, and the ship drawing near to its port, the ship’s company began to recover from their consternation, though greatly alarmed by their circumstances. They found that the water having floated their moveables in the hold, all the casks of provisions had been beaten to pieces by the violent motion of the ship. On the other hand, their live stock had been washed overboard in the storm. In short, all the

provisions they saved, except the fish lately caught on the banks for amusement, and a little of the pulse kind. which used to be given to the hogs, would have supported them but a week, and that at a scanty allowance. The sails, too, were mostly blown away; so that they advanced but slowly, even while the wind was fair. They imagined they were about a hundred leagues from land, but were in reality much further. Mr. N.’s leisure was chiefly employed in reading, meditation on the Scriptures, and prayer for mercy and instruction.

Things continued thus for about four or five days, till they were awakened one morning by the joyful shouts of the watch upon deck, proclaiming the sight of land, with which they were all soon raised. The dawning was uncommonly beautiful; and the light, just sufficient to discover distant objects, presented what seemed a mountainous coast, about twenty miles off, with two or three small islands: the whole appeared to be the north-west extremity of Ireland for which they were steering. They sincerely congratulated one another, having no doubt that if the wind continued, they should be in safety and plenty the next day. Their brandy, which was reduced to a little more than a pint, was, by the captain’s orders, distributed among them; who added, "We shall soon have brandy enough." They likewise ate up the residue of their bread, and were in the condition of men suddenly reprieved from death.

But, while their hopes were thus excited, the mate sunk their spirits, by saying, in a graver tone, that he wished "it might prove land at last." If one of the common sailors had first said so, the rest would probably have beaten him. The expression, however, brought on warm debates, whether it was land or not: but the case was soon decided; for one of their fancied islands began to grow red from the approach of the sun. In a word, their land was nothing but clouds: and, in half an hour more, the whole appearance was dissipated.

Still, however, they cherished hope from the wind continuing fair; but of this hope they were soon deprived. That very day, their fair wind subsided into a calm; and, the next morning, the gale sprung up from the south-east, directly against them, and continued so for more than a fortnight afterwards. At this time the ship was so wrecked, that they were obliged to keep the wind always on the broken side, except when the weather was quite moderate; and were thus driven still further from their port in the north of Ireland, as far as Lewes, among the western isles of Scotland. Their station now was such, as deprived them of any hope of relief from other vessels. "It may indeed be questioned," says Mr. N. "whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean at the same time of the year."

Provisions now began to fall short. The half of a salted cod was a day’s subsistence for twelve people: they had no stronger liquor than water, no bread, hardly any clothes, and very cold weather. They had also incessant labor at the pumps, to keep the ship above water. Much labor and little food wasted them fast, and one man died under the hardship. Yet their sufferings were light when compared with their fears. Their bare allowance could continue but little longer; and a dreadful prospect appeared of their being either starved to death, or reduced to feed upon one another. At this time Mr. N. had a further trouble, peculiar to himself. The captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching him as the sole cause of the calamity, and was confident that his being thrown overboard would be the only means of preserving them. The captain, indeed, did not intend to make the experiment; but "the continued repetition of this in my ears," says Mr. N., "gave me much uneasiness; especially as my conscience seconded his words:

I thought it very probable, that all that had befallen us was on my account; that I was at last found out by the powerful hand of God, and condemned in my own breast."

While, however, they were thus proceeding, at a time when they were ready to give up all for lost, and despair appeared in every countenance, they began to conceive hope from the wind's shifting to the desired point, so as best to suit that broken part of the ship, which must be kept out of the water, and so gently to blow, as their few remaining sails could bear. And thus it continued at an unsettled time of the year, till they were once more called up to see land, and which was really such. They saw the island of Tory, and the next day anchored in Lough Swilly, in Ireland, on the 8th of April, just four weeks after the damage they had sustained from the sea. When they came into this port, their very last victuals were boiling in the pot, and before they had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained till they were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence; so that, if they had continued at sea that night, they must, in all human estimation, have gone to the bottom! "About this time," says Mr. N., "I began to know that there is a God, who hears and answers prayer."

03.0004. Vol 01 - MEMOIRS CONTINUED

MEMOIRS CONTINUED

Mr. N.’s history is now brought down to the time of his arrival in Ireland, in the year 1748; and the progress he had hitherto made in religion will be best related in His own words. I shall, therefore, make a longer extract than usual, because it is important to trace the operation of real religion in the heart. Speaking of the ship in which he lately sailed, he says, "There were no persons on board to whom I could open myself with freedom concerning the state of my soul: none from whom I could ask advice. As to books, I had a New Testament, Stanhope, already mentioned, and a volume of Bishop Beveridge’s Sermons; one of which, upon our Lord’s Passion, affected me much. In perusing the New Testament, I was struck with several passages, particularly that of the fig-tree, Luke 13:1-35; the case of St. Paul, 1 Timothy 1:1-20; but particularly that of the Prodigal, Luke 15:1-32. I thought that had never been so nearly exemplified as by myself And then the goodness of the father in receiving, nay, in running to meet such a son, and this intended only to illustrate the Lord’s goodness to returning sinners. Such reflections gaining upon me, I continued much in prayer: I saw that the Lord had interposed so far to save me, and I hoped he would do more. Outward circumstances helped in this place to make me still more serious and earnest in crying to him who alone could relieve me; and sometimes I thought I could be content to die even for want of food, so I might but die a believer.

"Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland, I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the truth of the Gospel, as considered in itself, and of its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. I saw, that, by the way they were pointed out, God might declare not his mercy only, but his justice also, in the pardon of sin. on account of the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ. My judgment at that time, embraced the sublime doctrine of God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world unto himself. I had no idea of those systems, which allow the Savior no higher honor than that of an upper servant, or at the most of a demi-god. I stood in need of an Almighty Savior; and such an one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvelous thing: I was no longer an infidel: I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and had taken up some right notions; was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my past misspent life, and purposed an immediate reformation. I was quite freed from the habit of swearing. which seemed to have been as deeply rooted in me as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man.

"But, though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God. yet still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the law of God; or of the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ: a continual dependence on him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I

acknowledged the Lord’s mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come. I had no Christian friend or faithful minister to advise me that my strength was no more than my righteousness; and though I soon began to inquire for serious books, yet, not having spiritual discernment, I frequently made a wrong choice; and I was not brought in the way of evangelical preaching or conversation (except the few times when I heard, but understood not) for six years after this period. Those things the Lord was pleased to discover to me gradually. I learnt them, here a little and there a little, by my own painful experience, at a distance from the common means and ordinances, and in the midst of the same course of evil company and bad examples I had been conversant with for some time.

"From this period I could no more make a mock at sin, or jest with holy things: I no more questioned the truth of Scripture, or lost a sense of the rebukes of conscience. Therefore I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me; but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards."

While the ship was refitting at Lough Swilly, Mr. N. repaired to Londonderry, where he soon recruited his health and strength. He was now a serious professor, went twice a day to the prayers at church, and determined to receive the sacrament the next opportunity. When the day came, he arose very early, was very earnest in his private devotions, and solemnly engaged himself to the Lord; not with a formal, but sincere surrender, and under a strong sense of the mercies which he lately received. Having, however, as yet but an imperfect knowledge of his own heart, and of the subtlety of Satan’s temptations, he was afterwards seduced to forget the vows of God that were upon him. Yet he felt a peace and satisfaction in the ordinance of that day, to which he had hitherto been an utter stranger. The next day he went on a shooting party, with the mayor of the city and some other gentlemen. As he was climbing up a steep bank, and pulling his fowling-piece in a perpendicular direction after him, it went off so near his face as to destroy the corner of his hat. The remark he makes on this ought not to be omitted: "Thus, when we think ourselves in the greatest safety, we are no less exposed to danger than when all the elements seem conspiring to destroy us. The Divine providence, which is sufficient to deliver us in our utmost extremity, is equally necessary to our preservation in the most peaceful situation."

During their stay in Ireland, Mr. N. wrote home. The vessel he was in had not been heard of for eighteen months, and was given up for lost. His father had no expectation of hearing that his son was alive; but received his letter a few days before It embarked from London to become governor of York Fort, in Hudson’s Bay, where he died. He had intended to take his son with him, had he returned to England in time. Mr. N. received two or three affectionate letters from his father; and hoped, that, in three years more, he should have had the opportunity of asking his forgiveness for the uneasiness his disobedience had occasioned; but the ship that was to have brought his father home came without him. It appears he was seized with the cramp, while bathing, and was drowned before the ship arrived in the bay. Before his father’s departure from England, he had paid a visit in Kent, and given his consent to the union that had been so long talked of.

Mr. N. arrived at Liverpool the latter end of May 1748, about the same day that his father sailed from the Nore. He found, however, another father in the gentleman whose ship had brought him home. This friend received him with great tenderness, and the strongest assurances of assistance;

yet trot stronger than he afterwards fulfilled, for to this instrument of God’s goodness he fell be owed every thing-. "Yet," as Mr. N. justly observes, "it would not have been in the power even of this: friend to have served me effectually, if the Lord had not met me on my way home, as I have related. Till then I was like the man possessed with the Legion. No arguments, no persuasion, no views of interest, no remembrance of the past, nor regard to the future, could have restrained me within the bounds of common prudence; but now I was, in some measure, restored to my senses." This friend immediately offered Mr. N. the command of a ship, which, upon mature consideration, he, for the present, declined. He prudently considered, that, hitherto, he had been unsettled and careless: and, that he had better, therefore, make another voyage, and learn obedience, and acquire further experience in business, before he ventured to undertake such a charge. The mate of the vessel in which he came home was preferred to the command of a new ship, and Mr. N. engaged to go in the station of mate with him.

There was something so peculiar in Mr. N.’s case, after this extraordinary deliverance, and because others in like circumstances might be tempted to despair, that I think it proper to make another extract from his "Narrative;" as such accounts cannot be well conveyed but in his own words.

"We must not make the experience of others in all respects a rule to ourselves, nor our own a rule to others; yet these are common mistakes, and productive of many more. As to myself, every part of my case has been extraordinary: I have hardly met a single instance resembling it. Few, very few, have been recovered from such a dreadful state: and the few that have been thus favored have generally passed through the most severe convictions; and, after the Lord has given them peace, their future lives have been usually more zealous, bright, and exemplary than common. Now, as, on the one hand, my convictions were very moderate, and far below what might have been expected from the dreadful review I had to make; so, on the other, my first beginnings in a religious course were as faint as can be well imagined. I never knew that season alluded to, Jeremiah 2:2, Revelation 2:4, usually called the time of the first love. Who would not expect to hear, that, after such a wonderful and unhoped for deliverance as I had received, and after my eyes were in some measure enlightened to see things aright, I should immediately cleave to the Lord and His ways with full purpose of heart, and consult no more with flesh and blood? But, alas! it was far otherwise with me. I had learned to pray: I set some value upon the word of God, and was no longer a libertine; but my soul still cleaved to the dust. Soon after my departure from Liverpool, I began to intermit and grow slack in waiting upon the Lord; I grew vain and trifling in my conversation; and, though my heart smote me often, yet my armor was gone, and I declined fast: and, by the time we arrived at Guinea, I seemed to have forgotten all the Lord’s mercies and my own engagements; and was, profaneness excepted, almost as bad as before. The enemy prepared a train of temptations, and I became his easy prey: for about a month he lulled me asleep in a course of evil, of which, a few months before, I could not have supposed myself any longer capable. How much propriety is there in the Apostle’s advice, Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!" In this voyage Mr. N.’s business, while upon the coast, was to sail in the long-boat from place to place, in order to purchase slaves. The ship, at this time, was at Sierra Leone, and he at the Plantanes, the scene of his former captivity, and where every thing he saw tended to remind him of his present ingratitude. He was now in easy circumstances, and courted by those who had once despised him. The lime-trees he had formerly planted were

growing tall, and promised fruit upon his expected return with a ship of his own. Unaffected, however, with these things, he needed another providential interposition to rouse him; and, accordingly, he was visited with a violent fever, which broke the fatal chain, and once more brought him to himself. Alarmed at the prospect before him, he thought himself now summoned away. The dangers and deliverances through which he had passed his earnest prayers in time of trouble his solemn vows before the Lord at his table--and his ungrateful returns for all his goodness, were present, at once, to his mind. He began then to wish that he had sunk in the ocean when he first cried for mercy. For a short time, he concluded that the door of hope was quite shut. Weak, and almost delirious, he arose from his bed, crept to a retired part of the island, and here found a renewed liberty in prayer: daring to make no more resolves, he cast himself upon the Lord, to do with him as he should please. It does not appear that any thing new was presented to his mind, but that, in general, he was enabled to hope and believe in a Crucified Savior.

After this, the burden was removed from his conscience; and not only his peace, but his health, was gradually restored when he returned to the ship: and, though subject to the effects and conflicts of sin dwelling in him, yet he was ever after delivered from its power and dominion. His leisure hours, in this voyage, were chiefly employed in acquiring Latin, which he had now almost forgotten. This desire took place from an imitation he had seen of one of Horace’s Odes in a magazine. In this attempt at one of the most difficult of the poets, he had no other help than an old English translation, with Castalio’s Latin Bible. He had the edition in usum Delphini; and, by comparing the Odes with the interpretation, and tracing such words as he understood from place to place by the index, together with what assistance he could get from the Latin Bible, he thus, by dint of hard industry, made some progress. He not only understood the sense of many Odes, and some of the Epistles, but "I began, " says he, "to relish the beauties of the composition; acquired a spice of what Mr. Law calls classical enthusiasm; and, indeed, by this means, I had Horace more ad unguem, than some who are masters of the Latin tongue, for my helps were so few, that I generally had the passage fixed in my memory before I could fully understand its meaning."

During the eight months they were employed upon the coast, Mr. N.’s business exposed him to innumerable dangers, from burning suns, chilling dews, winds, rains, and thunderstorms, in an open boat: and, on shore, from long journeys through the woods; and from the natives, who in many places, are cruel, treacherous, and watchful of opportunities for mischief. Several boats, during this time, were cut off: several White men were poisoned: and, from his own boat, he buried six or seven people with fevers. When going on shore, or returning, he was more than once ever-set by the violence of the surf, and brought to land half dead, as he could not swim. Among a number of such escapes, which remained upon his memory, the following will mark the singular providence that was over him. On finishing their trade, and being about to sail to the West Indies, the only service Mr. N. had to perform in the boat was to assist in bringing the wood and water from the shore. They were then at Rio Cestors. He used to go into the river in the afternoon, with the sea-breeze, to procure his lading in the evening, in order to return on board in the morning with the land-wind. Several of these little voyages he had made; but the boat was grown old, and almost unfit for use. This service, likewise, was almost completed. One day, having dined on board, he was preparing to return to the river as formerly: he had taken leave of the captain, received his orders, was ready in the boat, and just going to put off. In that instant the captain came up from the cabin, and called him on board again. Mr. N. went, expecting further orders; but

the captain said he had taken it into his head (as he phrased it) that Mr. N. should remain that day in the ship, and accordingly ordered another man to go in his room. Mr. N. was surprised at this, as the boat had never been sent away without him before. He asked the captain the reason of his resolution; but none was assigned, except, as above, that so he would have it. The boat, therefore, went without Mr. N., but returned no more: it sunk that night in the river; and the person who supplied Mr. N.'s place was drowned! Mr. N. was much struck when news of the event was received the next morning. The captain himself, though quite a stranger to religion, even to the denying of a Particular Providence, could not help being affected; but declared that he had no other reason for countermanding Mr. N. at that time, but that it came suddenly into his mind to detain him. A short time after he was thus surprisingly preserved, they sailed for Antigua; and from thence to Charlestown, in South Carolina. In that place there were many serious people: but, at this time, Mr. N. was little capable of availing himself of their society; supposing that all who attended public worship were good Christians, and that whatever came from the pulpit must be very good.

He had two or three opportunities, indeed, of hearing a minister of eminent character and gifts, whom, through struck will, his manner, he did not rightly understand. Almost every day, when business would permit, he used to retire into the woods and fields (being his favorite oratories), and began to taste the delight of communion with God, in the exercises of prayer and praise: and yet so much inconsistency prevailed, that he frequently spent the evening in vain and worthless company. His relish, indeed, for worldly diversions was much weakened; and he was rather a spectator than a sharer in these pleasures; but he did not as yet see the necessity of absolutely relinquishing such society. It appears, that compliance's of this sort, in his present circumstances, were owing rather to a want of light than to any obstinate attachment. As he was kept from what he knew to be sinful, he had, for the most part, peace of conscience; and his strongest desires were towards the things of God. He did not as yet apprehend the force of that precept, Abstain from all appearance of evil: but he very often ventured upon the very brink of temptation. He did not break with the world at once, as might have been expected; but was gradually led to see the inconvenience and folly of first one thing and then another, and, as such, to give them up.

They finished their voyage, and arrived in Liverpool. When the ship's affairs were settled, Mr. N. went to London, and from thence he soon repaired to Kent. More than seven years had now elapsed since his first visit. No views of the kind seemed more chimerical than his, or could subsist under greater discouragements; yet, while he seemed abandoned to his passions, he was still guided, by a Hand that he knew not, to the accomplishment of his wishes. Every obstacle was now removed: he had renounced his former follies; his interest was established, and friends on all sides consenting. The point was now entirely between the parties immediately concerned; and, after what had passed, was easily concluded: accordingly, their hands were joined, February the 1st, 1750.

"But, alas! " says he, " this mercy, which raised me to all I could ask or wish in a temporal view, and which ought to have been an animating motive to obedience and praise, had a contrary effect. I rested in the gift, and forgot the Giver. My poor narrow heart was satisfied. A cold and careless frame, as to spiritual things, took place, and gained ground daily. Happy for me, the season was advancing; and, in June, I received orders to repair to Liverpool. This roused me from my dream; and I found the pains of absence and separation fully proportioned to my preceding pleasure. He

wrote to Mrs. Newton from St. Alban’s, and in his letter inserted a prayer for his own health and that of Mrs. N. From his interleaved copy of his "Letters to a wife," I extract the following remarks on this letter.

" This prayer includes all that I at that time knew how to ask for: and had not the Lord given me more than I then knew how to ask or think, I should now be completely miserable. The prospect of this separation was terrible to me as death: to avoid it, I repeatedly purchased a ticket in the lottery; thinking, ’Who knows but I may obtain a considerable prize, and be thereby saved from the necessity of going to sea?’ Happy for me, the lot which I then considered as casual was at thy disposal. The money, which I could not with prudence have spared at the time, was lost: all my tickets proved blanks, though I attempted to bribe thee, by promising, if I sue-needed, to give a considerable part to the poor. But these blanks were truly prizes. Thy mercy sent me to sea against my own will. To thy blessing, and to my solitary sea-hours, I was indebted for all my temporal comforts and future hopes.

"Thou wert pleased likewise to disappoint me by thy providence of some money which I expected to receive on my marriage; so that, excepting our apparel, when I sailed from Liverpool on my first voyage, the sum total of my worldly inventory was seventy pounds in debt. Through all my following voyage, my irregular and excessive affections were as thorns in my eyes, and often made my other blessings tasteless and insipid. But He, who doeth all things well, over-ruled this likewise for good: it became an occasion of quickening me in prayer, both for her and myself: it increased my indifference for company and amusement: it habituated me to a kind of voluntary self-denial, which I was afterwards taught to improve to a better purpose." Mr. N. sailed from Liverpool in August 1750, commander of a good ship. He had now the control and care of thirty persons; and he endeavored to treat there with humanity, and to set them a good example. [I have heard Mr. Newton observe, that, as the commander of a slave-ship he had a number of women under his absolute authority: and, knowing the danger of his situation on that account, he resolved to abstain from flesh in his food, and to drink nothing stronger than water, daring the voyage; that, by abstemiousness, he might subdue every improper emotion; and that, upon his setting sail, the sight of a certain point of land was the signal for his beginning a rule which he was enabled to keep.] He likewise established public worship, according to the Liturgy of the Church of England, officiating himself twice every Lord’s day. He did not proceed further than this, while he continued in that occupation.

Having now much leisure, he prosecuted the study of. Latin with good success. He remembered to take a Dictionary this voyage; and added Juvenal to Horace: and, for prose authors, chose Livy, Caesar, and Sallust. He was not aware of the mistake of beginning with such difficult writers; but, having heard Livy highly commended, he was resolved to understand him: he began with the first page, and made it a rule not to proceed to a second till he understood the first. Often at a stand, but seldom discouraged, here and there he found a few lines quite obstinate, and was forced to give them up, especially as his edition had no notes. Before, however, the close of that voyage, he informed us that he could, with a few exceptions, read Livy almost as readily as an English author. Other prose authors, he says, cost him but little trouble; as, in surmounting the former difficulty, he had mastered all in one. In short, in the space of two or three voyages, he became tolerably acquainted with the best classics. He read Terence, Virgil, several pieces of Cicero; and the modern classics, Buchanan, Erasmus, and Cassimir; and made some essays towards writing

elegant Latin.

"But, by this time," he observes, "the Lord was pleased to draw me nearer to himself, and to give me a fuller view of the Pearl of great price--the inestimable Treasure hid in the field of the holy Scripture: and, for the sake of this, I was made willing to part with all my newly acquired riches. I began to think that life was too short (especially my life)to admit of leisure for such elaborate trifling. Neither poet nor historian could tell me a word of Jesus; and I therefore applied myself to those who could. The classics were at first restrained to one morning in the week, and at length laid aside,"

This, his first voyage after his marriage, lasted the space of fourteen months, through various scenes of danger and difficulty; but nothing very remarkable occurred: and, after having seen many fall on his right hand and on his left, he was brought home in peace, November 2, 1751. In the interval between his first and second voyage, he speaks of the use he found in keeping a sort of diary; of the unfavorable tendency of a life of ease, among his friends; and of the satisfaction of his wishes proving unfavorable to the progress of grace: upon the whole, however, he seems to have gained ground, and was led into further views of Christian doctrine and experience by Scougal's "Life of God in the Soul of Man," "Hervey's Meditations," and the "Life of Colonel Gardiner." He seems to have derived no advantages from the preaching he heard, or the Christian acquaintance he had made; and, though he could not live without prayer, he durst not propose it, even to his wife, till she first urged him to the social practice of it. In a few months, the returning season called him abroad again; [Mr. N. had had an unexpected call to London; and, on his return, when within a few miles of Liverpool, he mistook a marie-pit for a pond, and, in attempting to water his horse, both the horse and the rider plunged in it overhead, He was afterwards told, that, near that time, three persons had lost their lives by a mistake of the same kind.] and he sailed from Liverpool in a new ship, July 1752. "I never knew," say's he, "sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion, than in my two last voyages to Guinea, when I was either almost secluded from society on shipboard, or when on shore among the natives. I have wandered through the woods, reflecting on the singular goodness of the Lord to me, in a place where, perhaps, there was not a person who knew me for some thousand miles round. Many a time, upon these occasions, I have restored the beautiful lines of Propertius to the right owner: lines, fall of blasphemy and madness, when addressed to a creature; but full of comfort and propriety, in the mouth of a believer."

Sic ego desertis possim bene vivere sylvis Quo nulla humano sit via trita pede:

Tu. mihi curarum requies, in nocte vel atra Lumen, et in solis tu mihi turba locis.

PARAPHRASED In desert woods with thee, my God, Where human footsteps never trod, How happy could I be!

Thou my repose from care, my light Amidst the darkness of the night, In solitude my company. In the course of this voyage, Mr. N. was wonderfully preserved through many unforeseen dangers. At one time there was a conspiracy among his own people to become pirates, and take possession of the ship: when the plot was nearly ripe, they watched only for opportunity. Two of them were taken ill, in one day, and one of them died: this suspended the affair, and opened a way to its discovery. The slaves on board frequently plotted insurrections; and were sometimes upon the very brink of one when it was disclosed. When at a place called Mana, near Cape Mount, Mr. N. intended to go

on shore the next morning to settle some business; but the surf of the sea ran so high, that he was afraid to attempt landing: he had often ventured at a worse time; but then feeling a backwardness which he could not account for, the high surf furnished a pretext for indulging it: he therefore returned to the ship without doing any business. He afterwards found, that, on the day he intended to land, a scandalous and groundless charge had been laid against him, which greatly threatened his honor and interest, both in Africa and England, and would perhaps have affected his life had he landed: the person most concerned in this affair owed him about a hundred pounds, which he sent in a huff; and otherwise, perhaps, would not have paid it at all: Mr. N. heard no more of this accusation till the next voyage; and then it was publicly acknowledged to have been a malicious calumny, without the least shadow of foundation. But as these things did not occur every day, Mr. N. prosecuted his Latin, being very regular in the management of his time. He allotted about eight hours to sleep and meals, eight hours to exercise and devotion, and eight hours to his books; and thus, by diversifying his engagements, the whole day was agreeably filled up. From the coast he went to St. Christopher's, where he met with a great disappointment; for the letters which he expected from Mrs. N. were, by mistake, forwarded to Antigua. Certain of her punctuality in writing, if alive, he concluded, by not hearing from her, that she was surely dead. This fear deprived him of his appetite and rest, and caused an incessant pain in his stomach; and, in the space of three weeks, he was near sinking under the weight of an imaginary stroke. "I felt," says he, "some severe symptoms of that mixture of pride and madness, commonly called a broken heart; and, indeed, I wonder that this case is not more common. How often do the potsherds of the earth presume to contend with their Maker; and what a wonder and mercy it is that they are not all broken! This was a sharp lesson, but I hope it did me good; and, when I had thus suffered some weeks, I thought of sending a small vessel to Antigua. I did so, and she brought me several packets, which restored my health and peace, and gave me a strong contrast of the Lord's goodness to me, and of my unbelief and ingratitude towards him." In August, 1753, Mr. N. returned to Liverpool. After that voyage, he continued only six weeks at home; and, in that space, nothing very memorable occurred.

We now follow Mr. N. in his third voyage to Guinea. It seems to be the shortest of any that he had made; and is principally marked by an account of a young man who had formerly been a midshipman, and his intimate companion on board the Harwich. This youth, at the time Mr. N. first knew him, was sober; but was afterwards deeply infected with Mr. N.'s then libertine principles. They met at Liverpool, and renewed their former acquaintance. As their conversation frequently turned upon religion, Mr. N. was very desirous to recover his companion. He gave him a plain account of the manner and reasons of his own change, and need every argument to induce him to relinquish his in fidelity. When pressed very close, his usual reply was, that Mr. N. was the first person who had given him an idea of his liberty; which naturally occasioned many mournful reflections in the mind of his present instructor. This person was going master to Guinea himself: but, meeting with disappointment, Mr. N. offered to take him as a companion, with a view of assisting him in gaining future employment; but, principally, that his arguments, example, and prayers might be attended with good effect. But his companion was exceedingly profane; grew worse and worse; and presented a lively, but distressing picture, continually before Mr. N.'s eyes, of what he himself had once been. Besides this, the man was not only deaf to remonstrance himself, but labored to counteract Mr. N.'s influence upon others: his spirit and passions were likewise so exceedingly high, that it required all Mr. N.'s prudence and authority to hold him in any

degree of restraint. At length Mr. N. had an opportunity of buying a small vessel, which he supplied with a cargo from his own ship. He gave his companion the command of it, and sent him away to trade on the ship's account. When they parted, Mr. N. repeated and enforced his best advice: it seemed greatly to affect his companion at the time; but, when he found himself released from the restraint of his instructor, he gave a loose to every appetite; and his violent irregularities, joined to the heat of the climate, soon threw him into a malignant fever, which carried him off in a few days. He seems to have died convinced, but not changed; his rage and despair struck those who were about him with horror; and he pronounced his own fatal doom before be expired, without any sign that he either hoped or asked for mercy. I hope the reader will deem the features of this awful case, though a digression from the principal subject, too instructive to be omitted.

Mr. N. left the coast in about four months, and sailed for St. Christopher's. Hitherto he had enjoyed a perfect and equal state of health in different climates for several years: but, in this passage, he was visited with a fever, which gave him a very near prospect of eternity. He was, however, supported in a silent composure of spirit, by the faith of Jesus; and found great relief from those words, He is able to save to the uttermost. He was for a while troubled, either by a temptation or by the fever disordering his faculties, that he should be lost or overlooked amidst the myriads that are continually entering the unseen world; but the recollection of that Scripture, The Lord knoweth them that are his, put an end to his doubts. After a few days he began to amend; and, by the time they arrived in the West Indies, he was perfectly recovered. In this way he was led, for about the space of six years. He had learnt something of the evil of his heart had read the Bible over and over had perused several religious books and had a general view of Gospel Truth: but his conceptions still remained confused in many respects; not having, in all this time, met with one acquaintance qualified to assist his inquiries. On his arrival at St. Christopher's, he found a captain of a ship from London, a man of experience in the things of God. For near a month, they spent every evening together on board each other's ship alternately; prolonging their visits till near day-break. While Mr. N. was an eager recipient, his companion's discourse not only informed his understanding, but inflamed his heart--encouraged him in attempting social prayer--taught him the advantage of Christian converse--put him upon an attempt to make his profession more public, and to venture to speak for God. His conceptions now became more clear and evangelical: he was delivered from a fear, which had long troubled him, of relapsing into his former apostasy; and taught to expect preservation, not from his own power and holiness, but from the power and promise of God. From this friend he likewise received a general view of the present state of religion, and of the prevailing errors and controversies of the times; and a direction where to inquire, in London, for further instruction. Mr. N.'s passage homewards gave him leisure to digest what he had received. He arrived safely at Liverpool, August, 1754 In a MS. note on a letter from sea, in the interleaved copy of his "Letters to a Wife," before-mentioned, Mr. Newton remarks:--"I now enter my 70th year. Still thou art singularly bountiful to me: still I have reason to think myself favored as to externals beyond the common lot of mortals. Thou didst bear me above the removal of her I most valued, to the admiration of all who knew me. The best part of my childhood and youth was vanity and folly: but, before I attained the age of man, I became exceeding vile indeed; and was seated in the chair of the scorner, in early life. The troubles and miseries I for a time endured were my own. I brought them upon myself, by forsaking thy good and pleasant paths; and choosing the ways of transgressors, which I found very hard: they led to slavery, contempt, famine, and despair.

"But my recovery from that dreadful state was wholly of Thee. Thou didst prepare the means, unthought of and undesired by me. How nice were the turns upon which my delivery from Africa depended! Had the ship passed one quarter of an hour sooner, I had died there a wretch, as I had lived. But Thou didst pity and hear my first lispings in prayer, at the time the storm fell upon the. Thou didst preserve me from sinking and starving. Thus I returned home; and Thou didst provide me friends, when I was destitute and a stranger. His stay at home, however, was intended to be but short; and, by the beginning of November, he was ready again for sea. But the Lord saw fit to over-rule his design. It seems, from the account he gives, that he had not had the least scruple as to the lawfulness of the Slave Trade: he considered it as the appointment of Providence: he viewed this employment as respectable and profitable: yet he could not help regarding himself as a sort of jailer: and was sometimes shocked with an employment so conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles. On this account he had often prayed that he might be fixed in a more humane profession; where he might enjoy more frequent communion with the people and ordinances of God, and be freed from those long domestic separations which he found it so hard to bear. His prayers were now answered, though in an unexpected way.

Mr. N. was within two days of sailing, and in apparent good health; but, as he was one afternoon drinking tea with Mrs. N. he was seized with a fit, which deprived him of sense and motion. When he had recovered from this fit, which lasted about an hour, it left a pain and dizziness in his head, which continued with such symptoms as induced the physicians to judge it would not be safe for him to proceed on the voyage. By the advice of a friend, therefore, to whom the ship belonged, he resigned the command on the day before she sailed: and thus he was not only freed from that service, but from the future consequences of a voyage which proved extremely calamitous. The person who went in his room died; as did most of the officers, and many of the crew. As Mr. N. was now disengaged from business, he left Liverpool, and spent most of the following year in London, or in Kent. Here he entered upon anew trial, in a disorder that was brought upon Mrs. N. from the shock she received in his late illness: as he grew better, she became worse, with a disorder which the physicians could not define, nor medicines remove. Mr. N. was therefore placed for about eleven months in what Dr. Young calls -------- the dreadful post of observation, Darker every hour. The reader will recollect that Mr. N.’s friend at St. Christopher’s had given him information for forming a religious acquaintance in London: in consequence of this he became intimate with several persons eminent for that character; and profited by the spiritual advantages which a great city affords, with respect to the means of grace. When he was in Kent, His advantages were of a different kind: most of his time he passed in the fields and woods. "It has been my custom," says he, "for many years, to perform my devotional exercises sub dio, when I have opportunity; and I always find these scenes have some tendency both to refresh and compose my spirits. A beautiful, diversified prospect gladdens my heart. When I am withdrawn from the noise and petty works of men, I consider myself as in the great temple which the Lord has built for his own honor."

During this time he had to weather two trials, the principal of which was Mrs. N.’s illness: she still grew worse, and he had daily more reason to fear that hour of separation which appeared to be at hand. He had likewise to provide some future settlement: the African trade was over-done that year; and his friends did not care to fit out another ship till that, which had been his, returned. Though a provision of food and raiment had seldom been with him a cause of great solicitude, yet

he was some time in suspense on this account; but, in August following, he received a letter, informing him that he was nominated to a post which afforded him a competency, both unsought and unexpected. When he had gained this point, his distress respecting Mrs. N. was doubled: he was obliged to leave her in the greatest extremity of pain and illness, and when he had no hope that he should see her again alive: he was, however, enabled to resign her and himself to the Divine disposal; and, soon after he was gone, she began to amend; and recovered so fast, that, in about two months, he had the pleasure to meet her at Stone, on her journey to Liverpool. From October; 1755, he appears to have been comfortably settled at Liverpool, and mentions his having received, since the year 1757, much profit from his acquaintance in the West Riding of Yorkshire. "I have conversed," says he, "at large among all parties, without joining any: and, in my attempts to hit the golden mean, I have been sometimes drawn too near the different extremes; yet the Lord has enabled me to profit by my mistakes," Being at length placed in a settled habitation, and finding his business would afford him much leisure, he considered in what manner he could improve it. Having determined, with the Apostle, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified, he devoted His life to the prosecution of spiritual knowledge, and resolved to peruse nothing but in subservience to this design. But, as what fellows will appear most natural, and must be best expressed, in his own words, I shall transcribe them from the conclusion of his "Narrative."

"This resolution," says Mr. N., "divorced me (as I have already hinted) from the classics and mathematics. My first attempt was to learn so much Greek as would enable me to understand the New Testament and Septuagint; and, when I had made some progress this way, I entered upon the Hebrew the following year: and, two years afterwards, having surmised some advantages from the Syriac Version, I began with that language. You must not think that I have attained, or ever aimed at, a critical skill in any of these: I had no business with them, but as in reference to something else. I never read one classic author in the Greek: I thought it too late in life to take such a round in this language as I had done in the Latin: I only wanted the signification of scriptural words and phrases; and for this I thought I might avail myself of Scapula, the Synopsis, and others, who had sustained the drudgery before me. In the Hebrew, I can read the Historical Books and Psalms with tolerable ease; but, in the Prophetical and difficult parts, I am frequently obliged to have recourse to Lexicons, &c. However, I know so much as to be able, with such helps as are at hand, to judge for myself the meaning of any passage I have occasion to consult.

"Together with these studies, I have kept up a course of reading the best writers in divinity that have come to my hand, in the Latin and English tongues, and some French, for I picked up the French at times, while I used the sea.) But, within these two or three years, I have accustomed myself chiefly to writing, and have not found time to read many books besides the Scriptures.

"I am the more particular in this account, as my case has been something singular: for, in all my literary attempts, I have been obliged to strike out my own path by the light I could acquire from books; as I have not had a teacher or assistant since I was ten years of age.

"One word concerning my views to the ministry, and I have done. I have told you, that this was my dear mother’s hope concerning me; but her death, and the scenes of life in which I afterwards engaged, seemed to cut off the probability. The first desires of this sort in my own mind arose many years ago, from a reflection on Galatians 1:23-24. I could but wish for such a public opportunity to testify the riches of Divine grace,. I thought I was, above most living, a fit person to

proclaim that faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners; and, as my life had been full of remarkable turns, and I seemed selected to shew what the Lord could do. I was in some hopes that perhaps, sooner or later, he might call me into his service.

"I believe it was a distant hope of this that determined me to study the original Scriptures; but it remained an imperfect desire in my own breast, till it was recommended to me by some Christian friends. I started at the thought when first seriously proposed to me: but, afterwards, set apart some weeks to consider the case, to consult my friends, and to entreat the Lord’s direction. The judgment of my friends, and many things that occurred, tended to engage me. My first thought was to join with the Dissenters, from a presumption that I could not honestly make the required subscriptions: but Mr. C--, in a conversation upon these points, moderated my scruples; and, preferring the Established Church in some respects, I accepted a title from him, some months afterwards, and solicited ordination from the late Archbishop of York. I need not tell you I met a refusal, nor what steps I took afterwards to succeed elsewhere. At present, I desist from any applications. My desire to serve the Lord is not weakened; but I am not so hasty to push myself forward as I was formerly. It is sufficient that he knows how to dispose of me, and that he both can and will do what is best. To him I commend myself: I trust that his will and my true interest are inseparable. To his name be glory for ever; and with this I conclude my story." A variety of remarks occurred to me while abridging the " Narrative;" but I refrained from putting them down, lest, by interrupting its course, and breaking the thread of the history, I should rather disgust than profit the reader. I have heard Mr. N. relate a few additional particulars, but they were of too little interest to be inserted here: they went, however, like natural incidents, to a further authentication of the above account, had it needed any other confirmation than the solemn declaration of the pious Realtor. Romantic relations, indeed, of unprincipled travelers, which appear to have no better basis than a disposition to amuse credulity. to exhibit vanity, or to acquire gain, may naturally raise suspicion, and produce but a momentary effect at most on the mind of the reader: but facts, like the present, manifest such a display of the power, providence, and grace of God; and, at the same time, such a deep and humbling view of human depravity, when moved and brought forth by circumstances, as inexperience can scarcely credit, but which must arrest the eye of pious contemplation, and open a new world of wonders.

I must now attempt to conduct the reader, without the help of Mr. N.’s" Narrative," finished February 2, 1763; to which, as I have already observed, he referred me for the former and most singular part of his life. When I left the above account with him for revision, he expressed full satisfaction as to all the facts related; but said, he thought I had been too minute even in the abridgment, since the "Narrative" itself had been long before the public. I remarked, in reply, that the "Narrative" contained a great variety of facts; that these Memoirs might fall into the hands of persons who had not seen the "Narrative" but that, without some abridgment of it, no clear view could be formed of the peculiarity of his whole dispensation and character; and, therefore, that such an abridgment appeared to be absolutely necessary, and that he had recommended it at my first undertaking the work. With these reasons he was well satisfied. I now proceed to the remaining, though less remarkable, part of his life.

Mr. Manesty, who had long been a faithful and generous friend of Mr. N., having procured him the place of tide-surveyor in the port of Liverpool, Mr. N. gives the following account of it: "I entered upon business yesterday. I find my duty is to attend the tides one week, and visit the ships that

arrive, and such as are in the river; and the other week to inspect the vessels in the docks; and thus, alternately, the year round. The latter is little more than a sinecure; but the former requires pretty constant attendance, both by day and night. I have a good office, with fire and candle, and fifty or sixty people under my direction; with a handsome six-oared boat and a coxswain, to row me about in form."

We cannot wonder that Mr. N. latterly retained a strong impression of a Particular Providence, superintending and conducting the steps of man; since he was so often reminded of it in his own history. The following occurrence is one of many instances: Mr. N. after his reformation was remarkable for his punctuality: I remember his often sitting with his watch in his hand, lest he should fail in keeping his next engagement. This exactness with respect to time, it seems, was his habit while occupying his post at Liverpool. One day, however, some business had so detained him, that he came to his boat much later than usual, to the surprise of those who had observed his former punctuality He went out in the boat, as heretofore, to inspect a ship; but the ship blew up just before he reached her. It appears, that, if he had left the shore a few minutes sooner, he must have perished with the rest on board. This anecdote I had from a clergyman, upon whose word I can depend; who had been long in intimate habits with Mr. N., and who had it from Mr. N. himself: the reason of its not appearing in his letters from Liverpool to Mrs. N. I can only suppose to be, his fearing to alarm her with respect to the dangers of his station. But another providential occurrence, which he mentions in those letters, I shall transcribe. "When I think of my settlement here, and the manner of it, I see the appointment of Providence so good and gracious, and such a plain answer to my poor prayers, that I cannot but wonder and adore. I think I have not yet told you, that my immediate predecessor in office, Mr. C., had not the least intention of resigning his place on the occasion of his father’s death; though such a report was spread about the town without his knowledge. or rather in defiance of all he could say to contradict it. Yet to this false report I owe my situation. For it put Mr. M. upon an application to Mr. S. the member for the town; and, the very day he received the promise in my favor, Mr. C. was found dead in his bed; though he had been in company, and in perfect health, the night before. If I mistake not, the same messenger, who brought the promise, carried back the news of the vacancy, to Mr. S. at Chester. About an hour after, the mayor applied for a nephew of his; but, though it was only an hour or two, he was too late. Mr. S. had already written, and sent off the letter, and I was appointed accordingly. These circumstances appeared to me extraordinary, though of a piece with many other parts of my singular history. And the more so, as, by another mistake, I missed the land-waiter’s place, which was my first object, and which, I now see, would not bare suited us nearly so well. I thank God, I can now look through instruments and second causes, and see his wisdom and goodness immediately concerned in fixing my lot."

Mr. N. having expressed, near the end of his "Narrative," the motives which induced him to aim at a regular appointment to the ministry in the Church of England, and of the disappointment he met wills in His first making the attempt, the reader is further informed, that, on December 16, l758, Mr. N. received a title to a curacy from the Rev. Mr. C., and applied to the Archbishop of York, Dr. Gilbert, for ordination. The Bishop of Chester, having countersigned his testimonials, directed him to Dr. Newton, the Archbishop’s Chaplain. He was referred to the Secretary, and received the softest refusal imaginable. The Secretary informed him, that he had "represented the matter to the Archbishop, but His Grace was inflexible in supporting the Rules and Canons of the church, &c."

Traveling to Loughborough, Mr. N. stopped at Welwyn: and, sending a note to the celebrated Dr. Young, he received for answer, that the Doctor would be glad to see him. He found the Doctor's conversation agreeable, and answerable to his expectation respecting the author of the "Night Thoughts." The Doctor likewise seemed pleased with Mr. N. He approved Mr. N.'s design of entering the ministry, and said many encouraging things upon the subject; and, when he dismissed Mr. N., desired him never to pass near Welwyn without calling upon him.

Mr. N., it seems, had made some small attempts at Liverpool, in a way of preaching or expounding. Many wished him to engage more at large in those ministerial employments to which his own mind was inclined; and he thus expresses his motives in a letter to Mrs. N., in answer to the objections she had formed. "The late death of Mr. Jones, of St. Savior's, has pressed this concern more closely upon my mind. I fear it must be wrong, after having so solemnly devoted myself to the Lord for his service, to wear away my time, and bury my talents in silence (because I had been refused orders in the Church), after all the great things he has done for me. " In a note annexed, he observes, that the influence of his judicious and affectionate counselor moderated the zeal which dictated this letter, written in the year 1762); that, had it not been for her, he should probably have been precluded from those important scenes of service, to which he was afterwards appointed: but he adds, "The exercises of my mind upon this point, I believe, have not been peculiar to myself. I have known several persons, sensible, pious, of competent abilities, and cordially attached to the Established Church; who, being wearied out with repeated refusals of ordination, and, perhaps, not having the advantage of such an adviser as I had, have at length struck into the itinerant path, or settled among the Dissenters. Some of these, yet living, are men of respectable characters, and useful in their ministry; but their influence, which would once have been serviceable to the true interests of the Church of England, now rather operates against it." In the year 1764, Mr. N. had the curacy of Olney proposed to him, and was recommended by Lord D. to Dr. Green, Bishop of Lincoln; of whose candor and tenderness he speaks with much respect. The Bishop had admitted him as a candidate for orders. "The examination," says he, "lasted about an hour, chiefly upon the principal heads of divinity. As I was resolved not to be charged hereafter with dissimulation, I was constrained to differ from his lordship in some points; but he was not offended: he declared himself satisfied, and has promised to ordain me, either next Sunday. in town, or the Sunday following at Buckden. Let us praise the Lord!"

Mr. N. was ordained deacon at Buckden, April 29, 1764; and priest, in June, the following year. In the parish of Olney he found many who not only had evangelical views of the truth, but had also long walked in the light and experience of it. The vicarage was in the gift of the Earl of D****** the nobleman to whom Mr. N. addressed the first twenty-six letters in his "Cardiphonia." The Earl was a man of real piety, and most amiable disposition: he had formerly appointed the Rev. Moses Brown to the vicarage.

Mr. Brown was a faithful minister, and a good man: of course, he had afforded wholesome instruction to the parishioners of Olney: he had also been the instrument of a sound conversion in many of them. He was the author of a poetical piece, entitled "Sunday Thoughts," a translation of Professor Zimmerman's "Excellency of the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, &c." But Mr. Brown had a numerous family, and met with considerable trials in it: he too much resembled Eli, in his indulgence of his children. He was also under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, and had therefore accepted the Chaplaincy of Morden College, Blackheath, while Vicar of Olney.

Mr. N. in these circumstances, undertook the curacy of Olney, in which he continued near sixteen years, previous to his removal to St. Mary Woolnoth, to which he was afterwards presented by the late John Thornton, Esq. As Mr. N. was under the greatest obligations to Mr. Thornton's friendship while at Olney, and had been enabled to extend his own usefulness by the bounty of that extraordinary man, it may not be foreign to our subject, to give some general outline of Mr. Thornton's character, in this place.

It is said of Solomon, that the Lord gave him largeness of heart, even as the sand on the sea shore: such a peculiar disposition for whatever was good or benevolent was also bestowed on Mr. Thornton. He differed as much from rich men of ordinary bounty, as they do from others who are parsimonious. Nor was this bounty the result of occasional impulse, like a summer shower, violent and short: on the contrary, it proceeded like a river, pouring its waters through various countries, copious and inexhaustible. Nor could those obstructions of imposture and ingratitude, which have often been advanced as the cause of damming up other streams, prevent or retard the course of this. The generosity of Mr. Thornton, indeed, frequently met with such hindrances, and led him to increasing discrimination; but the stream of his bounty never ceased to hold its course. Deep, silent, and overwhelming, it still rolled on, nor ended even with his life. But the fountain from whence this beneficence flowed, and by which its permanency and direction were maintained, must not be concealed. Mr. Thornton was a Christian. Let no one, however, so mistake me here, as to suppose that I mean nothing more by the term CHRISTIAN, than the state of one, who, convinced of the truth of Revelation, gives assent to its doctrines--regularly attends its ordinances--and maintains, externally, a moral and religious deportment. Such a one may have a name to live while he is dead: he may have a form of godliness without the power of it: he may even be found denying and ridiculing that power--till, at length, he can only be convinced of his error at an infallible tribunal; where a widow, who gives but a mite, or a publican, who smites on his breast, shall be preferred before him.

Mr. Thornton was a Christian indeed; that is, he was alive to God by a spiritual regeneration. With this God he was daily and earnestly transacting that infinitely momentous affair, the salvation of his own soul; and, next to that, the salvation of the souls of others. Temperate in all things, though mean in nothing, he made provision for doing good with his opulence: and seemed to be most in his element when appropriating a considerable part of his large income to the necessities of others. But Mr. Thornton possessed that discrimination in his attempts to serve his fellow-creatures, which distinguishes an enlightened mind. He habitually contemplated man, as one who has not only a body, subject to want, affliction, and death; but a spirit also, which is immortal, and must be happy or miserable for ever. He felt, therefore, that the noblest exertions of charity are those which are directed to the relief of the noblest part of our frame. Accordingly, he left no mode of exertion untried to relieve man under his natural ignorance and depravity. To this end, he purchased advowsons and presentations, with a view to place in parishes the most enlightened, active. and useful ministers. He employed the extensive commerce in which be was engaged, as a powerful instrument for conveying immense quantities of Bibles, Prayer-books, and the most useful publications, to every place visited by our trade. He printed, at his own sole expense, large editions of the latter for that purpose; and it may safely be affirmed, that there is scarcely a part of the known world, where such books could be introduced, which did not feel the salutary influence of this single individual. Nor was Mr. Thornton limited in his views of promoting

the interests of real religion, with what sect soever it was connected. He stood ready to assist a beneficial design in every party, but would be the creature of none. General good was his object: and, wherever or however it made its way, his maxim seemed constantly to be, Valeat quantum valere potest. But the nature and extent of his liberality will be greatly misconceived, if any one should suppose it confined to moral and religious objects, though the grandest and most comprehensive exertions of it. Mr. Thornton was a philanthropist, on the largest scale--the friend of man, under all his wants. His manner of relieving his fellow-men was princely. Instances might be mentioned of it, were it proper to particularize, which would surprise those who did not know Mr. Thornton. They were so much out of ordinary course and expectation, that I know some who felt it their duty to inquire of him, whether the sum they had received was sent by his intention or by mistake. To this may be added, that the manner of presenting his gifts was as delicate and concealed, as the measure was large.

Besides this constant course of private donations, there was scarcely a public charity, or occasion of relief to the ignorant or necessitous, which did not meet with his distinguished support. His only question was, "May the miseries of man in any measure be removed or alleviated!" Nor was he merely distinguished by stretching out a liberal hand: his benevolent heart was so intent on doing good, that he was ever inventing and promoting plans for its diffusion at home or abroad.

He, who wisely desires any end, will as wisely regard the means. In this, Mr. Thornton was perfectly consistent. In order to execute his beneficent designs, he observed frugality and exactness in His personal expenses. By such prospective methods, he was able to extend the influence of his fortune far beyond those who, in still more elevated stations, are slaves to expensive habits. Such men meanly pace in the trammels of the tyrant Custom, till it leaves them scarcely enough to preserve their conscience, or even their credit; much less to employ their talents in Mr. Thornton’s nobler pursuits. He, however, could afford to be generous; and, while he was generous, did not forget his duty in being just. He made ample provision for his children: and though, while they are living, it would be indelicate to say more, I am sure of speaking truth, when I say--they are so far from thinking themselves impoverished by the bounty of their father, that they contemplate with the highest satisfaction the fruit of these benefits to society which he planted, which it may be trusted will extend with time itself, and which, after his example, they still labor to extend.

But, with all the piety and liberality of this honored character, no man had deeper views of his own unworthiness before his God. To the Redeemer’s work alone he looked for acceptance of his person and services: he felt that all he did, or could do, was infinitely short of that which had been done for him, and of the obligations that were thereby laid upon him. It was his abasedness of heart towards God, combined with the most singular largeness of heart towards his fellow-creatures, which distinguished JOHN THORNTON among men. To this common patron of every useful and pious endeavor, Mr. N. sent the "Narrative" from which the former part of these Memoirs is extracted. Mr. Thornton replied in his usual manner, that is, by accompanying his letter with a valuable bank-note; and, some months after, he paid Mr. N. a visit at Olney. A closer connection being now formed between friends who employed their distinct talents in promoting the same benevolent cause, Mr. Thornton left a sum of money with Mr. N. to be appropriated to the defraying of his necessary expenses, and the relief of the poor. "Be hospitable," said Mr. Thornton, "and keep an open house for such as are worthy of entertainment. Help the poor and needy. I will

statedly allow you 200#. a-year, and readily send whatever you have occasion to draw for more."--Mr. N. told me, that he thought he had received of Mr. Thornton upwards of 3000#. in this way, during the time he resided at Olney. The case of most ministers is peculiar in this respect. Some among them may be looked up to, on account of their publicity and talents: they may have made great sacrifices of their personal interest in order to enter on their ministry, and may be possessed of the warmest benevolence; but, from the narrowness of their pecuniary circumstances, and from the largeness of their families, they often perceive, that an ordinary tradesman in their parishes can subscribe to a charitable or popular institution much more liberally than themselves. This would have been Mr. N.’s case, but for the above-mentioned singular patronage. A minister, however, should not be so forgetful of his dispensation, as to repine at his want of power in this respect. He might as justly estimate his deficiency by the strength of the lion, or the flight of the eagle. The power communicated to him is of another kind: and power of every kind belongs to God, who gives gifts to every man severally as he will. The two mites of the widow were all the power of that kind, which was communicated to her; and her bestowment of her two mites was better accepted, than the large offerings of the rich man. The powers, therefore, of Mr. Thornton and of Mr. N., though of a different order, were both consecrated to God; and each might have said, Of thine own have we given thee.

Providence seems to have appointed Mr. N.’s residence at Olney, among other reasons, for the relief of the depressed mind of the Poet COWPER. There has gone forth an unfounded report, that the deplorable melancholy of Cowper was, in part, derived from his residence and connections in that place. The fact, however, is the reverse of this: and, as it may be of importance to the interests of true religion to prevent such a misrepresentation from taking root, I will present the real state of the case, as I have found it attested by the most respectable living witnesses; and, more especially as confirmed by a MS. written by the poet himself, at the calmest period of his life, with the perusal of which I was favored by Mr. N.

It most evidently appears, that symptoms of Mr. Cowper’s morbid state began to discover themselves in his earliest youth. He seems to have been at all times disordered, in a greater or less degree. He was sent to Westminster school at the age of nine years, and long endured the tyranny of an elder boy, of which he gives an affecting account in the paper above-mentioned; and which "produced," as one of his biographers observes, who had long intimacy with him, "an indelible effect upon his mind through life."--A person so naturally bashful and depressed as Cowper must needs find the profession of a Barrister a further occasion of anxiety. The post obtained for him by his friends in the House of Lords overwhelmed him: and the remonstrances, which those friends made against his relinquishing so honorable and lucrative an appointment (but which soon after actually took place), greatly increased the anguish of a mind already incapacitated for business. To all this were added events, which, of themselves, have been found sufficient to over set the strongest minds: namely, the decease of his particular friend and intimate Sir William Russell; and his meeting with a disappointment in obtaining a lady, upon whom his affections were placed. But the state of a person, torn and depressed (not by his religious connections, but) by adverse circumstances, and these meeting a naturally morbid sensibility, long before he knew Olney, or had formed any connection with its inhabitants, will best appear from some verses which he sent at this time to one of his female relations, and for the communication of which we are indebted to Mr. Hailey.

"Doom’d as I am in solitude to waste The present moments, and regret the past;

Depriv’d of every joy I valued most, My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien, The dull effect of humour or of spleen I Still, still I mourn with each returning day, Him--snatch’d by fate, in early youth away; And her, through tedious years of doubt and pain, Fix’d in her choice, and faithful--but in vain.

See me--ere yet my destin’d course half done, Cast forth a wand’rer on a wild unknown I See me, neglected on the world’s rude coast, Each dear companion of my voyage lost! Nor ask, why clouds of sorrow shade my brow, And ready tears wait only leave to flow;

Why all that soothes a heart, from anguish free, All that delights the happy--palls with me!"

Under such pressures, the melancholy and susceptible mind of Cowper received, from evangelical truth, the first consolation which it ever tasted. It was under the care of Dr. Cotton, of St. Alban’s, (a physician as capable of administering to the spiritual as to the natural maladies of his patients,) that Mr. C. first obtained a clear view of those sublime and animating doctrines which so distinguished and exalted his future strains as a poet. Here, also, he received that settled tranquillity and peace, which he enjoyed for several years afterwards. So far, therefore, was his constitutional malady from being produced or increased by his evangelical connections, either at St. Alban’s or at Olney, that he seems never to have had any settled peace but from the truths he learned in these societies. It appears, that, among them alone, he found the only sunshine he ever enjoyed, through the cloudy day of his afflicted life.

It appears also, that, while at Dr. Cotton’s, Mr. Cowper’s distress was for a long time entirely removed, by marking that passage in Romans 3:25 : Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare it is righteousness .for the remission of sins that are past. In this Scripture he saw the remedy which God provides for the relief of a guilty conscience, with such clearness, that, for several years after, his heart was filled with love, and his life occupied with prayer, praise, and doing good to his needy fellow-creatures.

Mr. N. told me, that, from Mr. Cowper’s first coming to Olney, it was observed he had studied his Bible with such advantage, and was so well acquainted with its design, that not only his troubles were removed, but that, to the end of his life, he never had clearer views of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, than when he first became an attendant upon them; that (short intervals excepted) Mr. Cowper enjoyed a course of peace for several successive years; that, during this period, the inseparable attendants of a lively faith appeared, by Mr. Cowper’s exerting himself to the utmost of his power in every benevolent service he could render to his poor neighbors; and that Mr. N. used to consider him as a sort of curate, from his constant attendance upon the sick and afflicted, in that large and necessitous parish. But the malady, which seemed to be subdued by the strong consolations of the Gospel, was still latent; and only required some occasion of irritation, to break out again, and overwhelm the patient. Any object of constant attention that shall occupy a mind previously disordered, whether fear, or love, or science, or religion, will not be so much the CAUSE of the disease, as the accidental OCCASION of exciting it. Cowper’s Letters will shew us how much his mind was occupied at one time by the truths of the Bible, and at another time by the fictions of Homer: but his melancholy was, originally a constitutional disease-a physical disorder, which, indeed, could be affected either by the Bible or by Homer, but was utterly distinct in its

nature from the mere matter of either. And here I cannot but mark this necessary distinction; having often been witness to cases where religion has been assigned as the proper cause of insanity, when it has been only an accidental occasion, in the case of one already affected. [I have been an eye-witness of several instances of this kind of misrepresentation; but will detain the reader with mentioning only one. I was called to visit a woman whose mind was disordered; and, on my observing that it was a case which required the assistance of a physician, rather than that of a clergyman, her husband replied; "Sir, we sent to you, because. it is a religious case: her mind has been injured by constantly reading the Bible." "I have known many instances," said I, "of persons brought to their senses by reading the Bible; but it is possible, that too intense. an application to that, as well as to any other subject, may have disordered your wife. "There is every proof of it," said he; and was proceeding to multiply his proofs, till his brother interrupted him by thus addressing me :--"Sir, I have no longer patience to stand by, and see you imposed on. The truth of the matter is this: my brother has forsaken his wife, and been long connected with a loose woman. He had the best of wives in her, and one who was strongly attached to him: but she has seen his heart and property given to another; and, in her solitude and distress, went to the Bible, as the only consolation left her. Her health and spirits, at length, sunk under her troubles; and there she lies distracted, not from reading her Bible, but from the infidelity and cruelty of her husband." Does the reader wish to know what reply the husband made to this? He made no reply at all, but left the room with confusion of face.] Thus Cowper’s malady, like a strong current, breaking down the banks which had hitherto sustained the pressure and obliquity of its course, prevailed against the supports he had received, and precipitated him again into his former distress.

I inquired of Mr. N. as to the manner in which Mr. Cowper’s disorder returned, after an apparent recovery of nearly nine years’ continuance; and was informed, that the first symptoms were discovered one morning, in his conversation, soon after he had undertaken a new engagement in composition. As a general and full account of this extraordinary genius is already before the public, such particulars would not have occupied so much room in these Memoirs, but with a view of removing the false statements that have been made. Of great importance also was the vicinity of Mr. N.’s residence to that of the Rev. Mr. Scott, then curate of Ravenstone and Weston Underwood, and now rector of Astern Sandford; a man, whose ministry and writings have since been so useful to mankind. This clergyman was nearly a Socinian: he was in the habit of ridiculing-evangelical religion, and labored to bring over Mr. N. to His own sentiments. Mr. Scott had married a lady from the family of Mr. Wright, a gentleman in his parish, who had promised to provide for him. But Mr. Scott’s objections to subscription arose so high, that he informed his patron it would be in vain to attempt providing for him in the Church of England; as he could not conscientiously accept a living, on the condition of subscribing its Liturgy and Articles. "This," said Mr. N., "gave me hopes of Mr. Scott’s being sincere, however wrong in his principles." But the benefit which Mr. Scott derived from his neighbor will best appear in his own words. [Scott’s "Force of Truth," p. 11, &c. 5th edit.]

"I was," says he, "full of proud self-sufficiency, very positive, and very obstinate: and, being situated in the neighborhood of some of those whom the world calls Methodists, I joined in the prevailing sentiment; held them in sovereign contempt; spoke of them with derision; declaimed against them from the pulpit, as persons full of bigotry, enthusiasm, and spiritual pride; laid heavy

things to their charge; and endeavored to prove the doctrines, which I supposed them to hold (for I had never read their books) to be dishonorable to God, and destructive of morality. And though, in some companies, I chose to conceal part of my sentiments; and, in all, affected to speak as a friend to universal toleration: yet, scarcely any person could be more proudly and violently prejudiced against both their persons and principles than I then was.

"In January, 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance; but, according to my general custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it: till, one evening, the woman being now dead, and the man dying, I heard that may neighbor Mr. N. had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that, whatever contempt I might have for Mr. N.'s doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack of care to those who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

"This reflection affected me so much, that, without delay, and very earnestly, yea with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect; and I resolved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty: which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have by Divine grace been enabled hitherto to keep. I went immediately to visit the survivor; and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions.

"It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr. N. commenced. At a Visitation, May 1775, we exchanged a few words on a centroverted subject, in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse; but, a day or two after, he sent me a short note, with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted: and I gladly embraced the opportunity which, according to my wishes, seemed new to offer; God knoweth, with no inconsiderable expectations, that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honor of rescuing a well-meaning person from his enthusiastical delusions.

"I had, indeed, by this time, conceived a very favorable opinion of him, and a sort of respect for him; being acquainted with the character he sustained, even among some persons who expressed a disapprobation of his doe-trines. They were forward to commend him as a benevolent, disinterested, inoffensive person, and a laborious minister. But, on the other hand, I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism; and entertained a very contemptuous opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had the curiosity to hear him preach; and, not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offense. I had also read one of his publications; but, for the same reason, I thought the greater part of it whimsical, paradoxical, and unintelligible. concealing, therefore, the true motives of my conduct, under the offer of friendship and a professed desire to know the truth, (which, amidst all my self-sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me,) with the greatest affectation of candor, and of a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long Letter; purposing to draw from him such an avowal and explanation of his sentiments as might introduce a controversial discussion of our

religious differences.

"The event by no means answered my expectation. He returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter; in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me. He declared that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit; that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to dictate to me: but that, leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served, from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the Gospel; and to communicate his sentiments to me, on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship.

"In this manner our correspondence began; and it was continued, in the interchange of nine or ten letters, till December in the same year. Throughout I held my purpose, and he his. I made use of every endeavor to draw him into controversy, and filled my letters with definitions, inquiries, arguments, objections, and consequences, requiring explicit answers. He, on the other hand, shunned every thing controversial as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful anal least offensive instructions: except that, now and then, he dropped his hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy of faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained; and concerning some other matters, suited, as he judged, to help me forward in my inquiry after truth. But they :much offended my prejudices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

"When I had made this little progress in seeking the truth, my acquaintance with Mr. N. was resumed. From the conclusion of our correspondence, in December 1775, till April 1777, it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company: I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor; and I was unwilling the world should think us in any way connected. But, under discouraging circumstances, I had occasion to call upon him; and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by his means relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend; though not, as now, rejoiced to call him so. I had, however, even at that time, no thoughts of learning doctrinal truth from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company; but I sometimes stole away to spend an hour with him. About the same period, I once heard him preach, but still it was foolishness to me; his sermon being principally upon the believer's experience, in some particulars, with which I was unacquainted. So that, though I loved and valued him, I considered him as a person misled by enthusiastical notions; and strenuously insisted that we should never think alike till we met in heaven."

Mr. Scott, after going on to particularize his progress in the discovery of truth, and the character of Mr. N. as its minister, afterwards adds :--

"The pride of reasoning, and the conceit of superior discernment, had all along accompanied me: and, though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto, therefore, I had not thought of hearing any person preach; because I did not think any one in the circle of my acquaintance capable of giving me such information as I wanted. But, being at length convinced that Mr. N. had been right, and that I had been mistaken, in the several particulars in which we had differed, it occurred to me, that, having preached these doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them to which I was a stranger. Now, therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar, I condescended to

be his hearer, and occasionally to attend his preaching, and that of some other ministers. I soon perceived the benefit; for, from time to time, the secrets of my heart were discovered to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed; and I seldom returned from hearing a sermon, without having conceived a meaner opinion of myself--without having attained to a further acquaintance with my deficiencies, weaknesses, corruption's, and wants--or without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. I likewise learned the use of experience in preaching; and was convinced, that the readiest way to reach the hearts and consciences of others, was to speak from my own. In short, I gradually saw more and more my need of instruction, and was at length brought to consider myself as a very novice in religious matters. Thus I began experimentally to perceive our Lord's meaning, when he says, Except ye receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, ye shall in no wise enter therein."

03.0005. Vol 01 - MEMOIRS CONTINUED

MEMOIRS CONTINUED

If I have seemed to digress in dwelling so long on these three characters, let the reader consider the importance of the facts, and their intimate connection with Mr. N.'s history: and let me inform him, that the author has a design much nearer his heart than that of precision in setting forth the history of an individual; namely, that of exhibiting the nature and importance of vital and experimental religion: he therefore gladly brings forward any fact found in his way, which may tend to illustrate it. But to return to the more immediate subject of these Memoirs-- In the year 1776, Mr. N. was afflicted with a tumor, or wen, which had formed on his thigh; and, on account of its growing more large and troublesome, he resolved to undergo the experiment of extirpation. This obliged him to go to London for the operation, which was successfully performed, October 10th, by the late Mr. Warner, of Guy's Hospital. I remember hearing him speak, several years afterwards, of this trying occasion: but the trial did not seem to have affected him as a painful operation, so much as a critical opportunity in which he might fail in demonstrating the patience of a Christian under pain. "I felt," said he, "that, being enabled to bear a very sharp operation with tolerable calmness and confidence, was a greater favor granted to me than the deliverance from my malady. " ["The following reflections on this .occasion occur in Mr. N.'s diary :--"Thou didst support the, and make this operation very tolerable. The core, by thy blessing, was happily expedited: so that on Sunday the 27th, I was enabled to go to church and hear Mr. F----, and the Sunday following to preach for him. The tenderness and attention of Dr. and Mrs. F----, with whom we were, I cannot sufficiently describe; nor, indeed, the kindness of many other friends. To them I would be thankful, my Lord, but especially to Thee: for what are creatures, but instruments in thy hand, fulfilling thy pleasure? At home, all was preserved quiet; and I met with no incident to distress or disturb me while absent The last fortnight I preached often, and was hurried shout in seeing my friends: but, though I had little leisure or opportunity for retirement, aim my heart, alas I as usual, sadly reluctant and dull in secret, yet, in public, Thou wert pleased to favor me with liberty."]

While Mr. N. thus continued faithfully discharging the duties of his station, and watching for the temporal and eternal welfare of his flock, a dreadful fire broke out at Olney, Oct. 1777. Mr. N. took an active part in comforting and relieving the sufferers: he collected upwards of 200#. for them; a considerable sum of money, when the poverty and late calamity of the place are considered. Such instances of benevolence towards the people, with the constant assistance he afforded the poor, by the help of Mr. Thornton, naturally led him to expect that he should have so much influence as to restrain gross licentiousness on particular occasions. But, to use his own expression, he had "lived to bury the old crop, on which any dependence could be placed." He preached a weekly lecture, which occurred that year on the 5th of November: and, as he feared that the usual way of celebrating it at Olney might endanger his hearers in their attendance at the church, he exerted himself to preserve some degree of quiet on that evening. Instead, however, of hearkening to his entreaties, the looser sort exceeded their former extravagance, drunkenness, and rioting; and even obliged him to send out money, to preserve His house from violence. This happened but a

year before he finally left Olney. When he related this occurrence to me, he added, that he believed he should never have left the place while he lived, had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed, in a parish which he had long labored to reform. But I must remark here, that this is no solitary fact, nor at all unaccountable. The Gospel, we are informed, is not merely a savor of life unto life, but also of death unto death. Those, whom it does not soften, it is often found to harden. Thus we find St. Paul went into the synagogue and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But, when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed .from them. The strong man armed seeks to keep his house and goods in peace; and, if a minister is disposed to let this sleep of death remain, that minister's own house and goods may be permitted to remain in peace also. Such a minister may be esteemed by his parish as a good kind of man--quiet, inoffensive, candid, &c., and, if he discovers any zeal, it is directed to keep the parish in the state he found it; that is, in ignorance and unbelief, worldly-minded and hard-hearted--the very state of peace in which the strong man armed seeks to keep his palace or citadel, the human heart.

But, if a minister, like the subject of these Memoirs, enters into the design of his commission--if he be alive to the interest of his own soul, and that of the souls committed to his charge; or, as the Apostle expresses it, to save himself and those that hear him--he may depend upon meeting in his own experience the truth of that declaration, Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution, in one form of it or another. One of the most melancholy sights we behold, is. when ally part of the church, through prejudice, joins the world in throwing the stone. There is, however, such a determined enmity to godliness itself, in the breasts of a certain class of men existing in most parishes, that, whatever learning and good sense are found in their teacher--whatever consistency of character or blameless deportment he exhibits--whatever benevolence or bounty (like that which Mr. N. exercised at Olney) may constantly appear in his character--such men remain irreconcilable. They will resist every attempt made to appease their enmity. God alone, who changed the hearts of Paul and of Newton, can heal these bitter waters. I recollect to have heard Mr. N. say, on such an occasion, "When God is about to perform any great work, he generally permits some great opposition to it. Suppose Pharaoh had acquiesced in the departure of the children of Israel--or that they had met with no difficulties in the way--they would, indeed, have passed from Egypt to Canaan with ease; but they, as well as the church in all future ages, would have been great losers. The wonder-working God would not have been seen in those extremities which make his arm so visible. A smooth passage here, would have made but a poor story."

But, under such disorders, Mr. N. in no one instance that I ever heard of was tempted to depart from the line marked out by the precept and example of his Master. He continued to bless them that persecuted him; knowing that the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. To the last day he spent among them, he went straight forward, in meekness instructing those that opposed, if God peradventure might give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.

But, before we take a final leave of Olney, the reader must be informed of another part of Mr. N.'s labors. he had published a volume of Sermons before he took Orders, dated Liverpool, January 1, 1760. In 1762, he published his "Omicron;" to which his Letters, signed "Vigil," were afterwards

annexed. In 1764, appeared his "Narrative:" in 1767, a volume of Sermons, preached at Olney: in 1769, his "Review of Ecclesiastical History :" and, in 1779, a volume of Hymns; of which some were composed by Mr. Cowper, and distinguished by a C. To these succeeded, in 1781, his valuable work "Cardiphonia." But more will be said of these in their place. From Olney Mr. N. was removed to the Rectory of the United Parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth, and St. Mary Woolchurch-Haw, Lombard-street, on the presentation of his friend Mr. Thornton.

These parishes had been favored with two very eminent pastors before Mr. N. appeared; namely, the Rev. Josias Shute, B. D., Archdeacon of Colchester, and Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, who died 1643; and the Rev. Ralph Robinson, who died in 1655. There is a well-written account of Mr. Shute in the Christian Observer for January 1804; from which it appears, that his piety, ministerial talents, and moderation, in those difficult times, were very much distinguished, during the thirty-three years which he continued rector [Granger, in his Biographical History of England, says, that "his learning in divinity and ecclesiastical history was extensive, indeed almost universal." And Walker, in his Account of the Clergy, says, that, "In the beginning of the troubles, he was molested and harassed to death, and denied a funeral sermon to be preached for him by Dr. Holdsworth, as he desired ;" and that he was "a person of great piety, charity, and gravity, and of a most sweet and affable temper." It further appears, that, like his successor Mr. N., he preached twice on the Sunday, and had a lecture in his church every Wednesday.] Mr. Robinson died young, but has left a volume of truly evangelical discourses, preached at St. Mary's.

Some difficulty arose on Mr. N.'s being presented, by Mr. Thornton's right of presentation being claimed by a nobleman: the question was, therefore, at length brought before the House of Lords, and determined in favor of Mr. Thornton. Mr. N. preached his first sermon in these parishes, December 19, 1779, from Ephesians 4:15. Speaking the truth in love. It contained an affectionate address to his parishioners, and was immediately published for their use.

Here a new and very distinct scene of action and usefulness was set before him. Placed in the center of London-in an opulent neighborhood--with connections daily increasing, he had now a course of service to pursue, in several respects different from his former at Olney. Being, however, well acquainted with the word of God and the heart of man, be proposed to himself no new weapons of warfare, for pulling down the strong-holds of sin and Satan around him. He perceived, indeed, most of his parishioners too intent upon their wealth and merchandise to pay much regard to their new minister: but, since they would not come to him, he was determined to go, so far as he could, to them; and therefore, soon after his institution, he sent a printed address to his parishioners; he afterwards sent them another address, on the usual prejudices that are taken up against the Gospel. What effects these attempts had then upon them does not appear: certain it is, that these, and other acts of his ministry, will be recollected by them, when the objects of their present pursuits are forgotten or lamented.

I have heard Mr. N. speak with great feeling on the circumstances of his last important station. "That one," said he, "of the most ignorant, the most miserable, and the most abandoned of slaves, should be plucked from his forlorn state of exile on the coast of Africa, and at length be appointed minister of the parish of the first magistrate of the first city in the world--that he should there, not only testify of such grace, but stand up as a singular instance and monument of it--that he should be enabled to record it in his history, preaching, and writings, to the world at large--is a fact I can

contemplate with admiration, but never sufficiently estimate." This reflection, indeed, was so present to His mind, on all occasions and in all places, that he seldom passed a single day any where, but he was found referring to the strange event, in one way or ether.

It may be necessary to add, that the latter part of these Memoirs leads me to speak so personally of my friend, that any further inspection from his own eye was deemed improper. When Mr. N. came to St. Mary's he resided for some time in Charles's Square, Hoxton. Afterwards he removed to Coleman-street Buildings, where he continued till his death. Being of the most friendly and communicative disposition, his house was open to Christians of all ranks and denominations. Here, like a father among his children, he used to entertain, encourage, and instruct his friends; especially younger ministers, or candidates for the ministry. Here also the poor, the afflicted, and the tempted found an asylum and a sympathy, which they could scarcely find, in an equal degree, any where besides. His timely hints were often given with much point and profitable address, to the numerous acquaintance which surrounded him in this public station. Some time after Mr. N. had published his "Omicron," and described the three stages of growth in religion, from the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, distinguishing them by the letters A. B. and C., a conceited young minister wrote to Mr. N., telling him that he read his own character accurately drawn in that of C. Mr. N. wrote in reply, that, in drawing the character of C. or full maturity, he had forgotten to add, till now, one prominent feature of C.'s character; namely, that C. never knew his own face.

"It grieves me," said Mr. N., "to see so few of my wealthy parishioners come to church. I always consider the rich as under greater obligations to the preaching of the Gospel than the poor. For, at church, the rich must hear the whole truth as well as others. There they have no mode of escape. But let them once get home, you will be troubled to get at them; and, when you are admitted, you are so fettered with punctilio--so interrupted and damped with the frivolous conversation of their friends, that, as Archbishop Leighton says, 'It is well if your visit does not prove a blank or a blot.'"

Mr. N. used to improve every occurrence which he could with propriety bring into the pulpit. One night he found a bill put up at St. Mary Woolnoth's, upon which he largely commented when he came to preach. The bill was to this effect: "A young man, having come to the possession of a very considerable fortune, desires the prayers of the congregation, that he may be preserved from the snares to which it exposes him." "Now if the man," said Mr. N., "had lost a fortune, the world would not have wondered to have seen him put up a bill; but this man has been better taught."

Coming out of his church, on a Wednesday, a lady stopped him on the steps, and said, "The ticket, of which I held a quarter, is drawn a prize of ten thousand pounds. I know you will congratulate me upon the occasion." "Madam," said he, "as for a friend under temptation, I will endeavor to pray for you."

Soon after he came to St. Mary's, I remember to have heard him say, in a certain company, "Some have observed, that I preach shorter sermons on a Sunday morning, and with more caution: but this I do upon principle. I suppose I may have two or three of my bankers present, and some others of my parish, who have hitherto been strangers to my views of truth. I endeavor to imitate the Apostle. I became, says he, all things to all men: but observe the end; it was in order to gain some. The fowler must go cautiously to meet shy birds; but he will not leave his powder and shot behind him. I have fed you with milk, says the Apostle: but there are some that are not only for forcing strong meat, but bones too, down the throat of the child. We must have patience with a

single step in the case of an infant; and there are one-step books and sermons, which are good in their place. Christ taught his disciples, as they were able to bear; and it was upon the same principle that the Apostle accommodated himself to prejudice. "Now," continued he, "what I wish to remark on these considerations is, that this apostolic principle, steadily pursued, will render a minister apparently inconsistent: superficial hearers will think him a trimmer. On the other hand, a minister, destitute of the apostolic principle and intention, and directing his whole force to preserve the appearance of consistency, may thus seem to preserve it; but, let me tell you, here is only the form of faithfulness, without the spirit."

I could not help observing, one day, how much Mr. N. was grieved with the mistake of a minister, who appeared to pay too much attention to politics. "For my part," said he, "I have no temptation to turn politician, and much less to inflame a party, in these times. When a ship is leaky, and a mutinous spirit divides the company on board, a wise man would say, ’My good friends, while we are debating the water is gaining on us. We had better leave the debate, and go to the pumps.’--I endeavor, "continued he, "to turn my people’s eyes from instruments to God. I am continually attempting to shew them, how far they are from knowing either the matter of fact or the matter of right. I inculcate our great privileges in this country, and advise a discontented man to take a lodging for a little while in Russia or Prussia."

Though no great variety of anecdote is to be expected in a course so stationary as this part of Mr. N.’s life and ministry; for sometimes the course of a single day might give the account of a whole year; yet that day was so benevolently spent, that he was found in it not only rejoicing with those that rejoiced, but literally weeping with those that wept. The portrait, which Goldsmith drew from imagination, Mr. N. realized in fact; in so much, that, had Mr. N. sat for his picture to the poet, it could not have been more accurately delineated than by the following lines in his "Deserted Village :"-- "Unskillful he to fawn, or seek for power By doctrines fashion’d to the varying hour:

Far other aims his heart had learn’d to prize, More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.

Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride, And e’en his failings lean’d to Virtue’s side;

But, in his duty prompt at every call, He watch’d and wept, he pray’d and felt, for all And, as a bird each fond endearment tries, To tempt its new-fledg’d offspring to the skies, He tried each art, reprov’d each dull delay, Allur’d to brighter worlds, and led the way."

I remember to have heard him say, when speaking of his continual interruptions, "I see in this world two heaps, of human happiness and misery: now, if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I carry a point. If, as I go home, a child has dropped a halfpenny, and if, by giving it another, I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something. I should be glad, indeed, to do greater things; but I will not neglect this.-When I hear a knock at my study door, I hear a message from God. It may be a lesson of instruction; perhaps a lesson of patience: but, since it is his message, it must be interesting." But it was not merely under his own roof that |his benevolent aims were thus exerted; he was found ready to take an active part in relieving the miserable, directing the anxious, or recovering. the wanderer, in whatever state or place he discovered such: of which take the following instance.

Mr. ********, who is still living, and who holds a post of great importance abroad, was a youth of considerable talents, and had received a respectable education. I am not informed of his original

destination in point of profession; but, certain it is, that he left his parents in Scotland, with a design of viewing the world at large: and that, without those pecuniary resources which could render such an undertaking convenient, or even practicable. Yet, having the sanguine expectations of youth, together with its inexperience, he determinately pursued his plan. I have seen an account from his own hand, of the strange, but by no means dishonorable, resources to which he was reduced in the pursuit of this scheme; nor can romance exceed the detail. But the particulars of his long journey, till he arrived in London, and those which have since occurred, would not be proper, at present, for any one to record except himself; and I cannot but wish he would favor the world with them, on the principle which led Mr. N. to write his "Narrative :" to London, however, he came; and then he seemed to come to himself. He had heard Mr. N.'s character, and on a Sunday evening he came to St. Mary Woolnoth, and stood in one of the aisles while Mr. N. preached. In the course of that week he wrote Mr. N. some account of his adventure, and state of mind. Such circumstances could be addressed to no man more properly. Mr. N.'s favorite maxim was often in his mouth, more often in his actions, and always in his heart:

Haud ignara mali, miseris, succurrere disco.

Mr. N. therefore gave notice from the pulpit on the following Sunday evening, that, if the person was present who had sent him such a letter, he would be glad to speak with him. Mr. ******** gladly accepted the invitation, and came to Mr. N.'s house, where a friendship began which continued till Mr. N.'s death. Mr. N. not only afforded this youth the instruction which he, at this period, so deeply needed; but, marking his fine abilities and corrected inclination, he introduced him to Henry Thornton, Esq., who, inheriting his father's unbounded liberality and determined adherence to the cause of real religion, readily patronized the stranger. By the munificence of this gentleman, he was supported through a university education, and was afterwards ordained to the curacy of _____. It was, however, thought expedient that his talents should be employed In an important station abroad, which he readily undertook, and in which he now maintains a very distinguished character. It ought not to be concealed, that, since his advancement, he has not only returned his patron the whole expense of his university education; but has also placed in his hands an equal sum, for the education of some pious youth, who might be deemed worthy of that assistance once afforded to himself!

Mr. N. used to spend a month or two, annually, at the house of some friend in the country. He always took an affectionate leave of his congregation before he departed; and spake of his leaving town as quite uncertain of returning to it, considering the variety of incidents which might prevent that return. Nothing was more remarkable than his constant habit of regarding the hand of God in every event, however trivial it might appear to others. On every occasion--in the concerns of every hour--in matters public or private, like Enoch, he walked with God. Take a single instance of his state of mind in this respect. In walking to his church he would say, "The way of man is not in himself, nor can he conceive what belongs to a single step. When I go to St. Mary Woolnoth, it seems the same whether I turn down Lothbury or go through the Old Jewry; but the going through one street and not another may produce an effect of lasting consequences. A man cut down my hammock in sport: but had he cut it down half an hour later, I had not been here; as the exchange of crew was then making. A man made a smoke on the sea-shore at the time a ship passed, which was thereby brought to, and afterwards brought me to England."

Mr. N. had experienced a severe stroke soon after he came to St. Mary's, and while he resided in Charles's Square, in the death of His niece, Miss Eliza Cunningham. He loved her with the affection of a parent; and she was, indeed, truly lovely. He had brought her up; and had observed, that, with the most amiable natural qualities, silo possessed a real piety. With every possible attention from Mr. and Mrs. Newton and their friends, they saw her gradually sink into the arms of death: but fully prepared to meet him, as a messenger sent from a yet kinder Father; to whom she departed, October 6th, 1785, aged fourteen years and eight months. On this occasion Mr. N. published some brief memoirs of her character and death, In the years 1784 and 1785, Mr. N. preached a course of sermons, on an occasion of which he gives the following account in his first discourse :--" Conversation, in almost every company, for some time past, has much turned upon the commemoration of Handel; and, particularly, on his oratorio of the 'Messiah.' I mean to lead your meditations to the language of the oratorio; and to consider, in their order, (if the Lord, on whom our breath depends, shall be pleased to afford life, ability, and opportunity) the several sublime and interesting passages of Scripture which are the basis of that admired composition." In the year 1786, he published these discourses, in two volumes octavo.

There is a passage so original, at the beginning of his fourth sermon, from Malachi 3:1-3, The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, &c. that I shall transcribe it for the use of such as have not seen these discourses: at the same time, it will, in a few words, convey Mr. N.'s idea of the usual performance of this oratorio, or attending its performance, in present circumstances.

"Whereunto shall we liken the people of this generation, and to what are they like? I represent to myself a number of persons, of various characters, involved in one common charge of high treason. They are already in a state of confinement, but not yet brought to their trial. The facts, however, are so plain, and the evidence against them so strong and pointed, that there is not the least doubt of their guilt being fully proved, and that nothing but a pardon can preserve them from punishment. In this situation, it should seem their wisdom to avail themselves of every expedient in their power for obtaining mercy. But they are entirely regardless of their danger, and wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves, that they may pass away the term of their imprisonment with as much cheerfulness as possible. Among other resources, they call in the assistance of music. And, amidst a great variety of subjects in this way, they are particularly pleased with one: they choose to make the solemnities of their impending trial, the character of their Judge, the methods of his procedure, and the awful sentence to which they are exposed, the ground-work of a musical entertainment: and, as if they were quite unconcerned in the event, their attention is chiefly fixed upon the skill of the composer, in adapting the style of his music to the very solemn language and subject with which they are trifling. The King, however, ant of his great clemency and compassion towards those who have no pity for themselves, prevents them with his goodness: undesired by them, he sends them a gracious message: he assures them that he is unwilling they should suffer: he requires, yea, he entreats them to submit: he points out a way in which their confession and submission shall be certainly accepted; and, in this way, which he condescends to prescribe, he offers them a free and a full pardon. But, instead of taking a single step towards a compliance with his goodness, they set his message likewise to music: and this, together with a description of their present state, and of the fearful doom awaiting them if they continue obstinate, is sung for their diversion; accompanied with the sound of cornet, flute, harp,

sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of instruments. Surely, if such a case as I have supposed could be found in real life, though I might admire the musical taste of these people, I should commiserate their insensibility!"

But, clouds return after the ruin: a greater loss than that of Miss C. was to follow. Enough has been said in these Memoirs already to shew the more than ordinary affection Mr. N. felt for her who had been so long his idol, as he used to call her: of which I shall add but one more instance, out of many that might easily be collected. Being with him at the house of a lady at Blackheath, we stood at a window which had a prospect of Shooter's Hill. "Ah," said Mr. N., "I remember the many journeys I took from London to stand at the top of that hill, in order to look towards the part in which Mrs. N. then lived; not that I could see the spot itself, after traveling several miles, for she lived far beyond what I could see, when on the hill; but it gratified me even to look towards the spot: and this I did always once, and sometimes twice a week."--" Why," said I, "this is like one of the vagaries of romance, than of real life."--"True," replied he: "but real life has extravagancies that would not be admitted to appear in a well written romance; they would be said to be out of nature." In such a continued habit of excessive attachment, it is evident how keenly Mr. N. must have felt, while he observed the progress of a threatening induration in her breast. This turnout seemed to have arisen from a blow she received before she left Liverpool. The pain it occasioned at the time soon wore off, but a small lump remained in the part affected. In October, 1788, on the tumor's increasing, she applied to an eminent surgeon, who told her it was a cancer, and now too large for extraction, and that he could only recommend quiet As the spring of 1789 advanced, her malady increased: and, though she was able to bear a journey to Southampton, from which she returned, in other respects, tolerably well, she grew gradually worse with the cancer, till she expired, December 15, 1790.

Mr. N. made this remark on her death :--"Just before Mrs. N.'s disease became so formidable, I was preaching on the waters of Egypt being turned into blood. The Egyptians had idolized their river, and God made them loathe it. I was apprehensive it would soon be a similar case with me." During the very affecting season of Mrs. N.'s dissolution, Mr. N., like David, wept and prayed; but, the desire of his eyes being taken away by the stroke, he too, like David, arose from the earth, and came into the temple of the Lord, and worshipped, and that in a manner which surprised some of his friends.

I must own I was not one of those who saw any thing that might not be expected from such a man, surrounded with such circumstances. I did not wonder at his undertaking to preach Mrs. N.'s funeral sermon, on the following Sunday, at St. Mary's; since I always considered him as an original, and his case quite an exception to general habits in many respects. There could be no question as to the affection he had borne to the deceased: it had even prevailed, as he readily allowed, to an eccentric and blamable degree; and indeed, after her removal, he used to observe an annual seclusion, for a special recollection of her, whom through the year he had never forgotten, and from which proceeded a sort of little elegies or sonnets to her memory. But he clearly recognized the will of God in the removal of his idol, and reasoned as David did on the occasion: While she was yet alive, I fasted and wept :for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that she may live? But, now she is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring her back again? I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me.

Besides which, Mr. N. had a favorite sentiment, which I have heard him express in different ways, long before he had so special an occasion of illustrating it in practice. "God in his providence," he used to say, "is continually bringing about occasions to demonstrate characters." He used to allege the case of Achan and Judas among bad men; and that of St. Paul (Acts 27:1-44), among good ones. "If any one," said he, "had asked the Centurion who Paul the prisoner was, that sailed with them on board the ship, it is probable he would have thus replied: 'He is a troublesome enthusiast, who has lately joined himself to a certain sect. These people affirm that a Jewish malefactor, who was crucified some years ago at Jerusalem, rose the third day from the dead; and this Paul is mad enough to assert that Jesus, the leader of their sect, is not only now alive, but that he himself has seen him, and is resolved to live and die for him. Poor crazy creature! But God made use of this occasion to discover the real character of Paul; and taught the Centurion, from the circumstances which followed, to whom it was he owed his direction in the storm, and for whose sake he received his preservation through it." In all trying occasions, therefore, Mr. N. was particularly impressed with the idea of a Christian, and especially of a Christian minister, being called to stand forward as an example to his flock--to feel himself placed in a post of honor--a post in which he may not only glorify God. but also forcibly demonstrate the peculiar supports of the Gospel. More especially, when this could be done (as in his own case) from no doubtful motive; then, it may be expedient to leave the path of ordinary custom, for the greater reason of exhibiting both the doctrines of truth and the experience of their power.

Though I professedly publish none of Mr. N.'s letters, for reasons hereafter assigned, yet I shall take the liberty to insert part of one, with which I am favored by J. F*****, Esq. of Stanmore Hill, written to him while at Rome, and dated December 5th, 1796. It shows the interest which the writer took in the safety of his friend, and his address in attempting to break the enchantments with which men of taste are surrounded when standing in the center of the Fine Arts.

"The true Christian, in strict propriety of speech, has no home here: he is, and must be, a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth: his citizenship, treasure, and real home are in a better world; and every step he takes, whether to the east or to the west, is a step nearer to his Father's house. On the other hand, when in the path of duty, he is always at home; for the whole earth is the Lord's: and, as we see the same sun in England or Italy, in Europe or Asia, so, wherever he is, he equally sets the Lord always before him, and finds himself equally near the Throne of Grace at all times and in all places. God is every where; and, by faith in the Great Mediator, he dwells in God, and God in him. To him that line of Horace may be applied, in the best sense, Caelum non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt.

"I trust, my dear sir, that you will carry out, and bring home with you, a determination similar to that of the patriarch Jacob, who vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I came again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God! May the Lord himself write it on your heart!

"You are now at Rome, the center of the Fine Arts; a place abounding with every thing to gratify a person of your taste. Athens had the pre-eminence in the Apostle Paul's time: and I think it highly probable, from many passages in his writings, that he likewise had a taste capable of admiring and relishing the beauties of painting, sculpture, and architecture, which he could not but observe

during his abode in that city: but then he had a higher, a spiritual, a divine taste, which was greatly shocked and grieved by the ignorance, idolatry, and wickedness which surrounded him, in so much that he could attend to nothing else. This taste, which cannot be acquired by any effort or study of ours, but is freely bestowed on all who sincerely ask it of the Lord, divests the vanities which the world admire of their glare; and enables us to judge of the most splendid and specious works of men who know not God, according to the declaration of the Prophet, They hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider's web. Much ingenuity is displayed in the weaving of a cobweb; but, when finished, it is worthless and useless. Incubation requires close diligence and attention: if the hen is too long from her nest, the egg is spoiled; but why should she sit at all upon the egg, and watch it, and warm it night and day, if it only produces a cockatrice at last? Thus vanity or mischief are the chief rulers of unsanctified genius: the artists spin webs; and the philosophers, by their learned speculations, hatch cockatrices, to poison themselves and their fellow-creatures: few of either sort have one serious thought of that awful eternity upon the brink of which they stand for a while, and into the depth of which they successively fall.

"A part of the sentence denounced against the city which once stood upon seven hills, is so pointed and graphical, that I must transcribe it: And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the light of a candle shall no more be seen in thee. Now, I am informed, that, upon certain occasions, the whole cupola of St. Peter's is covered with lamps, and affords a very magnificent spectacle: if I saw it, it would remind me of that time when there will not be the shining of a single candle in the city; for the sentence must be executed, and the hour may be approaching-- Sic transit gloria mundi.

"You kindly inquire after my health: myself and family are, through the Divine favor, perfectly well: yet, healthy as I am, I labor under a growing disorder, for which there is no cure; I mean old age. I am not sorry it is a mortal disease, from which no one recovers: for who would live always in such a world as this, who has a scriptural hope of an inheritance in the world of light. I am now in my seventy-second year, and seem to have lived long enough for myself. I have known something of the evil of life, and have had a large share of the good. I know what the world can do, and what it cannot do: it can neither give nor take away that peace of God which passeth all understanding: it cannot soothe a wounded conscience, nor enable us to meet death with comfort.--That you, my dear sir, may have an abiding and abounding experience that the Gospel is a catholicon adapted to all our wants and all our feelings, and a suitable help when every other help fails, is the sincere and ardent prayer of.

"Your affectionate friend "JOHN NEWTON."

But, in proportion as Mr. N. felt the vanity of the pursuits which he endeavored to expose in the foregoing letter, he was as feelingly alive to whatever regarded eternal concerns. Take an instance of this, in a visit which he paid to another friend. This friend was a minister who affected great accuracy in his discourses; and who, on that Sunday, had nearly occupied an hour in insisting on several labored and nice distinctions made in his subject. As he had a high estimation of Mr. N.'s judgment, he inquired of him, as they walked home, whether he thought the distinctions just now insisted on were full and judicious. Mr. N. said he thought them not full, as a very important one had been omitted.--"What can that be? " said the minister: "for I had taken more than ordinary care

to enumerate them fully."--" I think not," replied Mr. N.; for , "when many of your congregation had traveled several miles for a meal, I think you should not have forgotten the important distinction which must ever exist between MEAT and BONES." In the year 17915, Mr. N. had the honorary degree of D. D. conferred upon him by the University of New Jersey in America, and the diploma sent to him. He also received a work in two volumes, dedicated to him with the above title annexed to his name. Mr. N. wrote the author a grateful acknowledgment for the work, but begged to decline an honor which he never intended to accept. "I am," said he, "as one born out of due time ." In a MS. note, dated December 15th, 1797, on a letter in the collection before referred to, Mr. N. writes:--" Though I am not so sensibly affected as I could wish, I hope I am truly affected by the frequent reviews I make of my past life. Perhaps the annals of thy church scarcely afford an instance in all respects so singular. Perhaps thy grace may have recovered some from an equal degree of apostasy, infidelity, and profligacy; but few of them have been redeemed from such a state of misery and depression as I was in, upon the coast of Africa, when thy unsought mercy wrought for my deliverance. But, that such a wretch should not only be spared and pardoned, but reserved to the honor of preaching thy Gospel, which he had blasphemed and renounced, and at length be placed in a very public situation, and favored with acceptance and usefulness, both from the pulpit and the press; so that my poor name is known in most parts of the world, where there are any who know thee;--this is wonderful indeed! The more thou hast exalted me, the more I ought to abase myself." I have neither the pretension nor wish to honors of this kind. However, therefore, the University may over-rate my attainments, and thus shew their respect, I must not forget myself: it would be both vain and improper were I to concur in it." But Mr. N. had yet another storm to weather. While we were contemplating the long and rough voyage he had passed, and thought he had only now to rest in a quiet haven, and with a fine sun-setting at the close of the evening of his life, clouds began to gather again, and seemed to threaten a wreck at the very entry of the port.

He used to make excursions in the summer to different friends in the country; endeavouring to make these visits profitable to them and their neighbors, by his continual prayers, and the expositions he gave of the Scriptures read at their morning and evening worship. I have heard of some who were first brought to the knowledge of themselves and of God, by attending his exhortations on these occasions; for, indeed, besides what he undertook in a more stated way at the church, he seldom entered a room but something both profitable and entertaining fell from his lips.

After the death of Miss Cunningham and Mrs. N., his companion in these summer excursions was his other niece, Miss Elizabeth Catlett. This young lady had also been brought up by Mr. and Mrs. N. with Miss Cunningham; and, on the death of the two latter, she became the object of Mr. N.’s naturally affectionate disposition. She also became quite necessary to him by her administrations in his latter years: she watched him, walked with him, and visited wherever he went: when his sight failed, she read to him, divided his food, and was unto him all that a dutiful daughter could be.

But, in the year 1801, a nervous disorder seized her, by which Mr. N. was obliged to submit to her being separated from him. During the twelvemonth it lasted, the weight of the affliction, added to his weight of years, seemed to overwhelm him. I extracted a few of his reflections on the occasion, written on some blank leaves in an edition of his "Letters to a Wife," which he lent me on my undertaking these Memoirs, and have subjoined them in a note. [August 1st, 1801. "I now enter

my 77th year. I have been exercised this year with a trying and unexpected change; but it is by thy appointment, my gracious Lord, and thou art unchangeably wise, good, and merciful. Thou gavest me my dear adopted child. Thou didst own my endeavors to bring her up for thee. I have no doubt that thou hast called her by thy grace. I thank thee for the many years' comfort (ten) I have had in her; and for the attention and affection she has always shewn me, exceeding that of most daughters to their own parents. Thou hast now tried me, as thou didst Abraham, in my old age; when my eyes are failing, and my strength declines. Thou hast called for my Isaac, who had so long been my chief stay and staff; but it was thy blessing that made her so. A nervous disorder has seized her, and I desire to leave her under thy care; and chiefly pray for myself, that I may be enabled to wait thy time and will, without betraying any signs of impatience or despondency unbecoming my profession and character. Hitherto thou hast helped me; and to thee I look for help in future. Let all issue in thy glory, that my friends and hearers may be encouraged by seeing how I am supported: let thy strength be manifested in my weakness, and thy grace be sufficient for me, and let all finally work together for our good: Amen! I am to say from my heart, Not my will, but thine be done. But, though thou hast in a measure made my spirit willing, thou knowest, and I feel, that the flesh is weak. Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief. Lord, I submit: subdue every rebellions thought that dares arise against thy will. Spare my eyes, if it please thee; but, above all, strengthen my faith and love." It may give the reader pleasure to be informed that Miss Catlett returned home, gradually recovered, and afterwards married a worthy man of the name of Smith.

It was with a mixture of delight and surprise, that the friends and hearers of this eminent servant of God beheld him bringing forth such a measure of fruit in extreme age. Though then almost eighty years old, His sight nearly gone, and incapable, through deafness, of joining in conversation, yet his public ministry was regularly continued, and maintained with a considerable degree of his former animation. His memory, indeed, was observed to fail, but his judgment in divine things still remained: and, through some depression of spirits was observed, which he used to account for from his advanced age; yet his perception, taste, and zeal for the truths which he had long received and taught were evident. Like Simeon, having seen the salvation of the Lord, be now only waited and prayed to depart in peace.

After Mr. N. was turned of eighty, some of his friends feared he might continue his public ministrations too long. They marked not only his infirmities in the pulpit, but felt much on account of the decrease of his strength, and of his occasional depressions. Conversing with him in January 1806 on the latter, he observed, that he had experienced nothing which in the least affected the principles he had felt and taught; that his depressions were the natural result fourscore years; and that, at any age, we can only enjoy that comfort from our principles which God is pleased to send. "But," replied I, "in the article of public preaching, might it not be best to consider your work as done, and stop before you evidently discover you can speak no longer?"--"I cannot stop," said he, raising his voice. "What! shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?" In every future visit, I perceived old age making rapid strides. At length his friends found some difficulty in making themselves known to him: his sight, his hearing, and his recollection exceedingly failed; but, being mercifully kept from pain, he generally appeared easy and cheerful. Whatever he uttered was perfectly consistent with the principles which he had so long and so honorably maintained. Calling to see him a few days before he died, with one of his most intimate friends, we could not make him recollect either of us; but, seeing him afterwards when sitting up in his chair, I

found so much intellect remaining, as produced a short and affectionate reply, though he was utterly incapable of conversation.

Mr. N. declined in this very gradual way, till at length it was painful to ask him a question, or to attempt to rouse faculties almost gone: still his friends were anxious to get a word from him, and those friends who survive him will be as anxious to learn the state of his mind in his latest hours. It is quite natural thus to inquire, though it is not important, how such a decided character left this world. I have heard Mr. N. say when he has heard particular inquiry made about the last expressions of an eminent Christian, "Tell me not how the man died, but how he lived." Still, I say, it is natural to inquire: and I will meet the desire; not by trying to expand uninteresting particulars, but so far as I can collect encouraging facts: and I learn from a paper, kindly sent me by his family, all that is interesting and authentic.

About a month before Mr. N.’s death, Mr. Smith’s niece was sitting by him, to whom he said, "It is a great thing to die; and, when flesh and heart fail, to have God for the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever. I know whom I have believed, and he is able to keep that which I have committed against that great day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." When Mrs. Smith came into the room, he said, "I have been meditating on a subject, Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." At another time he said, "More light, more love, more liberty! Hereafter, I hope, when I shut my eyes on the things of time, I shall open them in a better world. What a thing it is to live under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty! I am going the way of all flesh? And when one replied, "The Lord is gracious," he answered," If it were not so, how could I dare to stand before him?" The Wednesday before he died, Mrs. G---- asked him if his mind was comfortable: he replied, "I am satisfied with the Lord’s will."

Mr. N. seemed sensible to his last hour, but expressed nothing remarkable after these words. he departed on the 21st, and was buried in the vault of his church the 31st of December, 1807, having left the following injunction in a letter for the direction of his executors.

"I propose writing an epitaph for myself, if it may be put up, on a plain marble tablet, near the vestry door, to the following purport :-- JOHN NEWTON, CLERK, Once an Infidel and Libertine, A Servant of Slaves in Africa, Was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior

JESUS CHRIST, Preserved, restored, pardoned, And appointed to preach the Faith He had long labored to destroy, Near 16 years at Olney in Bucks; And .... years in this church.

--------- On Feb. 1, 1750, he married

MARY Daughter of the late George Catlett, Of Chatham, Kent.

He resigned her to the Lord who gave her, On 15th December, 1790.

"And I earnestly desire that no other monument, and no inscription but to this purport, may be attempted for me." The following is a copy of the exordium of Mr. Newton’s will dated June 13. 1803.

"In the name of God, Amen. I, JOHN NEWTON, of Coleman street Buildings, in the parish of St. Stephen, Coleman street, in the city of London, Clerk, being through mercy in good health, and a

sound and disposing mind, memory, and understanding although in the seventy eighth year of my age, do, for the settling of my temporal concerns, and for the disposal of all the worldly estate which it has pleased the Lord in His good providence to give me, make this my last Will and Testament as follows. I commit my soul to my gracious God and Savior, who mercifully spared and preserved me, when I was an apostate, a blasphemer, and an infidel, and delivered me from that state of misery on the coast of Africa into which my obstinate wickedness had plunged me; and who has been pleased to admit me (though most unworthy) to preach His glorious Gospel. I rely with humble confidence upon the atonement and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, God and Man; which I have often proposed to others as the only Foundation whereon a sinner can build his hope; trusting that he will guard and guide me through the uncertain remainder of my life, and that he will then admit me into his presence in his heavenly kingdom. I would have my body deposited in the vault under the parish church of Saint Mary Woolnoth, close to the coffins of my late dear wife and my dear niece Elizabeth Cunningham; and it is my desire that my funeral may be performed with as little expense as possible, consistent with decency."

03.0006. Vol 01 - REVIEW OF MR. NEWTON'S CHARACTER

REVIEW OF MR. NEWTON’S CHARACTER

There seems to be little need of giving a general character of Mr. N. after the particulars which appear in the foregoing Memoirs. He unquestionably was a child of a peculiar Providence, in every step of his progress; and his deep sense of the extraordinary dispensation through which he had passed was the prominent topic in his conversation. Those, who personally knew the man, could have no doubt of the probity with which his "Narrative" (singular as it may appear) was written. They, however, who could not view the subject of these Memoirs so nearly as his particular friends did, may wish to learn something further of his character with respect to his LITERARY ATTAINMENTS--his MINISTRY--his FAMILY HABITS--his WRITINGS--and his FAMILIAR CONVERSATION. Of his LITERATURE, we learn from his "Narrative" what he attained in the learned languages; and that, by almost incredible efforts. Few men have undertaken such difficulties under such disadvantages. It, therefore, seems more extraordinary, that he should have attained so much, than that he should not have acquired more. Nor did he quit his pursuits of this kind, but in order to gain that knowledge which he deemed much more important. Whatever he conceived had a tendency to qualify him, as a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of God, bringing out of his treasury things new and old--I say, in pursuit of this point, he might have adopted the Apostle’s expression, One thing I do. By a principle so simply and firmly directed, he furnished his mind with much information: he had consulted the best old divines; had read the moderns of reputation with avidity; and was continually watching whatever might serve for analogies or illustrations in the service of religion. "A minister," he used to say, "wherever he is, should be always in his study. He should look at every man, and at every thing, as capable of affording him some instruction." His mind, therefore, was ever intent on his calling--ever extracting something, even from the basest materials, which he could turn into gold. In consequence of this incessant attention to this object, while many (whose early advantages greatly exceeded his) might excel. N. in the knowledge and investigation of some curious, abstract, but very unimportant points, he vastly excelled them in points of infinitely higher importance to man. In the knowledge of God, of his word, and of the human heart in its wants and resources, Newton would have stood among mere scholars, as his name-sake the philosopher stood in science among ordinary men. I might say the same of some others, who have set out late in the profession; but who, with a portion of Mr. N.’s piety and ardor, have greatly outstripped those who have had every early advantage and encouragement. Men with specious titles and high connections have received the rewards; while men, like Newton, without them, have done the work. With respect to his MINISTRY, he appeared, perhaps, to least advantage in the pulpit; as he did not generally aim at accuracy in the composition of his sermons, nor at any address in the delivery of them. His utterance was far from clear, and his attitudes ungraceful. He possessed, however, so much affection for his people, and so much zeal for their best interests, that the defect of his manner was of little consideration with his constant hearers; at the same time, his capacity and habit of entering into their trials and experience gave the highest interest to his ministry among them. Besides

which, he frequently interspersed the most brilliant allusions; and brought forward such happy illustrations of his subject, and those with so much unction on his own heart, as melted and enlarged theirs. The parent-like tenderness and affection which accompanied his instruction made them prefer him to preachers who, on other accounts, were much more generally popular.

It ought also to be noted, that, amidst the extravagant notions and unscriptural positions which have sometimes disgraced the religious world, Mr. N. never departed, in any instance, from soundly and seriously promulgating the faith once delivered to the saints; of which his writings will remain the best evidence. His doctrine was strictly that of the Church of England, urged on the consciences of men in the most practical and experimental manner. "I hope," said he one day to me, smiling, "I hope I am upon the whole a SCRIPTURAL preacher; for I find I am considered as an Arminian among the high Calvinists, and as a Calvinist among the strenuous Arminians."

I never observed any thing like bigotry in his ministerial character; though he seemed at all times to appreciate the beauty of order, and its good effects in the ministry. He had formerly been intimately connected with some highly respectable ministers among the Dissenters, and retained a cordial regard for many to the last. He considered the strong prejudices which attach to both Churchmen and Dissenters, as arising more from education than from principle. But, being himself both a clergyman and an incumbent in the Church of England, he wished to be consistent. In public, therefore, he felt he could not act with some ministers whom he thought truly good men, and to whom he cordially wished success in their endeavors; and he patiently met the consequence. They called him a bigot; and he, in return, prayed for them, that they might not be really such.

He had formerly taken much pains in composing his sermons, as I could perceive in one MS. which I looked through: and, even latterly, I have known him, whenever he felt it necessary, produce admirable plans for the pulpit. I own I thought his judgment deficient, in not deeming such preparation necessary at all times. I have sat in pain, when he has spoken unguardedly in this way before young ministers; men who, with but comparatively slight degrees of his information and experience, would draw encouragement to ascend the pulpit with but little previous study of their subject. A minister is not to be blamed, who cannot rise to qualifications which some of his brethren have attained; but he is certainly bound to improve his own talent to the utmost of his power: he is not to cover his sloth, his love of company, or his disposition to attend a wealthy patron, with the pretense of depending entirely on Divine influence. Timothy had as good ground at least for expecting such influence as any of his successors in the ministry; and yet the Apostle admonishes him to give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine --to neglect not the gift that was in him--to meditate upon these things--to give himself WHOLLY to them, that his profiting might appear to all.

Mr. N. regularly preached on the Sunday morning and evening at St. Mary Woolnoth, and also on the Wednesday morning. After he was turned of seventy he often undertook to assist other clergymen; sometimes, even to the preaching of six sermons in the space of a week. What was more extraordinary, he continued his usual course of preaching at his own church after he was fourscore years old, and that when he could no longer see to read his text! His memory and voice sometimes failed him; but it was remarked, that, at this great age, he was no where more recollected or lively than in the pulpit. He was punctual as to time with his congregation. Every first

Sunday evening in the mouth he preached on relative duties. Mr. Alderman Lea regularly sent his carriage to convey him to the church, and Mr. Bates sent his servant to attend him in the pulpit; which friendly assistance was continued till Mr. N. could appear no longer in public. His ministerial visits were exemplary. I do not recollect one, though favored with many, in which his general information and lively genius did not communicate instruction, and his affectionate and condescending sympathy did not leave comfort.

Truth demands it should be said, that he did not always administer consolation, nor give an account of characters, with sufficient discrimination. His talent did not lie in discerning of spirits. I never saw him so much moved, as when any friend endeavored to correct his errors in this respect. His credulity seemed to arise from the consciousness he had of his own integrity; and from that sort of parental fondness which he bore to all his friends, real or pretended. I knew one, since dead, whom he thus described, while living: "He is certainly an odd man, and has his failings; but he has great integrity, and I hope he is going to heaven :" whereas, almost all who knew him thought the man should go first into the pillory! In his FAMILY Mr. N. might be admired more safely than imitated. His excessive attachment to Mrs. N. is so fully displayed in his" Narrative," and confirmed in the two volumes he thought it proper to publish, entitled "Letters to a Wife," that the reader will need no information on this subject. Some of his friends wished this violent attachment had been cast more into the shade; as tending to furnish a spur, where human nature generally needs a curb. He used, indeed, to speak of such attachments, in the abstract, as idolatry; though his own was providentially ordered to be the main hinge on which his preservation and deliverance turned, while in his worst state. Good men, however, cannot be too cautious how they give sanction, by their expressions or example, to a passion which, when not under sober regulation, has overwhelmed not only families, but states, with disgrace and ruin. With his unusual degree of benevolence and affection, it was not extraordinary that the spiritual interests of his servants were brought forward, and examined severally every Sunday afternoon; nor that, being treated like children, they should grow old in his service. In short, Mr. N. could live no longer than he could love: it is no wonder, therefore, if his nieces had more of his heart than is generally afforded to their own children by the fondest parents. It has already been mentioned that his house was an asylum for the perplexed or afflicted. Young ministers were peculiarly the objects of his attention: he instructed them; he encouraged them; he warned them; and might truly be said to be a father in Christ, spending and being spent for the interest of his church. In order thus to execute the various avocations of the day, he used to rise early: he seldom was found abroad in the evening, and was exact in his appointments. Of his WRITINGS, I think little needs to be said here: they are in wide circulation, and best speak for themselves. An able editor is now employed in adding some posthumous pieces, left for publication by the author. After which, the whole will appear in a complete set, with a reduced copy of the admirable portrait of Mr. N. lately published by Mr. Smith, engraved by J. Collyer, A.R.A., from an original painting by J. Russell, R.A. This was the only reason why no portrait was published with these Memoirs, [To render the three Memoirs uniform, a portrait of Mr. N. has been given in the last edition, reduced, for the purpose, by Collyer, from the larger portrait above mentioned.] as had been done in the Memoirs of the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Cadogan, and of John Bacon, Esq. I hope to see a fuller and more accurate account of these writings published by the editor, should the executors deem it necessary. At present, therefore, what I shall observe upon them will be but general and cursory. The "Sermons" which Mr. N. published at Liverpool, after being refused on his first application for orders, were intended to shew

what he would have preached, had he been admitted: they are highly creditable to his understanding and to his heart. The facility with which he attained so much of the learned languages seems partly accounted for, from his being able to acquire so early a neat and natural style in his own language, and that under such evident disadvantages. His "Review of Ecclesiastical History," so far as it proceeded, has been much esteemed; and, if it had done no more than excite the Rev. Joseph Milner (as that most valuable and instructive author informs us it did) to pursue Mr. N.'s idea more largely, it was sufficient success. Before this, the world seems to have lost sight of a history of real Christianity: and to have been content with what, for the most part, was but an account of the ambition and politics of secular men, assuming the Christian name.

It must he evident to any one who observes the spirit of all his sermons, hymns, tracts, &c. that nothing is aimed at which should be met by critical investigation. In the preface to his Hymns, he remarks, "Though I would not offend readers of taste by a willful coarseness and negligence, I do not write professedly for them. I have simply declared my own views and feelings, as I might have done if I had composed hymns in some of the newly discovered islands in the South Sea, where no person had any knowledge of the name of Jesus but myself." To dwell, therefore, with a critical eye on this part of his public character, would be absurd and impertinent: it would be to erect a tribunal to which he seems not amenable. He appears to have paid no regard to a nice ear, or an accurate reviewer; but, preferring a style at once neat and perspicuous, to have laid out himself entirely for the service of the church of God, and more especially for the tried and experienced part of its members. His chief excellence, as a writer, seemed to lie in the easy and natural style of his epistolary correspondence. His Letters will be read while real religion exists; and they are the best draught of his own mind.

He had so largely communicated with his friends in this way, that I have heard him say, he thought, if his letters were collected, they would make several folios. He selected many of these for publication; and expressed a hope that no other person would take that liberty with the rest, which were so widely spread abroad. In this, however, he was disappointed and grieved; as he once remarked to me: and for which reason I do not annex any letters that I received from him. He esteemed that collection published under the title of "Cardiphonia" as the most useful of his writings, and mentioned various instances of the benefits which he heard they had conveyed to many. His "Apologia," or Defense of Conformity, was written on occasion of some reflections (perhaps only jocular) cast on him at that time.--His "Letters to a Wife," written during his three voyages to Africa, and published in 1793, have been received with less satisfaction than most of his other writings. While, however, his advanced age and inordinate fondness may be pleaded for this publication, care should be taken lest men fall into a contrary extreme; and suppose that temper to be their wisdom, which leads them to avoid another, which they consider as his weakness. But his "Messiah," before mentioned--his Letters of the Rev. Mr. Vanlier, Chaplain at the Cape--his Memoirs of the Rev. John Cowper (brother to the poet), and those of the Rev. Mr. Grimshaw, of Yorkshire--together with his single sermons and tracts--have been well received, and will remain a public benefit.

I recollect reading a MS. which Mr. N. lent me, containing a correspondence that had passed between himself and the Rev. Dr. Dixon, Principal of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford; and another MS. of a correspondence between him and the late Rev. Martin Madan. They would have been very interesting to the public, particularly the latter; and were striking evidences of Mr. N.'s humility,

piety, and faithfulness: but reasons of delicacy led him to commit the whole to the flames. To speak of his writings in the mass, they certainly possess what many have aimed at, but very few attained, namely, originality. They are the language of the heart: they shew a deep experience of its religious feelings; a continual anxiety to sympathize with man in his wants, and to direct him to his only resources. His CONVERSATION, and familiar habits with his friends, were more peculiar, amusing, and instructive, than any I ever witnessed. It is difficult to convey a clear idea of them by description. I venture, therefore, to add a few pages of what I may call his Table-Talk; which I took down at different times, both in company and in private, from his lips. Such a collection of printed remarks will not bare so much point as when spoken in connection with the occasions that produced them: they must appear to considerable disadvantage thus detached; and candid allowance should be made by the reader, on this account. They, however, who had the privilege of Mr. N’s conversation when living, cannot but recognize the speaker in most of them, and derive both profit and pleasure from these remains of their late valuable friend; and such as had not, will (if I do not mistake) think them the most valuable part of this book.

03.0007. Vol 01 - REMARKS MADE BY MR. NEWTON, IN FAMILIAR CONVERSATION

REMARKS MADE BY MR. NEWTON, IN FAMILIAR CONVERSATION

"While the mariner uses the loadstone, the philosopher may attempt to investigate the cause; but, after all, in steering through the ocean, he can make no other use of it than the mariner."

"If an angel were sent to find the most perfect man, he would probably not find him composing a body of divinity, but perhaps a cripple in a poor-house, whom the parish wish dead; a man humbled before God, with far lower thoughts of himself than others have of him."

"When a Christian goes into the world, because he sees it is his call, yet, while he feels it also his cross, it will not hurt him."

"Satan will seldom come to a Christian with a gross temptation: a green log and a candle may be safely left together; but bring a few shavings, then some small sticks, and then larger, and you may soon bring the green log to ashes."

"If two angels came down from heaven to execute a Divine command, and one was appointed to conduct an empire, and the other to sweep a street in it, they would feel no inclination to choose employments."

"The post of honor in an army is not with the baggage, nor with the women."

"What some call providential openings are often powerful temptations. The heart, in wandering, cries, 'Here is a way opened before me;' but, perhaps, not to be trodden, but rejected."

"Young people marry, as others study navigation, by the fire-side. If they marry unsuitably, they can scarcely bring things to rule; but, like sailors, they must sail as near the wind as they can. I feel myself like a traveler with his wife in his chaise and one: if the ground is smooth, and she keeps the right pace, and is willing to deliver the reins when I ask for them, I am always willing to let her drive."

"A Christian should never plead spirituality for being a sloven: if he be but a shoe-cleaner, he should be the best in the parish."

"My course of study, like that of a surgeon, has principally consisted in walking the hospital."

"In divinity, as well as in the other professions, there are the little artists. A man may be able to execute the buttons of a statue very neatly, but I could not call him an able artist. There is an air, there is a taste, to which his narrow capacity cannot reach."

"My principal method of defeating heresy, is, by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares: now, if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts."

"When some people talk of religion, they mean they have heard so many sermons, and performed so many devotions; and thus mistake the means for the end. But true religion is a habitual recollection of God and intention to serve him; and this turns every thing into gold. We are apt to suppose that we need something splendid to evince our devotion, but true devotion equals things: washing plates, and cleaning shoes, is a high office, if performed in a right spirit. If three angels were sent to earth, they would feel perfect indifference who should perform the part of prime minister, parish minister, or watchman."

"When a ship goes to sea, among a vast variety of its articles and circumstances there is but one object regarded; namely, doing the business of the voyage: every bucket is employed with respect to that."

"Many have puzzled themselves about the origin of evil: I observe there is evil, and that there is a way to escape it; and with this I begin and end."

"Consecrated things, under the Law, were first sprinkled with blood, and then anointed with oil, and thenceforward were no more common. Every Christian has been a common vessel for profane purposes; but, when sprinkled and anointed, under the Gospel, he becomes separated and consecrated to God."

"I would not give a straw for that assurance which sin will not damp. If David had come from his adultery, and had talked of his assurance at that time, I should have despised his speech."

"A spirit of adoption is the spirit of a child: he may disoblige his father, yet he is not afraid of being turned out of doors. The union is not dissolved, though the corn. reunion is. He is not well with his father; therefore must be unhappy, as their interests are inseparable."

"We often seek to apply cordials when the patient is not prepared for them; and it is to the patient’s advantage, that he cannot take a medicine when prematurely offered. When a man comes to me, and says, ’I am quite happy,’ I am not sorry to find him come again with some fears. I never saw a work of grace stand well without a check.--’I only want,’ says one, ’to be sure of being safe, and then I will go on.’ No; perhaps, then you will go off."

"A Christian in the world, is like a man who has had a long intimacy with one whom at length he finds to have been the murderer of a kind father: the intimacy, after this, will surely be broken."

"Except a ,man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.--A man may live in a deep mine in Hungary, never having seen the light of the sun: he may have received accounts of prospects, and, by the help of a candle, may have examined a few engravings of them; but, let him be brought out of the mine, and set on the mountain--what a difference appears!"

"Candor will always allow much for inexperience. I have been thirty years forming my own views; and, in the course of this time, some of my hills have sunk. and some of my valleys have risen: but, how unreasonable would it be to expect all this should take place in another person; and that, in the course of a year or two."

"Candor forbids us to estimate a character from his accidental blots. Yet it is thus that David, and others, have been treated."

"Apollos met with two candid people in the church: they neither run away because he was legal, nor were carried away because he was eloquent."

"There is the analogy of faith: it is a master-key, which not only opens particular doors, but carries you through the whole house. But an attachment to a rigid system is dangerous.--Luther once turned out the Epistle of St. James, because it disturbed his system.--I shall preach, perhaps, very usefully upon two opposite texts, while kept apart: but, if I attempt nicely to reconcile them, it is ten to one if I do not begin to bungle."

"We are surprised at the fall of a famous professor; but, in the sight of God, the man was gone before: we, only, have now first discovered it. He that despiseth small things shall fall by little and little."

"There are critical times of danger. After great services, honors, and consolations, we should stand upon our guard. Noah--Lot--David--Solomon, fell in these circumstances. Satan is a robber: a robber will not attack a man in going to the Bank, but in returning with his pocket full of money."

"A Christian is like a young nobleman, who, on going to receive his estate, is at first enchanted with its prospects: this, in a course of time, may wear off; but a sense of the value of the estate grows daily."

"When we first enter into the divine life, we propose to grow rich: God’s plan is to make us feel poor."

"Good men have need to take heed of building upon groundless impressions. Mr. Whitfield had a son, whom he imagined born to be a very extraordinary man: but the son soon died, and the father was cured of his mistake."

"Christ has taken our nature into heaven, to represent us; and has left us on earth, with his nature, to represent him."

"Worldly men will be true to their principles; and if we were as true to ours, the visits between the two parties would be short and seldom."

"A Christian in the world, is like a man transacting his affairs in the rain. He will not suddenly leave his client because it rains; but, the moment the business is done, he is gone: as it is said in the Acts, Being let go, they went to their own company."

"The Scriptures are so full, that every case may be found in them.--A rake went into a church, and tried to decoy a girl, by saying, ’Why do you attend to such stuff as these Scriptures?’-- ’Because,’ said she, ’they tell me, that, in the last days, there shall come such scoffers as you.’"

"God deals with us as we do with our children: he first speaks; then, gives a gentle stroke; at last, a blow."

"The religion of a sinner stands on two pillars; namely, what Christ did for us in his flesh, and what he performs in us by his Spirit. Most errors arise from an attempt to separate these two.”

"Man is not taught any thing to purpose till God becomes his teacher: and then the glare of the world is put out, and the value of the soul rises in full view. A man’s present sentiments may not be

accurate, but we make too much of sentiments. We pass a field with a few blades: we call it a field of wheat; yet here is no wheat in perfection; but wheat is sown, and full ears may be expected."

"The word Temperance, in the New Testament, signifies self-possession: it is a disposition suitable to one who has a race to run, and therefore will not load his pockets with lead."

"Contrivers of systems on the earth, are like contrivers of systems in the heavens; where the sun and moon keep the same course, in spite of the philosophers."

"I endeavor to walk through the world as a physician goes through Bedlam: the patients make a noise, pester him with impertinence, and hinder him in his business; but he does the best he can, and so gets through."

"A man always in society, is one always on the spend: on the other hand, a mere solitary is, at his best, but a candle in an empty room."

"If we were upon the watch for improvement, the common news of the day would furnish it: the falling of the tower in Siloam, and the slaughter of the Galileans, were the news of the day; which our Lord improved."

"The generality make out their righteousness, by comparing themselves with some others whom they think worse. A woman of the town, who was dying of disease in the Lock Hospital, was offended at a minister speaking to her as a sinner, because she had never picked a pocket."

"Take away a toy from a child and give him another, and he is satisfied; but if he be hungry, no toy will do. As new-born babes, true believers desire the sincere milk of the word; and the desire of grace, in this way, is grace."

One said, that the great Saints in the Calendar were many of them poor Sinners. Mr. N. replied, "They were poor Saints indeed, if they did not feel that they were great Sinners."

"A wise man looks upon men as he does upon horses, and considers their caparisons of title, wealth, and place, but as harness."

"The force of what we deliver from the pulpit is often lost by a starched, and what is frequently called a correct, style; and, especially, by adding meretricious ornaments. --I called upon a lady who had been robbed, and she gave me a striking account of the fact; but had she put it into heroics, I should neither so well have understood her, nor been so well convinced that she had been robbed."

"When a man says he received a blessing under a sermon, I begin to inquire the character of the man who speaks of the help he has received. The Roman people proved the effect they received under a sermon of Antony, when they flew to avenge the death of Caesar."

"The Lord has reasons far beyond our ken, for opening a wide door, while he stops the mouth of a useful preacher. John Bunyan would not have done half the good he did, if he had remained preaching in Bedford, instead of being shut up in Bedford prison."

"If I could go to France, and give every man in it a right and peaceable mind by my labor, I should have a statue: but, to produce such an effect in the conversion of one soul, would be a far greater

achievement."

"Ministers would over-rate their labors, if they did not think it worth while to be born, and spend ten thousand years in labor and contempt, to recover one soul."

"Don’t tell me of your feelings. A traveler would be glad of fine weather; but, if he be a man of business, he will go on. Bunyan says, you must not judge of a man’s haste by his horse; for when the horse can hardly move, you may see, by the rider’s urging him, what a hurry he is in."

"A man and a beast may stand upon the same mountain, and even touch one another; yet they are in two different worlds: the beast perceives nothing but the grass; but the man contemplates the prospect, and thinks of a thousand remote things. Thus a Christian may be solitary at a full exchange: he can converse with the people there upon trade, politics, and the stocks; but they cannot talk with him upon the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

"It is a mere fallacy to talk of the sins of a short life. The sinner is always a sinner. Put a pump into a river; you may throw out some water, but the river remains."

"Professors, who own the doctrines of free grace, often act inconsistently with their own principle when they are angry at the defects of others. A company of travelers fall into a pit: one of them gets a passenger to draw him out. Now he should not be angry with the rest for falling in; nor because they are not yet out, as he is. He did not pull himself out: instead, therefore, of reproaching them, he should shew them pity. He should avoid, at any rate, going down upon their ground again; and shew how much better and happier he is upon his own. We should take care that we do not make our profession of religion a receipt in full for all other obligations. A man, truly illuminated, will no more despise others, than Bartimeus, after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick, and beat every blind man he met."

"We much mistake, in supposing that the removal of a particular objection would satisfy the objector. Suppose I am in bed, and want to know whether it be light, it is not enough if I draw back the curtain; for though there be light, I must have eyes to see it."

"Too deep a consideration of eternal realities might unfit a man for his present circumstances. Walking through St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, or Bedlam, must deeply affect a feeling mind; but, in reality, this world is a far worse scene. It has but two wards: in the one, men are miserable; in the other, mad."

"Some preachers near Olney dwelt on the doctrine of predestination: an old woman said, ’Ah! I have long settled that point: for, if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure he would have seen nothing in me to have chosen me for afterwards.’"

"I see the unprofitableness of controversy in the case of Job and his friends: for, if God had not interposed, had they lived to this day, they would have continued the dispute."

"It is pure mercy that negatives a particular request. A miser would pray very earnestly for gold, if he believed prayer would gain it: whereas, if Christ had any favor to him, he would take his gold away. A child walks in the garden in spring, and sees cherries: he knows they are good fruit, and therefore asks for them. ’No, my dear,’ says the father, ’they are not yet ripe: stay till the season.’"

"If I cannot take pleasure in infirmities, I can sometimes feel the profit of them. I can conceive a king to pardon a rebel, and take him into his family, and then say, 'I appoint you, for a season, to wear a fetter. At a certain season, I will send a messenger to knock it off. In the mean time, this fetter will serve to remind you of your state: it may humble you, and restrain you from rambling.'"

"Some Christians, at a glance, seem of a superior order, and are not: they want a certain quality. At a florists' feast the other day, a certain flower was determined to bear the bell; but it was found to be an artificial flower: there is a quality, called GROWTH, which it had not."

"Doctor Taylor of Norwich said to me, 'Sir, I have collated every word in the Hebrew Scriptures seventeen times; and it is very strange if the doctrine of atonement, which you hold, should not have been found by me.'--I am not surprised at this: I once went to light my candle with the extinguisher on it; now, prejudices from education, learning, &c., often form an extinguisher. It is not enough that you bring the candle: you must remove the extinguisher."

"I measure ministers by square measure. I have no idea of the size of a table, if you only tell me how long it is: but, if you also say how wide, I can tell its dimensions. So, when you tell me what a man is in the pulpit, you must also tell me what he is out of it, or I shall not know his size."

"A man should be born to high things not to lose himself in them. Slater's will walk on the ridge of a house with ease, which would turn our heads."

"Much depends on the way we come into trouble. Paul and Jonah were both in a storm, but in very different circumstances."

"I have read of many wicked popes, but the worst pope I ever met with is POPE SELF."

"The men of this world are children. Offer a child an apple and a bank note, he will doubtless choose the apple."

"The heir of a great estate, while a child, thinks more of a few shillings in his pocket than of his inheritance. So a Christian is often more elated by some frame of heart than by his title to glory."

"A dutiful child is ever looking forward to the holidays, when he shall return to his father; but he does not think of running from school before."

"The Gospel is a proclamation of free mercy to guilty creatures--an act of grace to rebels. Now, though a rebel should throw away his pistols, and determine to go into the woods, and make his mind better before he goes to court and pleads the act; he may, indeed, not be found in arms, yet, being taken in his reforming scheme, he will be hanged."

"Man is made capable of three births: by nature, he enters into the present world; by grace, into spiritual light and life; by death, into glory."

"In my imagination, I sometimes fancy I could make a perfect minister. I take the eloquence of ----, the knowledge of----, the zeal of ----, and the pastoral meekness, tenderness, and piety of ----: then, putting them all together into one man, I say to myself, 'This would be a perfect minister.' Now there is One, who, if he chose it, could actually do this; but he never did. He has seen fit to do otherwise, and to divide these gifts to every man severally as he will."

"I feel like a man who has no money in his pocket, but is allowed to draw for all he wants upon one infinitely rich: I am therefore, at once both a beggar and a richman."

"I went one day to Mrs. G-----'s, just after she had lost all her fortune. I could not be surprised to find her in tears: but she said, 'I suppose you think I am crying for my loss, but that is not the case: I am now weeping to think I should feel so much uneasiness on the account.' After that I never heard her speak again upon the subject as long as she lived. Now this is just as it should be. Suppose a man was going to York to take possession of a large estate, and his chaise should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him wringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, 'My chaise is broken! My chaise is broken!'"

"I have many books that I cannot sit down to read: they are, indeed, good and sound; but, like halfpence, there goes a great quantity to a little amount. There are silver books; and a very few golden books: but I have one book worth more than all, called the Bible; and that is a book of bank-notes."

I conclude these remarks, not because my memorandum-book is exhausted, but lest the reader should think I forget the old maxim, ne quid nimis. No undue liberty, however, has been taken in publishing Mr. N.'s private conversation, since all the above remarks were submitted to him as intended for this publication, and were approved.

03.0008. Vol 01 - GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS The difference of mental improvement among men seems very much to depend on their capacity and habit of gathering instruction from the objects which are continually presented to their observation. Two men behold the same fact: one of them is in the habit of drawing such remarks and inferences as the fact affords, and learns somewhat from every thing he sees; while the other sees the same fact, and perhaps with a momentary admiration, but lets it pass without making so much as one profitable reflection on the occasion. The excursions of the bee and the butterfly present an exact emblem of these two characters.

I have present to my mind an acquaintance, who has seen more of the outside of the world than most men: he has lived in most countries of the civilized world; yet I scarcely know a man of a less improved mind: with every external advantage, he has learned nothing to any useful purpose: he seems to have passed from flower to flower without extracting a drop of honey; and, now, he tires all his friends with the frivolous garrulity of a capricious, vacant, and petulant old age.

I wish the reader of these Memoirs may avoid such an error in passing over the history here laid before him. An extraordinary train of facts is presented to his observation; and if "The proper study of mankind is man," the history before us will surely furnish important matter of the kind to the eye of every wise, moral traveler.

I would here call the attention of three classes of men to a single point of prime importance; namely, the EFFICACY AND EXCELLENCY OF REAL CHRISTIANITY, as exhibited in the principles and practice of the subject of these Memoirs.

03.0009. Vol 01 - I. Unhappyness with an evil heart of unbelief.

I. Unhappyness with an evil heart of unbelief.

Suppose the reader to be so unhappy (though his misfortune may be least perceived by himself) as to be led astray by bad society, in conjunction with an evil heart of unbelief. I will suppose him to be now in the state in which Mr. N. describes himself formerly to have been, and in which also the writer of these Memoirs once was. I will suppose him to be given up to believe his own lie; and that he may be in the habit of thinking that God, when he made man, left him to find his way without any express revelation of the mind and will of his Maker and Governor; or, at most, that he is left to the only rule in morals, which nature may be supposed to present. What that way is, which such a thinker will take, is sufficiently evident from the general course and habits of unbelievers. But there is a conscience in man. Conscience, in sober moments, often alarms the most stout-hearted. When such an unbeliever meets an overwhelming providence, or lies on a death-bed, he will probably awake to a strong sense of his real condition. He will feel, if not very hardened indeed, in what a forlorn, unprovided, and dangerous state he exists. Life is the moment in which only this skeptical presumption can continue; and when it is terminating, where is he to set the sole of his foot? He wildly contemplates the book or nature, in which he may have been persuaded that man may read all he needs to know; but the forlorn outcast sees nothing there to meet his case as a sinner. Infinite power, wisdom, contrivance, general provision, alone appear; but nothing of that further and distinct information which a dying offender needs. He wants footing, and finds none. He needs the hand of a friend to grasp, but none is seen. Possibilities shock his apprehension. He may, perhaps, discern that the present system has a moral government, which frowns upon guilt; and, for ought he knows to the contrary, the next scene may present a Judge upon his throne of justice,--this world, his present idol, vanished like smoke, and quick and dead called to give their account. Where then is he?--an atom of guilt and wretchedness. All this, I say, may be, for ought he knows to the contrary. But the express and well-authenticated revelation, which that Judge has sent to man, tells us plainly that all this shall be, and that every eye shall behold it!

"Be it so," such a reader may reply: "still I am what I am. My habits of thinking are fixed; and I perceive my habits of life can only he decently borne out by my profession of unbelief. Both are now inveterate. Nor do I see, all things considered, what can be done in my ease. How can I adopt the Christian Revelation?--and what could it do for me, if I could?"

I answer, by calling your attention to the fact before us. What was the case of John Newton? Could any one be more deeply sunk in depravity, in profligacy, in infidelity, than he? Can you even conceive a rational creature more degraded, or more hardened in his evil habits? Would you attempt to recover such a mind, by arguments drawn from the advantage which virtue has over vice? or by rousing his attention to the duties of natural religion, or to the possible consequences of a future retribution? He would have gone on thinking he had made the most of his circumstances, in his practice of catching fish, and eating them almost raw. He would sullenly have

proceeded to sleep through the drying of his one shirt, which he had just washed on the rock, and put on wet. He would, with a savage ferocity, have watched an opportunity for murdering his master. He would have drowned all reflection in a drunken revel; and would have overwhelmed all remonstrance, by belching out new-invented blasphemies: and then sought to rush headlong, in a drunken paroxysm, into the ocean.

Here is, certainly, presented the utmost pitch of a depraved and degraded nature: nor does it seem possible for Satan to carry his point further with a man--EXCEPT in one single instance, namely, by the final disbelief of a remedy.

Now, by God's help, this Divine remedy was applied, and its efficacy demonstrated; of which there are thousands of living witnesses. A plain matter of fact is before us. It pleased God, that, by a train of dispensations, this prodigal should come to himself. He is made to feel his wants and misery: he follows the light shining in a dark place: he calls for help: he is made willing to follow his guide: he proceeds with implicit confidence. And now let us examine to what, at length, he is brought; and by what means.

I speak of a matter of fact. Whither is he brought? He is brought from the basest, meanest, under-trodden state of slavery--from a state of mind still more degraded, being foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating--wanting nothing of a complete devil but his powers. This man is brought, I say, to be a faithful and zealous servant of his God--an able and laborious minister of Christ--a useful and benevolent friend to his neighbor--wise to secure the salvation of his own soul, and wise to win the souls of others.

Consider also the MEANS by which he was brought. It was not by the arguments of philosophists, or the rational considerations of what is called natural religion. Mr. N.'s own account informs us, that the peculiar discoveries of Revealed Truth gradually broke in upon his mind; till, at length, he was made sensible that there was a remedy provided in the Gospel, and which was fully sufficient to meet even his case; and he found that, and that only, to be the power of God unto salvation. The result, therefore, which should be drawn from these premises, is the following. There exists a desperate disorder in the world, called Sin. Heathens, as well as Christians, have marked its malignant influence: they have tried various expedients, which have been prescribed for its cure; or its mitigation, at least: but no means have been discovered, except God's own appointed means, which have availed to the relief of so much as a single individual. Yet, strange to say, this medicina mentis of God's own appointment, to which only he has promised a peculiar blessing, and by which he is daily recovering men in the most desperate circumstances who actually employ it--strange to say, this remedy still remains a stumbling-block--is counted foolishness--inasmuch that many will rather dash this cup of salvation from the lips of a profligate, like Newton, when disposed to receive it, than that he should obtain relief in that way. Their conduct seems to say, "Rather let such a wretch go on in his profligacy, than the Gospel be acknowledged to be the wisdom and the power of God." Not that the case of Mr. N., here presented to the consideration of an unbeliever, is brought forward as if the Gospel needed any further evidence, or has occasion for facts of our own time to give it additional authenticity: but we are directed to regard the cloud of witnesses, among which our departed brother was distinguished; and, though now dead, yet speaketh. May the reader have ears to hear the important report!

Does, therefore, the question return, as to what the unbeliever should do? Let him, after seriously considering what is here advanced, consider also, what conduct is becoming a responsible, or at least a rational, creature? Surely it becomes such an one to avoid all means of stifling the voice of conscience, whenever it begins to speak--to regard the voice of God, yet speaking to him in the revelation of his grace; and that, much more humbly and seriously than such persons are wont to do. It becomes him, if he have any regard to the interest of his own soul, or the souls of his fellow-creatures, to give no countenance, by his declarations or example, to the senseless cavils and indecent scoffs, by which the profligate aim to cloak the disorders of their hearts--by which vanity aims at distinction, and half-thinkers affect depth. The person I am now speaking to cannot but observe how much the judgment becomes the dupe of the passions. If the veil be upon the heart, it will be upon every thing. We need not only an object presented, but an organ to discern it. Now the Gospel alone affords both these. -Mr. N. becomes an instructive example, in this respect, to the unbeliever. "One of the first helps," says he, "which I received," in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully, "was from Luke 6:13; If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when, in reality, I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God: but, here, I found a Spirit spoken of, which was to be communicated to those who ask it. Upon this I reasoned thus: If this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise: I have need of that very Spirit by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask: and, if it be of God, he will make good his own word." A man, therefore, who is found in this unhappy state, but not judicially hardened in it, should mark this stage of Mr. N.’s recovery; and attend to the facts and evidences of the power and excellency of real religion, such as this before him. He should appreciate that Gospel, which it has pleased God to employ as his instrument for displaying the wonders of his might in the moral world. He should pray that he may experience the power of it in his own heart, and thus not lose the additional benefit of the cases presented to him in Memoirs like these; a case, probably, far exceeding his own in the malignity of its symptoms. Let him also consider, that, while such convictions can produce no real loss to him, they may secure advantages beyond calculation. He may not be able, at present, to comprehend how godliness is profitable for all things, in having not only the promise of the life that now is, but of that which is to come; but he may see, as a rational creature, that, at the very lowest estimation, he has taken the safe side, by embracing the only hope set before him: and, on this ground, it is clearly demonstrable, that not only the grossest folly must attach to the rejecter of a revelation attended with such accumulated evidences; but actual guilt also, and the highest ingratitude and presumption.

sermon index

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net